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## **Feminist Interventions into Macro Economic Policies**

### **Building a Transnational Regime of Resistance against Global Social Inequality and Gender Injustice**

Hannah Arendt describes the fact that humans can interrupt processes and reclaim and restart them as „the miracle of freedom“. This article discusses the attempts by women's organisations, transnational feminist networks and feminist scholars to intervene in the globalised economy and macro-economic policies in order to interrupt the neo-liberal restructuring of the economies. This recent critical engagement with macro economics by women breached a double myth: firstly, the myth of gender neutrality in macro economics and secondly, the myth that macro-economics are a field exclusively for experts.

This was possible because of the experiences women's networks made through their interventions into the political regime of the United Nations in the 1990s, and based on the elaboration of feminist economics. The transnational networks linked women's micro-economic realities to the macro-economic and multilateral level in their analyses of the politics of neo-liberal globalisation. These linkages created a vivid topography of struggles and confrontations, debates and negotiations, of decentralised and polycentric activities at different political levels. Their vertical and horizontal networking does not constitute a coherent social movement around a main axis but is still a kind of transnational project that connects the aims of global social justice and gender justice.

#### **The normative globalisation of women's rights**

After the Fourth World Conference on Women 1995 in Beijing, there was a strategic and political shift in focus towards macro-economic politics among many women activists for whom the series of big UN conferences in the 1990s were a main point of mobilisation and reference.

The Beijing Platform for Action (BpFA) became a monument for the successful „politics of recognition“ (Fraser) by the international women's rights movement. This movement succeeded in establishing the multidimensional women's human rights paradigm as a normative framework in the multilateral document. With regards to economics the women's human rights approach also opened new opportunities for feminist intervention. The human rights framework defines women's economic exclusion, discrimination and poverty as a complex violation of women's rights. Unlike earlier development discourses, women are not just considered needy or deprived victims, but legal subjects and citizens entitled to assert their right to recognition, resources, economic opportunities and social security (Wichterich 2002).

However, the Beijing Platform for Action was also strongly criticised from an economic point of view: it does not address the root causes and driving forces within

the globalised neoliberal regime that generate women's poverty and social inequality (Barton 2004). The inadequate problem analysis provokes insufficient solutions. All reviews of the implementation of the BPfA revealed a marked asymmetry: in many countries legislation was changed in favour of women's civil and political rights, especially in the area of violence against women. However, neoliberal restructuring of the economies as well as a series of economic crisis obscured the opportunities to enjoy the legal rights transnational women's networks had fought for at the UN conferences. In particular economic and social rights were constrained and threatened by the intensified competition and commodification in the world market, and by the withdrawal of the state from regulation of the economy. (UNRISD 2005).

### **The glocalisation of women's struggles**

At the grassroots level, mounting resistance towards the negative impact of market liberalisation and structural adjustments emerged. Women played an important role at strategic nodes of the struggles against the globalised neo-liberal regime and against transnational corporations (Rowbotham/Lonkogle 2001, Mies 2002). Women were the majority in the South African anti-privatisation movement that protested against the increase of fees for the use of water and electricity and against the privatisation of supply services. In Nigeria and India, they resist against the appropriation of local resources by transnational corporations such as Shell, Coca-Cola and Monsanto. In Latin America, women mobilised against the pan-American free trade agreement FTAA. Female small farmers are organised with *Via Campesina* and in land occupation movements to secure their right to land, biodiversity and seeds and to defend that right against the privatisation of common goods and patenting. In South East Asia, female export workers protest not only against despotic labour regimes the value adding chains around the world, but also against a wave of companies closing down as a result of work being outsourced to China. Gender budget initiatives started in more than forty countries to itemise budgets, public income and expenditure according to gender. Additionally, women's organisations were part of two global resistance movements since 1997: the campaign against the *Multilateral Agreement on Investment* at the WTO, and the *Global Women's March* that decentrally reclaimed the streets to re-politicise the two themes of violence and poverty.

