CHAPTER 5

Counting women in: globalization, democratization and the women's movement

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Introduction

> Feminism offers the only politics which can transform our world into a more humane place and deal with global issues like equality, development and peace, because it asks the right questions: about power, about the links between the personal and the political; and because it cuts through race and class.

> (Antrobus quoted in Bunch and Carillo, 1990, p.73)

This quotation from the Caribbean writer Peggy Antrobus introduces complex relationships between globalization, democratization and the women's movement. These are the concern of this chapter.

The feminist movement may seek democratization on a global scale, according to Antrobus, but women are still hampered by a 'democratic deficit' in terms of economic and political power. Even in the European heartlands of liberal democracy, democratic representation for women has only been fully achieved in the late twentieth century – as late as 1971 in Switzerland. In some parts of the world gains made earlier this century are being lost. Following the 1992 revolution in Afghanistan, for example, women lost their voting rights after a mere 27 years of the suffrage.

Even where they retain democratic rights, women still lack political and economic power, along with access to the sites of power (see Figure 5.1). As of 1993, women still owned only 1 per cent of the world's property (including land) and earned 10 per cent of the globe's income. They constituted a minuscule 4 per cent of heads of state, and 5 per cent of cabinet ministers. Their representation in national legislatures was only marginally better at 10 per cent overall. They held 6 per cent of senior posts in international governmental organizations and 5 per cent of high positions in national policy making (Peterson and Runyan, 1993, p.6). Women have not necessarily benefited from what is conventionally seen as the 'triumph' of liberal democracy and the process of global democratization since 1989 (see Figure 5.2).

But on the other hand, global feminist networks and new expanded forms of (non-territorial) political 'space' *do* appear to be increasing democratic participation for women. This, too, contradicts a conventional hypothesis: that the liberal democratic state's autonomy and political effectiveness are hampered by an increasingly interconnected global system
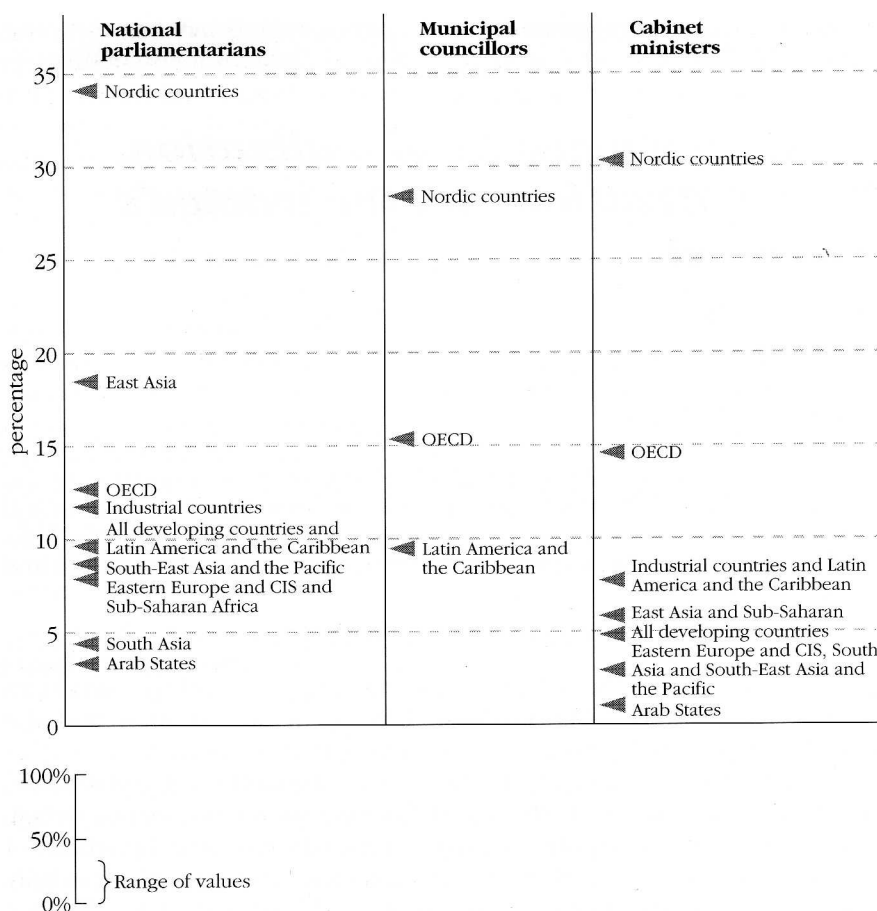
	National parliamentarians	Municipal councillors	Cabinet ministers
35	Nordic countries		
30			Nordic countries
25		Nordic countries	
20	East Asia		
15		OECD	OECD
	OECD		
	Industrial countries		
	All developing countries and		
10	Latin America and the Caribbean	Latin America and the Caribbean	
	South-East Asia and the Pacific		Industrial countries and Latin America and the Caribbean
	Eastern Europe and CIS and Sub-Saharan Africa		East Asia and Sub-Saharan
5			All developing countries
	South Asia		Eastern Europe and CIS, South Asia and South-East Asia and the Pacific
	Arab States		Arab States
0			

percentage

100%
50%
0%
} Range of values

Figure 5.1   Women's political participation is low

Source: United Nations Development Programme (1995) *Human Development Report 1995*, New York, Oxford University Press, Inc.

Women's share, 1994 (%)   Men's share, 1994 (%)

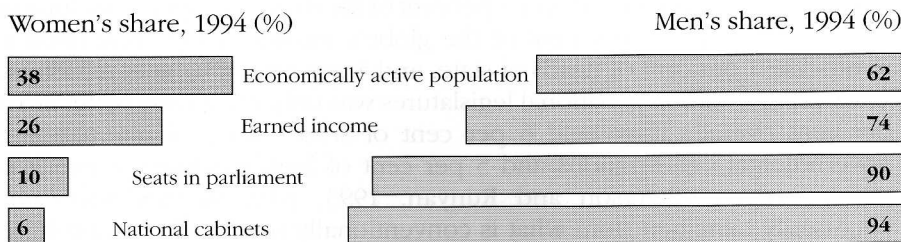|		
38	Economically active population	62
26	Earned income	74
10	Seats in parliament	90
6	National cabinets	94

Figure 5.2   In most respects, it is still an unequal world

Source: Economically active population – UN forthcoming (*The World's Women*); earned income – calculated on the basis of the data from UN 1994i and ILO 1994b, consultant reports prepared for the 1994 and 1995 Human Development Reports, World Bank 1992 and UN forthcoming (*The World's Women*); parliament – IPU 1994; cabinets – data from UN 1994i, as analysed by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (revised by the Human Development Report Office in 1995.

of power relations. This is the paradox which I want to explore in this chapter. I want to suggest that *globalization may finally make democracy real for women, in a way that the liberal 'democratic' nation-state never has*.

