

Global Empowerment of Women

Responses to Globalization and
Politicized Religions

Edited by
Carolyn M. Elliott



Routledge Research in Gender and Society

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Preface

The authors represented in this collection were members of the Fulbright New Century Scholars Program (NCS) on Global Empowerment of Women. This group of thirty-one scholars from twenty-two countries met in three seminars over the course of the program year, 2004–2005, in addition to pursuing individual research projects. They worked on a broad variety of issues—from sexual autonomy, to marriage laws, to war and memory. Their research was located in many different spaces—villages, prisons, health clinics, and the International Criminal Court, among others. The task of the seminars was to draw on this research for collaborative projects to advance women's empowerment, and to formulate an overall research-based understanding of problems and possible solutions. At the first meeting the NCS scholars divided themselves into four working groups, organized by topic, that worked together throughout the project year. The statement that follows (the Scholars' Statement) is compiled from the scholars' collective statement and the subgroup conclusions that they summarized for presentation at a public meeting in New York in May 2005.

The Scholars' Statement provides a powerful, substantive critique of the structural impediments to women's empowerment agreed upon by scholars from both the North and the South. As a group, these scholars speak from long experience with research, both field investigations and theoretical formulations. Many of the group have also established careers as activists on behalf of women's and gender issues.

SCHOLARS' STATEMENT

The implementation of neoliberal policies over the last twenty-five years has resulted in the dominant role of the market, greater openness to international trade and investment, and a reduced role for government in promoting population well-being. The focus of government policy is on individual strategies rather than collective responsibility. These processes are intertwined with continued violence against women, the feminization of poverty, transnational labor exploitation, and control of women's mobility.

The world has moved toward greater inequality within and among states as well as among women, even as women are achieving a degree of equality with men in some settings. Structural adjustment, privatization of state functions, and the expansion of market economies contribute to widening the gap between North and South, rich and poor, and men and women. Religious, ethnic, and national tensions obscure and justify material injustices. In this setting of increasing worldwide inequality, the path toward global gender equity is more difficult.

We support the substantial international commitments and conventions to advance women's equality made in such agreements as the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Declaration of the United Nations' Conference on Human Rights, the Beijing Platform for Action, the World Summit on Social Development, and the Millennium Declaration. We are concerned, however, that the recently adopted Millennium Development Goals (MDG) are a step backward from the earlier United Nations-based initiatives that came out of the conferences on women and social development. These earlier recommendations were concerned not just with individual claims but also with broader questions of structural change that now appear to have been removed from the mainstream agenda.

We focus on understanding what changes in the global order mean for women and women's empowerment. Our work is guided by an explicit commitment to developing analytical and practical alternatives to contemporary global hegemonies. We address debates about globalization and global restructuring through the development of a critical transnational feminist framework for analysis and action.

Our research has identified many key sources and sites of women's empowerment. Empowerment has been a critical concept for the international women's movement, underscoring the effectiveness of women's activism in changing the world. We have discovered numerous ways in which women have transformed their lives. We have also found multiple instances of individual and institutional resistance to global trends that have negative effects on women. Further, our research confirms and exemplifies the power of women's collective action.

Yet we also recognize problems with the way empowerment has been defined, measured, and deployed. Notions of empowerment often emphasize individual rights without recognizing women's responsibilities to others. Empowerment has too often been used in instrumental ways to meet the goals of development programs rather than to transform structural and gender inequalities. There is also a tension between empowerment as a series of individual choices and the structural constraints within which those choices must be made. Choices that may appear self-defeating or self-endangering to an outsider may be rational within the situation a woman faces. Other problems arise when empowerment generates conflict among the several roles of women or between groups of women. The unevenness

and inconsistencies of empowerment must be charted, within women's lives and across women's experiences.

GENDER, GLOBALIZATION, AND GOVERNANCE

Our research deals with governance, understood to be a multifaceted political process that involves both public and private sectors in the determination of social and economic inequalities. While economic governance is generally posited in terms of states and markets, we broaden these concepts to include inequalities of power, production, and distribution. The research challenges the narrow understanding of economic governance inherent in the neoliberal paradigm.

