



THE REMAKING OF SOCIAL CONTRACTS

FEMINISTS IN A FIERCE NEW WORLD

Edited by  and
MARINA DURANO
for DAWN



The remaking of social contracts

Feminists in a fierce new world

EDITED BY

GITA SEN AND MARINA DURANO

FOR **DAWN**



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The remaking of social contracts

About the editors

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About DAWN

DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES WITH WOMEN FOR A NEW ERA (DAWN), founded in 1984, is a network of feminist scholars, advocates and activists from the economic South who work for economic and gender justice and sustainable and democratic development. DAWN provides a forum for feminist analyses and advocacy on issues affecting the human rights, livelihoods and development prospects of women, especially poor and marginalized women, in the South. It supports women's mobilization and building the capacity of young feminists to challenge inequitable power relations at all levels, and to advance feminist alternatives. DAWN draws strength from, and is committed to further empowering women's movements in the South to counter social, economic and political inequality, injustice and exclusion.

Foreword

This book addresses some of the critical challenges of the fierce new world that marks the early decades of the twenty-first century. The complex interplay among the economic, ecological, political and social challenges of today have left the world lurching from crisis to crisis. This has had especially harmful consequences for people who are subordinated, oppressed and exploited, and threatens the very survival of our planet. Massive increases in inequality reflect a symbiosis between the extreme and growing wealth of some and deepening risks to the survival and livelihoods of many. The runaway celebration of greed in both North and South is matched by a reckless flouting of ecological boundaries, and rapid growth of militarism and conflict. Such challenges run counter to the deepened commitments to human rights and the upsurge in social movements that we witnessed in the last quarter of the previous century.

In an effort to address these complex issues, the United Nations is in the throes of a process to reach multilateral agreement on a new set of development goals after the time frame of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) ends in 2015. While many key global actors are caught up in the frenzy of negotiating the Post-2015 Development Agenda, it is important for civil society movements not to lose sight of the longer and larger perspective on growth, development and human rights, even as we speak out and advance our political critiques and alternatives in this global process of shaping the future of our earth and its peoples. This book is an attempt to address some of these larger questions. Its approach is based on DAWN's reflections on our thirty years of collective processes of feminist analysis, advocacy, popular resistance and movement building towards creating, together with other civil society allies, strong alternatives that will help move our world out of global gridlock.

The vigour and vitality that have driven the book to completion comes from activists, advocates and leaders of civil society movements and increasingly from a younger generation from the global South, who joined DAWN training sessions and organized discussions and debates and then later became members of advocacy teams at regional and global levels. It is on the young feminists – our DAWN alumni and associates as we call them – that we place our hope of sustaining DAWN’s intergenerational politics of open debate and meaningful partnership. These are young women who we believe will shape and create a world truly committed to all human rights and to the human rights of all, regardless of class, caste, race, religion, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation and gender identity, abilities and citizenship.

We are grateful to the authors for their time, effort and commitment. The contributors are predominantly South-based feminists, allied with feminists from the economic North and with men advocating for fundamental change who share the vision and politics of DAWN. Through many years we have struggled together against neoliberal globalization, fundamentalisms and militarism on the streets as well as in the halls of inter-governmental negotiations.

We wish to thank Sonia Corrêa in particular for her vigorous engagement with the book in its initial phases of conceptualization and Seona Smiles for her support in the creation of the manuscript. We value our partnership with Zed Books, a friend of DAWN’s through many years.

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JOSEFA FRANCISCO
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PART I

Introductory overview

Social contracts revisited: the promise of human rights

GITA SEN AND MARINA DURANO

This book has been a while in the making. Many of its authors have engaged over decades with the discourses and debates on development. They have also been involved in the practical politics of social mobilization and advocacy. Most would view themselves, as we the editors do, as part of broad social movements for economic, ecological and social justice. In particular, many are feminists (women and men) in the particular sense that has evolved through the analysis and practice of DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era), the international network of researchers, activists and policymakers that came into being at the time of the United Nations Third World Conference on Women (Nairobi, 1984) and has been active since then in global and regional development debates. DAWN's approach from the beginning has been to recognize the connections between the different worlds of work, of reproduction, of interaction with nature, of social mobilization, within which we live. We are conscious that feminist thinking and practice have been shaped by the ups and downs of the development environment. Moving from the optimism about development of the 1960s and 1970s through the backsliding of the 1980s and 1990s, the world experienced an apparent resurgence in development thinking in the new millennium, but this was soon followed by current uncertainties and ambiguities, even as feminists and their allies struggle to challenge and transform that environment.

The book is the product of a collective attempt by DAWN and our allies to understand the complexities of our times, to challenge the webs of power and the many intersecting forms that social injustice takes; to spell out what it will take to resist and transcend the might of the juggernauts of globalization and reaction. Written by an international group

of authors with diverse expertise in political economy, ecology, human rights and social change, the book attempts to weave these threads together to articulate a vision both multifaceted and interlinked. What drives that vision is our collective understanding of the world we live in, and our belief that changing this world is both essential and possible. This book explores, from a Southern feminist perspective, the potential of an interlinked approach to human rights for confronting and transforming the fierce world in which we live. We provide no blueprints. Indeed, we do not believe in them. We do value open questioning and debate, challenging ourselves to search for understanding of complex and difficult dilemmas in politically fraught terrains. This book is an attempt to open debates, not close them.

