INSIDE–OUTSIDE–DYNAMICS:
WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

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This paper is written from a social movement perspective and aims to highlight that the theory and the practice of gender and democratic governance can not be confined to the participation of women in political institutions, parties, and parliaments. Women's activism and movements' policies have contributed in history and still contribute significantly to building democracy from below – distinct and apart from formal democratic mechanisms. The 2009 elections in Iran are the most recent example how women's struggle for rights and the struggle for democratization are inseparably linked and intertwined. The case of women's democratic struggle in Iran reminds us what the discourse and the struggle for women in politics and democracy is all about: it is about equal rights, exclusion and inclusion, and profoundly about power. It is not only about adding women into the existing institutions and mechanisms but about transforming power relations.

I would like to share some lessons learnt from the policies of women's movements around the sequence of UN-conferences in the 1990s which started 1992 in Rio de Janeiro with the *Conference on Environment and Development*, reached - from a women's perspective - a peak with the famous *4. World Women's Conference* in Beijing, and ended 1997 with the *World Food Summit* in Rome.

In the history books of women's movements, the 1990s are documented as an outstanding success story with regard to inclusion and democratisation of the international policy arena: 1) Women's movements gained in terms of voice, visibility, recognition and participation. 2) They managed to integrate gender issues, in particular the women's/human rights paradigm into most of the global governance regimes and UN declarations. 3) In a kind of boomerang effect they were able to use the normative rights framework of the UN as reference system and to push national governments to change legislation, in particular regarding violence against women (Keck/Sikkink 1998). The strategic objective was to manoeuvre nation states in a vice between normative pressure exerted from the international level, the UN, and forceful demands articulated by autonomous women's movements at the grassroots. The idea was to sandwitch governments between pressure from above and pressure from below!

What made the story so successful?

What made women's activism at the international level successful in terms of voice, visibility and agenda setting? Women's agency emerged in a favourable historic context after the collapse of the bipolar world order. The UN planned to set up global governance regimes in order to resolve burning global problems, like environmental degradation and poverty. The sequence of the big UN-conferences offered an opportunity structure for co-operation and participation of civil society organizations, including women's networks and movements. And women's activists were keen to engage, to intervene and participate in politics though their relation to nation states had always been ambivalent: they criticised the state as an patriarchal institution which had systematically excluded and discriminated women (Pateman 1988). At the same time, women addressed the post-colonial state as juridical secular guardian of their rights and citizenship apart from cultural and religious regimes.

I would like to highlight three specific reasons for the 1990 success story of women in international politics regarding a) women's movements as political actors, b) their agenda and c) their strategies.

Actors: Agency was based on two specific relationships between the political actors. Firstly, women s movements and networks built a strategic sisterhood. Well aware of political differences and cultural diversity, they constructed for that very purpose a collective political identity and unity as women who claim their rights, and went into the negotiations as "global women's lobby" (Alvarez 2000). Secondly, they established a "velvet triangle" of gender policies, a triangle between feminist activists, feminist scholars and femocrats, as women with a feminist perspective in political institutions and parties have been called (Woodward 2001). In contrast to the iron triangle of male political decision making, this triangle is "velvet" and fluid because many women actors shift from one corner to the other of the triangle. Both, strategic sisterhood and the velvet triangle helped to establish women's networks as political actor in its own right, well acknowledged in the international political arena and by the media.

Agenda setting: The strategic sisterhood as well as the velvet triangle were based on common values and common objectives. The women's/human rights paradigm was used for a redefinition of the agenda as a common reference system to build transnational solidarity. Its centre piece is the "right to have rights" as Hannah Arendt called the basic concept of being recognised as full person and full citizen despite all differences. The women/human rights paradigm opened not only the doors to enter the UN but it opened new spaces to negotiate the relationship between women and the state, between women, culture and identity, between the private and the public. Based on the redefinition of politics which was coined by the second women's movements into the slogan: "the private is political", the women's/

human rights paradigm was instrumental to get issues on the political agenda which were earlier buried in a culture of silence and hidden in the private sphere, e.g. domestic violence, sexual and reproductive rights, rape in conflict situation, so-called honour crimes. Naming violence against women as a crime became the strongest common denominator across classes, cultures, and identities. The rights discourse facilitated the shift away from the basic needs approach which depicts women mainly as victims and deficient persons. Instead, the basic rights approach focusses on women as juridical subjects and as "full" citizens who claim recognition and entitlements to economic and social justice as well as political participation.