Global restructuring has increasingly shifted governance processes to private institutions and international actors, which operate by market rules and are removed from democratic accountability. The policy of marketization—increasing reliance on markets for producing and distributing goods—is detrimental to poor people in general and to women in particular, for it ignores the critical contribution of social reproduction and the care economy to the capacity for production. The impacts of global restructuring include cutbacks in public support for the unwaged work crucial for family survival, increasing burdens on women. We are experiencing deepening inequality and jeopardy of the productive capacity in our societies.

NEGOTIATING CITIZENSHIP AND DIVERSITY: GENDER, NATION, AND DIASPORAS

Studies of women's empowerment must take into account their membership in ethnic, national, and religious communities, be attentive to the contradictory roles of women in social and political conflicts, and investigate the complex relationships between gender, citizenship, and processes of social inclusion and exclusion. In particular, they need to examine how gender is used in the construction of national and ethnic identities.

Group rights are often prioritized over women's rights. Women accept, actively embrace, reject, or reconfigure their roles as symbols and markers of identity. While we can no longer assume that women are simply used as passive symbols of nationalism, in many instances women do function as bearers of culture, and the consolidation of national/ethnic identity takes place at the cost of their freedom and well-being. In highly charged situations where group identity is at stake, communities tend to react with increased concern about gender roles and seek to tighten control over women. At the same time it is necessary to acknowledge women's agency in each context, even if it is expressed in ways we may find difficult to understand.

Many women have found participation in liberation and resistance movements empowering. However, post-liberation results have often been contradictory, uneven, and disappointing. In situations of conflict, women and girls are affected in specifically gendered ways. Restoring to collective memory women's victimization, activism, and resistance can be the basis for new forms of democratic development and gender justice.

RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE

Violence against women has been widely recognized as a pervasive global problem. It is an enduring impediment to the empowerment of women and, more generally, to social justice and peace. Cultures of violence are based on repression, denial, and manipulation. In the case of violence against women this is particularly acute. Historically women have been blamed, shamed, and silenced about the violence perpetrated against them, especially sexual violence. Silence surrounding gender violence contributes to the violence by maintaining it and exacerbating its traumatic impact on victims and the broader consequences for all women.

The identification, documentation, and validation of these crimes are a key to providing accountability and redress, and for achieving a more just truth. Providing a public space for breaking the silence and recording the testimonies of violence contributes to justice and helps to minimize the possibility of recurrence. Truth commissions have played this role in many post-conflict situations, but within these forums violence against women has been ignored or considered to be outside the commissions' purview. Women's participation in anti-war and resistance movements is also too often absent from public memory, leaving the impression that women were victims and supporters but never actors in the movements against war.

We propose that that truth commissions be designed to emphasize the empowering aspects of inclusion, recognizing women not only as victims, but also as leaders and agents. Debates about constructions of women as agents rather than victims pose a false dichotomy. Without denying the structural limits on this agency, and ignoring the pain and fear that accompany violence, we think it essential to recognize the resiliency and strength of women in the face of widespread violence. Women may be simultaneously victims, survivors, and agents of change. They may also be perpetrators of violence.

SEXUAL AUTONOMY AND GLOBAL POLITICS: FEMINIST CRITIQUES OF HIV/AIDS INTERVENTIONS IN AFRICA

As the HIV/AIDS epidemic accelerates, it has become evident that the behavioral health and risk-reduction models used to understand and address the

epidemic are inadequate because they ignore the complexities, contradictions, and tensions inherent in sexual decisions for many women around the world. These models incorrectly assume that populations are undifferentiated (by sex, class, age, or other factors), that males and females have equal control over their sexual health decisions, that individuals act autonomously and according to biomedical constructions of rationality, and that culture (usually read as "African culture") is an impediment to risk reduction. Such assumptions narrowly define the spread of HIV as a problem of individual choice and fail to account for the political, economic, and social contexts surrounding sexual health decisions. For example, condoms might not seem rational for a newly married couple for whom reproduction is an important family obligation and a public symbol of marital happiness. HIV/AIDS campaigns are so focused on risk that they do not adequately address desire or other emotions that motivate sexual behavior. We argue that designing appropriate campaigns requires an appreciation of local ideas of desire, including who can desire and who is desired. Feminist analyses show that intervention programs intended to protect public health may draw females further under the surveillance of local and global patriarchal structures, undermining their sexual rights and sexual autonomy.

