

# Cracks in the Edifice

Critical African Feminist Perspectives  
on Women and Governance

DAWN — Development Alternatives with Women  
for a New Era

Edited by Vivienne Taylor with Anne Mager and Paula Cardoso.

Political Restructuring and Social Transformation

Report on the Africa Regional Research Meeting

Cape Town 29-30 November 1999

# **Cracks in the Edifice:**

**Critical African Feminist Perspectives  
on Women and Governance**

**DAWN**

**Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era**

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DAWN is an international feminist network from the global South that promotes critical perspectives on development alternatives for gender justice.

# Cracks in the Edifice: Critical African Feminist Perspectives on Women and Governance

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*Vivienne Taylor*

## List of abbreviations

AAWORD	Association of African Women for Research and Development
ANC	African National Congress
ANCWL	ANC Women's League
CEDAW	Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CGE	Commission for Gender Equality
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
GAD	Gender and Development
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
IDASA	Institute for Democracy in South Africa
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MAI	Multilateral Agreement on Investments
MNC	Multi-national Corporation
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSW	Office on the Status of Women
PRST	Political Restructuring and Social Transformation
SADCC	Southern African Development Co-ordinating Committee
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
TNC	Trans-national Corporation
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Family Planning Agency
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WB	World Bank
WID	Women in Development
WHO	World Health Organisation
WNC	Women's National Coalition
WSSD	World Summit on Social Development
WTO	World Trade Organisation

## Summary

The African Regional meeting held in Cape Town, South Africa, on the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> November 1999 was the third in a series of regional meetings which form part of the DAWN Political Restructuring and Social Transformation (PR &ST) focus.

DAWN's PR & ST initiative, co-ordinated by Vivienne Taylor of South Africa, began in 1996. The aim of the PR & ST project is to enable feminist researchers, analysts and activists in the South to come together to develop a critique and to challenge mainstream governance and political reform ideas which have arisen in the context of economic globalisation. The focus of the critique is to expose the political dimensions of economic globalisation and to empower feminist and women activists and scholars to use the analytical tools developed in the process of research and analysis.

The African regional meeting included delegates from Senegal, Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Tanzania, Palestine, South Africa and Mauritius. The meeting focused on four principle themes pertaining to Political Restructuring and Social Transformation. These themes were: 'Politics and Power', 'Institutionalisation of Women's



Politics', 'Social Movements, the Feminist Movement and the State' and 'Globalisation and the State'. Vivienne Taylor, DAWN PR & ST co-ordinator presented the PR & ST position paper and outlined the research objectives. Delegates from Anglophone and Francophone Africa presented papers on the main themes. These presentations gave rise to intensive discussion encompassing continuities and discontinuities across the region and enabled participants to identify key PR & ST problems and strategies. The meeting culminated in a session that identified the main trends to emerge from the research and discussion. The structure of this report follows the outline of the meeting process.

The substantive findings of the research and analysis are set out in the report and only briefly summarised here. Participants felt that despite enormous difficulties with the character of the state in most African countries, the state remains an important site of struggle. International instruments such as CEDAW and Beijing are significant instruments for social transformation, despite state attempts to blunt their efficacy. Participants stressed that advocacy did not simply mean engaging with the state, but also taking ideas back to constituencies. Engaging with the institutional process requires a multi-pronged approach encompassing strategies to challenge, reform and engage the state and talking with ordinary people.

While the eradication of poverty, education and social services are being cut back in the context of globalisation and Structural Adjustment Policies, these areas continue to be key focal points for feminist research and advocacy. Participants felt that African women should not be portrayed simply as victims of these processes but also as active agents in developing survival strategies, both individually and through organisational initiatives.

Participants identified numerous examples of the misfit between western hegemonic ideas of governance and some western feminist ideas of gender roles on the one hand and African specificities on the other. They pointed to the need for more research and analysis to create a development model that promotes truly alternative policies and actions that take into account the perspectives and realities of the poorest and most vulnerable women of the African continent and other regions of the South.

The outcomes of the discussion and presentations at the African regional meeting will be taken to the DAWN inter-regional meeting early in 2000. Here African delegates will meet with delegates from the Latin American, South Asian, South East Asian, Pacific and Caribbean regions to work on a common platform document on PR & ST in the context of globalisation. The document will put forward perspectives of women of the South.

DAWN will launch this platform document at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the five year review of the World Summit on Social Development (WSSD + 5), to be held in June 2000 in Geneva.

# 1 Welcome and introduction

## 1.1 Welcome

**B**ene Madunagu and Fatou Sow (DAWN regional co-ordinators for Anglophone and Francophone Africa) welcomed the participants, donors and assistants.

Fatou Sow welcomed all the participants from the African continent and Claire Slatter from the DAWN head office in Fiji. On behalf of Francophone Africa, Fatou Sow stressed the importance of overcoming the divide on language lines and invited everyone to participate in fruitful discussion.

Bene Madunagu located the Africa regional meeting in the context of DAWN's belief in an alternative development based on women's experiences rather than those of the dominant mainstream. DAWN envisages that through a process of sensitization of women at all levels, we will find a space in the mainstreaming processes of policy and governance. This space will enable us to reshape the dominant malestreaming.

We need to make sure that slogans to alleviate poverty do not in reality exacerbate poverty. In the arena of institutionalisation, we should guard against marginalisation. In particular, we should be aware that separate ministries for women tend to remove women from the mainstream while separate tables within ministries become a division for women. Internationally, women are also being pushed aside. The first ladies who claim to represent women are now becoming a global structure of first ladies for Africa. At United Nation's conferences there are always more men than women represented and even pre- and post- Beijing, men speak on women's behalf.



Within Africa, the structures that continue to oppress women have remained because they are deemed to be cultural. But the structures for male power have changed in order to perpetuate male power. National treasuries are used by men who buy themselves into power. While western powers term this democracy, from an African perspective it is not the case.

In contrast to these mainstream tendencies, DAWN seeks to achieve a genuine global representation of women of the South. The purpose of the African regional meeting within the DAWN PR & ST initiative is to develop a framework for women to find a place in the processes of transformation that are taking place. DAWN brings together people and processes that bind us together across the South.

All the participants then introduced themselves and set out the national and local contexts from which they came.

## 1.2 Introduction

The African feminist research meeting on Political Restructuring and Social Transformation (PR & ST) held in Cape Town on 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> November 1999 was the third in a series of DAWN meetings focused on a global analysis on PR & ST. These workshops and the research process on which they are based have been co-ordinated by DAWN research co-ordinator for PR&ST, Vivienne Taylor, Director of SADEP (Southern Africa Development Education and Policy Research Unit), Department of Social Development, at the University of Cape Town (South Africa).

The aim of the research workshops is to bring together a core of South feminist thinkers, activists and advocates in each of four regions, encompassing South East Asia, South Asia, Pacific Island States, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. These South regional workshops will be followed by an inter-regional research meeting to bring together perspectives on issues of global governance and its impact on national states and women. The outcome of the PR & ST project is to produce a South feminist analysis of PR & ST which will form a platform document for debate and dissemination at the World Summit on Social Development + 5 in the year 2000.

DAWN's PR & ST workshop for the African region in Cape Town was part of this process. The workshop centred on four PR & ST related themes:

- Politics and Power
- Institutionalisation of Women's Politics
- The Feminist Movement and the State
- Globalisation and the State.

Where possible, presentations on each theme reflected both Francophone and Anglophone perspectives. This meant that there was more than one presentation per theme in most instances. The structure allowed for rich discussion of continuities and discontinuities across the region.

## 2 The political restructuring and social transformation project: Background and research objectives

### 2.1 Background

*Claire Slatter (DAWN General Co-ordinator, Fiji)*

**D**AWN, a global organisation of Southern activist feminists and scholars started in 1984, seeks to develop a critical feminist perspective on development alternatives and a systematic critique of the dominant growth model of development. When DAWN adopted the PR & ST theme as a focus for research in 1996, the original concern was to address the impact of the global economy and the changing economic order on the role of the state and its capacity to deliver gender justice. The theme was closely linked to DAWN's ongoing analysis of globalisation, the mainstay of DAWN's work. It was felt that a stronger focus on the political dimensions of global economic restructuring was needed to understand the complex relationships between systems of governance and economic globalisation.

The discrediting of state-led development with the collapse of socialist regimes and the global ascendancy of neo-liberal economies had significantly impacted on the institution of the state. The World Bank's promotion of the 'market friendly'



state which would aid the transition to private sector led growth and greatness (in the image, until 1997, of the South East Asia Tigers), accompanied its prescription of economic policies. These policies were designed to downsize the state, divest it of its economic assets and revenue earning parts, and erode its capacity to provide social services. The dominant World Bank led discourse on 'governance', 'accountability' and 'transparency' that arose from 1993/4, largely came to focus on the financial excesses of political leaders (corruption), the fundamentals of achieving balanced budgets, administrative efficiency and financial accountability – the elements of economic restructuring.

Today, the advocates of free trade use the notion of 'transparency' to advance access by foreign firms to contracts commissioned by national governments. This is evident in the bid to extend World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreements to the area of 'government procurement' – a thinly disguised endeavour to further advantage Trans-National Corporations (TNCs) who are already profiting from economic liberalisation policies across all sectors.

There is much talk today of the end of sovereignty, the end of the nation state and the decline of global governance. Yet we know that the militarised state is still intact as are other variants such as the ethnicised state, the fundamentalist state and the colonial state. All of these seem destined to linger into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and to continue to oppress, abuse and violate the rights of people, especially women. These are as much a target for critique as the multilateral financial institutions which direct economic restructuring at the global level.

This is the background to the DAWN project on PR & ST. The DAWN statement of intent sets out the aims and objects of the PR & ST project as follows:

*The DAWN project on PR & ST seeks, among other things, to critique or challenge mainstream 'governance' or political reform ideas which have arisen in the context of economic globalisation and expose the political dimensions of economic globalisation. It offers a path-breaking feminist analysis, drawn from the experience, insights and wisdom of feminists in the South. These analyses encompass the fundamental problems of existing and/or reformed political systems and practices, the meaning and value for women of concepts such as democracy, citizenship, nationality, rights, accountability, political participation, representation and state responsibility. DAWN seeks to articulate a vision of genuine political restructuring to achieve the social transformation necessary for the realisation of equitable, environmentally sustainable, and gender-just development.*

## 2.2 Research Objectives

*Vivienne Taylor (DAWN PR & ST research co-ordinator, South Africa)*

DAWN is a network of women scholars and activists from the economic South who engage in feminist research and analysis of the global environment and are committed to working for equitable, just and sustainable development.

DAWN's focus on PR & ST seeks to provide an analysis of the contradictory trends that have emerged in national, regional and global processes of political restructuring and systems of governance in the 1990s. DAWN believes that there is an urgent need for a critical feminist analysis of the changes in the geopolitical landscape, the type of realignments and the new power blocs that are emerging. These analyses will contribute to the debate and lobby for alternative political strategies to promote gender justice and social transformation at the level of national states, regions and at the global level.

### Objectives

DAWN identified the following research objectives for its PR & ST project:

- To bring together the critical perspectives of feminists from the South on both state and non-state processes that shape political and social processes in the arena of governance and that move to critical action at a global, regional and national level;
- To identify through a collective process the key issues that affect the nature of political and social transformation, strengthen individual and collective capacities through the sharing of common and unique experiences, analyse, formulate and track political and governance processes from a gender perspective;
- To examine the nature of the relationships between the women's movement, national liberation movements and other political formations and iden-



tify what alternative political strategies are being or could be used to promote political restructuring and social transformation.

As a guide for critical, feminist interrogation of women's engagement with the state, DAWN has identified a set of questions:

- What does it mean when we talk of the construction of gendered citizenship: are we talking about the promotion of gender justice?
- What does globalisation mean in terms of the gender division of labour and exploitation of women?
- What political spaces are opening up for women and how do we use these strategically to expand the agenda in the interests of poor women and people?
- What does engendering macro-economic policies mean: gender sensitisation of macro-economic policies is not the same as having an alternative economic framework. We cannot add gender or women to frameworks that have led to the exclusion of women in the first place and to marginalisation of the majority of poor people – these are not transformative in content.
- Gender and state-based violence - both the violent nature of the economy and the economic nature of violence - need to be examined as an integral part of the political process

We are aware of the diverse regional dynamics spawned through patterns of colonialism and compacts of power that are distant from ordinary peoples' lives and we recognise that there is a new urgency to make sense of the trends and contradictions in relation to governance. How to link these compacts of political and economic power and the daily lives of people is an important focus of DAWN research. In the PR & ST project, DAWN looks at what democracy, development, governance, the nature of the state, globalisation and feminist movements mean and how these constructs shape the lived experiences of poor women. DAWN seeks to reframe traditional constructs such as states, issues of sovereignty, political identity and security through feminist lenses.

