



Women's Movements in the Global Era

THE POWER OF LOCAL FEMINISMS

Edited by Amrita Basu

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Amrita Basu
Editor



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*For my mother,
Rasil Basu*

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Boxed Information

Indices

Human Development Index Ranking: This index measures factors relating to life expectancy, educational opportunities and achievement, and income. This index, which ranks each country between 0 and 1, is meant to serve as a frame of reference for both social and economic development.

Gender Empowerment Measure Value: This index measures the level of economic and political activity of women in a given country and is typically used as a measure of progress. The index is particularly concerned with measuring the effectiveness and utilization of institutions designed to support women's empowerment. Measures of empowerment include political representation and participation and economic activity.

Gender-Related Development Index Value: This index measures the same factors as the Human Development Index but takes into account the inequalities that exist between men and women in a given country. Measures of inequality include (but are not limited to) access to education and income disparity. A country's Gender-Related Development Index value is usually lower than its HDI value.

Key Terms

Condom use at last high risk sex: The percentage of men and women who have had sex with a nonmarital, noncohabiting partner in the last twelve months and who say they used a condom the last time they did so.

Contraceptive prevalence rate: The percentage of married women of reproductive age (15–49) who are using, or whose partners are using, any form of contraception, whether modern or traditional.

Enrollment ratio, gross: Total number of pupils or students enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population in the theoretical age group for the same level of education. Gross enrollment ratios in excess of 100% indicate that there are pupils or students outside the theoretical age groups who are enrolled in that level of education.

Estimated earned income: Derived on the basis of the ratio of the female nonagricultural wage to the male nonagricultural wage, the female and male shares of the economically active population, total female and male population, and GDP per capita; given in purchasing power parity terms in U.S. dollars.

Fertility rate, total: The number of children that would be born to each woman if she were to live to the end of her child-bearing years and bear children at each age in accordance with prevailing age-specific fertility rates in a given year/period, for a given country, territory, or geographical area.

Labor force participation rate, female: The number of women in the labor force expressed as a percentage of the female working-age population.

Mortality ratio, maternal, adjusted: Maternal mortality ratio adjusted to account for well-documented problems of underreporting and misclassification of maternal deaths, as well as estimates for countries with no data.

Professional and technical workers, female: Women's share of positions defined according to the International Standard Classification of Occupations to include physical, mathematical, and engineering science professionals; life science and health professionals; teaching professionals; and other professionals and associate professionals.

Women in government at ministerial level: Includes deputy prime ministers and ministers. Prime ministers were included when they held ministerial portfolios. Vice presidents and heads of ministerial-level departments or agencies were also included when exercising a ministerial function in the government structure.

Sources

BBC country profiles: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/country_profiles/803257.stm#facts

CEDAW Statistical Database: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/statistics.htm>

United Nations Human Development Reports: <http://hdrstats.undp.org/countries/>

U.S. Department of State: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/>

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Introduction

AMRITA BASU

In the past fifteen years, women's activism has become more extensive and more contentious. Global networks that address women's rights have flourished. So too have women's policy bureaus in governments and the femocrats (feminist bureaucrats) who staff them. Women's organizations have been active in designing constitutions, collaborating with political parties, and pushing for new legislation. However, feminism remains deeply contested, particularly by conservative religious groups. Wars within and between nations have increased women's vulnerability and weakened women's movements. The spread of neoliberalism has created new economic opportunities for some women and increased hardship for many more. Moreover, the very advances that women have made—in the nation and the world—have given rise to new divisions among feminists.

My earlier book, *The Challenge of Local Feminisms*, was written in anticipation of the UN-sponsored women's conference in Beijing in 1995, the culmination of a series of conferences that began in Mexico City two decades earlier. It analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of women's movements from seventeen regions, across North-South and East-West divides. It identified women's movements' varied responses to domestic and international constraints. *Women's Movements in the Global Era* explores the lessons that the past fifteen years hold for women's movements. How, since the Beijing conference, do activists and scholars regard feminism and its relationship to women's movements? How has the collapse or emergence of democracy influenced them? What is the relative significance of domestic and global influences on local women's movements?