Strategies: Women's organisations systematically adopted new political forms and a mix of strategies: symbolic and pressure politics, direct action and lobbying, protest and proposal, linking the outside and the inside, and networking of national, regional and international activities. For example the strategic package used around the *UN-Conference on Human Rights* in Vienna aimed at acknowledging violence against women as human rights violation and comprised a range of activities:
 a) national and transnational campaigns around unnamed issues such as the "comfort women" tortured by the Japanese army during the war, including demonstrations in front of Japanese embassies in many countries, public hearings or tribunals as platforms for visibility and scandalisation where "comfort women" spoke for the first time for themselves and gave testimony about the sexual violence they experienced,
b) mass mobilisation to collect signatures which were submitted at the conference in Vienna,
c) lobbying to influence the language and the normative agenda of UN documents, and to institutionalise policy mechanisms at the UN, e.g. the optional protocol of CEDAW which gives individuals the opportunity to directly address the CEDAW-commission, in case their governments fail to prosecute the violation of their rights,
d) demanding accountability and monitoring women's rights and gender policies at the national level.
Additionally, gender mainstreaming was promoted as a methodology of getting gender issues out of the women's corner, involve men in the equal rights agenda and get a gender perspective into all political institutions and political sectors.

When women's movements and networks started the journey into political institutions, their objective was to become agents of change, to challenge power relations, to eradicate poverty, transform structures of inequality, to forge democratization of the private and the public sphere (Abeysekere 2004). Women's agency did not limit itself to gender equality, as Indian development economist Devaki Jain stressed: "We don't want a bigger piece of the poisoned pie". In order to link the dual agenda of equal rights and transformation of power, DAWN, the women's network from the South, phrased as a guiding principle: "transformation through participation", meaning women sought participation in politics as an equal rights issue but

wished to use participation in decision making finally for structural change of power asymmetries. Taking Nancy Fraser's distinction between politics of recognition and redistribution, women's movements aimed at both, recognition as political actors and full citizens, and redistribution of power and wealth (Fraser 2003).

However, when 10 years after the Beijing conference, in 2005, women's networks looked back they realized that - despite of all the progress made -, the envisaged transformation of power relations had not happened. The paradox is that women really managed to move from margin to mainstream, but the gains made on the way had been mainly in the area of visibility and recognition rather than in the area of redistribution of power. While they were busy struggling for access and inclusion, the ambition to act as agents of change had evaporated in the halls of power and political institutions.

Dilemmas of "women in politics"

I would like to highlight three of the ambivalences, contradictions and trajectories faced by women's activism in this process because they are relevant for women in politics at each level and at each stage.

Gap between quantitative/technical and substantial inclusion: The first lesson learnt was: numbers never tell the full story. Participation is not automatically decision making. Inclusion means that you become part of a pre-configured and self-governed space of power, you have to speak the language of the system and adopt the rules of the game.

To link the two objectives of participation and transformation, women opted for quota or reservation systems as door opener to political institutions, in order to quickly build a "critical mass". The assumption was that only a larger number of women, a critical mass of 30 %, would be able to initiate a change of the masculinist culture, the structures and the contents of policy making. However, quota, a critical mass may ensure quantitative participation but they do not ensure substantive participation, critical agency or critical voices.

Similarly, gender mainstreaming may cause technical inclusion of gender issues, often with the help of checklists. However mainstreaming into the existing power asymmetries and unjust structures is a flawed project, which resulted in a loss of the transformative drive, and a deradicalisation of the perspective of feminist activism (Khan 2002). Although US-femocrat Bella Abzug had clearly stated: "We don't want to be mainstreamed into a polluted stream", the shift of focus on technical implementation led to a domestication of the emancipatory project (Mukhopadhyay 2004).