There are three major areas within PR & ST which feminist thinkers, activists and lobbyists need to take up. Firstly, DAWN has identified the need to take up the spaces that are opening up in the context of political restructuring and transformation in the 1990s. But what precisely does this mean? Should we engage with the WTO, the World Bank and government structures? If so, how do we keep the strategic objectives of social transformation and gender justice to the fore? Secondly, following the Beijing Conference in 1995, it became evident that global institutions of economic governance were taking on the rhetoric of left wing organisations and promoting themselves through this rhetoric. Transparency, good governance and development became the new buzz words. Feminists need to critically examine this rhetoric. To what extent is it a co-optation of the women's movement and to what extent does it reflect a change in thinking in these global organisations? Serious research is needed to see to what extent the rhetoric is translated into gains for women and whether it results in fundamental change. We also need to examine to what extent governments are fulfilling the commitments they made at Copenhagen and

Beijing. Thirdly, feminist researchers need to consider how to develop a collective analysis on political restructuring and social transformation at national and global levels to promote an advocacy agenda rooted in the needs of poor women and people.

DAWN arrived at the point of regional and global engagement on PR & ST after intense debates leading up to and after the World Conference on Women in Beijing and the World Summit on Social Development (WSSD) in Copenhagen. The debates highlighted the need to undertake research that would examine governance in a global context focusing both on national pressures and the increasing interdependence of national economies.

The DAWN workshops in Latin America, South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Caribbean identified links between recurrent political and economic crises, systems of economic governance, economic fundamentalism and political processes. These workshops point to the need for researchers to engage with global and national issues in ways that take into account these recurrent crises and the finely nuanced relationships which converge at macro and micro levels. Preliminary analysis also suggests that terms such as democracy, feminist movement and governance need to be interrogated. The Africa research process provides another important perspective in building a South based analysis on these issues of governance and transformation. In the context of a call for an African renaissance, gender justice and social transformation need to be put onto the global agenda in a rigorous way.



### 3 The emerging PR&ST framework

*Vivlene Taylor*

*Although political independence is a noble achievement in the struggle against colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism, its effectiveness is superficial unless economic and cultural independence is also achieved.*

Since Kwame Nkrumah wrote this statement, much has changed in the continent of Africa and globally. It may be argued that the struggle for independence in Africa and elsewhere was indeed a struggle for democratic citizenship and renewal. In many countries in the world, we are talking about the whole notion of democracy and what it means in different regions. We also pose questions about what people talk of as Western-style liberal democracy and what that has meant in the Southern countries of the world.

Today in South Africa, we also talk of what you see as the African renaissance, the African continent coming together and asserting itself in the global system. However, given the re-casting of the political landscape globally, the break-up of the Eastern block and the push for multi-party democracies across Africa and elsewhere, we are today challenged to interrogate whether the objectives of the many struggles for liberation are being attained. We need to ask ourselves to what extent political liberation from repressive regimes has led to an improvement in the over-all quality of life of the poorest people. There is a new urgency to understand and interrogate changes underway in national, regional and global contexts from a critical perspective of democracy and development.



It is evident from much of the mainstream debate on the nature of political changes and processes of governance that the dominant discourse does not include perspectives and concerns of poor people, nor of women. The debates tend to focus on the nature of the state, the crisis of the state or the capacity of states to manage within a global context of accelerated change. Public interests and perspectives of the state have dominated contemporary discourse, creating a false sense of homogeneity in relation to the state as characterised by what we call patriarchy and neo-colonial factors. Further, it is just as clear that social transformation, as much as it has become the mantra of governments and perspectives on the left, is not understood in the same way and is not necessarily an objective of political change or democratic renewal.

It is therefore necessary to understand what issues of governance and state restructuring within a changing global context mean for the disenfranchised, the socially and economically excluded.

## Pluralist democracy and democratic renewal

Societies today are said to operate in a post-modern context in which the dynamic culture within which the changes are taking place demand alternatives beyond conventional, orthodox models of development. Within this changing context, the form of governance that would best serve the interests of those who have been excluded both economically and politically is an essential concern. Any strategies for democratic renewal must therefore recognise that economic and political processes are interrelated and that economic power and political power are mutually reinforcing. While the sites of struggle and the actors may differ over time, the complex negotiations and confrontations that take place at various moments contribute to the multiple experiences of people's exclusion at the household, community, national, regional and international levels.

Looking at concepts of democracy and development in relation to these issues of governance, we pose the questions: What does democracy mean for the poorest people? How do experiences of democracy and democratic structures lead to a significant shift in power relations beyond individual mobility, particularly in countries in the South?

Sometimes it is very easy for us to conflate our individual movement upward into the perception that we have had social class movement, but we haven't. We have seen indeed that globally, and especially in countries of the South, there are growing inequalities both at the level of social relations and at the level of income. So we find that democracy has not led to poverty eradication. The extent to which democracy has actually brought about a shift in power relations has become conflated in the search for alternatives.

What DAWN has found in our preliminary debates is that forms of democracy have been built on the pillars of economic, political, cultural and institutional behaviour, although the role or significance given to each of these varies according to the context. Democracy for some has often meant \$1 = 1 vote

or competition in the market instead of active citizen participation in the sphere of governance.

Countries in the South, most notably in Africa and Latin America, have experienced democratic changes at a speed not seen in other parts of the world. This has a determining influence on potential social transformation and renewal. Indeed, the whole area of democratic governance is still being contested in these parts of the world.

It is also necessary for us as feminists and as people concerned with gender equality to understand the nature of pluralism in relation to historical and contemporary forms of politics, so that development practitioners or development activists can engage in the process from a critical perspective. Pluralist democracy is not the ultimate in terms of people's participation; it is usually just the beginning. Yet the reality is that development professionals and movements for change within national contexts and at global levels are not really engaging in what democracy means. They are not engaging in the debates, neither are they engaging in the practice of trying to transform liberal democracy as it exists and as it is promoted. To what extent this is an outcome of learning how to engage in new political and social spaces and not a reluctance to challenge the new alignments and power blocs still remains to be seen, particularly within the women's movement.

Are we learning to adapt to what we see as a democratic culture that is antagonistic to a people-centred development? Or are we afraid to challenge the new alignments and new coalitions?

Another issue that clouds the debates is that the proponents of mainly western-style democracy and their agents are often not nationals. Rather, they are external institutions involved in determining and defining development directions in terms of economic liberalisation. Events in some countries have indicated that while social development may sometimes be a spur to democracy, economic stagnation or collapse can also undermine the basis of authoritarian or illegitimate governments and pave the way for democracy.

However, in some cases economic growth has also strengthened anti-democratic elites who



use material resources to reward friends and punish opponents, giving rise to what is termed in South Africa the patriotic bourgeoisie, or what we have seen in South East Asia as crony capitalism. Weakened, ineffective institutions make the relationships between the governed and the government problematic. But often institutions that are powerful in societies where there are few or no autonomous civil society organisation centres of power, can allow those in control of state machineries to remain unchecked. We have seen that when the state machineries are unchecked that women and children are on the receiving end. The question then is to what extent has institutional transformation accompanied the push for democracy and development and how has transformation led to the participation of citizens? When we talk about institutional transformation, we are also talking about it in the context of national machinery that has been introduced to promote gender equality in many countries, post-Beijing and post-World Summit on Social Development.

Moreover, while reasons for state restructuring may vary, how have movements used existing leverage to ensure that institutional transformation leads to the re-casting of the political arena and democratic renewal? Did the introduction of new structures, new institutions, new policies and new procedures really re-cast the political sphere? Have they made a qualitative difference to how we as women, and how the poorest have actually engaged in the process?

This is, I think, key to the issue of political transformation and of social change impact. Then we must ask to what extent our participation in the political arena has transformed politics and how much it leads to qualitative difference in the lives of the poorest people. In the process of engagement within new political spaces, how do women's movements and gender activists respond to the challenges without becoming contained and co-opted into the main stream agenda?

In the context of globalisation in the 1990s, what DAWN found has been a significant shift in the debate on democracy, on development and on governance. The debate has shifted from issues of distribution and re-distribution to how to manage governments more efficiently. This is a significant shift because what it has meant is that the attention is now focused on how we engage in the management of processes that are without the strategic objectives of liberation, whether it is women's liberation or liberation from oppressive regimes. It is this aspect that we need to take on board in a more significant way.

## State & state power

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Having raised some of these issues, I'd like us now to go into the notion of what the state means in our discourse and in our debates on the issue of political re-structuring and social transformation. We use democracy, governance, and the state as a notion and as a construct without actually interrogating how these constructs come out from both historical interpretations and

experiences as well as from a very male-dominated and patriarchal interpretation of what state-led development processes have meant.

States have been considered the most important kind of political organization in the global system. The power of states is an important feature in political restructuring and social transformation. By engaging in the debates of your sub-regional and regional groupings on three common definitions of state power, you may be able to pick up common strands of how state power is constituted and how we can actually interface within this concept.

The first common definition that is used by many political scientists is that state power is seen as control over resources, control over actors and control over outcomes. Distinctions are made between what the state possesses and what the state is able to do. Mainstream debates on politics are located within a masculine construct of the state and the state's power: 'When we speak of power, we mean man's control over the minds and actions of other men' (Morgenthau, *Politics and Nation*).

Other political scientists also see power as embodied in resources that a state possesses, such as population size, geographic size and location, size of gross national product, size and sophistication of the military. Put simply, the state holds the key to economic development, social security, individual liberty, and life and death over people. The complex relationship between state control over resources and its ability to shift the behavior of others or to control outcomes in international disputes is not easy to understand because



there are other dynamics that influence a state. There are other internal factors that are not explicit but that emerge at certain points in the history of development within the nation state.

However what we need to do is to re-frame these traditional constructs, such as state, sovereignty, political identity and security, through feminist lenses. We also need, as women who are engaging in the search for political alternatives and for real alternatives, to challenge notions that competing interest groups as proponents of liberal pluralism would like us to believe. Neither should we view the state as the withering instrument of the ruling class, as orthodox Marxists would like us to believe. The state is neither. It is an actor in its own right. While the state may act independently, its unity or coherence should not be exaggerated. This is what we need to grapple with as feminists.

We have tended to see the state as a monolithic organisation that cannot be pressurised to change from within. But I believe that we have not engaged with the state in a substantive way. We have allowed ourselves to differ from the state and its power rather than to challenge the state in any meaningful way. It is important now, when we talk about political restructuring and social transformation, to begin to see the state as a contested terrain and not leave the state and the state machinery unchecked.

The state experiences and represents the same social forces as other social organisations. States and state elites, in attempting to appear united for whatever reason, mask the actual disunity of political power. Political power in itself is not a unified homogeneous power that cannot be dismantled and grappled with. Unified political power is usually brought about through control and coercion: in very militarised states, through the power of force; in authoritarian systems, through a lack of democracy and of civil liberties.

What is relevant for us today in this period of our history, as national states begin to engage within a globalised system, is that states have what is called a Janus-faced nature. States stand at the intersection between domestic, social-political borders and transnational relations, within which many states manoeuvre through gaining advantage and surviving in relation to other states.

During the post-World War II era, many states used to begin transnational relations through the international trade system. They attempted to look at what their comparative advantage was in relation to trading systems. The issues in a globalised system have moved beyond comparative advantage to competitive edge in relation to how quickly states can amass power and control — not necessarily through state-led processes but through transnational corporations. There is a compact of power, whether explicit or applied. A very real compact of power exists between state-led institutions and transnational corporations. It is not imagined. In fact, what we have found in our debates and our discussions within DAWN and elsewhere, is that instead of states acting in the interests of its representatives that have put them into power, states are actually acting in the interests of private enterprise. The shift from democracy and looking at what is in the interest of the public, through to the shifts in how to secure faster gains for the private sector for capital, are real.