So this chapter focuses on the relationships between globalization, the women's movement, and the transformation of liberal democratic politics. This discussion is subdivided into three sections:

–   How has globalization affected women's lives around the world? (Section 5.1)

–   What form has women's response to globalization taken? In particular, what new forms of democratic participation and what new kinds of political space have resulted? A case study in Section 5.2 on the Fourth World Women's Conference, held in Beijing during August-September 1995, illustrates how the women's movement has transformed our nation-state-centred understanding of the democratic political arena into a global one. This leads into the final question:

–   To what extent has the global women's movement transformed the nature of democratic politics?

Coming at the end of the first section of 'Global transformations', this chapter pulls together the discussion of the key domains of globalization introduced so far. The impact on women of economic globalization and global environmental degradation are discussed in Section 5.1 whilst democratization and militarization in a global context is examined in Section 5.3, where I argue that there has been a 'feminization of citizenship' in the nuclear and post-nuclear period, transforming the traditional link between military service and democratic participation.

Yet if the abstract parameters of citizenship have shifted, women's ability to participate is not necessarily any greater. At the Beijing Conference, economic, ecological and military factors affecting women were all on the agenda, but so were other issues barring women from fuller access to power: the globalization of religious fundamentalism, for example, discussed in Section 5.1. In Section 5.4, I conclude by evaluating the achievement of feminism and its impact on the transformation of (territorial) liberal democracy.

5.1   How has globalization affected women's lives?

At first glance it may well appear that the forces of globalization restrict, rather than increase, women's levels of democratic participation. This is particularly true of economic factors. Economic globalization, linked to modernization, was initially expected to improve women's condition world wide. But its effect has actually been far more complex than a naive model of linear progress would predict.

Economic globalization

Modernization and economic globalization may give women more extensive civil rights than under traditional regimes, but economically they often remain subordinate – frequently, increasingly disadvantaged. This is

particularly true of the globalization of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) (see Chapter 3), which have been called 'the most profound and serious political and economic issue affecting most of the world today' (Sparr, 1994, p.1). The Sri Lankan writer Swarna Jayaweera agrees, stressing the interplay between the sexual and global division of labour (Jayaweera, 1994, p.107). SAPs affect not only women but also men, not only poor people in the Third World but also middle- and low-income earners in those economies of the old 'First World' which have embraced neo-liberal economic policies. Yet it is women who bear the brunt of structural adjustment policies.

Women did not benefit greatly from the development loans which precipitated the global debt crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, bringing structural adjustment policies in their wake. Whereas women grow 70 per cent of the food in Third World nations as a whole, they receive only 5 per cent of the 5.8 million agricultural loans given by the multilateral development banks. Women in both Africa and Asia rarely own the land on which they work, and so they rarely benefit from the global loan schemes for land improvement through irrigation, fertilization and mechanization. But although they have rarely been the beneficiaries of international loans and global development projects, women have been the principal victims of the structural adjustment programmes which followed them. In 1991 a report by the UN International Fund for Agricultural Development showed that the number of Third World rural women living in poverty had *increased 50 per cent in the previous 20 years*, during the 'high tide' of structural adjustment policies (Peterson and Runyan, 1993, p.177).

Structural adjustment in the broadest sense involves 'a *conscious* change in the fundamental nature of economic relationships within a society' (Sparr, 1994, p.1). Political relationships are also affected: the core concerns of liberal democracy become more procedural, as governments draw back from assuring positive welfare entitlements to protecting negative rights such as freedom from government intervention (see Chapter 3). Typically SAPs entail the following government policies:

- Acceptance of a *laissez-faire* 'free market' ideology.
- Less government intervention, price control and/or subsidy, sometimes in an apparently contradictory pairing with wage restraint.
- Production for export rather than local consumption (often in newly privatized firms or multinationals).
- Raising interest rates, making loans to small businesses more expensive.
- Cutbacks in government provision of welfare services.

Most of these measures have a gendered impact. For example, cutbacks in government activity mean redundancies for women, who are heavily represented in public sector employment in Ghana and other African countries, as in much of Europe and North America (Manuh, 1994). In Sri Lanka, government handicrafts programmes for local consumption, begun in the 1960s to increase female employment, were shut down in favour of concentrating on exports (Jayaweera, 1994). Higher interest rates hurt market women and small entrepreneurs in nations like Jamaica and Nigeria, because

these women generally have less capital and collateral than their male counterparts (French, 1994). The reduction in welfare entitlements under structural adjustment programmes has left women with the burden of caregiving abandoned by governments. State entitlements which previously reduced women's reproductive labour, e.g. by providing care for the elderly, have been radically cut, but at the same time women have come under increased pressure to augment subsistence labour with low-paid jobs in the productive sector.

On the other hand, by entering paid work women can be seen to emerge into the public arena, even if their conditions are poor. In industrial work, the globalization of 'high-tech' information and service industries has combined with encouragement of production for export in tax-subsidized Export-Processing Zones (EPZs) to create a higher demand for female employment. Some Third World writers claim that EPZ work is liberating for women and that Western feminists have been ethnocentric and patronizing in condemning EPZs (Lim, 1989).

A woman worker prepares to spray a car in Accra, Ghana

What has been the overall impact of structural adjustment programmes on women's lives around the world? It is difficult to separate the effect of SAPs from the international debt crisis of the late 1970s and 1980s, the restructuring of the global economy to produce a new international division of labour, and the world-wide recession which had already reduced the export price of many commodities in the South. In addition, the direction of causation is unclear. It has been argued that gender inequality further contributes to global economic crises; at the same time that globalization produces or worsens structural gender inequality, inequality aggravates global crisis (Peterson and Runyan, 1993).