This multi-faceted agency of women at local, national and transnational level broke the paralysis vis-à-vis the seemingly overwhelming power of global capital, supranational institutions and their win-win-ideology. A shift in feminist discourses on globalisation offered a framework for an increasingly polycentric and more empowering context analyses. The initially "globalocentric" view criticised globalisation as an overwhelming system of economic coercion following a universal script of penetration and rape. Through the homogeneous globalocentric lens, only global resistance and global countervailing power would be in a position to oppose the processes of neoliberal globalisation since they are governed and controlled by powerful global players like the WTO, the international financial institutions and the transnational corporations. This disempowering framework was increasingly deconstructed and differentiated by the concept of "glocalisation" that puts emphases on the heterogeneity and hybridity of interaction between global and local forces. It provides a more complex and empowering framework for agency, subjectivity and resistance (Marchand/Runyan 2001). Under the assumption that

there is some scope for “national management“ of global influences, and different markets and institutions are seen as disputed terrain, opportunities are revealed for intervention into struggles of distribution or restructuring from below with various local or regional practices of resistance (Bergeron 2003). Those practices open space for transnational convergence of interests and new alliance building.

This also hints at the “Janus face of globalisation” of inequality and democratisation (Moghadam 2005:40ff): on the one hand the neoliberal regime creates social rifts, disparities and polarisations, on the other hand it creates global patterns of work, consumption, social integration, capital accumulation and civil society participation. Similarities in problems, interests and values in different societies open up new spaces for democratic and collective agency, and for transnational networking (UNRISD 2005). A repertoire of common values, a common framework of discourse and meaning, and common aims to change policies is the precondition for the functioning of transnational advocacy networks according to Keck and Sikkink (Keck/Sikkink 1998:2ff).

### **Globalisation from below: recognition, resources, redistribution**

The networking of local struggles and analyses in a horizontal as well as in a vertical dimension was an innovative step of transnationalisation of resistance and a necessary answer to transnational integration and networking in the private sector and in multilateral politics. New transnational advocacy networks link the decentralised struggles and translate them into advocacy, lobbying and political intervention. The two rationales for alliance building discerned by Sonia Alvarez, the logic of solidarity that strengthens interests and identities on the one hand, and the logic of advocacy aimed towards influencing politics join up in transnational networks (Alvarez 2000). Female scholars, trade unionists and representatives of UNIFEM came together in *Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing* (WIEGO) to represent the interests and identities of two transnational grassroots networks, *Streetnet* and *Homenet*, in international political processes. Different activist groups – trade unions, human rights, consumer protection and church organisations – formed alliances for fair working conditions worldwide in transregional networks such as the *Campaign for Clean Clothing* (CCC) and the *Anti-Sweatshop-Campaign* (Musiolek 1999). Additionally, new networks and NGOs such as *Women’s Eyes on the Multilaterals* or the *International Gender and Trade Network* (IGTN) were also formed which are completely focussed on macro-economic politics and the international financial and trade institutions.

The simultaneity of local protests and transnational struggles and the linkages between “local struggles and transnational politics“ resulted in an anti-neoliberal topography that confronts globalisation from above with a “globalisation from below” (Naples/Desai 2002; Wichterich 2003; Moghadam 2005). The diversity of controversies and struggles are arenas of learning to break with the neoliberal hegemony, to develop capabilities for resistance and political agency as well as “scattered counterhegemonies“ (Naples/Desai 2002:32).

From a feminist perspective, the politics of resistance also include strong elements of the politics of recognition. The centre piece of feminist economics is the recognition that unpaid care work that globally is mainly performed by women is

productive, i.e. economically valuable work (Elson 1991; Bakker 1994). The feminist concept of “social citizenship” requires corresponding civil rights not only for waged workers but equally for care workers outside the markets. Informal workers, domestic or sex workers and undocumented migrants demand recognition as “real” employees who are entitled to work contracts, minimum wages, social security and the right to trade union organisation (Committee for Asian Women 2004).

Just as feminist economics do not detach the social fabric and relations from economics, and re-embed production into social reproduction, trade union-like organisations of women in the global south try to bridge the division between private and political, between paid labour and social reproduction - for instance the organisations of domestic workers in Asia and Latin America or SEWA, an association of informal workers in India. The mobilisation starts in the community, the neighbourhood or the dormitory – not so much at the workplace – and the wage, the centre piece of men's trade unions, is only one element, which is often secondary, in the struggle against exploitation, violence and marginalisation. Migrant workers in China where free trade unionisation is not allowed start “unorganised” protests against working conditions at the dormitory or at the hospital where they get treatment after work accidents (Pun 2005).