The up-side of what is happening is that now states are not fixed ideological entities. Rather, they embody an on-going dynamic, a changing set of aims, as they engage with and disengage from other social forces. I have looked at the state and globalisation, in particular at how the World Trade Organisation, WTO, the European Union, EU, and other instruments of other inter-governmental systems have played a role in determining world development directions. I have also looked at the extent to which women have been able to engage in the system.

### Critical and feminist views of the state

The need for institutional reform of the state is emerging from both a neo-liberal and a left critique for different reasons. Both sides of the critiques focus on the state's role in the market. The right see the market and the NGO sectors, or civil society organisations as alternatives to lead economic development. Development direction is driven by the emphasis on market efficiency while both critiques focus on the unresponsiveness of bureaucracy to people's views and needs and the growing inequalities within and between countries.

There is a convergence of critiques, though the objectives of the right and the left differ. The right may be said to co-opt left critique toward its own agenda. Neo-liberal proponents see the market as the best allocator of goods and services, while the left perceives the state to be alienated from people, corrupt and promoting a new elite with vested interests in maintaining the status quo.

Emerging critiques of current state and governance debates from the feminist perspective see the discourse as lacking an historical analysis. It therefore does not reflect powerlessness, patterns of powerlessness, nor does it reflect the manner in which traditional cultures and colonial cultures have combined through state and economic institutions to exploit women.

Even when an historical context is used by theorists of the left, the state is examined from the perspective of class and race and the position of women is ignored. This raises further issues in our feminist analysis of the state, i.e. how to examine how patterns of patriarchy are embedded in institutions and how they are derived from traditional cultural forms but are not exclusive to these. The result is an explicit or implicit compact of male power that permeates every sphere

of women's lives and has given rise to what the feminists call the masculinity of the state.

The construction of a masculine society and state has a significant impact on the type of space for women's engagement and there are stark contradictions emerging. On the one hand it has resulted in the push for democracy and protection of individual rights within the notions of



citizenship and nationhood. On the other hand it has given rise to a fundamentalist backlash with all the violence that brings with it. Whatever the critique, the state is seen as the arbiter of democracy and therefore its role in public policy and action cannot be abolished. It cannot be left to the NGO sector as if this is an independent sector. Nor can it be left to what we very glibly talk of as a unified, homogeneous civil society sector.

### State de-regulation of services

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The rolling back of the state in the form of deregulation from public interests to regulation of private interest should be a major cause for concern for many of us. How does the rolling back of the state in the form of de-regulation impact on women and poor people? Free market policies have re-organised the state, according to some development proponents. But the privatisation of state assets and industries appears to enlist direct involvement of states in the production and distribution of goods and services. Alongside this has been the rise of new state regulations, subsidies and institutions, which are designed with the intention of promoting and enabling an environment for newly privatised industries. In many countries in the South, we have accepted as a norm the inevitability of privatisation of universities and of what used to be public services, such as the provision of electricity, transport and transport systems, and roads. We have accepted as a given the fact that we pay for water. Those who do not have access to water can no longer demand it in the same way that many years ago people were able to push for households to have access to water. Access to basic needs are no longer a given because their distribution is now in the hands of the private sector. We need to engage with this in a very substantive way.

### Emergence of new elites

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Changes such as these have actually resulted in a new class structure and shifts in internal social relations within countries in the South. In South Africa, for example, a complex arrangement of interests is evolving with new elites joining forces with the traditional multi-national corporations, so that white and black elites can begin to engage in economic development processes. In reality, these new elites are obtaining a share in companies, thereby buying into a system. This is being talked about as the democratisation of the economy. But putting in a few black people as shareholders in national or multi-national companies is not democratisation of the economy. This has led to the movement of a few individuals into positions of power. These individuals, even though they come from within the national liberation struggle, are unable to check the way these companies engage in the market place or to mediate between labour and private sector interests.

In addition we have found emerging tensions in social movements and in the progressive alliances in South Africa. We need to engage with this in a much

more substantive way. Is there a reversed class structure emerging out of the old class formations, where instead of having a racist capitalist system, we now have a non-racial capitalist system without democracy playing a role at all? In a recent workshop on the Human Development Report that I attended, we raised the question of whether democratisation of a capitalist economy was actually attainable? Is it not a contradiction in terms? Can one actually have democratisation of the economy within a capitalist system? If so, how can we look at economic power, economic development and control of resources if these resources are already in the hands of privatised and transnational forces?

Analysts from the left argue that the state has played, and continues to play, a role in promoting and implementing free-market policies. Indeed, the free market is said to need the protection of the state to maintain its interests and in short, its power. Given that poor women operate largely outside the mainstream markets, and that markets respond to needs with cash, the emerging state market relationships perpetuate the exclusion of poor women from mainstream economic and social activities. The key to these debates is the nature and role of state institutions in relation to dominant market forces. What are the objectives of state restructuring or re-organising? Current trends indicate that states are being re-organised to serve the interests of market forces, and these do not coincide with the interests of the dispossessed. Generally, in the North and the South, structural adjustment measures have been introduced in different ways. We also note the emergence of contradictory trends. While in the North, the proportionate share of state spending relative to the economy has continued to grow, averaging 50% of the GDP. In the South, government spending has been cut down to just over 25% of GDP on average. Government spending has also been redirected in the South toward increased militarisation, especially when you look at the budgets of India and Pakistan.

The state is not withering away. It continues to play a significant role in framing taxation and monetary policy, and in directing subsidies, no longer to public goods but to sectors of industry. The state is actually subsidising the

development of roads for private toll companies and is underwriting loans to private industries in many countries in the South. In health, social development and education, the emphasis is on the establishment of new state mechanisms to ensure market efficiency and discipline. At the same time, there is an increase in initiatives within governments and outside to train, re-train and re-orient civil servants toward business



plans and efficiency models. If we examine not just the objectives of the state, but the processes of governance, we find that vis-a-vis national development plans and visions of national development, we now have business plans and civil servants talking of strategic planning. The debates are shifting from priorities in national development to how governments can engage with the private sector in a strategic incremental process that is no longer going to look at issues of equality, income, and others.

Another disturbing trend is arising from pressures created from increasing inequalities. Efforts to facilitate increasing domestic and foreign direct investments have led states to deal with the outcomes of crime and violence in new ways. Instead of dealing with issues of poverty and poverty eradication, the state's response is to increase military forces to protect entrepreneurs and businesses. So there is yet greater repression at greater cost. In India, for example, there are special police units being trained by Western security experts to protect the life and property of foreign investors. Similar trends emerge in South Africa, with what are finely nuanced relationships developing between some African governments and private security firms or groups of mercenaries. South African-based Executive Outcomes maintain private military or paramilitary forces that are being used by governments and others to engage in cross-border incursions and in violations of rights without the responsibility of accepting that there is state action. So states can abdicate their responsibility and incur violence against citizens within their own countries, and even across their borders, without being accountable because it involves exchange of money rather than political accountability. Counter-insurgency is used to enforce, control, and impose compliance. As a result, democratic processes, accountability, and transparency become expendable. The state can, under many instances, abdicate its responsibility towards the security of its people.

We talk within the feminist movement on how we engage with the state, but we need to understand that these are the dynamics that exist. We need to actually engage with these dynamics wherever we are located, not just at a global level because many of these dynamics have a ripple effect. They do exist at global level, but they have different form and shapes in the regional processes, in the national processes, and also at a very local level. Our discussion about the increase of unreported incidences of rape and violence against women is just one manifestation of the violence inherent in the economic system that we are a part of, and which we need to engage with in a more substantive way.

What we have found thus far also, however, is that feminists have a contradictory relationship with the state. We want to capture power to bring about transformation as feminists, but we are uneasy with the way power plays itself out and with the forms of power which dominate political processes. I will illustrate what I mean with an anecdote. A few weeks ago I was having dinner with an eminent black woman, the first African black woman to hold a position and to be offered a senior post within the World Bank. She is one of the four managing directors of the World Bank. She is also Vice-Chancellor of the University that I belong to. We were student activists together in the heyday of the black consciousness move-

ment during the 1970's. During dinner she was sharing with us some of her concerns about this new job and what it was going to mean. She is, after all, right in the belly of the beast yet she still sees herself as having the potential to engage in bringing about change and social transformation within the World Bank. She said that one of the things she learnt in coming into the management job within the university was that her role models on management had been white, liberal males. The handful of us who were there were shocked at what was being said, especially because these words came from somebody who had her political origins in the black consciousness movement. What became evident as she proceeded to talk was that it wasn't so much the fact that these were white males that defined what she learned from them. It was the fact that these white males understood when they had captured power, and they knew how to use and maintain it.

### Reconstructing states for gender justice and citizenship

Mainstream or male stream debates on the nature of states, from both the right and the left' and the contradictory logic of how governments make decisions with regard to women and their fundamental human rights as citizens needs to be challenged. In addition engagement at policy levels should not result in complacency because of the co-option of gendered language and the rhetoric of public participation. It is just as important to track the implementation of policy objectives to assess whether such policy shifts have brought with them

a qualitative difference to the lives of the poorest women. Consequently the mainstreaming process has to become an opportunity to restructure from within (changing policy, structure and political culture) as opposed to adapting to the dominant.



### Political empowerment to social transformation

There is no end state in which women suddenly realize that they are politically empowered to act in certain ways. Political empowerment is a process through which women are able to secure the right to participate in the exercise of political power through formal institutions such as local government structure, parliamentary processes and organizations to promote a movement for social transformation. Political empowerment helps to increase power and control of women over their own lives, the right to address structural inequalities and systematic issues, and influence wider decision making as a collective force in society.

There are various ways through which women are engaging in political restructuring and social transformation:

- *Empowerment through direct action* - Women's organizations, public policy processes and projects move through certain stages in the empowerment process as they interact with forces of domination. These stages may be reflected in a progression from sensitization to consciousness and then critical analyses and action leading to social transformation. There are many practical examples of this. Some include situations in South Africa, Latin America and in India.
- *Empowerment through building Grassroots Democracy* - The other approach that is gaining ground is one based on the development of reciprocal relations between the power of the state and the power of civil society through a process of building grassroots democracy as opposed to a formal democracy which protects the interests of those with economic power. How the state articulates with civil society and movements for change, which include women's movements can reflect new modes of democratization. In this way organizations work to overcome the contradictions that are inherent in relationships of oppression by working in dialogue with women, to analyze their own oppressive conditions.
- *Empowerment through building a human rights culture* - In some countries the constitutional and legal framework has changed and provides institutional mechanisms through which women are able to secure their rights. However, assessing rights, understanding what they imply and ensuring that they are administered in a way that is sensitive to race, class, gender, age and other issues is critical. The flip side is that while the legal framework legitimates certain rights it also makes others invisible.

Linked to the above is the concern that when women understand their rights and are able to assert these they are exposed to negative reactions from the powers that be. Reactions include the increase in institutional violence, they become subjected to forms of fundamentalism that provide all areas of their lives and limit their freedom to voice their views, to associate, to engage in activity that will advance issues of gender justice.

*Within the feminist movement, and even as progressives in emerging democracies or in decision-making structures, we have an uneasy relationship with power. What the abuse of power has done in our own households, in our relationships, at a very intimate level and at other levels in society, makes us not want to capture power. We need to engage with this dilemma in a most substantive way. We also need to understand how we use power within the movement itself— whether we use power to engage in processes of collective advancement or whether we are using power for individual advancement.*

## Limits to political restructuring

At different moments in the transition process there are points of historical conjuncture and disjuncture. These points provide strategic challenges in the restructuring and empowerment process which can build women's capabilities and secure their rights to full social citizenship. The major challenges confronting development advocates within the gender field at the moment is how to ensure that the complex, differentiated and varied relationships women and organisations have with the state and civil society promote a recasting of the political sphere (public and private) and, a realignment in terms of movements and organizations, a restructuring and transformation of structures and system that are oppressive, perpetuate national domination, discriminating and economic exploitation.

## Concluding remarks

We need reconceptualise how we politicise the notion of gendered states and citizenship. We need to engage substantively with what globalisation means in terms of the gendered division of labour and the exploitation of women. We need to look at gender and political space: there is political space and we can use it strategically.