It is well-nigh impossible to come up with generalizations that fit all the world's women. For example, the introduction of charges for education under SAPs has reversed prior gains made in educating African girls: only 30 girls are educated, for every 100 boys. Yet girls' educational achievement rates now exceed those of boys in western Asia, Latin America and the

Caribbean, despite government cutbacks under SAPs (United Nations, 1995).
In Britain government cutbacks in education have been more or less
continuous since the 1970s. Yet although class divisions in education have
widened, girls are now performing better than boys in examination results.

Nonetheless, we can say that generally the following changes, with
particular implications for liberal democracy, have accompanied structural
adjustment programmes:

–   There has been an *increase in female labour force participation* –
    documented by studies throughout the North, as well as in Turkey,
    the Caribbean, Southeast Asia and Latin America. Waged employment
    could give women opportunities for administration and decision
    making, skills which might enhance democratic participation. But
    where women are simultaneously underemployed and overworked,
    they have no time or inducement to take up these opportunities. In
    this sense SAPs are often said to *lessen* women's involvement in civil
    society (Manuh, 1994).

–   Yet the number of women wishing to be active in the labour force has
    often been coupled with *higher female than male unemployment* –
    exacerbated in countries such as Egypt by Islamic fundamentalist
    groups who have taken advantage of privatization to urge women
    back into the home. In Turkey, for example, there was an increase in
    female employment as a percentage of the overall labour force, but
    female unemployment has also consistently outstripped that of men.

–   *Widening male–female wage differentials* have been documented in
    many countries: for example, Egypt, Sri Lanka, and Argentina. Lack of
    gender-disaggregated income and poverty data for many other nations
    makes it hard to be sure whether this is actually a *global* trend, and
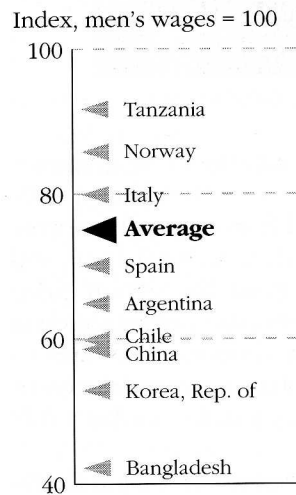   whether it is caused by, or correlated with, SAPs (see Figure 5.3). But if

Index, men's wages = 100

Figure 5.3   Women's average wages languish below men's

Source: United Nations Development Programme (1995) *Human Development Report
1995*, New York, Oxford University Press, Inc.

the gap between men's and women's wages is not necessarily widening worldwide, neither is it shrinking. The expected reduction in the difference between men's and women's pay – the objective of the equal pay acts which many European nations enacted in the 1970s – has notably failed to materialize in the First World (Davidson and Cooper, 1993).

– *Substitution of women's unpaid work for welfare services by governments* (e.g. shorter school hours, cutbacks in public transport, and fewer clinics) means that women spend more time tending children, walking to work, or caring for the sick at home. It is not clear whether women's work time has increased overall or is being redistributed towards income generation, with daughters taking up mothers' reproductive work at the expense of their own schooling. But either way, there is less time available for women's political participation.

Global environmental degradation

The planners behind structural adjustment programmes thought that women were only responsible for subsistence and reproduction. Yet in a self-fulfilling prophecy, SAPs push women further in that very direction by making subsistence such a pressing concern. The global degradation of the environment has also made subsistence increasingly difficult, although it in turn has been exacerbated by both structural adjustment and development programmes. We would expect women to respond by turning more and more towards family concerns and away from political participation. However, the globalization of environmental issues has provided a political arena for some women activists, at both local and global levels.

The initial impact of SAPs on the environment was severe. Servicing debt and concentrating on exports encouraged farmers to abandon traditional farming methods in favour of intensive agriculture. Women are affected for two reasons: as subsistence farmers they rarely benefit from agriculture for profit, but the quality of land and water supplies declines. For example, the introduction of cotton as an export crop in Tanzania increased male farmers' incomes. Following the traditional East African man's preference for cattle as wealth, these farmers put their profits into cattle, which overgrazed the grasslands and sparked soil erosion that spread to women's smallholdings (Dasgupta, 1993, p.287).

Where the resource of water or fuel remains common, women must now spend up to half of their work time and energy collecting it from further and further away. Privatization, often a requirement of structural adjustment, also has a disproportionate effect on women. Common-property resources constitute 15–25 per cent of family income in India and are usually women's and children's entitlement, although local male elders often stand to profit from privatization (ibid., p.291).

Whilst poverty is generally viewed as the sole cause of under-nourishment, unequal bargaining power must also be considered. 'A family in abject poverty not only has to make do with little, it cannot even afford to share its poverty equally' (ibid., p.500). Men are given more food because their productivity is perceived to be higher, and more dependent on nutritional status. Yet intensively cultivated small family farms, where women

play the greatest role, exceed the productivity of large farms in yield per hectare and production of staple food (Berry and Cline, 1979).

The most minimal effect of undernourishment is 'reproductive stress' for women, the worst is increased female mortality (Bantje, 1995). Whatever we might expect of progress in modern medicine, in some parts of the South women's life expectancy is either falling or failing to keep pace with improvements in male longevity. In India the ratio of females to males has fallen consistently throughout the twentieth century, from 0.97 in 1901 to 0.93 in 1981, with rates as low as 0.75 in some regions. The widening difference between male and female life expectancy in India is insufficiently explained by variables which exclude gender i.e. population pressure, investment in social services, or class inequality (Mazumdar and Sharma, 1994, p.189). Much of this growing disparity is explained by environmental degradation, mediated by discrimination against women and girls.

The political effect of global environmental degradation, like that of structural adjustment programmes, appears at first sight to be that hard-pressed women will have less and less time for political participation. But the other side of the coin is the political activism bred by environmental disaster. The 'tree-hugging' movement in northern India, in which women activists chained themselves to trees in order to prevent loggers from cutting local forests, is matched in the North by the Newbury bypass protest (1996) in which women were likewise active. Another sort of global environmental catastrophe – the devastation of East Africa by the HIV virus – has prompted the revival of traditional support networks among women and the development of new forms of political organization and collective action (Obbo, 1995).