For those struggles based on different identities of workers and aiming at full recognition the equality of rights is a strategically important, normative point of reference. Since neo-liberal restructuring invokes the liberal legal paradigm, the women's human rights paradigm is an effective instrument on a local and regional level to politicise the discrimination of women, to demand equality and to call for recognition, resources and redistribution. Making governments accountable to guarantee rights and welfare and to exact social corporate responsibility from private enterprises is a strategy of moralising public and private policies.

### **Shunting-station policy or social and economic rights**

Because of the success of the rights approach at the United Nations, some women's networks such as *Women in Development Europe* (WIDE) and *Working Women Worldwide* (WWW) tried to transfer the rights approach to multilateral economic and trade policies and applied it at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) by demanding labour standards and social clauses in the global supply chains (Hale 1998). However, the WTO declared – just as the World Bank does – that human rights are not part of their mandate. WTO's mandate is to set up a multilateral, legally binding system for free trade and cross-border operation of corporations. The WTO's rights and value regime gives corporate freedom and free trade, property and investment laws priority over the human rights paradigm. Human rights are therefore relegated back to the UN organisations, for instance working rights to the ILO.

This means that social responsibility for gender equality is being merrily shifted to and fro between transnational corporations, local sub-contractors, national governments and international organisations. Corporations have formulated thousands of tailored codes of conduct but whenever civil society networks like the *Clean Clothes Campaign* demand an independent inspection of export industries the firms reject control. The German private industry successfully resisted an equality law and only accepted a “voluntary” regulation only. In China, the US and EU chambers of commerce opposed additional securities for the workers and asked for

“flexible“ regulations during discussions on a new labour law.

The lesson learnt by feminist activists at the WTO was that the strategy of moralization of policies with the help of human rights, ethical and equality norms at a supranational level – a strategy that worked as a door-opener at the UN - was not applicable to other regimes of global governance. It was not transferable to macro-economics because they adhere to other systems of values and norms. Furthermore, a distinct difference between the WTO and the UN is WTO's intransparency and its unwillingness to allow civil society organisations to access government negotiations. Until today, the WTO operates very much as a closed shop. The same holds true for any negotiations on trade and investment, bilateral, regional and multi-lateral alike. Attempts to democratisation from civil society and to establish transparency are rejected.

### **Wither the myth of gender neutrality: Engender macro mconomics**

The demand to “engender” macro-economics goes beyond the demand for equality. The relation between gender and macro-economics is seen as a reciprocal relationship: on the one hand, macro-economic politics is based on gender differences and the gender division of labour, on the other hand, macro-economics influence and change gender roles. These assumptions hold the need for the whole market-related production and non-market-related care work and reproduction to be incorporated into economic models and analysis. This concept is strongly influenced by the feminist critique of macro-economic structural adjustment since the 1980s. The focus of structural adjustment programmes on financial stabilisation, combating inflation and on austerity measures in the public sector had highly gender-specific effects and dislocated costs from the market to the unpaid care and subsistence economy. Correspondingly, macro-economic politics always need to be queried on how they design growth creation and which gender prerequisites are to be included in which growth strategies, e.g. in an export-oriented growth strategy. Every privatisation policy should be assessed according to its social effects in relation to access to essential services, public goods and social security. And every tax policy or the tax reforms occurring in many countries should be examined in relation to gender-biased shifts of obligation.

„Engendering“ macro-economics means to analyse and uncover the gender-specific implications of macro-economic policies and to include gender justice as a normative reference parameter for political decision-making processes (Joeekes/Weston 1994; Grown/Elson/Cagatay 2000; WIDE 2001). The core element is to incorporate ex-ante into macro-economic policy decisions the interdependency between the social product which is included in the macro analysis (arbitrated through the market) and the social product which is not arbitrated through the market but is indispensable for the production of human resources.

### **Knowledge-based struggles**

This systemic gender-analytical perspective on macro-economics was first rejected by trade politicians and neoclassical economists. They assumed that the social category gender is not related to macro-economic regimes because they deal with aggregated data such as trade balances, tariffs and interests rates that are gender

neutral. The actors that produce these aggregated values are intentionally blanked out. Therefore gender issues were shifted to the mezzo-economic level of labour markets, other partial markets and economic sectors or shifted to the micro-level of corporations and private households and left to private responsibility e.g. voluntary codes of conduct of corporations. Additionally, domestic policy in each country supposedly should ensure equal opportunities through equal wages, laws and affirmative action.