There is a need to look at gender and macro-economic policies and whether sensitising existing macro-economic policies is the same as transforming and providing alternative economic frameworks. I would argue strongly that having gender sensitisation or engendering some of the macro-economic policies in our countries is not the same as having an alternative economic framework. We cannot add gender to frameworks that have already led to the exclusion of women

and to the marginalisation of the majority of poor people. We really do need to engage with these aspects because they are being promoted as if they are transformative in content, but they are not.

We also have to look at gender and state-based violence. One of the important aspects of this is embodied in this quote from Bertold Brecht: *'In democratic countries the violent nature of the economy is not perceived. In authoritarian countries, it is the economic nature of violence which is not perceived.'*



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## 4 Politics and power

### 4.1 Preliminary thoughts on gender, politics and power in African contexts

*Amina Mama (Nigeria)*

**G**ender politics in Africa as a field of research is in its infancy. There is a great need to raise intellectual and theoretical questions that grapple with gender, power and politics. But the state of knowledge on politics and power in Africa presents a number of difficulties for the researcher.

#### Western academic knowledge and the state in Africa

The literature shows that specific cases have repeatedly been used to render general statements about African trends. These then feed into imperial constructions of knowledge about Africa. The general intellectual trend, especially characteristic of external work, is to focus on a specific aspect of a particular context and moment and then to make general statements from this work. A closer examination of politics and power in Africa reveals that the dynamics between indigenous and externally introduced forms of power and the way



these are played out within the state have generated huge differences between nation states on the African continent. We need to recognise that the tendency to make generalisations has created problems on the knowledge front and this is problematic as they are reflected in international policy prescriptions on 'good governance', 'political restructuring' and in recipes for political development.

A further difficulty for African knowledge is the constant change - enormous rates of flux and great diversity across the continent and within nation states. How many African states are stable enough to be pinned down and analysed? This does not mean that there are no common themes to be explored. But it does suggest that commonalities can only be perceived at immense distance from what is happening on the ground and this is likely to be derived largely from external forces since the policies of transnational organisations such as Structural Adjustment Policies, do have an homogenising effect.

The condemnations of the African state by western intellectuals resonate with those of the multinational corporations whose response is to bypass the state or weaken it. This raises a

set of important questions: who owns the state and who directs policy making? Are African states really African states or are they African states in name only? Where does power reside and who directs processes of restructuring? What are the implications for gender analysis? Women cannot afford to ditch the state. What gains feminists have made have tended to come through the state, or through relationships between the state and civil society. What has happened to the position of women where the state has collapsed, as in Rwanda or Sierra Leone? What form does power and politics take in these regions? What is it like to be stateless, to be a refugee?

### Feminist knowledge and the state

Feminist studies have broadened the notion of power and politics at the micro and macro political levels and shown that social power is not simply state power. However, most feminist studies of the state in Africa are western based and found in Third World compilations. Africa is not well represented in international feminism. While western feminist scholarship raises important questions for women and the state in Africa, does the public-private division have

*Knowledge of African politics is often derived from political science, a field which is very state centred, focusing largely on the state as a site of power. The result are analysis that emphasize the resounding failure of the African state, and see the state as corrupt, patrimonial, neo-patrimonial, negative, cannibalistic, the source of failure and of the African crisis. This anti-statist characterisation of African states echoes imperial ideology and uncomplimentary views of the African. While it may be true that authoritarianism is a feature of the African state, the question is whether this distinguishes the state in Africa or whether authoritarianism is not just a manifestation of a form of power.*

the same relevance in contexts in which very different sexual divisions of labour prevail? Also, what does the public-private dichotomy mean where the state has been treated as the private property of a dictator or where a private wife has enormous public power? The notion of public-private opens a Pandora's box in Africa.

The influence of feminist scholarship on African feminist work is not without problems. African feminists need to interrogate the apparently politically correct tools of western feminism that casts African women's movements across the continent as very similar. These analyses do not go very deep. Nina Mba's and Cherry Walker's 1982 publications mark a new departure in feminist historiography in Africa and have been followed by a number of other important studies. But most African feminist work appears in scattered articles. Much work is needed to build up feminist knowledge on gender, politics and power in Africa. In some countries, forty years of politics have not been properly documented.

It is an important challenge for us as African scholars to make knowledge active. This can then inform feminist political strategies. We need to think through questions such as: Should feminist activists enter the state or engage with the state? How do we become more strategic in our engagement with the state? How do we deepen that engagement? We need to ensure that states deliver the reforms that women have agitated for. We need to identify where laws and policies reflect women's demands but are not implemented. We need to identify why laws which women have agitated for are not upheld and which policies uphold patriarchal power. Identifying appropriate strategies is bound to throw up dilemmas and conflicts for gender activists.

Activism in Africa has often focused on getting more women into positions of formal power in the state and in other institutions. We need to pose the question: how do we ensure that women engage in feminist practice once they are in power? First Ladyism is an extreme example of this problem. First Ladyism, which comes from North America and is now indigenised, remains a challenge to feminist activists in Africa. First ladies have advanced conservative gender discourses, but they have also spawned enormous grassroots organisations and garnered the support of well-educated women. The problem of First Ladyism is far from simple.

Transitional regimes too, throw out a challenge to feminist activists. Women who support 'transitional' military regimes often appear unconcerned about 'transition' since they do not know what it is that we are transiting towards. But women do not make significant entrance into political structures of transitional regimes. We need to pose the question: what does transformation really deliver? Do we simply ditch national machineries set up to achieve transformation because they have not delivered enough or do we restructure? What are the alternatives if we cancel the process?

Concentrated attention on the state and its failings has been part of the neo-liberal strategy to supplant the state with market forces. Alongside this focus there has also been a growing interest in civil society, conceptualised as the alternative to 'bad government'.

How realistic is this and what does a gender perspective bring to the theory and practice of civil society?

We also need to look at civil society, to understand why women's organisations are constrained. The scope and spread of effective women's organisations on the continent is weak and the autonomy of women's organisations is in jeopardy. Civil society is often uncivil to women, and patriarchal structures ensure that civil society is organised against women's interests. We saw this in Zimbabwe when some sectors of civil society organised to have the state roll back the gains of the women's movement, to reassert patriarchal authority in the name of tradition or authenticity.

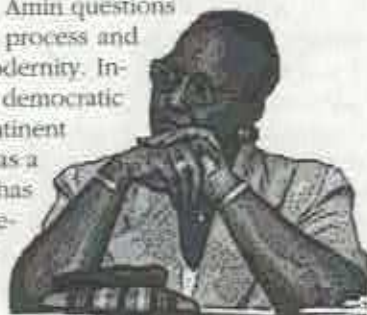
Feminist activists need a whole new organising strategy at local, national and international levels. We need to ask what kinds of solidarities are possible across the region? What kinds of international connections can be made when polemic outstrips practice and fiction outstrips truth? How do we undermine the sites of power where tyranny is manufactured? How do we make use of the rhetoric that supports women? What are the spaces that this rhetoric is opening up? We need to re-analyse gender, politics and power. This area is no longer the preserve of an autonomous women's movement. The state and political parties also play gender politics. Feminist activists need to rethink gender politics in Africa and to devise new strategies for advancing gender transformation.

## 4.2 Gender, politics and power in African contexts

*Aminata Diaw (Senegal)*

The focus of this presentation is on the production of exclusion, the power of the masculine and the power of the feminine and the ways these affect the power to produce. It begins by identifying three outstanding processes unfolding on the African continent over the past two decades: Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs), democratic transition and globalisation. It notes that the triumph of liberalism has resulted in a preoccupation with macro-economic stability and debt rather than human issues. It raises questions about the hegemony of the state and the interaction of national states with globalisation.

The ideas of Samir Amin provide a useful starting point for analysing the problem of the state in Africa in this period. Amin questions the way Africa entered the democratisation process and points out that Africa has not produced modernity. Instead, the effect of Africa entering into the democratic process has been to make the African continent perform for capitalism. The state has failed as a structure of production and consequently has renegotiated its power base and political legitimacy in terms of gender and ethnic relations.



Women have responded to this restructuring in many ways. In particular, the women's convention in Beijing in 1995 raised critical questions for gender and politics in the democratic transition process. Firstly, how have processes of transformation affected power and politics? Secondly, how have different forms of power affected women's entry into politics? Has women's position within state power shifted from one of objectification to one in which women are subjects? Thirdly, how do women take charge of political processes in their lives? These questions will be addressed below under the themes male power and the politics of exclusion and female power and the politics of challenging male power.

### Male power and the politics of exclusion

The politics of exclusion was the dominant strand in development strategies immediately after independence. The state was the principle agent in disaggregating forces on the lines of ethnicity and gender. This can be seen from the ways in which national objectives were defined. In Senegal, for example, women were not included in the national objectives until 1977-1981. The post-independence state defined its mission as nation-building and development. Women were ignored in both areas.

*The transition to democracy is a narrative of the exclusion of women. What is needed is a new geography to give women space. This new space which women seek is one where there is negotiation between those with power and those without. The reality, however, is that which is revealed by the street lights. Those with power and mobility drive under the bright lights in the centre of the road. The dimly lit sidewalks are the spaces on the margins, where the beggars sit and beg, spaces where the unemployed look for work, spaces where those who survive by their bodies come awake at night. The sidewalks need to become the negotiated spaces in the new geography. These new spaces represent the loss of territory, material space and desocialisation, issues which are a consequence of women leaving the domestic realm in order to survive but without adequate protection. The new spaces become an articulation of an informal sector of survival, a complete dis-articulation of space.*

Women then began to challenge this approach to building a national African state on the basis of excluding women. As women returned as actors on the national stage, nation-building shifted from a unified strategy to a more differentiated one. Women took up the right to speak and became visible in public through their participation in women's organisations. Women adopted a 'rights' discourse, demanding the right to control over their bodies and the right to employment, among others. In so doing, women questioned the domination of men and challenged the state's strategy of ignoring women.

The transition to democracy has sometimes been called the political economy of liberty. But transition has not afforded feminist discourses a space. Women have had to organise to challenge the hegemony of the state and male domination within it.

The failure of modernisation is that

women are increasingly subjected to precarious social survival. Mutation and change have meant fewer resources for meeting women's increasing social responsibilities. Globalisation has led to the displacement of women from the domestic sphere to the market place without education or a protective environment in which to survive in these spaces. The question of good governance is not politically neutral. In the context of globalisation, the role of the state and its day-to-day interventions are mechanisms for ensuring better integration of the state into the global capitalist system. In Africa and the Caribbean, the state has been deprived of the means for changing its practices of exclusion since it has no resources for meeting the needs of women.

### Female power and the politics of challenging male power

We now pose the question: have women been successful in creating a means of challenging the state symbolically and ideologically? Has the number of women in positions of power changed the nature of that power or have they been part of the legitimisation of that power? Despite the juridical instruments that have been ratified by many countries, their governments are still not taking the need for women's representation and women's interests into account. The reason for the poor representation of women in the executives of African countries is that the political realm is a masculine and androcentric world that appears to be impenetrable by women.

Women in Africa have adopted two broad procedures for confronting their exclusion from state power. They have appropriated international discourses on women's rights and used these to advance the political cause of women. They have also entered new spaces and used these to subvert the paradigm of exclusion. These strategies have provided space for women and augmented women's presence in politics. However, these strategies have not challenged male domination in the state. Nor have they subverted male power.



## The way forward

Women need to challenge the logic of the market and to ensure that it does not become a logic of exclusion. Women must create an independent economic space that subverts male power to some extent. Women must ensure that the new human rights culture ties in with economic independence. The new spaces that women create must be built on a culture of justice and a place where women can be actors.

### 4.3 Discussion: Politics and power

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#### State functions and social welfare

Participants observed that the shift in the World Bank away from rolling back the state had led to the state becoming more functional in terms of liberalisation but it had not led to social delivery being made a function of the state. The market as an exclusionary factor was not uniform across Africa as exemplified by West Africa and South Africa. It was noted that as the welfare obligation and capacity of the state are undermined or shrink, militarisation increases. In this two-way pull, warlords take over the state.

The Tanzanian delegate pointed out that under President Julius Nyerere, there had been a culture of paying taxes and enjoying social services. Since then, people had stopped paying taxes and social services had collapsed. This raised an important issue. How do we re-activate the knowledge that we can improve the basic conditions of life for people?