The resistible rise of fundamentalism

Women's democratic deficit, in an era of 'triumph' for liberal democracy, is intimately linked with another form of globalization: that of religious fundamentalism. There are radically new connections between fundamentalist movements, which are frequently regional, and in other cases genuinely global. For example, archtheocratic regimes, such as those in power at the time of writing in Afghanistan and Iran, are partly funded by global oil revenues, either their own or those provided by financial aid packages from oil-rich states such as Saudi Arabia (Goodwin, 1994, p.82).

These links are not confined to the Islamic world. Saudi Arabia supplied arms and aid to the Afghan Resistance, which took power in 1992 as a fundamentalist regime; yet this aid was matched dollar by dollar, although indirectly, by the USA. That Afghan women should owe their political veiling, as it were, to both a fundamentalist Islamic regime and a pluralist Western one demonstrates just how complicated the connections are between globalization and women's political situation. But do such links indicate a genuine globalization of fundamentalism?

The 'globalization of fundamentalism' thesis is supported by Karen McCarthy Brown (1994), who holds that a close analysis of gender in American fundamentalism reveals a strong family likeness to Third World fundamentalisms. All are reactive attempts to reproduce order where it is most symbolic, in the family. However, Jay Harris (1994) asserts that to see

fundamentalism this way is ethnocentric and simplistic ignoring the longevity and diversity of religious traditions to which it appeals.

There is a compelling likeness, I think, between the globalization of economic 'fundamentalism' under SAPs – the return to neo-classical 'basics' after the 'excesses' of Keynesianism – and that of religious fundamentalism. Neo-liberalism resembles other fundamentalisms in that it seeks a return to a supposed golden age of unfettered free market capitalism. It, too, defines itself through opposition – to the excesses of state intervention.

Fundamentalism generally seeks to return women to the private sphere, to a past golden age of traditional family values. This is a central plank on which a global miscellany of fundamentalist movements appear to agree. It is not so much that models of the family are universal – clearly they are not – as that woman as 'other' is universal. 'Embodying the other that is at once intimate and ubiquitous, women serve as a fine canvas on which to project feelings of general besetment' (Hawley, 1994, p.27).

What does this entail for women and democratization at the national level? In some nations there are clear links between structural adjustment, fundamentalism and diminished economic or political participation for women. This, too, contradicts the conventional hypothesis about the 'triumph of liberal democracy' across the globe.

In Egypt, for example, the acceptance of structural adjustment programmes and privatization has gone hand in hand with the demise of 'state feminism' – by which the Nasser regime had rewarded anti-colonial women's movements such as Bint-al-Nil (Daughters of the Nile). Independence in 1952 ushered in substantial rights for women, to distinguish the new state from the *ancien régime*. But the 1970s witnessed an unlikely alliance of the IMF and the World Bank, together with fundamentalist Muslim groups. State employment of women diminished or stagnated under privatization; in turn female unemployment was increased by employers' nervousness in the face of Islamic demands that women return home.

Whereas older fundamentalist groups like the Amish in Pennsylvania, the Mennonites in Belize and the Jewish Hasidim isolated themselves in separatist enclaves, modern fundamentalism typically battles to gain the high ground of politics. Often it aims to seize the modern nation-state itself, and to reinstate the alignment of church and state. The feminist movement has sought to outmanoeuvre this stratagem as much through global political activity as through campaigns bounded by the conventional nation-state – through the creation of new global political arenas. The most potent symbol of this trend is the Beijing Conference of 1995.

———————————— *Summary of Section 5.1* ————————————

- Women did not benefit proportionately from the 1970s development loans which resulted in the international debt crisis and ensuing structural adjustment policies, because their reproductive labour was undervalued and because they rarely owned land.

- However, they have suffered disproportionately from structural adjustment programmes, which have created a 'triple burden' of paid

work in low-wage EPZs or the informal sector, plus the existing 'double shift' of subsistence labour and housework. In general we have witnessed a globalization of gender inequality, bringing even non-elites in the Third World into the ambit of a global division of labour.

- Although paid employment, which has increased under SAPs, may involve women in civil society, the 'triple shift' seems to leave them little time for democratic political participation.

- The forces of economic globalization have had a mixed impact on women's opportunities for political participation, and on the structures of the nation-state.

- Global environmental degradation, which hits rural women particularly hard, has often accompanied structural adjustment programmes and has sometimes been worsened by them.

- Although the immediate effect of environmental degradation is to increase women's workload still further, a subsidiary effect is sometimes the stirrings of political activism.

- Fundamentalism as a global reaction to modernization has attempted to take the centre ground of politics in many states, typically calling for women's removal from the political stage, along with other forms of regulating the key ideological space of the family.

- In addition to concrete financial links between fundamentalist groups throughout the world, there are ideological similarities which may justify the notion that fundamentalism has become globalized.

- But so has the women's movement – and in the process it has created new democratic political arenas and new kinds of political organization, symbolized by the Beijing Conference of 1995.

5.2   New 'communities of fate': women's democratic political initiatives above, below and across the nation-state

In this section I look at women's political response to economic globalization, international environmental degradation, and global fundamentalism. That response has been real and innovative, I argue here, despite the apparently overwhelming strikes against it. But because it does not necessarily follow conventional political routes, it is easily overlooked or downplayed. It is a form of *reinventing democratic politics*, entailing a new notion of the democratic political community – and therefore not easily recognizable in existing categories.

These conventional categories limit democratic development to the sheltering boundaries of the nation-state (e.g. Huntington, 1991, cited in Chapter 1). The liberal democratic state, it is usually argued, has proved very adaptable towards the demands of a variety of groups desiring further democratization. What this argument omits is the intransigence of liberal democracy towards women's demands for full citizenship. Indeed, even the notions in which the democratic debate was couched before the twentieth

century – 'universal suffrage', for example, meaning male suffrage – failed to count women in (Dickenson, 1988).

Women's political participation was not conceded by the 'accommodating' liberal democratic state until two *global* crises in the twentieth century – the First and Second World Wars. It was not until the First World War that women in the USA and the UK obtained the vote for which they had been lobbying since the early nineteenth century; in France, where women first demanded the vote during the Revolution, true universal suffrage was not obtained until after the Second World War, 150 years later (Rendall, 1985). The economic mobilization demanded by total war required women's labour and support, which had to be recompensed. The sovereign nation-state has *not* been associated with democracy for women, I would argue (see also Pateman, 1988); only when its sovereignty is *threatened* has the nation-state interested itself in its female citizens.