NOTES

1. The group included one scholar each from twenty-one countries of Asia, Latin America, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East and ten from the United States, two of whom were born and educated abroad. It was chaired by Carolyn Elliott, editor of this volume.
2. This statement is based on the presentation made and distributed at the public plenary of the New Century Scholars (NCS) Program in New York on April 28, 2005. It was made possible by the NCS program but reflects the views of the NCS Scholars, not the Fulbright Program nor the U.S. State Department. Editorial changes made in this statement for this publication have been approved by the authors in this volume.

Dedication and Acknowledgments

This volume is dedicated to the memory of Alice Stone Ilchman. Alice had a favorite quotation from Edith Wharton inscribed on the wall above the books in her study:

There are two ways of spreading light;
to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.

Alice did both, in public and private ways. Appointed by President Carter as Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs, she was responsible for the Fulbright program, U.S. libraries abroad, and the international visitor program. Alice was revered in the field of international education, for she worked long after her tenure in Washington to support Fulbright funding and articulate the significance of public diplomacy. While maintaining this important public stance, she also did the work of scholars in the interstices of Fulbright, reading piles of applications, sitting for hours on selection committees, and supporting scholars at work with enthusiastic appreciation of their contributions to scholarship and international understanding. The New Century Scholars Program on Global Empowerment of Women was privileged to have Alice Ilchman on our committee.

Alice was a candle and mirror also in higher education. She served Sarah Lawrence College as president for seventeen years and, through building the science center now named for her, led its emergence as a full-spectrum institution of excellence in liberal arts education. Alice attended commencements far and wide for family and friends, served on trustee boards, and led search committees. At her death she was the Director of the Jeannette K. Watson Fellows Program that placed New York City-based undergraduates in paid summer internships, offering them vision-expanding opportunities not broadly available in city institutions. Alice observed, "Talent is widely distributed but not widely recognized." She was enormously proud of her fellows and they blossomed in her light.

Alice was a feminist who largely worked inside institutions to make them work for both women and men. As Dean of Wellesley College, she provided critical nurturance to the Wellesley Center for Research on Women, now a

major source of scholarship and advocacy for educational equity for women and girls. She was a trustee of Mount Holyoke College during the period of many women's colleges considering coeducation; Mount Holyoke did not change and is now thriving as a college for women. In the eighties Alice chaired the National Research Council's Committee on Women's Employment and Related Social Issues, and produced two research initiatives on work and family. Recently on her watch as search committee chair, the Public Broadcasting Corporation appointed its first woman president. All the while, Alice recommended women for positions in her extensive network and wrote many letters for students and colleagues.

Alice was also a dear friend, godmother to my daughter, loyal supporter, and witty commentator on life events. We shared tailors in India, a nanny in the US, and many adventures in conversation, reading, and travel. When my daughter needed a college and I was off in India, Alice took time from her own presidency to visit a college. When Alice needed internships for her fellows, I took three overnight flights in one week to Africa and India. Our sisterhood was personal and global.

For the possibility of writing this book, I wish to thank the NCS program, the U.S. Department of State, and the Council for International Education of Scholars (CIES). This program supported the scholars' research and the seminars, and provided crucial assistance in preparing the manuscript. At a time of so much difficulty in U.S. relations with the rest of the world, it is heartening that in one corner of U.S. diplomacy this open and fruitful program could proceed unfettered.

A number of individuals deserve special thanks: Micaela Iovine, then of CIES, provided administrative support. Jane Jaquette, Alice Ilchman, Deborah Rosenfelt, Molaria Ogundipe, and Kathleen Cloud served on the selection committee. The Ford Foundation made possible the NCS seminar in India and the U.S. Educational Foundation in India arranged the India program. I am especially grateful to all the scholars who contributed to an exceptionally rich set of discussions that inform the volume, and the contributors who gracefully dealt with a fairly interventionist mode of editing in the name of creating a volume accessible for undergraduate classroom use. Deborah Guber, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Vermont, was an invaluable colleague as technical editor.

I also wish to thank Ben Holtzman for his friendly facilitation at Routledge Press, *Feminist Studies* for permission to reprint the Ewig article and *Political Geography* for permission to reprint the Silvey article, both without fees. Finally, I must acknowledge the Internet. Without the capacity to send manuscripts instantaneously back and forth between the U.S., Ghana, India, and wherever, we could never have attempted a project like this.