#### Democracy, the state and economic liberalisation

Can there be a different definition for democracy in Africa? Should feminists be fighting to bring down the state or supporting fighting states? These were the questions posed by participants.

Some felt that democracy should not mean something different in Africa. The difficulty for democracy in Africa lay in identifying where power was located. For example, the arms trade following liberalisation of the market place meant that groups outside the state wielded enormous aggressive power in some African countries. Even African states in transition had closed down gender machinery. Participants felt that feminist strategies needed to be context specific if women were to avoid being outmanoeuvred. Some participants warned of the dangers of seeing post-Women in Development (WID) projects as creating an economic space for women. Others urged that we be more vigilant about the characterisation of transformation that is presented to us. We should question whether transformation means liberalisation.

## 5 Institutionalisation

### 5.1 The institutionalisation of gender in Africa

*Charmaine Pereira (Nigeria)*

**T**he presentation centred on the question: what does the institutionalisation of gender entail where state institutions are less and less able to govern?

#### State legitimacy, gender equity and the institutionalisation of governance

In most African countries, the institutionalisation of gender has been associated with WID/GAD structures or machineries made up of gender desks and units within the state. There are two preconditions to the success of WID/GAD structures: that the state is legitimate and that there is the political will to promote and implement gender equity.

State legitimacy and the institutionalisation of governance are shaped by the broader context of the currently dominant liberalisation theory. Economic liberalisation is promoted as a precondition for political democracy and good governance. The inherent hypocrisy is clear when rolling back the state means rolling back the service parts of the state while strengthening its coercive parts. It is clear that Structural Adjustment Policies reduce the legitimacy of the state and its ability to govern. These trends seriously complicate the problems of institutionalising social justice in a way that includes gender justice. The tendency to merge equity and efficiency arguments carries with it the dangers of



instrumentalism – in other words, instead of asking what can women do for development, the question becomes what can development do for women?

Only certain forms of social conflict are recognised. Gender conflict is not seen in the same way as ethnic and religious conflict. Thus mainstream political discourses talk about power-sharing on an ethnic, regional or religious basis but not in terms of gender. In Nigeria, power-sharing is discussed in the framework of a federalism of territorially based and ethnically defined states. Feminist activists need to rethink federalism and to seek its restructuring in ways that take poverty alleviation and gender equity into account. This means achieving functional state institutions in local areas and reasserting that gender equity is an essential part of social justice. It also means that the starting point for activism should not be efficiency, but equity, recalling and recontextualising the anti-colonial slogan of 'no peace without justice'.

### Gender institutions and the political will to achieve gender equity

The gender structures that have been put in place for women in Nigeria have arisen under military regimes which have cast state institutions as part of a 'transition'. Their location within the transition discourse implies that the structures will outlast specific military regimes. But this does not occur since the political will is to remain in power, rather than to institutionalise gender justice. Thus we see First Ladies incorporating women into organisations that accommodate any government in power. This form of incorporation serves to legitimate marginalisation rather than include women into formal politics.

*For rights to be taken up and acted upon there needs to be policy. And for women to take advantage of the spaces that are provided by the discourse of Human Rights and by policy, their own organisations have to be strengthened and institutionalised. Women need to be trained and skilled to engage in the processes required to reconstruct state institutions and functions, such as policy-making. Women can then challenge the neo-liberal agenda of using civil society organisations to replace or substitute for services that ought to be the responsibility of the state, and challenge the states that implement them*

### Women and the Human Rights institutional framework -reconstructing sovereignty

The Human Rights framework developed after the World Conference in Vienna in 1993 has been used as a tool for the mainstreaming of feminism. Human Rights discourse provides leverage for women to reconstruct and exercise popular sovereignty through global, national and regional networks. This is a challenge both to the tendency for globalisation to undermine sovereignty and for constructions of sovereignty as gender neutral. Shadow reports have emerged as a key Human Rights strategy. These alternative reports have been used by women to highlight abuses and to put pressure on the states which are signa-

ories to the Convention for the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and other conventions. Shadow reports have been used to identify violations of human rights, name those who have committed violations and spell out what the state has done or not done to remedy human rights violations.

Two major constraints to women challenging the state are the resistance of bureaucracies to change and the need for strong social bases. To overcome the first, we need to increase the number of women in public office, support their consciousness raising and devise means for bridging the class, ethnic, religious, age and language divisions among women. To achieve the second, we need to build strong autonomous women's organisations and to engage in the politics of alliance. These combined strategies may then lead to achieving the goals of institutionalising social justice and gender equity.

## 5.2 Discussion: Institutionalisation

**D**iscussion on the issues of institutionalisation focused largely on the challenges of building gender equity.

### Constraints to gender equity

The Tanzanian delegate pointed out that the civilian governments of East Africa were as guilty of hostility to gender equity and corruption as the military regimes of West Africa.

Participants noted that male 'deafness' and resistance to feminist discourse and the way that some male leaders constantly ridicule gender serves to constrain institutionalising gender equity. One of the delegates from Senegal described how the male representatives of the Zambian government had threatened the female NGO delegation at the Beijing + 5 planning conference.

Participants stressed the need for women to find ways to overcome corruption among government officials, such as instances where some have appropriated or given themselves loans out of funds for poverty alleviation that directly impact on poor women's lives. Multilateral treaties like WTO undermine human rights tied to international instruments. Even when national governments



have signed documents such as CEDAW, the WTO rules make it impossible for them to implement human rights. Factors such as these and privatisation of services also constrain institutionalisation of gender equity.

### Disaggregating civil society

One of the South African participants suggested that civil society is a dangerous term for those building a strong social base as it does not recognise that organisations stand at different points from the popular masses. To build a strong social base means lobbying, advocacy and research, but it also means taking ideas back to our constituencies. Delegates were challenged to report back to the next DAWN workshop on how the knowledge and mechanisms developed through the workshop have been put to use.

Other participants believed that civil society is a useful term but they stressed that civil society itself is dynamic and constantly changing. For example, in some contexts, social movements have dissipated and turned into NGOs, changing the shape of civil society. Civil society is multifaceted, and includes not only forward-looking organisations but also conservative groups. This means that we need to specify which organisations in civil society we are talking about. It also means that the aims and goals of organisations need to be clear for them to be able to work for gender justice.



## 6 The feminist movement and the state

### 6.1 Institutionalising gender: An examination of state-led strategies for gender equality

*Shireen Hassim (South Africa)*

#### Some assumptions

Working on political restructuring challenges one's ideological frameworks. The notion of the state as a complex, contradictory and disaggregated set of institutions is more useful than the idea of the state as a monolithic entity. Different aspects of the state weave different meanings into our lives. This is not to deny the coercive dimensions of the state. Rather, it is to enable us to uncover the way institutions constitute women's interests.

National machineries are institutional means that open up the state to considering women's interests, but they assume that there is some pre-defined set of women's interests that can be acted upon. There are few interests that have been won by women's movements rather than having been defined by the gender machinery within the state. This illustrates that the gender machinery is not neutral.



The paper encompasses three-areas of focus (in South Africa):

- Key questions such as: What are the new terrains of engagement between the state and civil society around gender inequalities? What is the impact of institutionalisation of gender machineries on the ability of women's organisations to mobilise?
- The ways in which women are constituted in the state at two levels: the representative sphere and the bureaucracy,
- How women's interests are constituted in the policy of the child maintenance grant.

### New terrains of engagement

Women's organisations in South Africa after 1990 had to reorient themselves to government in the period of transition in order to engage with the state. This was facilitated by widespread confidence in the ability of the future ANC government to engage gender inequality. In the transitional period, the hand over of political authority focused on institutional arrangements for consolidating and sustaining democracy. Institutionalisation was seen as a way of reducing conflict in South Africa. Although women's organisations did not have the same scope for creating conflict as capital or the labour movement, women had more space and leverage than under the apartheid government. Once in place gender mechanisms went beyond a single structure (such as a ministry) in government because women activists had learnt the importance of a comprehensive structure and package of institutionalised mechanisms. The pack-

age includes the Office of the Status of Women (OSW), the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE), a constitutional clause on equality and gender structures in Parliament. The OSW is charged with the task of conceptualising a national gender policy and liaising between civil society organisations that deal with women's issues and the Office of the President and Parliament. The effect of this machinery has been to make the state more permeable to the politics of women.

Social movements made up of organisations of civil society can be weakened when they are institutionalised. Institutionalisation can have the effect of demobilising civil society, and often sends a message to the masses to participate in politics in the 'correct way'. This is one way of thinking about institutionalisation. Another way is to think about institutionalisation as a formal way of opening up 'habitats' for women activists, that ena-

*Gender machinery is not neutral. How women are constituted as a group for whom the state provides services is deeply political. Different institutions make claims for different groups of women. We need to establish how the state mediates those claims. One could argue that all social policy carries the cost of aggregating and privileging interests since the state can't act separately on behalf of all interests. However, it is important to identify what is erased or shifted to the margins in this process because these movements open up or close spaces for women.*

bles thinking about the next stage of gender struggle. In South Africa, it recognises that the ANC government opened new spaces for gender activists in civil society, especially for marginal groupings.

This is not to deny that institutionalisation has resulted in greater stratification in civil society. Indeed, civil society is fractured along three main lines:

- At national level – the period since 1994 has seen the decline of the Women's National Coalition (WNC) and its replacement by sectoral networks that are highly policy articulate, with relatively good access to the policymaking process, such as the National Network Against Violence Against Women lobby, the Reproductive Rights Alliance and the Anti-Poverty Coalition;
- At policy and advocacy level – as can be seen in bodies such as the Gender Advocacy Project and IDASA that are well-resourced and well-informed about the policy, technical and research needs of the policy environment;
- The mass of women's organisations at the local level that are closest to women's needs but do not have the resources to impact at national level. These organisations continue to use social movement political tactics such as protests, as the New Women's Movement did in relation to the Child Maintenance Grant.

The extent to which institutionalisation is progressive or demobilising depends on the linkages between these three levels and the state. Successful cases of state led approaches to gender change are those that combine both state and civil society initiatives, their strategic routes being complimentary rather than separate.

### Representative politics and institutionalising gender in government

The contradictory nature of the state means there may be more success in one area of the state than in others and women's experiences vary according to which aspect of the state they are interacting with. Parliament for instance, is a relatively small elite within which the ANC constitutes a strong majority party that has no fear of losing votes if it supports gender equity. Parliament thus offered a more open and permeable state institution for transformation for several reasons: because of the large number of pro-



gressive people who entered Parliament, the political will of the majority party and because gender activists were able to make gains within the system.

In contrast, the civil service has not had the same degree of success despite the large number of new people who entered government departments. The civil service retains a large number of apartheid bureaucrats and there is no strong majority party to back-up gender activists as there is in Parliament. For example, the OSW found that political will at the highest level did not make their work any easier within specific government departments. Racism remains another issue in the civil service and black women lack institutional political clout to fight this double exclusion.

The challenges regarding the bureaucracy are twofold. Firstly, women in the civil service have to transform the internal structures of government to create a culture in which women employees are treated as equal to men. Secondly, they have to impact on resource allocation and policy priorities so that the needs of women are addressed by service delivery agencies.

### Constituting women's interests: the case of the Child Maintenance Grant

The case of the Child Maintenance Grant shows that we cannot rely solely on state structures but need also to mobilise outside of government. Women's organisations responded angrily to the way in which a new flat-rate child support benefit was predicated on cutting past grants to white, Indian and coloured mothers and shifting maintenance away from the state and onto parents. Activists pointed out that although policy-making was led by a feminist and supported by women-friendly social scientists, policy ultimately supported privatisation disguised as parental responsibility, and acted against women's interests.

Finally, there is a danger that, in the process of institutionalising gender and the stratification that this gives rise to, gender issues may become the domain of academics and technocrats and of a new gender elite disaggregated from mass constituencies and the black working class. 'Real politics' is needed to get back into articulating gender issues.

## 6.2 Civil society and the state: The changing nature of women's organisations in the 1990s

*Sheila Meintjes (South Africa)*

The focus of the presentation is on the NGO-isation of feminism in the 1990s. NGO-isation implies a shift from movement activism to issue specific interventions and pragmatic strategies.

