

Examining the Women's Movement

Summarised by Earnest Mangalubnan-Zabala

As part of its 30th year anniversary, Isis International Manila partnered with several global, regional and local women's networks for a series of feminist debates on issues of critical concern to the women's movement.

Earlier this year, Isis Manila collaborated with Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), The African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice (WICEJ), among others, for the international Feminist Dialogues (FD) that took place on 14-15 January 2004 in Mumbai, India. Held in conjunction with the World Social Forum, FD was an opportunity for women from a broad spectrum of political platforms and advocacy positions to meet and discuss on four thematic areas: Reproductive Rights, Sexuality, Human Rights, and Local and Global Movements.¹

This was followed a few months later by a one-day forum entitled "At the Crossroads: Rethinking the Critical Advocacies of the Women's Movement." In April 2004, Isis Manila and the Women and Gender Institute (WAGI) of Miriam College, Philippines, co-sponsored a forum that examined and evaluated two advocacy agendas important to the women's movement: Violence Against Women (VAW) and Gender Mainstreaming.

Building on the momentum from these two events, Isis Manila invited feminist from different regions to an online discussion entitled "Examining Feminist and Social Movements" last August. The discussion revolved around the following topics:

- How are the women's or feminist movements faring in the social movements, and how does this relate to movement building?

- How do we push our agenda amongst social movements?
- How do we build stronger alliances with social movements?
- What is our analysis of global women's and social movements?, and
- What are some possible strategies and recommendations for future action?

The discussion was moderated by Susanna George, former executive director of Isis Manila.

Participants

susanna1911: Hi everyone! We are just waiting for three more people to join the list. We can all introduce ourselves to each other for the time being. We are waiting for Marilee Karl, Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Raijeli Nicole and Gigi Francisco. Annie, Vanessa, Bina, would you like to give each other a little intro of where you are from your past work, areas of activism, etc.

annieserrano2003: Annie Serrano: Am a Filipina. Used to work for United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), national commission on women in the Philippines, and an NGO on development communication—all Philippine-based. I just finished coordinating the Asia-Pacific NGO Forum on Beijing + 10. Getting ready for the High-Level Intergovernmental Meeting next week.

vangrif: Vanessa Griffen: formerly in Asia Pacific Development Centre, Gender and Development Programme. Born in Fiji, educated and active here in women's, nuclear-free Pacific and anti-colonial movements. Now, at home here in Fiji, I want to write and reflect on our work as a movement.

(clockwise starting on top left) Fiery feminists: Raijeli Nicole, Bina Srinivasan, Susanna George, Marilee Karl, Vanessa Griffen, and Annie Serrano.



Vanessa Griffen



"I think one thing missing from the women's movement today is that sense of anger and passion that propelled us to take action....the situation has changed very much, but I think that our strategies in those times were what brought



about that change! The obvious thing is that we formed strong women's organisations and refused to compromise when we were told we were dividing the struggle."

- Marilee Karl

binasr2001: Bina Srinivasan: I'm a writer and researcher, and have been involved with women's movements in India and South Asia. I have worked on displacement, conflict, violence against women and religious fundamentalism. Right now, am also involved with something called the Feminist Dialogues, a transnational meeting of feminists, usually before the World Social forum

susanna1911: Susanna George: Formerly with Isis International-Manila, and before that with UNDP and Asia Pacific Development Centre. I've been active in the women's movement for the past 15 years...

Marilee Karl has joined the conference.

marilee_karl: Marilee Karl here, the co-founder of Isis International in 1974 and served as Coordinator

of Isis for its first 20 years. I am currently Honorary Chairperson of Isis International-Manila and continue my activism in the women's movement and other movements for social justice.

susanna1911: All right. We have just managed to contact Sharon Bhagwan Rolls of femLINKpacific in Fiji and she tells us that she will not be able to join us today because of some urgent work that she needs to take care of. Gigi Francisco of DAWN has also informed us that she will be late and Rajeli seems to not be able to get online for some reason. Shall we get formally started?

