

# Global Feminist Activism in Focus

The time is ripe for feminists in the women's movement to have a big sit down and think through session. It seems that everyone talks about the changing times—politically, socially, economically and culturally, about how in turn we as feminists have changed, how the movement that we have devoted a good part of our lives to has changed, and how our strategies towards challenging and ending patriarchy too has and must respond decisively to these changes. This bumper issue of *Women in Action* pulls together the perspectives, reflections and ruminations of feminist activists on the changing nature of the women's movement, feminist strategies, in the face of a vastly different terrain from when we first began over three decades ago. Isis put out a call for contributions to this issue to focus on the re-examination of the feminist movement vis-à-vis our renewed alliances with social justice movements in the context of the growing conservatism, neo-liberal globalisation and globalised campaigns to induce a state of public terror by fundamentalists of all colours and creeds.

The collection of articles that was put together in this issue clearly points to a desire to engage in critical self-reflection as a global feminist movement. Some contributors, such as Peggy Antrobus and Ewa Charkiewicz, express serious doubts about our strategies particularly at a global level, including our engagements with the UN, and hyped up processes such as the Millenium Development Goals (or as Peggy refers to them, Major Distraction Gimmicks). Others, such as Suzette Mitchell make a case for the ground level transformative impact on individual women being involved in transnational events such as the World Conference on Women. The unsettling dilemma of how, and how closely, if at all, to work with the State, continues as a theme for interrogation in some of the contributors, such as Sunila Abeysekera in her article that juxtaposes the social movements, feminist movements and the state in the South Asian context.

"Gender mainstreaming" is examined by several contributors from various vantage points, including Marilee Karl and Sunila Abeysekera, Agnes Atia Apusigah, Susanna George. All express frustration, to different degrees, at its current milked out, watered down state that runs the risk of becoming a mere apparatus of the dominant structure and its discourse of political correctness and tokenism, and cease to function as the effective counter-force that it needs to be. Despite feminists discrediting what Marilee Karl refers to the "add women and stir principle," this form of gender mainstreaming continues to be the most palatable way in which it has been imbibed by the development apparatus. As such, the language of gender mainstreaming has gained a life of its own that less and less challenges the mainframe of patriarchy. Patricia McFadden calls us towards a feminist autonomy that resists the attempts to straightjacket more radical feminist struggle in Africa by conservative forces through the use the "gender mainstreaming" as a way of "making gender equality manageable" and "reasonable."

Social justice and various forms of resistance to contest, obstruct, subvert and reshape the structures of patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism, racism and all forms of oppression have always been front-page issues for feminists activists. Sylvia Borren envisions a way forward as feminists given the diversity of our concerns, and our myriad approaches and priorities while Alejandra Sarda shares her ideas and experiences about the interrelationship of nationalism, fundamentalism and sexuality in Latin America.

In an online chat space, six feminists from India, Fiji, Italy, Malaysia and the Philippines dialogue on shifts in the women's movement, its strategies and its relationship to other social justice movements. Those participating in this discussion felt that it is important for feminists to more clearly define our alliances with other social movements and our bottom lines on what can and cannot be compromised when forging such alliances. A need is also expressed for more inter-movement discourse given that women's rights advocacy and issues are addressed not only in the women's movements but also in many social justice movements working within sectoral and issue-based campaigns such as trade, the environment, health, education, and peace.

Mari Santiago's reflections on the Feminist Dialogues, a transnational feminist initiative that took place around the World Social Forum in Mumbai early this year, look at how feminists are seeking to put forward transnational, cutting edge and intersectional analyses and strategies against a regime of neoliberal globalisation and resurgent fundamentalisms.

In its diversities and synergies, we hope that this issue can contribute towards building an active, oppositional and collective voice that nurtures cultures of public dissent, transnational strategising and new visions as exemplified by the World Social Forum and the second Feminist Dialogues in Porto Alegre in January 2005. Our choice of a piece of graffiti for the cover page of this issue is a tongue-in-cheek attempt to capture the intersectionality of social movements and feminist resistance to globalisation and patriarchy. Photographed by an Isis staff at the recent World Social Forum (WSF) in Mumbai in January 2004, the "No Pepsi, No Cock" is at first simply funny because of the laughable misspelling of a famous brand name that symbolises for many the epitome of globalised capitalism. On second glance though, it can be read as a new twist to a connection that feminists have often made between patriarchy and the market, and one that provides a bridge between feminists and other social justice movement actors.