Because female political participation has been circumscribed in most liberal democracies, it is not surprising that women have appealed to alternative models of association than the nation-state. Women's movements often tend to operate below the nation-state level; but they also organize across and above state boundaries (Peterson and Runyan 1993, p.113). A powerful recent example of this second, global tendency was the Fourth UN World Women's Conference, held in Beijing during August and September 1995.

The Beijing conference: a global political arena

Though trivialized in much of the Western press, the Beijing Women's Conference was an instance of women developing innovative political fora, including the newest global space, the Internet. Whether the conference's Platform for Action (PFA) will translate into measurable improvements for women is difficult to predict, and perhaps we should not be too optimistic in the face of the adverse factors which I detailed in Section 5.1. Nevertheless, there was a measurable difference in the political strategy of the women who attended the Fourth World Conference, compared with the three earlier meetings in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985). There was little sense of an international community of women at these earlier conferences; their concerns were coterminous with those of the governments involved. But the 'national community of fate' had become a global community for women by the time of the Beijing conference.

The very title of the First (Mexico City) Conference, 'Equality, development and peace', was dictated by Orwellian opposition among three power blocs – rather than by any local or global women's movement (Bunch and Carillo, 1990). 'Equality' was the catch-phrase required by the First World representatives, 'peace' by the Soviet bloc, and 'development' by the Third World. But the three slogans put together did not represent a coherently thought-out programme. Ideological disagreement between East and West, North and South, drastically weakened the conference.

The Second (Copenhagen) Conference, marking the midpoint of the UN Decade for Women, was dominated by the Palestine question. The conference's Programme of Action was rejected at the last moment because it condemned Zionism. US, Australian, Canadian and Israeli delegations voted

The Beijing International Convention Center, site of the Fourth UN World Women's Conference

in opposition, although the US delegation was riven in two by African-American members' support for the condemnation: race rather than gender was the salient divide for these women. Perhaps any expectation of consensus at Copenhagen was unrealistic, but then again perhaps *that* is to accept that *Realpolitik* has to dominate: that national loyalties must take precedence over gender identities (Ashworth, 1982). This is less a fact than an assumption, and feminists have challenged the presumption that the nation-state is *the* primary or exclusive political space (Peterson, 1992).

The Third Conference, held in Nairobi in 1985, did manage to achieve agreement at the eleventh hour, but at the price of failure to specify particular commitments. The only follow-up was a 1990 review of governments' implementation, to which only one-quarter of states bothered to reply. By contrast the 1995 Beijing conference did reach consensus on a Platform for Action which contains very specific commitments on women's sexual rights, unpaid work, property rights and resource allocation. Bella Abzug, co-chair of the Women's Economic Development Organization, described the result as 'the strongest consensus on women's equality, empowerment and justice ever produced by the world's governments' (Beijing Forum UK, 1995, p.4).

It is noteworthy that the world's governments did *not* achieve this consensus in their capacity as individual liberal democratic states acting in

association, but rather through a global 'legislative' process by women delegates. Groundwork for the Beijing conference began two years ahead of time; it came to include five regional conferences, an international preparatory meeting in March 1995, and steering committees of experts on particular issues who met to consider sticking points. The regional women's delegations who were to attend the Fourth Conference spent months beforehand hammering out watertight agreements on the draft Platform for Action. They identified common concerns and strategic objectives for 1996–2001, with only a limited number of bracketed phrases remaining to be agreed at Beijing itself.

Besides paving the way for Beijing, these regional conferences also obtained important concessions from previously recalcitrant governments. For example, at a preparatory African workshop in July 1995, South African deputy president Thabo Mbeki committed his government to filling all future ministerial and deputy ministerial posts with women until gender balance was achieved.

Nor was the Beijing conference dominated by the national foreign policy concerns of individual nation-states, as at the Copenhagen conference. Although delegates to Beijing had feared that progress made on women's sexual rights would be undermined by the Vatican and some Islamic states in a concerted rearguard action the agreements worked out at the Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994 were actually strengthened. When agreement on using controversial *terms* such as 'sexual rights' proved impossible, Beijing delegates simply got on with agreeing the practical *content* for those rights. In the end all 189 delegations endorsed the Platform for Action.

Much of the prior negotiation between women's delegations was done through the global electronic communication system, the Internet, raising the notion of a virtual political community. For example, 'Women's Net', a global community of women, activists and organizations using computer networks for information sharing, broadcast and collaboration with the intent of increasing women's rights, featured region and country listings for women's organizations in Africa, Asia/Pacific, and Latin America in addition to the First World. These electronic bulletin-boards remained in place after the conference, offering new political spaces for global organization, mobilization and enhancing the political accountability of governments.

The UN conferences, in addition to mobilizing women at the global level, require national member governments to submit sex-disaggregated data on basic indicators (health, education, productivity, and employment). If concrete targets and strategies based on those indicators are agreed at the conferences, individual states may be embarrassed into measuring up to their own failures, even though the Platform for Action is not legally binding and there is no formal enforcement mechanism. Already some governments have made concrete vows: a target of 30 per cent of women in key government posts in the Lebanon, a promise to increase women's education budgets to 6 per cent of GDP in India, a women's bank in Côte d'Ivoire, a six-year $1.5 billion initiative against domestic violence in the United States. Even within China itself, the conference acted as a catalyst: within a year of the gathering, 5,000 new women's education groups had been set up.

Beijing was not an unmitigated success. Geographical separation, imposed by the Chinese government, impaired communication between representatives of governmental and non-governmental organizations. The sheer number of NGOs – over 4,000 were accredited – made networking difficult. Experienced lobbyists had the upper hand, which 'effectively created a two-tier system, with only those on the inside likely to be directly involved in the negotiations' (Beijing Forum UK, 1995, p.3).