Essentialism: The second challenge raised was: what do women really have in common? The principle of representation and the concept of strategic sisterhood were both questioned from a post-colonial perspective because of

their essentialist assumptions. Gayatri Spivak asked why elite and educated women, women from the North, from higher castes and classes should speak for grassroots, less educated or poor women from the South. A central motivation for women to intervene into policy making had been "to speak for themselves" and not to be represented by their father, husband or male politicians. The construction of a collective identity and the liberal principle of representation, however, ignore that women are not a homogeneous group, that they have multiple identities, interests and various feelings of belonging which connect the individual woman to different classes, communities and interest groups. Reservation could re-enforce inequalities between women, e.g. by privileging once again the already privileged.

This points at a dilemma: Political agency can not do without constituencies and collective identities. Constructing strategic, targeted, temporary identities of women based on common values and objectives is a political must. However, it is not an easy task to flag communalities and act in unity and solidarity with others while claiming justice, and at the same time pay respect to diverse interests and identities instead of subordinating them (Abeysekere 2003).

Women's rights paradigm: The third lesson learnt was: There is a double time, spatial and conceptual rift, firstly between norm setting at a UN conference, and translation of this norm in gender sensitive, equal rights or women friendly legislation within a nation state, and secondly between de jure rights and their enforcement at national and local level.

From a women's/human rights' perspective, rights are indivisible: each is essential for the realization of the others and for full citizenship of women. However, policies and cultures attempt to compartimentalise rights and establish hierarchies, very often privileging formal civil and political rights over economic and social rights. Generally, the method of separating rights form each other once again opens opportunities of inclusion and exclusion, of divide and rule.

Enforcement of women's rights is blocked and threatened mainly from two sides: firstly, various conservative and fundamentalist forces infringe upon women's rights with reference to cultural identity, religious value systems, and customary laws. In a backlash, they insist on patriarchal values and structures, stress that the public sphere is masculine and relegate women to the family and private sphere. They establish a hierarchy which privileges cultural and religious rights over other rights.

Secondly, the expansion of the neoliberal capitalist economy, the so-called globalisation, tends to undermine livelihood, resource and workers' rights and women's de jure rights for the sake of commercialisation and competition (Francisco 2002). Women get integrated into the markets but on unequal terms. Under those uneven and unequal conditions, the concept of equal opportunities is neither sufficient to stop women's discrimination nor will it

change unjust and unequal structures. This points at the tension included in the equal rights paradigm between individual claims and social transformation.

Claims for equal rights are not sufficient to bring about the political, social and economic changes needed to achieve social and gender justice. A feminist notion of justice revolves around specific contexts and specific needs of women, meaning sometimes it is fair to treat women equal and in a different context it is fair to treat them differently (Kabeer 2005). This points at tensions within the human rights paradigm between the 'universal' and the 'particular', between individual and collective rights. A redistributive and need-oriented concept of justice inherently includes the perspective of changing power relations.

Conclusions

To conclude I would like to recall: women's movements set their own non-partisan agenda by redefining the scope and the substance of policies, women's rights and citizenship and brought this into policy making. Thus they played an important bridging role between the outside and the inside, between different political actors, between civil society, public discourses and political institutions. Nira Yuval-Davis called these policy forms "transversal dialogues" as they bridge the private-public divide, and cut across classes, cultures, identities, political ideologies and national borders. This contributed substantially to the construction of an inclusive participatory democracy from below.

If we want to go ahead with this political project, a number of challenges are lying before us:

After women's activism focussed for years on numbers and on the technical project of inclusion, women s civil society organisations should stress once again the political, empowerment and transformative perspective. If we talk about women in politics, in leadership and decision making we mean transformative politics, transformative leadership which is supposed to make a difference . For this purpose it is necessary to remobilise women as agents of change and revitalise women's movements who broke up into smaller identity-based groups, are presently tired or dormant, or vanished in mainstreams.

Both the feminist sayings that "each woman is an expert of her life" and that women want "to speak for themselves" refer to the need of mobilisation and active political involvement of women at the grassroots, in local civil society organisations and with regard to local governance. In a radical sense, democracy has to start at the roots with local constituencies, in order that women can get voice, visibility, recognition and bargaining power at the level of every day policies. From there democratic bargaining and decision making has to move bottom up, cover each political level and each area of policies

and converge with democratic processes which origin from inside of institutions.

This points again at women's movements and CSOs as a resource and a driver for democratisation. A continuous interaction between the inside and the outside, and transversal dialogues between women in political institutions and women's civil society organisations and movements remains a indispensable democratic lifeline.

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