South African feminism is located in the material needs of women. After 1990, the strategy of women activists was to draw up a clear agenda for meeting those needs. In particular, the Women's National Coalition (WNC) spearheaded by the ANC Women's League (ANCWL), drew up the Women's Charter for

Effective Equality. One of the key debates at this time was what the relationship between women's organisations and the state should be. While the WNC was instrumental in influencing the constitution and a great deal of policy and law (such as the outlawing of rape in marriage, protection from domestic violence for women and illegalising discrimination against women), some of the feminist objectives of the WNC have not been fulfilled. It did not realise the hope of using the Charter as a focus for the mobilisation of a strong and effective women's movement in South Africa, partly because of the diversity of interests involved in the WNC and partly because of leadership failure.

Since then, there has been more fragmentation around issue-based organisations. The emergence of what Shireen Hassim called new 'habitats' has blocked the emergence of a new politicised and mobilised 'feminist public'. The feminist movement has suffered from the loss of the leadership role played by the ANCWL which has subsequently failed to define a role for itself. Part of the difficulty has been that the Women's League defined itself as a 'movement' and was unable to relate to the ANC as a 'party'. These new developments do not appear to present a possibility for a new women's movement to emerge. The one possibility is that a feminist movement could grow out of the Network Against Violence Against Women.

### The Anti-Violence Movement

The Anti-Violence movement has moved from its beginnings as Rape Crisis, a small all white organisation, to embracing a broader grouping and from not engaging with the state, to engaging with the state. This change has been accompanied by a change in discourse and the move to centre stage of a more articulate and professional group that has articulated a new relationship with the state. The issue of violence and this engagement with the state has shifted the way the feminist movement engages with policy. Professionals from Rape Crisis organisations and other activists have moved into the heart of policy making and have been invited to draw up legislation; they played a key role in the drafting and passage of the Domestic Violence Bill in Parliament in 1998. Rape Crisis as an NGO has become part of the institutionalisation of the issues of violence and rape. In the process, women at the grassroots have lost their voice.

This does not mean that pressure from civil society has not been very important in shaping the policy process. Organisations have mounted campaigns and intellectuals have engaged with the state to shape policy. But what has been very important is the location within the state (both in Parliament and in the bureaucracy) of key women, who were gender activists, in decision-making positions. But the new machinery of the CGE and the OSW has not been particularly important - they have not been central to



the process of policy-making. This raises questions for engaging with the state. Engagement with the state has not created a new political movement. Rather, the process of professionalisation has created the possibility for feminist political gains in the state. The difficulty is that professional women are not always linked to the broader mobilisation of women in civil society. This has been exacerbated by the fragmentation of the issue-based focus of the policy process.

### 6.3 Social movements, women's movements and the state in Africa

*N'Dri Therese Assie-Lumumba (Ivory Coast)*

The presentation examines key issues pertaining to the nature of the state and the women's movement. It begins with a criticism of the argument that the state in Africa has failed.

#### What do we mean by the failure of the state?

What do we mean when we say the African state has failed to fulfill its duty towards women? Is it possible to induce changes to transform significantly its original nature and mission? Can women even in large numbers achieve the goal of transforming the state or at least establish an honest and productive partnership with the state?

Uncritically accepting that the African state has failed in these goals is equivalent to arguing that it is possible to transform capitalism into a human centred and pro-working class system. The African state was not designed to take care of the needs of women, so we cannot expect it to have done so.

The current political map of Africa is a reflection of European colonialism and African women's position in the state is a continuation of the debate of the Europeans. The last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century provides a legitimate basis for the discourse on 'democratic movement'. However much of the popular reference to democratisation is liberal democracy and its western tradition of procedural democracy, often reduced to the formal equality of 'one person one vote'. Yet democracy, participatory democracy, refers to democracy as a government in which people have a systematic or institutionalised mechanism of free and genuine participation. We need to query attempts to reproduce western traditions and values of governance and how they may or may not



fit the African traditions and contemporary social and economic conditions in the quest for change. Governance is philosophically universal but the values, the types of government, the types of political parties, whose interests are protected and the power of the masses to challenge the state, are not. We need to debate political formation before the Berlin conference. We need to ask how did we get where we are? How were African people able to solve their problems before the European presence?

### Identifying the positive aspects of African culture that support women

Even Africans have become accustomed to rejecting the most positive cultural attributes of Africa. The presence of gender balance in policy formulation and implementation and actual participation in the political process has been observed throughout history until European domination. Women from various African regions played a key role in state power building in Africa before the colonial era, for example, in West Africa and Western Central Africa-Kongo. Researchers are not funded to research the culturally empowering aspects of African culture. We are socialised into believing that women cannot and do not have power. This is not so if we only take the trouble to do the research. An example is that of African women in Mali who began to conduct centuries old African rituals in order to demonstrate their opposition to an Islamic leader.

Many African societies prior to colonialism had non-hierarchical gender divisions. Separate gendered spaces became hierarchical with colonialism. The making of the modern state excluded women from the period of the Berlin conference. Political institutions and positions were created by the Europeans or the old systems were redirected, under the euphemism of 'traditional chieftainship' to service the interest of the Europeans. These factors included the distribution of formal education and the transformation brought about by the capitalist economy in families that were units of production and consumption where women as producers and managers played a central role. They also included the introduction of a new all-male security/military system, compounded by religion (Islam and Christianity) as interpreted by males. These factors all converged to displace, corner and evict African women from their previous positions. In the post-colonial state, women were no longer perceived as worthy allies or key players in the management of public affairs in the modern African state. This is part of the legacy that has led to there being no official function, no designated rights and responsibilities for women. First Ladies try to create their own space under the political umbrella of their hus-

*A major challenge for us is to make a contribution to knowledge and discourse as a search for practical solutions to some of Africa's predicaments. We need to explore the hidden or apparent but neglected history that exists outside accepted and popular paradigms controlled from the centre. We need to explore new frontiers of knowledge and alternatives that can challenge the current state and propose solutions to improve the living conditions of the African populations*

hands. The 'first lady NGO' is a way of marginalised women accessing a share of their political power so we should not entirely dismiss the First Lady syndrome but explore what role first ladies might legitimately play.

The issue of women in politics in Africa is a difficult one. Why have African states not produced women holding highest positions during the colonial administration and in post-colonial politics? Both the European patriarchal belief that considers women as inferior to men and the feminist theory that makes African traditional patriarchy responsible for the limitation of women's realisations in post-colonial Africa, constitute part of the difficulty of analysing African experience. They constitute a framework of a unilinear human experience based on similar presence and manifestation of patriarchy. The African experience does not fit this mould.

Since the UN Decade for Women, NGOs for women have mushroomed. Beside these, local, sub-regional and regional independent organisations have been established in Africa. Some have been doing groundbreaking work, combining scholarship and activism, and have begun negotiating space between the formal system and separate spaces occupied by women with some success. Many have argued that the existence or absence of democracy should not be defined in narrow conventional terms of voting rights. Rather, democracy should be measured by alternative indicators.

We need to address the content of education offered to African people. Even in Africa, we cannot talk about African culture in the curriculum. Gender work also needs to look more closely and positively at African culture.

We also need to network. Regional networks can contribute to redefining Africa and African women can offer alternatives for social mobilisation and for



the creation of a collective ground for social programmes. We must guard against functioning as agencies of the dominant international financial institutions as most of the African regional economic organisations do. We need to work with students, labour unions, environment groups and religious organisations. We need to discuss the role of the African diaspora in supporting gender work in Africa.

Let us take a lesson from the *sankofa* bird which is looking back, not walking back. Looking back will enable us to see where we have been in order to know where we want to go.

## 6.4 Discussion: Feminist movements and the state

Discussion highlighted the changes that have occurred and the challenges that remain for women's organisations and the feminist movement in Africa.

### The meaning of feminism in Africa

Discussion was sparked off by the question 'What do we mean by a feminist movement in Africa and what does it mean to be a feminist in Africa? Are these terms simply taken over from international organisations? One participant defined feminism as a move for the removal of all forms of oppression against women, particularly violence against women. In South Africa for instance, women had been trying to construct an indigenous South African feminism for a long time and it is only since 1994 that the term feminism has been reclaimed by the women's movement.

The Palestinian delegate explained that it is unacceptable to talk of feminism in Palestine because the term is associated with the American feminist movement which in turn is seen as a lesbian movement. Palestinians prefer to speak of a women's movement. The history of the women's movement in Palestine is that while the national liberation movement started as an elite movement, the women's movement began as a mass movement. There was no specific role for elite women until the transition, when grassroots women withdrew and began to rely on the elite to articulate their needs on their behalf.

### Gender elites

One participant suggested that DAWN should see it as a challenge to avoid perpetuating a gender elite. Others felt that a gender elite is not necessarily a bad thing in redefining feminism. Elites could be a kind of vanguard. The gender elite in South Africa for instance has pushed for choice on abortion where a referendum would have probably lost this position. It was noted that grassroots consciousness is not always better for women than



analysis which comes from the elite. The danger is not the gender elite itself but rather the distance between those in government and civil society, and a possible move away from moral accountability to greater professionalisation.

Some participants expressed the view that women in Africa were despised because they did not have a gender elite. It was felt that to have women in the academy and to articulate theoretical discourse is important.

### Women's movements and national liberation movements

The question was raised as to why and how the once huge women's movement in the national liberation movement in South Africa had become disaggregated. It was explained that there had always been tension between the ANC and the ANCWL. After 1990, the ANC had to turn itself into a political party and this exacerbated the tension. In addition, the ANCWL had been used to support one individual's personal political agendas and this had led to its demise. It was also noted that in general women were often pushed aside after liberation. Bread and butter issues were so intense that women could not always make the connections to global issues that might help them to advance their interests.

The question as to whether there is any possibility of the re-emergence of a women's movement in South Africa was discussed. Participants noted that the increased gender activism and greater acknowledgement of diversity occurring in South Africa at present meant that it is not likely that one common organisation would come about. It was noted that the clarity that has emerged around policy has compelled us to go beyond commonality to acceptance of diversity at the same time as achieving greater awareness.

Others were more pessimistic about the possibility of rebuilding a feminist movement in South Africa because of the war against women's bodies. It was felt that the transformation discourse needed a strong women's movement to counter the backlash against women.

### First Ladies and patriarchal power relations frameworks

It was pointed out that the problem of First Ladyism in Nigeria occurred not only at national level but also at provincial and local levels where the wives of officials behaved like First Ladies. This type of patriarchal power manifests at other levels, as explained by one participant from Senegal, where women often only have prestige if they have high powered husbands

*It would be more useful to question the role of the executive in a country rather than that of the First Lady suggested a DAWN representative. We should be asking who takes part in drawing up the constitution? How does a constitution or law make some issues visible and others invisible? What is expected of people in executive positions in relation to governance? What should be the relationship of First Ladies to women's organisations and to development? The legal instrument that governs executive power is important to help us redefine the space occupied by First Ladies.*

or sons in religious institutions. This issue points to the complexity of the problem of the relationship between women and power in Africa.

The problem of women and power raised a number of questions: How do we advance the cause of women without going to the organisations that perpetuate the conditions that hold us back? How do we as women's organisations deal with issues like state revenues being used for organising women?

The problem of First Ladyism in Senegal, noted one participant, extended to the First Lady using government ministers to advance her own agendas. The First Lady was able to create institutions of power alongside the state. Other participants pointed out that women who have access to government had a duty to perform and that this duty came with responsibilities. It was suggested that one possible role was for the First Lady to question cultural and religious practices that oppress women in order to direct these to more present day values.

### Power and the women's movement

A participant asked if DAWN takes the issue of power seriously. Another participant explained that power relations in organisations played themselves out in different ways and that conflict was natural when one brought different groups together. The challenge for DAWN was not only how to deal with internal conflicts but how to project the dissension in conflict and engagement with protagonists of gender justice in ways that do not create more fragmentation.

Women in feminist movements sometimes also play despicable roles, and play out power relations undermining and breaking each other down. While we can sometimes grow through conflict, conflict has to be regulated. One participant urged us to reawaken a passion for the women's movement and to recognise that power and women do mix in the women's movement if not in the minds of those in power. Another contributor urged participants to avoid essentialising so that we do not see power as purely institutional or women either as angels or as passive and oppressed.