Another flaw is the uncritical acceptance of market economics throughout the Platform for Action. Although re-allocating and increasing resources to benefit women figure in the document, there is little analysis of the underlying causes of poverty or of the effect of SAPs on women. This is partly inevitable, given national governments' commitment to the market. UK non-governmental bodies which held discussions with the British government about implementing the PFA found far more receptive attitudes towards environmental, educational and health initiatives than to suggestions that economic efficiency should not be the be-all and end-all of development policy (Beijing Forum UK, 1996). Even though a debt moratorium was commonly forecast at the time of the Beijing conference, the PFA's language on the debt crisis and international aid is quite weak. However, the document is strong on commitments to measure and value women's reproductive labour. For the first time, governments are instructed to count women's unpaid reproductive work within national accounts.

One final point indicates that Beijing marked the emergence of a fully globalized women's movement. At previous conferences, the difficulties of organizing across national boundaries were exemplified by tension between Western and Third World feminists, even over practices which both condemned – such as polygamy, veiling, purdah, unilateral divorce, dowry, bridewealth, child marriage, and genital mutilation. Women in the South were angered both by these practices and by interference from feminists outside their own societies; the previous result was an impasse.

Some Western feminists (e.g. Morgan, 1984) had wrongly assumed that women's experiences are the same around the globe, and, most importantly, that women's experiences were effectively non-political. 'Universal sisterhood, defined as the transcendence of the "male" world, thus ... effectively erases material and ideological power differences within and among groups of women, especially between First and Third World women (and, paradoxically, removes us all as actors from history and politics). Ultimately in this reductive utopian vision, men *participate* in politics while women can only hope to *transcend* them' (Mohanty, 1991).

But the impasse was breached at Beijing. The Beijing Platform for Action deliberately eschews relativistic clauses which would 'count women out'. Delegates voted against allowing national governments to refuse reforms such as the abolition of female genital mutilation on the grounds of conflict with religious codes. Whereas the 1994 Cairo Conference on Population and Development declaration included the limiting phrase 'respecting cultural values and religious beliefs' in delineating the rights of women and girls, the Beijing text does not.

So perhaps we might say that human rights (see Chapter 6) were globalized, too, at Beijing. It is particularly appropriate that this development

occurred in the section on parental rights and the rights of the child (paragraph 262 of the Platform for Action). A safely private, 'female' domain – motherhood and the family – had become a platform for public, political action.

I have presented the 1995 Beijing conference as a generally successful transformation of democratic political organization at the global rather than the national level: as a restructuring of conventional political space and as a challenge to the conventional assumption that 'global' is somehow less democratic than 'national'. But before closing this section, I want to emphasize that the Beijing delegates did not ignore democratic politics at the nation-state level: far from it. They returned to their home countries ready to continue lobbying for the PFA's implementation with their own governments. In Sierra Leone, one conference delegate is now Minister for Gender and Children; in the UK, the Beijing Forum – an umbrella organization of NGOs concerned with women's issues – was invited to help set policy at a senior level in the Overseas Development Administration.

Without a critical mass of women in key positions at the national level, however, women will continue to be 'counted out' of liberal democratic politics. The UN itself is often alleged to be one of the least representative international institutions in terms of women at a senior level. The Beijing Platform for Action includes a demand for a senior UN post of assistant secretary-general for women. Getting more women into democratic politics through proportional representation or quotas, in the UN, as in national governments, was an important goal at Beijing. But it is a necessary though not a sufficient condition, in the eyes of many women's activists, for a feminist-derived *transformation* of liberal democratic politics – 'ungendering' what is now an invisibly gendered international dimension.

Below the national level: new models of democratic participation

If the Beijing conference is seen as a global, feminist transformation of liberal democracy, it is also important to recognize how the women's movement has presided over the *downward* shift of political networks. This is consistent with my basic premise about women's democratic deficit at the level of the nation-state. The global political community of women has been one response; another has been the attempt to create 'communities of fate' below the nation-state level. The possibilities of self-determination, long denied at nation-state level, may be realized by circumventing the nation-state from above or below. This section concerns concrete initiatives taken by feminists working *below* the level of national democratic politics.

Just as the Platform for Action section on parental and child rights produced the most public, political statements at Beijing, so has the family been a potent political symbol for organizing below nation-state level. But whereas the democratic participation sought by women in the North has been seen in terms of alternative models of association to the family, women in the South have retained and built on the family and their reproductive role as a basis for citizenship. Both, however, challenge the liberal democratic assumption that the family is separate from political life; both see the personal as political.

At the Greenham Common anti-cruise missile encampment from 1981 onwards, women were deliberately making themselves homeless – and yet setting up an alternative form of 'home', the largely-autonomous Peace Camps at the several base gates. They saw themselves as abandoning the non-political space allotted to women, and as refusing male 'protection'. Because the traditional justification for the military's anomalous presence in a liberal democracy is the protection of the nation, this was a particularly sensitive area (see Chapter 2). Whether or not the Greenham women actually achieved the withdrawal of US cruise missiles, their symbolic importance was considerable (Rosenau, 1992). The Greenham women also used more conventional political channels for maximum advantage. For example, they launched a joint US/UK district court action against the Reagan administration for deploying missiles in Europe in violation of international and US constitutional law.

In contrast to the Greenham women, Third World women more frequently use an idealized extended family as a cornerstone for new political 'buildings'. For example, women's producer co-operatives in Zimbabwe, set up to combat the effects of SAPs, preserve African women's traditional responsibility for the domestic mode of production, but expand that role to supplying local markets with products ranging from foodstuffs to uniforms. Although these co-operatives have been successful on an international scale, it is doubtful that they represent a new mode of democratic organization; their governance is quite conventional in form. What is distinctive is their emphasis on female solidarity (Sylvester, 1994).

Below the state level, practical concerns like food shortages or lack of health care often develop into strategic gender interests, sometimes accompanied by a more global analysis of women's subordination and transformation (Molyneux, 1985). Many of the regional caucuses behind the Beijing conference evolved out of such campaigns. However, volunteer local interest groups, emerging out of women's domestic responsibility for the family, are often unpaid and undervalued, as is women's reproductive labour generally. Men generally dominate paid formal community leadership, within the framework of national politics (Moser, 1991). This division is perpetuated by international agencies: for example, a UNICEF (UN International Children's Emergency Fund) basic services programme in India was designed so as to give men paid employment in the organization but to require unpaid community work by women. Given women's double or even triple shifts (paid work, subsistence production and household work), there are limits to how far local organization as a form of democratic transformation can proceed.