The volumes that have been published on women's networks, activism, and movements over the past fifteen years illuminate the diversity among women's

movements. A number of books are thematically organized around timely issues such as the impact of globalization and religious nationalism on women (see, for example, Naples and Desai 2002). Much has been written on transnational and international networks, issues, and arenas.¹ There has been extensive work on state feminism and women's governance.² Some studies have fruitfully compared women's movements in similar settings. The Comparative State Feminism series, for example, focuses on women's movements in democratic, advanced industrial societies in order to develop testable hypotheses about their achievements.³ These writings not only address a variety of themes but also illustrate varied approaches to studying women's movements. Some studies focus on a particular issue, others on a range of issues, some on the origins, others on the outcomes, some on the global, and others on the national context.

Women's Movements in the Global Era comprises thirteen chapters with cases studies of sixteen countries from the major regions of the world. Three of them are on Asia (Farida Shaheed on Pakistan, Naihua Zhang and Ping-Chun Hsiung on China, and Kalpana Kannabiran on India), two on Africa (Elaine Salo on South Africa and Shereen Essof on Zimbabwe), two on the Middle East (Islah Jad on Palestine and Nayereh Tohidi on Iran), three on Latin America (Cecelia M. B. Sardenberg and Ana Alice Alcantara Costa on Brazil, R. Aída Hernández Castillo on Mexico, and Elisabeth Jay Friedman on Brazil, Chile, Venezuela, and Bolivia), two on Europe (Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom on Russia and Elzbieta Matynia on Poland), and one, by Julie Ajinkya, on the United States. Accounts of at least two countries from the same region enable readers to compare countries within and across regions.

Analyzing women's movements in countries that differ with respect to their political systems, degrees of stability, and levels of economic development reveals the conditions under which women's movements are most likely to be successful. It also suggests, for reasons explored later in the chapter, that women's movements under widely different conditions have been most successful in addressing violence against women and least successful in challenging class inequalities.

The authors' principal focus is on women's movements that are national in scale, influence, or structure but are also active at the local level. However, to depict the range of issues that women's movements address, some of the chapters explore struggles by women who have been historically marginalized by mainstream women's movements: Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo analyzes indigenous women in Mexico; Elisabeth Jay Friedman explores, among other issues, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) organizing in

Venezuela, Chile, Bolivia, and Brazil; and Islah Jad describes Palestinian women's struggles in what has yet to become a sovereign state.

The authors were asked to address a common set of questions:

- How do they define feminism and women's movements, and how are their understandings influenced by the contexts they examine?
- What impact do international and transnational influences have on the women's movements they analyze?
- How has the state influenced the emergence, growth, and decline of women's movements? To what extent and why have women's movements sought both to challenge the state and to work within it?
- What is the relationship between women's movements and broader movements against colonialism, authoritarianism, and secularism, among others?
- What impact do key groups and organizations within civil society have on women's movements? What is the relationship between women's movements and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)?
- To what extent and how have women's movements addressed domestic violence, women's political representation, the rights of sexual minorities, and poverty and class inequality?

In elaborating on these key themes, I draw on the authors' chapters as well as other relevant literature. I argue that the challenge women's movements encounter is achieving a productive balance between alliance and autonomy in several spheres. This entails, first, attaining strong foundations within the national context while forging links with international and transnational forces. A second challenge concerns the state. Women's movements have been most successful when they have engaged the state, through contestation and collaboration, without abdicating their own identities and constituencies. Third, women's movements have been best served by forging strong linkages with other social movements and groups within civil society without relinquishing their own objectives and identities. The last section of this chapter analyzes the relative success of women's movements in addressing key issues.

Feminism and Women's Movements

The authors in this volume use the terms *feminism* and *women's movements* in different ways, and some employ other terms than these, but all of them contend with the desirable balance between breadth and specificity. A broad

definition of women's movements calls attention to the far-reaching expressions of women's agency and activism. However, if women's movements are simply considered compendiums of multiple forms of women's activism without specification of their characteristics, the term becomes devoid of analytic and political precision. One particular challenge is to differentiate women's struggles for gender equality from the many struggles that ignore or accept gender hierarchies. Maxine Molyneux's seminal distinction between women's practical and strategic interests provides one such attempt (1985b). Strategic interests, which are commonly identified as feminist, emerge from and contest women's experiences of gender subordination. Practical interests, by contrast, emerge from women's immediate and perceived needs. A number of essays in this volume draw on Molyneux's distinction to differentiate among women's struggles that have variable relations to feminism. However, some question whether struggles around strategic and practical interests are mutually exclusive. Elaine Salo argues that Sikhula Sonke, a South African union of farmworkers, combines reformist and radical approaches that are both strategic and practical. Furthermore, movements are dynamic entities. What begin as struggles to achieve women's practical interests can turn into struggles to defend their strategic interests, and vice versa.