To counter the myth of gender neutrality of fiscal, financial and trade policies, women's organisations had to adopt the language of neo-classical economics. Whenever civil society organisations enter the space of institutions and attempt to influence them they have to adhere to the rules of the game and speak the language of the system. When women started to work on gender sensitive budgets they had to acquire the skills to follow the flow of money and speak the language of money. Therefore, economic expertise became a significant strategic resource for feminist advocacy networks in addition to the women's human rights paradigm.

Thus a new type of knowledge-based advocacy networks emerged. Recently, IGTN defined itself as “a network of feminist gender specialists who provide technical information on gender and trade issues to women’s groups etc... and acts as a political catalyst to enlarge the space for a critical feminist perspective and global action on trade and globalisation”. The advocacy and interventionist work of ‘engendering macro-economics’ is carried out by a professional and specialised elite. This is more an epistemic or knowledge-based community than the representation of a constituency at the grass roots. This elite primarily draws its political legitimacy from its expertise.

Knowledge on macro-economic policies and the interconnections between micro- and macro-economies became an important transmission belt between the different levels of struggles against the neoliberal forces of globalisation. It was economic literacy training which tried to match up the experience-based knowledge systems of grass root women - of female workers, farmers, street vendors, migrants etc - with the expertise of feminist or heterodox economists. However, these different types of knowledge systems place feminisms at the horn of a dilemma: in recent feminist movements in the North and the South the inclusive experience-based knowledge of grass root women – “each woman is an expert of her life” – had been revalorised against the exclusive expert or academic knowledge. The concept of knowledge-based political networks carries a high risk of setting up a new hierarchy of different knowledge systems even when trying to make the various types of expertise confluence and merge.

However, the new knowledge-based networks are not just “political entrepreneurs” in a technical sense as Keck and Sikkink call transnational advocacy networks. They link their knowledge-based approach to a rights-based approach. The knowledge on multilateral policies and micro-macro-economic connectivities are a strategically significant transmission belt for “transnational solidarities” (Naples/Desai 2002). Like it is the linking of different knowledge systems - bottom-up and top-down -, it is as well the linking of the local struggles, regional campaigns and transnational networking with the critique of neoliberal policies by expert advocacy networks which altogether make for the very glocalisation of this feminist justice project. The actors

at different levels are equally dependent on each other since the knowledge systems are interdependent. While there is a feminist saying “one struggle is not more important than the other” and many attempts are made to get voices of grass root women into international political processes - still, the risk of constructing new hierarchies is evident. The key question is how much interconnectedness, transboundary and transnational solidarities, and affinities are built up between the different political levels, sites and different actors in order to carve out a transnational regime of resistance.

## **Neoliberal Emancipation**

Ten years after the *World Women's Conference* in Beijing, reviews done by women's organisations concluded that the focus of women's rights movements on politics of identity and recognition in the 1990s had the effect that the liberal strategy of integration, participation and equal opportunities displaced the transformational aims to change economic, social and political structures (Barton 2004, Charkiewicz 2004, Wichterich 2002). Although increasing numbers of women are being integrated into political institutions and the capitalist market economy, women's participation did not bring about or initiate a change of economic and political institutions towards a redistribution of power and resources (UNRISD 2005). With respect to macro-economic policies there is the same risk of inclusion and cooption for feminist demands for equality of rights and opportunities.

Feminist economists and gender activists succeeded to make UN organisations, the World Bank and even the WTO to acknowledge under the technical device of gender mainstreaming their concerns about gender inequalities in the global economy (Gammage et al. 2002; Williams 2003). An *Inter-Agency-Task Force* on “Gender and Trade” in Geneva under the auspices of UNCTAD carried out a gender analysis of the different WTO agreements assessing on whether trade liberalisation promotes gender equality or reproduces, reinforces and recreates gender differences.

Based on a gendered deficit analysis UNCTAD concluded that gender differences continued to exist, and that women were more often affected by negative impacts of trade liberalisation than men. It designed a neoliberal formula for engendering the economics, namely “make liberalisation work for women”, make markets, trade, growth etc. everything work for women, by providing them with more skills to improve their competitiveness, more jobs in export production, more credit facilities, better career, entrepreneurial and investment chances etc. The free trade dogma and the WTO trade agreements remain unchanged. Within this framework the claim for binding equal rights is watered down to equal opportunities (UN 2004).

The feminist concept of ‘engendering macro-economics, however, implies a continuous double strategy of gender equality on the markets and macro-economic change in line with social and gender justice.