Women in the South have also made use of notions such as positive discrimination, more commonly associated with Western feminists. In India, for example, a new positive-action statute requires that one-third of local council elders must be women. In both North and South, however, women have often abandoned conventional politics in order to combat other issues which seem more real, such as domestic violence. Women's rights organizations monitoring domestic violence around the world have called for an overhaul of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights to make it

reflect the women's rights concerns raised by CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, adopted in 1979 and ratified by 110 nations as of 1991). Domestic violence was also a key concern in the Beijing Platform for Action.

Similarly, female genital mutilation is increasingly seen by African women as incompatible with the health of girls and the reproductive and sexual wellbeing of adult women. Campaigns centred on promoting family health have reduced rates of genital mutilation dramatically in a ten-year period in Burkina Faso. Whereas campaigns against female circumcision were once seen as neo-imperialist interference, or at best as a diversion from more pressing economic concerns, African women are spontaneously beginning to use the imagery of the ideal rather than the actual family to end this most intimate invasion of women's space.

Structural adjustment programmes have catalysed economic development researchers from the North into co-operation with local women-run grassroots movements in the South. One example is Women in Development, a global group set up by American development economists concerned that capitalist development models imposed on the Third World have increased inequality between the sexes. Women in Development worked with some success to influence United States Agency for International Development policies. It is an interesting example of a *trans*national phenomenon moving into the sphere of *inter*national relations through the inter*governmental* machinery of the UN (Newland, 1991).

───────────────── ***Summary of Section 5.2*** ─────────────────

- Beijing succeeded where earlier women's conferences had failed because it drew on previous groundwork through regional and global electronic networks; because it concentrated on practical targets rather than ideological sloganeering; and because it benefited from growing recognition of women's rights as universal human rights.

- The Beijing conference itself, the electronic virtual political community which preceded it and still continues, and ongoing global and regional networks of activist women – all represent new forms of political activity and space.

- In addition, previously intransigent nation-states have begun to meet some of the demands of the Beijing Platform for Action, indicating a trickle-down from the global to the national level. This stands in stark contrast to the conventional assumptions which see global forces as hampering democratic decision making at the national level. Where women are concerned, the global political arena is arguably more accommodating than the national arena.

- Women's movements in both North and South have countered the fundamentalist notion of returning to 'family values' by challenging what we understand by the family. Western groups such as the Greenham Peace Campers have tried to produce alternative models of the family; women in the Third World have more typically transformed existing models of the family without rejecting them outright.

●   Campaigns of positive discrimination to bring more women into democratic politics are common to both North and South, as are feminist movements against domestic violence and female genital mutilation.

5.3   To what extent is the women's movement transforming the discourse and practices of liberal democratic politics?

In Section 5.2 I evaluated the extent to which democratic political space has been restructured through *concrete* initiatives above and below the nation-state level. In this section I also want to argue that the extent to which the women's movement has transformed liberal democratic politics should not be measured by operational indicators and concrete initiatives alone. This is to gauge its success only in terms of seizing *conventional political spaces* – whereas it has been equally or even more concerned with *changing the topography* of the political map. We should also look to *theoretical* rework-ings of key democratic concepts.

I have already mentioned one small example: the recognition that 'universal suffrage' was a much misapplied term. But the theoretical contribution of the feminist movement goes well beyond that fairly obvious statement. Women activists and scholars have sought to reconceptualize *political identity*, question the *public–private* distinction central to liberal democratic thought, rethink the nature of *democratic citizenship*, and query taken-for-granted assumptions about who counts in the democratic *political community*. Indeed, *political community* can be seen as the overarching question here: citizenship, political identity and the boundaries of the public are all subsumed in that one concept. The key theoretical contributions of the feminist movement all involve a challenge to conventional notions of the democratic political community, transforming political discourse to count women in.

Some feminists argue that economic globalization, global ecological crises, and global militarism combine with our increasingly global citizenship to require that we rethink our political identities. For example, no nation-state can solve global ecological crises on its own (Peterson, 1992). Because women's public identity as full citizens has only been grudgingly granted by national governments, and because the women's movement has experi-mented with alternative identities, such as politicized forms of the family, the transformation to global identities and the de-emphasis on national security may well be led by the feminist movement, if such a transformation is to occur.

The gender-neutrality of much liberal democratic theorizing has been tellingly questioned by feminist political theorists (Pateman, 1988). In particular the family, with a male head, is, according to such critiques, central to the public/private distinction in liberal democratic theory and practice. Feminist reconceptualizing has also cast doubt on the legitimacy of the nation-state's authority, understood in Weberian terms as a monopoly of violence. Nationalism, too, is seen as gendered by many feminists.

Conventional accounts of how national identity is constructed seem to be based on masculinist notions of self-determination and sovereignty. This has implications for another commonly made linkage: that between military participation and the rights of citizenship (see Chapter 2). I want to argue that this amounts to the *feminization of citizenship* (cf. Douglas, 1977).

In Chapter 2, Shaw notes that the linkage between military participation and citizenship has been broken because the military in a nuclear age no longer requires mass conscript armies. This has an ambivalent effect for women. Earlier I accepted the common argument that it was mass mobilization for war which gave women democratic rights of citizenship in the twentieth century. What happens, then, when the state no longer requires the military efforts of its male or female citizens?

Although I accept the strategic importance of the two world wars to the suffrage movements, I think that in general the link between military duty and citizenship rights is far more tenuous than is conventionally argued. Women have been exhorted, rewarded, or compelled to bear sons who will be soldiers in regimes from ancient Sparta through Napoleonic France to Ceaucescu's Romania; yet this undoubted contribution to the military effort has not entitled them to political participation (Le Doeuff, 1989). It is exactly such taken-for-granted notions as what constitutes service to the state which feminism is best at questioning. Counting women in means rethinking what counts as full membership in the democratic political community.

In classical Athens citizenship was defined in terms not only of militia duty, but primarily as ownership of the means of independent living, such as a small farm. Women were excluded from political life not because they could not bear arms – indeed, we have records of Greek female naval captains – but because Athenian women did not own the means of independent living. Nor, more importantly, did they own the property in their own persons: that belonged to their *kyrios* or lord, usually their husbands. Without autonomy over their own bodies and actions, they could not be given the right of political control over those who did own themselves, freeborn men. The liberal model of democracy, too, is rooted in a period when married women were effectively 'dead' at law, with no property or political rights. Similarly, except in Hobbes, women are not conceived as participating in the social contract which underlies liberal democracy (Pateman, 1988).