It is tempting to shy away from identifying oneself as a feminist because it is so contentious. Shereen Essof comments that women activists in Zimbabwe dropped the term *feminism* because it was considered inflammatory. Elzbieta Matynia notes that the word *feminism* had such pejorative connotations in Poland that until recently it was considered political suicide for a woman who was active in public life to identify herself with feminism. However, certain acts can be deemed feminist by virtue of their impact, regardless of the ways activists view them. Moreover, many activists describe themselves as feminists precisely because of the term's normative, political connotations.

I continue to employ the distinction between feminism and women's movements, as I did in *The Challenge of Local Feminisms*, and to define women's movements expansively. Myra Max Ferree suggests that whereas feminism is activism to challenge and change women's gender subordination, women's movements entail women organizing to achieve social change (Ferree and Tripp 2006, 9). Women's movements are defined by their constituencies, namely, women, but can address a variety of goals, whereas feminism has specified goals, of challenging gender inequality, but its constituencies can be male or female.

Feminism, unlike women's movements, can occur in a variety of arenas and assume a variety of forms. Feminism connotes both ideas and their enactments but does not specify who will enact these ideas or what forms these enactments

will take. Feminist discourses influence the character of speech, thought, and expression in the home and the workplace, among individuals and groups, in everyday life, and, episodically, in politics, culture, and the arts.⁴ Feminists have created new epistemologies and subjects of research concerning the politics of daily life.⁵ Black, lesbian, third world, and intersectional feminisms question the coherence of women's identities by exploring the intersections of gender and other forms of inequality. Feminism may have a greater impact on individuals than on groups, on family relations than on state policy, and on the arts than on politics. These expressions of feminism may have a cumulative impact on the society, the polity, and the economy.

As many of the chapters in this book demonstrate, feminist cultural interventions through feminist magazines, bookstores, publishers, novels, poetry, plays, and performances have had a far-reaching impact on women's movements. Often feminist cultural expression precedes the emergence of women's movements. Matynia argues that feminism emerged in Poland in culturally specific forms at the local level. These "microinterventions" were primarily cultural and performative and fell under the radar of state control. Julie Ajinkya notes that in the United States, women poets, playwrights, and novelists such as Audre Lorde, Cherrie Moraga, bell hooks, Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith, and Merle Woo posed some of the first and most powerful critiques of the predominantly white middle-class women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Women of color subsequently formed organizations to advance their own interests. But the significance of feminism rests not solely on its impact on societal structures and institutions but also in its influence on language, consciousness, and women's self-expression.

The Global Context

One of the most significant changes in women's movements over the past fifteen years has been the increased influence of global forces. Transnational advocacy networks, international funding for NGOs, and global discourses of women's rights have grown. But the impact of transnational forces is mediated by national ones.

Both enthusiasts and critics of globalization tend to use the term *global women's movements* to describe many different phenomena. Thus, it is important to differentiate between three different aspects of international and transnational influences. The first is the growth of transnational networks and advocacy groups; the second, the growth of international funding for nongovernmental organizations; and third, international conferences, particularly under the aegis

of the United Nations. None of these transnational entities are the same as movements, though they have important implications for movements.

All three forms of transnational and international influence have increased. All three have brought about the circulation of new discourses, particularly by introducing or increasing a focus on women's rights. Violence against women has come to refer to a range of practices that violate women's human rights. All three global influences have entailed the increased institutionalization of women's movements by strengthening nongovernmental organizations and collaboration between the state and women's movements. However, none of these global activities can be equated with global or transnational women's movements, in part because of the enormous challenges of organizing them. Sidney Tarrow notes, "For one thing, sustaining collective action across borders on the part of people who seldom see one another and who lack embedded relations of trust is difficult. For another, local repertoires of contention grow out of and are lodged in local and national contexts. Even more difficult is developing a common collective identity among people from different cultural backgrounds whose governments are not inclined to encourage them to do so" (2005, 7).

As many scholars have suggested, transnational networks differ in important respects from international organizations. Whereas international organizations typically consist of a coordinating umbrella organization composed of representatives from multiple national member organizations, transnational organizations consist of loosely affiliated, decentralized coordinating bodies. Transnational organizations tend to form and disband more quickly than international organizations. The growth of market forces and communication technologies has influenced both the growth and the structure of transnational organizations.