## 7 Globalisation and the state

### 7.1 Globalisation and the state

*Lindsey Collen-Seegobin (Mauritius)*

**G**lobalisation is both something completely new in its present form and also something that grew out of older forms of domination and exploitation over the last 500 years. The current globalisation process began over 25 years ago with shifts in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), and economic policies influenced by the ideas of Hayek and Friedman, put in practice by Reagan and Thatcher. What we see happening now is a shift from WB and IMF leadership to the WTO which has taken over from the aborted Multilateral Agreement on Investments (MAI).

These international organisations work through centrally planned processes, with a democratic veneer and are ultimately run by multinational corporations (MNCs). The officials of the IMF and the WB are like civil servants of a supranational state and they work through ministries, government departments, parastatals and universities. They are invisible, like a virus. This world-state apparatus destroys nationalised production and nation based capitalist production as well as many aspects of the nation state, in particular those which give democratic choices of policy and the performance of 'caring' roles. It challenges any form of gains made in post colonial countries and represents an attack on national sovereignty and in particular on the nation state's obligations and capacity to protect human rights. The rights of particular importance to women are most vulnerable:



free education and health care for all, old age pensions, subsidised basic foods and transport, running water, cheap electricity supplies, social security and basic housing.

The WTO pressurises national governments through its secretariat and one of its methods is to declare that a country's laws are no longer compatible with the rules of the WTO and have to be changed. They then offer a consultant, at high fees, who advises on macro-economic policy guidelines, entailing cuts in government spending and the privatisation of services, such as health and education. This approach is not peculiar to the WTO. Bodies within the United Nations such as WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNFPA are all also being affected by the same viral system. For example, some publications on contraception now have the name of the WB and of a consortium of pharmaceutical companies as one of their funders. What should be factual 'contraception news' cannot be relied upon as before, as behind the facts are diverse vested interests.

At the same time there has been deep political will for globalisation from inside some Third World nations. While regional co-operation used to be a progressive means of opposing imperialism, regional blocks are now the building blocks from which globalisation itself is made. At the same time a myriad of middlemen in Third World countries thrive on tidbits that fall from the table of international capital.

The civil service of the new, post-colonial state is also at the behest of international finance capital. As finance capital became independent of the nation state, all capital which used to be taxed by the nation state for funding public amenities such as health, education, water, telecommunications and pension rights, has escaped from governments. Rolling back the little bit of the caring state means women are no longer freed from the burdens of reproduction in all its forms.

### The Multilateral Agreement on Investments (MAI)

The aborted MAI was shelved because there was widespread protest against it. The MAI was to be an international treaty negotiated and planned in secret in 1997 as a 'World Constitution' by the OECD countries. Opposition was spear-headed by Canadian militants and their coordinated action was successful in putting the MAI on hold. Once SAPs have weakened nation states the MAI will re-enter in new forms to protect and strengthen investors, MNCs and finance capital.

Under MAI international investors would have a similar status to that of the nation-state and would be able to sue governments and local authorities if any of these elected institutions changed any laws, such as environmental laws, women's equality laws or laws for better working conditions, in a way that would diminish expected profits.

The draft MAI envisages societies made up of different categories of people:

- Investors: with rights to freedom of movement for themselves and their families, including entitlement of spouses to look for work;

- Managers, (those with the right to hire and fire), professionals and consultants: also with freedom to work, for themselves and their families;
- Workers: with limited freedom of movement within the nation state or within regional blocks, subjected to immigration and labour laws, who have no rights except a work contract.
- We can suppose that there is another category: the poor and excluded.

This MAI categorisation of people turns a class system into a caste system and shows us what might happen in the millennial round of globalisation.

### The World Trade Organisation (WTO)

In 1995 the WTO replaced GATT, and part of its historical role is to replace the role intended for MAI. The WTO even more than GATT has moved into areas that directly affect women and particularly women in the Third World, as is evident in agriculture. Under WTO, government subsidies on agricultural and food production and consumption are banned and have to be phased out. This removal of agriculture and food subsidies hits women particularly hard. The WTO also supports moves to patent seed forms and so has embarked on an attack on the women-led agricultural revolution of 10 000 years ago. Basmati rice has already been claimed. Third world farmers will lose their independence as terminator seeds are introduced around them. Even if some people oppose terminator seeds, others on their boundaries will use them and insects will carry them across. Some damage has already been done. That there is no information on genetically engineered crops in the media is a reflection of who owns the media. It is not widely known that in India, for example, a movement begun by women in 1993 to oppose seed patents under GATT has mobilised millions of farmers.

### Mauritius country study

Mauritius, with a population of 1.2 million over several islands, has full employment, free health care and education to tertiary level, universal old age pensions and subsidised imported foodstuffs, despite the government having taken IMF and World Bank funds and having adopted a SAP since 1979. This is not because Mauritius is a model of the success of the policies of the IMF and WB. This is rather a result of the combined effect of protectionism under the Lome Convention, influx of capital from Hong-Kong prior to its de-colonisation and widespread resistance to IMF and WB conditionalities. About 620 women's



organisations and over 300 trade unions have mobilised thousands of people to act and refuse to give up their rights, and refuse to accept conditions that the government has agreed to.

### The way ahead

It is important to recognise that globalisation is taking a new and destructive turn. We need to note the blurring lines between different actors such as the IMF, the WB and the WTO and the ways in which globalisation is advancing the interests of international capital. We need to check the role that scholars, intellectuals and right-wing think-tanks play in helping to set up regional bodies for engaging governments to fall in line with the globalisation. The fight against MAI was

an important achievement for oppositional groups even if it was mostly done through the Internet. But we need to recognise that the fight against MAI is not over and many of MAI policies have been resurrected by the WTO.

*It is important that women work out new forms of organisation to oppose the global state apparatus which leaves nothing but a repressive role for the nation state. Organisation and mobilisation must take place at different levels: national, regional and OAU levels in Africa, with women's organisations, labour and other progressive groups in the North, and internationally, taking advantage of the Internet. Another major challenge for us is to prevent the conversion of political struggles and resistance into inter-tribal, inter-religious and inter-ethnic confrontations by the state, through our political work.*

## 7.2 Discussion: Globalisation and the State

Participants identified the following key questions for discussion: What does national sovereignty, citizenship and liberation mean in the context of globalisation? How do women reclaim citizenship in this context? What role are regional institutions such as the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), Southern African Development Co-ordinating Committee (SADCC) and the Commonwealth playing?

### Research

It was stressed that knowledge production is in the hands of mainstream people and we need to consider how we as women involved in struggle can produce, control and disseminate knowledge.

Suggested areas for research:

- agriculture subsidies, patenting of seeds, services cuts;
- privatisation, unemployment and cuts in social services;
- ways in which IMF and WB policies are played out in different places;
- the informalisation of work;

- the meaning of national sovereignty for women;
- the ways in which globalisation advances international capital: we need constantly to ask 'who is the driving force and what is their agenda?'

### Mobilising women

Participants posed critical questions. On what level do women's organisations need to mobilise - is it at the international level or at the level of the nation state? If the addressee should be the government of the nation-state, then what does globalisation mean for strategy?

It was generally felt that women need strong regional and international networks. Women excluded from world events and processes are not capable of producing strategic information or taking appropriate action. We need to link-up to develop knowledge and share experiences for strategising.

This discussion led participants to emphasise the importance of education and for resistance to globalisation, to deal with technical revolutions, to educate and to advise. Education enables us to develop the capacity to organise and to plan for action. One participant challenged DAWN to use women's experience to produce critical knowledge and to develop strategies for disseminating this knowledge through networks.

### Globalisation as neocolonialism

It was noted that globalisation is a set of evolving patterns and is the pattern of neo-colonialism in the world today.

Participants identified numerous examples of unstable neocolonial patterns in African countries. In Senegal, water and electricity services were owned by the French under colonialism, followed by a period of Senegalese ownership and subsequently French and Canadian companies took control of these services. In Zanzibar, dependence on a single export crop (cloves) was encouraged through colonial economic policies. When the clove market fell, the economy fell. Similarly, in West Africa, a terrible blow has been dealt to cotton production through the integration of the cotton industry into export orientation. Importantly, Burkino Faso demonstrated that it was possible to resist globalised forms of colonial control in the economy. The state waged a campaign to encourage people to buy locally made fabric. This strategy enabled women to rediscover the meaning and power in cotton.

Most recently, neocolonialism is evident in the SAPs that are creating new forms of dependence.



In West Africa, SAPs have resulted in market women being organised by governments while independent trade unions are broken down. Market women then become dependent on government. In Cameroon, the processing of coffee and cocoa was 'stabilised' and the local processing company was closed. The coffee planters' livelihoods are now far from stable and they have begun appealing to multinational companies for help. Another example of cutbacks due to SAPs is in the health arena. Hospitals in Cameroon have been privatised and health services are coming onto the market.

The recently established free economic zones in Palestine also represent a form of neocolonialism. In these zones, Palestine has moved from colonisation by Israel to international colonisation. Foreign consultants are brought in while Palestinian professionals stay out as they are opposed to these zones. But unemployed Palestinian workers will be forced to seek work in these areas and they will have no protection unless we devise strategies to deal with these free trade zones.

### The media

Many participants pointed out that the mainstream media cannot be relied on to provide information on globalisation since it is selective and biased in the use of information about globalisation, including that coming off the Internet. Participants agreed that it is important for us to support the alternative media based in social movements.

Different forms of media were discussed. It was noted that the Internet was developed by the US military but that it has been subverted and is tremendously valuable in establishing links at national and international levels. One participant felt that radio, popular protests and marches are more effective ways of getting the message across to governments than the print media. Women can get onto radio and TV through their organisations, be it a savings or book club. Others stressed the importance of organising media workers.

### National politics and globalisation

Participants felt that the IMF and the WB were holding democracy as a carrot and governments were manipulating civil society. One participant said that in Ghana, as elsewhere, governments grabbed loans in order to remain in power.

*While participants pointed to continuities with older forms of neocolonial control, it was agreed that it is necessary to recognise the discontinuities with the past to identify the new dimensions of globalisation. The speed, scale, form, mechanisms, social forces and technology of globalisation in the present are new. An important element of what is new is the global dominance of the United States of America. In Southern Africa, the new image of business is white, male and Afrikaner. Participants stressed that we need to recognise these changes if we are to devise means of responding to and challenging this new form of neocolonialism.*

Jubilee 2000 obtained permission to demonstrate in favour of debt cancellation but permission was withdrawn at the last minute. Political leaders grabbed free trade zones in order to have something to show.

It was generally felt that South governments need progressive NGOs and oppositional groups to help them to negotiate a better deal for South countries. Some warned that we should be cautious about condemning governments because they had difficult choices to make. Rather, we need to organise to push governments into pro-citizen stances, through international coalitions like DAWN that are well-connected to individual countries.

Participants noted that new forms of political strategy were shaped by the changed nature of the political process in such a way that some political forms are totally outside the control of the electorate. One suggestion was that women demand transparency around conditionalities. Women should also call for a stop to WB and IMF programmes in the continent.

### The Africa Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA)

One participant explained that the Africa Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA) which is internal to the USA blows apart the meaning of free trade since all aid and trade with Africa are subject to conditions. AGOA also permits reinvestment by African capitalists outside their own nation states. The consequence will be that countries like Mauritius and South Africa will become invasive capital. This points to the need for a new kind of political party. In Mauritius the idea of getting workers and users of a particular sector together, such as in the health sector, is being mooted.



## 8 Regional trends, the way forward and conclusion

### 8.1 Regional trends

**D**iscussion took place in two groups, followed by a report back session. The issues raised by the two groups have been combined since many areas overlapped.

#### Engaging with the institutional process

The issue of institutional process raised key questions. Are we not imposing gender on inappropriate structures in this neocolonial era? How do we know, as gender activists, when we should try to co-operate with the nation-state and international bodies and when we should use opposition tactics? Do we support government delegations to the WTO?

Participants felt that the state was an important site of struggle. The institutional nature of the state meant that it was able to engender relatively rapid changes, for example through laws. This rapidity was contrasted to the slow pace of cultural change. Others noted that there was immense value in international declarations such as CEDAW. It was stressed that acknowledging their value did not mean denying that there was a paradox in the universal notion of human rights in a context where we have to confront and accommodate difference.