The models of democracy which we have inherited from Athens and seventeenth-century England rely on a linkage between *democratic citizenship* and *property in the person*. Other feminist writers have considered the troubled relationship between women and property in democratic political theory (Dickenson, 1997). Only recently have women begun to own their persons: the campaign against female genital mutilation shows that this struggle is ongoing. There is a stronger association between property ownership and citizenship, for women, than between military participation and democratic rights. Sweden and Switzerland both have a long-standing tradition of citizen conscript armies, needed to maintain their neutrality. One gave women the vote at the beginning of the century, well before the First World War; the other only towards the end, in 1971. By contrast, there is a consistent association between improvements in the

property laws relating to married women and the extension of the franchise. The first precedes the second in most Western countries.

Yet the linkage between military duty and democratic citizenship has been broken *for men*, as Chapter 2 argues, and in that sense we have witnessed a *feminization of citizenship*. Men now participate in democratic politics on the same terms as women: as Shaw rightly says, primarily in terms of democratic entitlements rather than duties to the nation-state. And if there has been any democratization of military power, much of the impetus has come from the women's movement. The 'mothers of the Plaza de Mayo', whose adult children were among the 'disparicidos' under the military regimes in Chile and Argentina, challenged the authority of those regimes even while they were still in power. These women's private grief became the vehicle for public activism. It was mothers of the nine friendly-fire victims in the British forces during the Gulf War who took the American military to court. The unlawful dismissal of pregnant officers by the British army resulted in large court settlements and proof that the army had been consciously disobeying the law. And the Greenham Common women represented a symbolic challenge to the military.

Such rethinkings of quintessential political concepts are among the most far-reaching and exciting transformations of liberal democracy through the women's movement (Phillips, 1992). As these examples show, conceptual transformation is not 'merely' theoretical: it can affect practical politics. 'Counting women in' does not mean 'adding women' as a few token participants in government, but requiring the key concepts of liberal democracy – and membership of the democratic political community – to be *genuinely* universal.

Summary of Section 5.3

- Practical indicators such as levels of women's representation are important, but the feminist movement has also challenged existing ideologies and democratic concepts. The discourse of democratic political theory has been affected in four key areas:

  political identity; the public/private distinction; the nature of citizenship; political community, the overarching concept which embraces the other three as well.

- The feminization of citizenship results when men are no longer required to bear arms as a basis for citizenship in a post-military age, combined with the accession of women to political participation as they come to control their own bodies.

Conclusion

Feminism may be a global call for action; but to paraphrase Hotspur in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I,* 'will action come when you do call for it?' I have argued that the democratic deficit at the nation-state level, despite the global spread of liberal democracy, has impelled women towards a global response. At the same time, women's organizations operating beneath the nation-state level have transformed the appearance of liberal democratic

politics. Finally, at the theoretical rather than the practical level, the discourse and ideology of liberal democratic politics is itself a site of feminist discontent and attempted transformation.

But is this enough to prove my initial suggestion – that globalization may make democracy real for women in a way that the liberal democratic nation-state has failed to do? After all, global transformations such as structural adjustment and environmental degradation really press women towards concentrating on survival, not political activism. Successive UN reports have found that the situation of women is worsening all over the world. World economic crisis, shifting sorts of labour discrimination such as 'flexibility', transfer of inappropriate technology to developing countries – all reinforce women's dispossession and their exclusion from economic and political power. In those nations where fundamentalist movements threaten women's involvement outside the home, there are further reasons to doubt whether women can increase their engagement with politics.

The gradualist approach to women's integration is also outstripped by the proliferation of state and international financial bureaucratic machinery. Ill-funded women's groups simply cannot keep up. The Beijing conference may have approved the Platform for Action, but will implementing equality stumble on cost? At the same time, the backlash against affirmative action in the USA, the rise of movements determined to deny women's reproductive rights in Eastern Europe and the Islamic world as well as in the USA, and the dominance of neo-liberal economics almost everywhere threaten the implementation of those advances within the nation-state which have been agreed after lengthy political processes.

Not only are there increasing practical barriers to 'counting women in' as part of liberal democratic politics; on a theoretical level, many feminists doubt whether liberal democratic concepts as currently framed can admit women. Although some feminist theorists are attempting to rework existing concepts such as authority, community and citizenship, others despair of such key concepts, seeing them as excluding women finally and irredeemably. To those feminist theorists, there is no chance for reform in democratic political discourse: it is male-centred all the way down. But the corresponding risk is that feminist political theory will descend into navel-gazing introspection.

These are powerful arguments for pessimism about the extent to which the women's movement can transform democratic politics within the nation-state. But the arguments for optimism are also powerful, and in the course of writing this chapter I have become more convinced by them. The recognition of women's rights as universal human rights; increasing unwillingness to accept multi-cultural 'opt-out clauses' through which governments attempt to resist reform of abuses condemned by their own women as well as Western feminists; the casting of rights demands in terms of very concrete and universally agreed programmes of action at Beijing – all these argue against cynicism.

The Beijing conference also suggests that women now identify more strongly with other women as a constituency than at the time of the Mexico City, Copenhagen and Nairobi conferences. Delegates refused to let other concerns such as racism, imperialism and neo-colonialism dominate the Beijing agenda. This identity is both reinforced and served by international

electronic networking, which was much in evidence before, at and after Beijing – itself a transformation of what counts as political space, and a new kind of 'virtual' democratic political community.

True, factors affecting women must be dealt with at a level above that of the nation-state, but the global women's movement is arguably better placed than any other international movement to demand change. And the very plasticity of the women's movement – its distrust of institutional structures and rigid concepts – may be an asset in an era of global unpredictability.

I have argued that the liberal democratic state has not been so adaptable as is generally supposed: that on the contrary, it has consistently been inflexible about 'counting women in'. It may only be the emergence of a *global civil society*, symbolized by the Beijing conference, which will finally force the full inclusion of women as part of the democratic political community at nation-state level.

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