There are some important differences between transnational advocacy networks and women's movements. Transnational advocacy networks, as Keck and Sikkink define them, include governmental and nongovernmental actors, foundations, the media, and parts of regional and international bodies (1998, 9). Although movement activists may participate in transnational networks, the networks themselves are not movements but broadly affiliated groups. By contrast, although women's movements might have close links with the state and feminists may be active within it, women's movements are primarily located within civil society.

Furthermore, whereas transnational advocacy networks are primarily issue based and policy oriented, the agendas of women's movements are broader and more diverse. They often shift their attention from one set of issues to another as political circumstances change. They are committed to solidarity build-

ing, consciousness raising, and negotiating the different interests and identities of their members. They may appear to be less efficient than transnational advocacy networks in influencing policy outcomes. However, their diffuse activities have far-reaching influences on politics. In exploring the major determinants of states' decisions to adopt measures to prevent violence against women in thirty-six countries, Laurel Weldon (2002) identifies the roles of women's movements as paramount. She further suggests that women's movements are far more effective than women's lobbies and interest groups because they engage in broad-based activities.

The second dimension of transnational linkages concerns increased international funding for nationally based NGOs. Funding for women's organizations that engage in service provision, income generation, and research and documentation has grown significantly. It has sustained impoverished activists and enabled them to increase their expertise, expand their reach, and gain leverage with the state. However, international funding has also created new challenges. The extent to which women's organizations can avail themselves of funding is limited by geopolitical realities. In Iran, Nayerreh Tohidi points out, women's rights activists have refused grants and donations from international donors because of government repression against civil society organizations that do so. Iranian women's organizations thus have the unsatisfactory alternatives of either being branded foreign agents and incurring government repression or lacking resources to engage in a range of activities that require material support.

The chapters in this volume suggest that foreign funding has been double-edged for many women's movements. Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom argues that foreign funding for civil society organizations was a major impetus for the development of the women's movement in Russia in the early 1990s. Conversely, donors' decisions to shift funding from Russia to Afghanistan and Iraq after 2001 seriously undermined women's organizations. She suggests that foreign funding not only failed to bring about the institutionalization of the women's movement but also discouraged women's groups from seeking wider public support and building domestic constituencies. She argues that women's organizations have focused narrowly on donors' agendas and have emphasized technical expertise in project execution and grant management at the expense of broader goals.

Naihua Zhang and Ping-Chun Hsiung argue that given the dearth of domestic funding, the independent Chinese women's movement has relied on external funding. However, they argue that Chinese women's organizations have been so eager to overcome decades of isolation that they have sometimes

failed to critically examine the sources and purposes of external funding. Chinese women's groups have collaborated with right-wing religious groups in the United States that have promoted chastity education and opposed safe-sex education in the name of stopping the spread of HIV/AIDS. Farida Shaheed worries that many women's groups have become donor driven, adapting their programs to the latest "flavor of the month."

Quite apart from the question of whether the groups have the requisite technical expertise for some of these activities, there is a danger of organizations' losing their self-determined purpose. The creation of jacks—or janes—of-all-trades and masters of none is likely to produce a multitude of groups attempting to deliver on too many fronts, therefore doing everything rather superficially instead of intervening in a focused manner. Uniform imposed agendas and the need to deliver "SMART outputs" (specific, measurable, achievable, reliable, and time-bound) undermine the scope for innovation.

The Women's Action Forum (WAF), which is at the forefront of the women's movement in Pakistan, does not accept funding from any sources other than personal donations, as a matter of principle. Shaheed argues that although WAF's financial autonomy enabled it to launch a mass movement against the Zia dictatorship in the late 1970s, it has been hampered by a lack of resources and effective fund-raising strategy.

The third and in my view most productive global influence on women's movements have been the United Nations' support for women's rights and women's conferences, particularly since 1985. Although women's movements have always been among the most international movements in the world, global interactions among movements have significantly increased. The UN world conferences on women in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985), and Beijing (1995), as well as interim conferences on other related issues, have been key sites of these interactions. These conferences created opportunities for negotiations between states and women's movements. In preparing for the fourth global women's conference in Beijing, between 1993 and 1995, governments discussed draft plans with women's groups at numerous regional and international preparatory meetings. In some countries women's movements, NGOs, and governments collaborated extensively in preparing the final document.

The Platform for Action, which resulted from the Beijing women's conference, is a manifesto of global women's movements. It calls primarily on governments but also on NGOs to mainstream gender by integrating a gender