Introductions

susanna1911: The second wave of the women's movement has, in over three decades of efforts and strategising, managed to make significant inroads in influencing governance processes, and affecting at some deep level societal conscience regarding women, their roles and rights, and relationships between men and women in society. The results have in many cases been not what we anticipated or desired, and over years, many feminists have called for the need to review, take stock and renew the movement taking into cognisance new societal and global realities. One of the key discussions revolving within different feminist circles is how we relate to other social movements, and indeed given the growing strength of the wide-spread anti-WTO, anti-corporate globalisation movements, this is a crucial point of reflection and action. Once we have identified the linkages between the women's movement and other social movements, on what basis, premises and ideological commonalities these linkages are formed, and the tensions, differences and challenges we face in forging linkages we will move on to discuss: a) how we push for our agenda amongst other social movements; b) how we build stronger alliances with other social movements even as we work to strengthen the global women's movement and c) strategies and recommendations for future action.

Rajeli Drodrolagi has joined the conference.

rajeli_drodrolagi: Good afternoon, everyone. Sorry we're late. Some unexpected tech glitches at the office. This is Rajeli Nicole, and with me are Mari Santiago and Necta Rocas, also from the Isis Team.

vangrif: Re Susanna's intro, I was wondering about your opinions on the effect of feminist perspectives on other movements, e.g., the ones cited. I don't have the experience to judge. In other movements here, despite women's leadership on the ground, the "lead in action" and other such strategies are not influenced much by women. Any comments?

binasr2001: I feel that it is often a love-hate relationship between the women's movement and other social movements. Some tensions are inevitable, and it is usually around issues of women participating equally in decision making, issues of violence against women and so on. While most movements will not deny the importance of feminist perspectives, there is often a gap in understanding these theoretically and putting them in practice.

annieserrano2003: So far, my engagement with other social movements have been as 'resource person' of their gender sessions. Because I was formally employed by the government and UN, that was the opportunity available to me. As I mentioned, I was recently with the labour unions—the Brotherhood of Asian Trade Unions (BATU). The national presidents or executive secretaries of national workers' congresses were there. Because [the event] was high level, I decided to do a dialogue approach...

vangrif: Annie's comment is interesting in itself. Is everything still along the lines of "adding a gender session"?

The Women's Movement So Far

susanna1911: Perhaps we can start by reflecting on the women's movement thus far, and what realities need to be taken into account today.

marilee_karl: Most of us older feminist were activists in political parties, liberation struggles or activist groups of some kind. We all know the story. Except for a few exceptionally strong women, we made the tea and coffee, did the cyclo-styling, and belittled so-called "women's issues."

vangrif: My experience is similar to Marilee's, except not parties. And the movements then (which were anti-colonial, anti-nuclear, etc) were not feminism-savvy, but we did not have a perspective for action to add. Do we now?

raijeli_drodrolagi: We agree with Marilee. The women's movement as it is right now has to do with our involvement in colonial resistance/national liberation movements 20-30 years ago. And in these struggles, women found that they were not only fighting the imperialist/colonial powers but patriarchy as well.

binasr2001: Yes, Marilee, that is where we as feminists bring in a richness, and perspectives that are much broader than most other groups, because ultimately, we also place feminist perspectives at the centre, while other movements might not.

marilee_karl: Can we reflect on what strategies we used to change that situation 20 or 30 years ago, because I think we learned lessons that are still valid today?

susanna1911: Marilee, would you start with some strategies that were employed?

vangrif: In response to Marilee, has the situation changed much since 20 years ago? Do let us know what you feel is different.

marilee_karl: Well, for one thing, we got angry! I think one thing missing from the women's movement today is that sense of anger and passion that propelled us to take action. And yes, Vanessa, the situation has changed very much, but I think that our strategies in those times were what brought about that change! The obvious thing is that we formed strong women's organisations and refused to compromise when we were told we were dividing the struggle. It was the strength of those women's organisations that enabled us to make our demands heard and accepted. The issue of mainstreaming is important here.

annieserrano2003: My activism was developed in the dictatorship years in the Philippines. I was part of the movement led by the Church! So it's hard for me to get angry at the Church! Whether it is that history or it's just me (hopefully not a pacifist by heart!). But I have indeed kept the lines open with church-based groups. I keep my anger in check in the hope of influencing them.

Examining Feminist and Social Movements

marilee_karl: Annie, by anger, I do not necessarily mean closing lines to any group. I mean anger at the patriarchal system and a passion to change it.

raijeli_drodrolagi: Yes, that's right. That "sense of anger and passion" has been transformed, appropriated and institutionalised. For instance, now, we have gender experts who do not carry the feminist transformative agenda.

binasr2001: Along with the anger and passion was the sense of solidarity. Now things have changed in the sense that it has become a much more complex and 'specialised' world, our understanding of the world and our organisations have also changed to become much more complex and in that sense just by being a woman today, you cannot automatically claim solidarity. Women are part of so many interrelated communities



"...what has been the experience of women activists there in the union movements?