The first section of this overview provides a thumbnail sketch from this perspective of the period since World War II, paying particular attention to the emergence and fracturing of social contracts, the rise of social movements, and the promise of human rights. This sketch makes no claim to be comprehensive. It draws on some of DAWN's own experiences over the years, including issues we have had to confront and grapple with in that engagement. It also makes some analytical remarks about social contracts and the meaning of feminism. The second section orients readers to the different themes and dilemmas that are discussed in greater depth in the various chapters of the book, as well as in the short contributions in boxes found throughout.

A fierce new world, a fractured social contract

The early twenty-first century has been marked globally by the 'war on terror' and the financial and economic crisis. Beneath these headlines, however, lie other phenomena of no less importance – climate change, species die-offs and a host of related ecological crises, as well as a backlash against advances towards social justice and human rights for all. Even deeper beneath the surface lies the drastic transformation of the world of work towards flexibility and precariousness that shapes what is possible and probable by way of social policies. A fierce new world has been born – full of shaken premisses, complicated contradictions, serious fractures, severe backlash, broken promises and uncertain outcomes for

the world's peoples. The period since World War II can be seen as having two parts: from 1945 until the early 1980s, and from the 1980s until 2008. These two sub-periods differ in multiple dimensions – the nature of global capital accumulation and political economy, the associated policies, social movements, and social contracts. The period since 2008 is one of great confusion and ambiguity with little clarity about future directions for global and national policies.

A word first about the way in which we use the term 'social contract' in this book. Definitions of the term from the seventeenth century on have entered political science textbooks, but they have also generated much criticism as being, among other things, rigid and patriarchal (Pateman 1988; Richardson 2007). We agree with much of this critique, and have had many internal debates about the value of the term given its troubled history. Nonetheless, we use it here to capture the recognition that social processes move in fits and starts, with turmoil and transformation being interspersed by short or long periods of stability, even stasis, when there is only slow or no change at all. Our usage is thus far removed from a notion of free and equal persons creating a society based upon rules to which all agree. Rather, it is embedded in the political economy of power and inequality at multiple levels and in varied forms. A social contract is a collective agreement that is built on and imbued with power; it may be imposed from above, fought over from below, and always holding the potential for change. But its fluidity is also interspersed with stability. Periods of stability in social contracts, local or global, are periods when our collective understanding of what is and what ought to be are stable and roughly in synchrony with each other; and when power structures and associated institutions are relatively steady.

In such times the main challenges to power remain within the boundaries of the system. Common normative understandings, as reflected in beliefs, social and political practices, and behaviours, reinforce the existing social order in different spheres – economic, political, legal, ecological, social, cultural and personal. Of course, there is no such thing as perfect stability. Internal contradictions lead to continuous pressures for change. Neither do the different spheres work synchronously. Thus, for instance, the demands for gender justice from women's movements may be far ahead of emerging changes in the political system. There is often not a

single social contract in existence but multiple ones in different spheres that may or may not mesh smoothly with each other. Nevertheless, as we argue, the difference between periods of stable social contracts and periods of instability and transformation is not just of degree but of kind. What marks the difference is the breaking down of accustomed norms and beliefs, as people's lived realities conflict more and more with these familiar practices, to the point where there is a widespread sense that the contract is simply not working any longer.

Three characteristics of social contracts are important from this perspective. The first is that a social contract is not a teleology – 'rationality' discovering itself in some inexorable way. For instance, the inability of current political economic orders to effectively halt, let alone reverse, climate change is a good counter-example to any presumption of inevitable rationality. In fact, changes in social contracts may not even be progressive; witness the real risks to gender equality and women's human rights in the democratic churning of the so-called Arab Spring, or the current threats in the United States to overturn the advances made towards the civil rights of African Americans and the reproductive rights of women. Second, the norms that are part of our collective beliefs are as critical to holding up a social contract as the structures of material resources and political power. Indeed, there may always be inherent tensions between the real basis and functioning of power structures and what people believe about them. When such fissures widen into chasms, beliefs break down, as has happened in Greece where faith in the value of belonging to the European Union has practically collapsed in the face of massive unemployment and economic hardship. For this reason, movements for social change work at both the normative level and the level of institutions and power structures. Third, social contracts are always in a state of flux. The fracturing of existing social contracts can come from many sources: social movements, technological changes, institutional and cultural transformations, and of course economic and ecological pressures.

Our reading of recent history uses this open-ended and flexible meaning of social contracts to analyse both what is and what ought to be today from the perspective of social justice and human rights. From such a perspective, the two sub-periods after World War II (1945–80 and