The World Bank has also included emancipatory demands for equality in its new *Gender Action Plan* entitled “Gender equality as smart economics“. It wants to “make markets work for women” and wants to make women competitive as market citizens – equipped with property rights to land, inheritance, capital and businesses. Gender

equality for the bank is not a human rights commandment but an economic calculation: the integration of competitive women is instrumental for an increase in productivity, efficiency and growth (World Bank 2006).

While it is necessary to promote equal opportunities in the markets, the World Bank's message is market totalitarian: There is no alternative (TINA). The message that equality is only possible through the markets and their neo-liberal rules means an economisation of the gender issue. By only applying capitalist market instruments such as small credits, business start-ups and private ownership of land and the means of production as a vehicle towards equality, emancipatory potentials enshrined in other forms of economy are denied and devalued. However, everywhere women are productive outside and at the margins of markets according to the principles of a moral economy based on care, reciprocity and solidarity. Therefore the "smart economy" with gender equality promoted by the World Bank completely sidetracks the feminist demand to engender macro-economics and to consider the interactions and transactions of both production and social reproduction. In the *Gender Action Plan* of the World Bank, integrating equality targets and overcoming the exclusion of women seems to sufficiently fulfil the emancipatory demand for social and economic rights of women.

### **Paradoxes of Integration**

This liberal concept of gender equality points however at a fatal trajectory of the women's human rights approach: it constructed a predominantly individualistic concept of rights with a focus on independence and free choice, self-determination, self-reliance, and autonomy. It is informed by a predominantly universal concept of rights leaving aside the broader context of power relations and societal structures. Thus the demands of women's movements – from securing independent livelihoods to the liberation from patriarchal control – are in perfect compliance with the logic of globalised markets that are built on the neoliberal rights concept of the *homo oeconomicus*, namely the property owner, the free competitor in the free market, the citizen who is responsible for him/herself.

These are exactly the market roles that are to create the "economic empowerment" of women. If separated from the transformational aims, the inclusive approach that is reduced to equal rights is in danger of being 1) watered down to equal opportunities and of being shunted to and fro between different market forces and political actors, and 2) of not achieving the desired equality, since powerful actors in unequal societal conditions always benefit more from equal rights than weak and vulnerable actors.

To some extent, the integration of women into the neo-liberal regime gives them visibility and a voice without changing the logic and the power regime that determine the corporate market system and the international division of labour. Following Gramsci, Frigga Haug describes this, as a "passive revolution". This passive revolution divides the two-fold aim of feminist justice project apart and disconnects gender justice from overall economic justice (Haug 2006).

In Foucault's terminology, the convergence of feminist and neo-liberal aims has the effect that external regulation is translated into self-regulation - governmentability. This creates the self-dependent female market citizen, flexible efficient actors, while

the master frame is not up for deliberations. Governmentability enforces new mechanisms of social integration and coherence through self-determination and market competition and thus contributes to the neo-liberal societal consensus (Charkiewicz 2004).

### **Regime of resistance against the TINA principle**

Despite this paradox, the feminist project to link gender justice and global social justice aims to create a multi-sited regime of resistance. It attempts to intertwine the equality-oriented integration approach with a more confrontational and transformation-oriented approach in order to foil the TINA principle. This was achieved with a two-fold strategy that combined confrontational and negotiation-related tactics at the WTO Ministerials in Cancun and Hong Kong: outside of the conference venue, resistance and campaign-based movements were protesting, whereas inside the venue, mostly knowledge-based networks tried to enter into dialogue.

The linkage of local struggles, regional networking and the interventions at the multilateral level through women's advocacy networks form the co-ordinates of glocalised resistance that practically and theoretically reach beyond the liberal demand for gender equality and aim to fight for global social justice.

Foucault argues that the politics of resistance is about strategic reversals. From a feminist perspective, those strategic junctures have to be identified or created where different type of actors can meet based on shared values, shared knowledge, a shared perspective and respect for different priorities. Such strategic junctures would be spaces where an inclusionary and a transformatory approach complement each other, and policies of recognition, policies of redistribution and policies of resistance are intertwined so that it becomes possible to build emancipatory dynamics which link gender and economic justice. The decentralised and pluralistic nature of this new regime of opposition to the neoliberal order with local and national struggles, transnational networking and outstanding international spaces and events like the *World Social Forum* constructs a new culture of thinking and acting beyond the mere possible.

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