How we engage with the institutional process has to be multi-pronged, participants generally agreed. The strategies of challenging, reforming and engaging the state were not mutually exclusive. Because the state is fragmented and contradictory, we need to engage with the state in strategic ways. Engaging

could be a step towards reforming but sometimes reforming did not change the impact of initiatives such as SAPs. Reform initiatives could also rebound, so we need to be cautious about what we seek to reform. Reform implies that we have some influence so if we want to reform we have to engage. We need to start out in the areas where we have some influence and control.

There was general agreement that women's organisations should support government delegations to economic and social rights conventions such as CEDAW and the UN Human Rights Commission. It was noted that most African states have signed CEDAW and this is a very important tool for women.

Participants pointed out that these strategic issues do not apply only to nation states. In some contexts, such as Palestine, women are trying to enter the political process without a state to help. Palestine has held one national election but few women came into politics and women's organisations are now trying to find women to stand for election at municipal level. Palestine has a gender department whose task is to introduce gender into other departments. Women's organisations co-operate with the gender department. In the context of a shortage of women in politics, the women's movement relies on men who are feminists. Another opportunity for engagement is for women to enter the peace process.



## Linking economics and politics

Participants agreed that understanding the links between economics and politics is critical. We should avoid a narrow definition of democracy and understand that democracy is also about economic rights. One participant added that both feminism and democracy have specific meanings in Africa because of the extent and intensity of poverty: 'What difference does it make if you can vote every five years if you do not have enough food to eat?'

An example was given of the contradictory ways in which economics and politics have been formalised in South Africa for instance. The South African government has enshrined social and economic rights in the Constitution at the same time as it has formulated a macro-economic strategy that inevitably violates these rights.

One participant urged us to be aware of how the WB uses the notion of social capital. The World Bank idea of capturing trust and reciprocity in economic terms can lead to unprogressive interventions or be used to justify the absence of positive interventions.

## Violence against women

It was generally felt that violence against women could be an important research issue if it was linked to political and economic processes. The issue of violence against women could be linked to the privatisation of social services and security and the state's assault on individual options for employment and life strategies. The context of global governance would then come into the picture. The example was given of an oil producing state in Nigeria, where revenues from oil have not been used towards development in the area and poverty and conflict have resulted in brutal intervention by the military who protect the TNCs. Dead bodies have been found floating in canals. Women are raped in daylight.

One participant outlined how the anti-violence movement in South Africa has become a dynamic area for women's engagement with the state. The strategies of the Rape Crisis counselling centres have developed and changed as circumstances have unfolded. With the help of women in Parliament, feminist lawyers and activists, the anti-violence movement has achieved a progressive Domestic Violence Act. The achievements of the anti-violence movement demonstrate how well the multi-pronged strategy built into the gender machinery in South Africa has worked.

## Building the feminist movement

Three key questions helped to focus discussion. How do we build a cadre of feminist women? How do we ensure that women's participation in politics makes a difference? What are the barriers to women entering politics?

Participants saw barriers encompassing personal factors such as partners in power blocking women from entering politics, women not having the capacity to operate in power positions and the fact that the state is uncivil towards women. The issue of barriers to women in politics could be a research topic.

The difficulties of sustaining feminist organisation were discussed with particular reference to drawing in young women. How do we bring the present generation of youth to feminist values? Participants gave examples of organisations working with youth in some African countries. Most felt that feminist organisations need to target young girls and to use the media to target youth.

It was generally agreed that feminists should give more attention to education. Research is needed on the content of the education curriculum and the outcomes of schooling. The details of CEDAW and the history of women's liberation should become part of the curriculum. Women should develop manuals for education ministries to incorporate into the curriculum. Research needs to identify who is doing the teaching and what ideas are being imparted to the youth.

### Feminism, gender and democracy

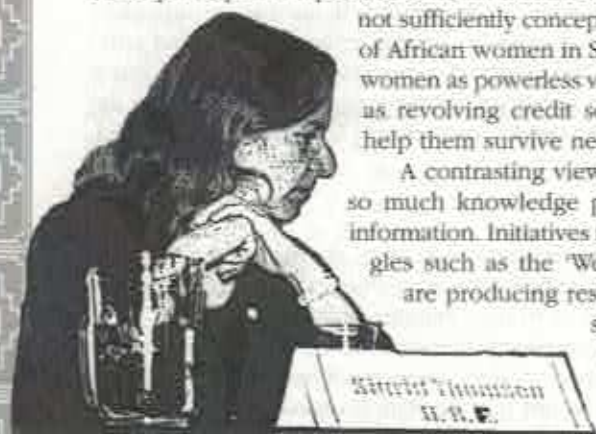
The Tanzanian delegate, Fatma Alloo related an experience that occurred in 1975 and that taught her a lesson in democracy and a lesson in women's rights.

Tanzania embarked on a mass literacy campaign in the mid 1970s and university students were required to go out to a factory or peasant farming area to teach literacy. A young student at the time, Fatma went to a rural district and watched a woman carrying a child, a load on her head and a hoe in her hand while the man walked completely free. Angered by what she saw, Fatma raised the issue in the literacy class the next day. 'Why did you not ask him to help you?' she asked. The woman replied, 'Even if he wanted to, I wouldn't let him. That land is mine, this child is mine, this hoe is mine. In our village, if anyone labours on your land, he is entitled to part of that land.' This woman knew her rights. She did not want to lose her land. This was a lesson in feminism and democracy. It demonstrated that specificities are important.

### African women, knowledge production and dissemination

Some participants expressed concern that the struggles of African women were not sufficiently conceptualised or documented. Images of African women in SAP stories repeatedly portrayed women as powerless victims. Innovative strategies such as revolving credit schemes adopted by women to help them survive need to be documented.

A contrasting view was that the problem was not so much knowledge production as dissemination of information. Initiatives for documenting women's struggles such as the 'Women Writing in Africa' project are producing results. The need is for systematic synthesis and dissemination of the material so that it gets into the curriculum.



## Western hegemony, gender and identity

One participant raised the problem of the perception that gender issues are western impositions and inappropriate to certain cultures. The example was given of delegates at the Beijing conference who expressed the view that gender issues were inappropriate to Islam. Another participant suggested that one way round the problem is to focus on injustices within western contexts like the US where there is not even maternity leave.

Others felt that African women should not adopt western laws wholesale. African women need to be critical about what is appropriate and what is positive. We should not allow other people to define who we are and what we want to be. If we want to hold on to communal life we have a right to demand that the state supports us.

It was suggested that one way of dealing with the paradoxical combination of human rights conceived as universal and the specificity of African contexts was to go back to dialectics. We could also go back to first principles and reconsider issues such as human nature. The philosopher Chomsky, for example, believes that humans have an innate morality. Even if we do this, another participant pointed out, the problem of specificity remains.

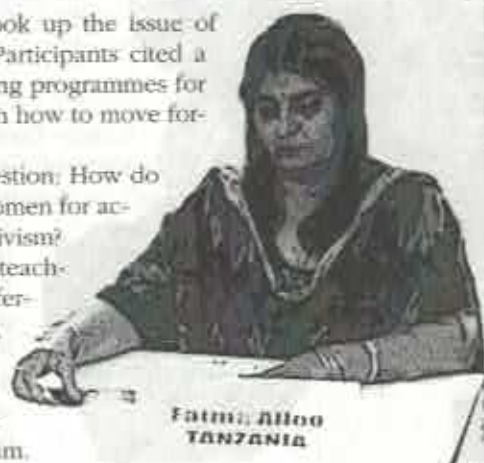
Another suggestion was that we undertake research into African cultural practices that empower women in the context of the state and violence against women. This work should focus not only on male violence against women, but women against women. And it should incorporate women's support systems as well as the institutionalisation of violence against women. Women who die in labour because the state has no money for hospitalisation experience institutional violence. This kind of research would have to be specific to particular African contexts while not losing sight of the general.

## 8.2 The way forward

Discussion in the plenary session took up the issue of how to sustain gender activism. Participants cited a number of examples of successful training programmes for gender activists and made suggestions on how to move forward.

Discussion was provoked by the question: How do we revitalise eagerness among young women for acquiring the political tools for gender activism?

Participants shared the difficulties of teaching gender and women's studies in different university contexts. In South Africa, many students at universities appear to be apolitical or hostile to gender issues. Few students take up the post-graduate gender options offered in the curriculum.



At the University in Dakar, Senegal, it has been impossible so far to set up a women's studies centre. In Nigeria, while women's studies go back to the 1980s, these courses depend on voluntarism and are not taught if key people are away.

Others shared examples of initiatives at the tertiary level that have successfully reached young women. In Nigeria, university courses have successfully incorporated a curriculum on personal empowerment, and a network for women's studies in 1996 has provided mutual support for women's studies scholars and teachers.

Beyond the university, there have been several successful initiatives. Examples of these are: women cadre schools linked to political parties in Mauritius; young women's training centres linked to political organisations and to NGOs such as WILDAF in Tanzania; young women and men at universities in Palestine who have taken gender teaching beyond the classroom to establish student committees for addressing gender issues; the AAWORD training programme for youth run in Arusha which has reached many young women.

Participants shared ideas about how to encourage a feminist consciousness among students and activists. Participants felt that is important to consider how young people today feel about the future and to locate the alienation of youth in the vacuum created by the demise of left-wing movements and the globalisation of neoliberal theory and practices. The vacuum has been filled by right-wing and reactionary forces and young women and men are subjected to the pressures of reactionary mobilisation. Rather than focusing on building a feminist movement, we should focus on building feminist consciousness to mobilise against global consumer culture.

It was suggested that we should also think about strategies which the feminist movement can use for forming horizontal links with movements such as the trade union movement. The feminist movement has not taken on the issues of unemployment and globalisation which would make points of contact with the trade union movement.

#### Becoming part of the DAWN Network

Vivienne Taylor explained that DAWN is a network in terms of the way it builds a critical feminist analysis.

Key in this process is analysis that leads to an advocacy agenda through the dissemination of information on specific issues. DAWN networks at a global level with organisations with similar aims and objectives. Its steering committee comprises founder members of the organisation. For its researchers, DAWN draws on the intellectual commitment of activists across the South.



DAWN undertakes to disseminate information, but it is up to activists to mobilise and to link the strengths of DAWN to other feminist organisations. Interested, like-minded organisations can be placed on the mailing list.

Participants made several suggestions for linking-up following the Africa regional workshop:

- A DAWN Africa e-mail list should be drawn up;
- A PR & ST e-mail list should be drawn up;
- DAWN should organise sub-groups around the PR & ST issues such as militarisation and new class structures.

### Comments on the papers and proceedings

Vivienne Taylor and Claire Slatter of DAWN commented on the quality of the papers, the rich feminist energy and strong regional/continental context present in the papers and workshop sessions. New political forms as well as new political processes are needed. We should not simply mobilise through structures as these have their own limitations. Participants were commended for reasserting the value of alternative systems for empowering women. Such initiatives provide a defence against the systems we are critiquing.

## 8.3 Conclusion

*Vivienne Taylor, DAWN PR & ST co-ordinator*

We believe that we are all participants in a political process and that we can come up with an analysis that identifies both the 'lived' experiences of women in the political and social arena, and translate those lived experiences into an analysis that helps us make sense of the macro context.

We need to find strategic ways to promote a gender perspective on the process and nature of political restructuring and social transformation, globally and specifically in all our national and regional contexts. Central to this are the links made between our research findings and the review of national governments' commitments made at Copenhagen in 1995 (WSSD).

We want to contribute to the development of a critical framework which can be used to monitor processes of governance, the promotion of ongoing debates and the impacts of these processes on gender relations.

DAWN will be developing a platform document to be launched at the Five Year Review of the World Summit on Social Development in Geneva, and a book to be published by the end of 2000. The platform document is going to incorporate all the regional perspectives within a global framework. But more than that, what we hope to do within the platform document is to promote an analysis that is substantially different from the analysis that we see coming out of the mainstream debates on development and governance. We don't only want to promote an alternative, we want to expose the contradictions within the existing systems and the hypocrisy that exists within the institutions of governance that operate at

different levels. In exposing the hypocrisy, we want to then present, at a global level, some options that feminists can begin to grapple with in a deeper way and share on many fronts.

We realise that the whole terrain is shifting. But as we engage in this process we need to ensure that the objectives of our collective struggles are not diffused and weakened. The state is not a monolithic structure and governance systems can be changed so that the dream of attaining personal liberation as well as national and international liberation can be achieved.



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Cape Town 29-30 November 1999 • Participants contact addresses

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