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Introduction

Markets, Communities, and Empowerment

*Carolyn M. Elliott*¹

The Scholars' Statement identifies two major concerns of international feminist scholarship and advocacy that are often seen as alternatives and in opposition: globalization and the politicization of religions. The scholars' investigations of gender violence and denial of sexual autonomy, as noted in their statement, trace the impact of these concerns in problem areas of special significance to women.

In agreement with a major trend of feminist research, the scholars offer a strong critique of neoliberal economic policy, a policy that privileges markets over states as generators of economic growth. While not uncritical of the resurgence of patriarchal practices and fundamentalist politics, the scholars appear more tolerant of religious and other expressions of identity than of markets. They argue that women may find spaces for empowerment and support for family functioning within community-based politics. In this they reflect criticisms of the North by many feminists in the South who identify neoliberal economic policy with imperialist ambitions.

The debate about globalization and politicized religions is situated in a tradition of political theory that contrasts individualist and communitarian approaches to modernity. These two ideas originate in different philosophical positions, one deriving from the conviction that individuals know their own preferences and interests best, the other from a concern for sustaining a common interest that may be neglected by self-maximizing individuals. In modern history, these positions were reflected in debates between liberals seeking to free society from medieval constraints on political and personal freedom, and conservatives wishing to preserve the stability of local communities.² Concerns for community in the face of industrialization led also to a left strand of communitarianism, the utopian socialists, that eventually generated Marxist socialism.³

The liberals were the modernizers historically, whereas the conservatives wanted to preserve the old order. In the contemporary politics of development, modernizers continue to be largely identified with classical or market liberal views, now called neoliberalism. The conservative position today is associated with religious politics, ethnic politics and, at the extremes, resurgent nationalism and fundamentalism. But it finds resonance on the left

where communitarian visions have long challenged the liberal narrative.⁴ Socialist communitarians have often allied with nationalist resistance to imperialism and westernization.

From the liberal conviction comes a concern for individual rights and a preference for limited government. Citizenship is conceived as equality among members in a political community that guarantees political and civil rights against intrusion by the state. In economic terms, this translates into a preference that the market allocate most resources, that individuals exercise choice, and that property rights be protected. Proponents of the market claim equality and inclusion, though markets often don't deliver on these ideals.

From the communitarian position comes a concern for social solidarity. Conservatives endorse leadership to articulate common goals and shape choices; they tolerate or espouse hierarchy and exclusion in the service of these goals. When conservatives use the language of rights, they often elevate the rights of groups to sustain their culture and protect their memberships over the rights of individuals to exercise choice. In the left form of communitarianism there is a strong commitment to equality, and a sharing of social benefits is privileged over civil, political, and property rights. All socialist communities that have existed in history have shared the conservatives' endorsement of leadership, often charismatic, to articulate and enforce an ambitious vision for the community.

This debate has now been elevated to the international stage. In economic terms, neoliberals emphasize freeing international trade from nationalist protection, arguing that international markets enable consumers to exercise choice. Proponents of local or national autonomy and those who object to international human rights agendas to protect cultural practices are drawing from a historically conservative position. Given human history to date, this position is inevitably anti-egalitarian in ways that can only be described as patriarchal.⁵

Where does feminism fit? Many feminists liked socialist communitarianism because it filled all their goals: equality, material improvements to meet people's needs, and community.⁶ With Marxism largely off the agenda, the choice is narrowed to neoliberal capitalism (often linked with democracy) and various "neoconservative" and sometimes "multicultural" positions, from the pro-family, anti-abortion right in the U.S. to religion-based nationalism shaping political change in the Middle East, Africa, and beyond. The language of human rights draws from the liberal tradition; many feminists support rights-based arguments while rejecting the individualist understanding of agency and citizenship that underlies the rights perspective. Deeply critical of neoliberalism, international feminism contains many alliances between socialists and Islamists, left and right communitarians.

There are rich lines of feminist theory and research analyzing each of these positions. Feminist scholars have pointed out that liberalism and markets tend to disadvantage women who have the responsibility for children; their inadequate resources (educational, social, financial, and time) make