Do those movements come out in support of women's organisations and actions when their support would be helpful? I see the opposite is more often the case—the women support other movements more than those movements support women's issues (to use that correctly, not to belittle)."

- Vanessa Griffen

vangrif: I also agree with Rajieli that gender experts today, or perhaps, interventions and gender implications, are very different from direct passionate involvement with the issues and being committed to pressuring for social change, rather than just voicing gender concerns for example.

marilee_karl: But then we gained the strength to make alliances with other social movements on our terms. Now we talk about gender mainstreaming and as Raji says, many gender experts are not even feminist. Gender mainstreaming often seems to be about gender equality without questioning patriarchy or social injustice. It often seems like just trying to get a bigger piece of the male-determined pie without changing the system. Or am I wrong?

susanna1911: So, that's one very concrete strategy that Marilee has identified: we pulled out of the general social movements and formed separate women's organisation to fight for and give focus to women's rights. And now it seems as if, after having pulled away from the broader social movements base, to give a distinct identity to women's issues, we have come full circle to see how we can influence those movements to take up feminist agendas. Would that be one way of looking at it?

annieserrano2003: The other strategy is indeed about the availability of "gender experts" to other movements for dialogue. Back to BATU or the labor unions, I meant to say two things: tapping into the so-called principles of their movement, e.g. participation, safeguarding the rights and interests of workers, etc., led them to see how discrimination against women, in the bigger society, workplace, and homes, is preventing them from participating in the unions.

binasr2001: Re. Gender experts... I feel that there is a certain conceptual value in gender as a term, but what has happened is that it has become completely co-opted and stripped of its meaning. Yes, it is true that many feminists have become gender experts and that they try to infuse the work of gender mainstreaming with more meaning. However, we cannot ignore the 'larger domains' of power, the structure and institutions of power. And that is what ultimately sets the agenda. The issue of funding is also important. Why is it that only mainstreaming gets

so much money when small organisations working in villages on domestic violence do not get funding? Yet, the issue was of questioning patriarchy within movements and division of labour and inequality inside the home and so on, or even violence against women in these organisations. And that was where the tensions arose and often just ossified.

annieserrano2003: Certainly, some can accept it conceptually. But the deep-seated patriarchal beliefs reveal themselves at the end. I refer to some of the leadership on the labour movement, for example. Despite the problem of entrenched leaders and other issues in the labour movement, it is a movement that we need to interact with, especially in terms of globalisation and the much stronger power of capitalists.

rajeli_drodrologi: We agree with Bina and Marilee. On Susanna's point on strategies, what was working then was that patriarchy was at the core of our struggles. That was what united us in the past. But right now, these gender experts have taken the concepts but left the transformational elements for the feminists from the outside to work on.

susanna1911: I want to identify another strategy that Rajeli and Marilee have pointed to: In the early days of the women's movement, there was a greater attempt to root out patriarchy and address the broader framework of social injustice. This seems to have dissipated over time, particularly with the institutionalised way in which gender has been interpreted.

annieserrano2003: Back on the gender experts. There is a need for a dialogue among us, we being the gender experts and the feminists. Indeed, there are those who have taken this as a career with insufficient grounding in feminist analysis and values.

vangrif: Annie, I agree with you, but what has been the experience of women activists there in the union movements? Do those movements come out in support of women's organisations and actions when their support would be helpful? I see the opposite is more often the case—the women support other movements more than those movements support women's issues (to use that correctly, not to belittle).

Solidarity With Other Social Movements

susanna1911: Before we get into a discussion on mainstreaming and gender experts, we may need to establish where we were in relation to other social movements before these terms were set in place? Can we go back a little to how solidarity was expressed in the pre-gender mainstreaming days?

marilee_karl: My experience is that many feminists continued to work within other social movements, trade unions, etc., but were strengthened by the support and solidarity they got from being part of strong feminist organisations as well. I loved what the Indian women did for the World Social Forum (WSF)—their insistence that gender parity at all WSF-organised panels. We need to demand that women form at least 50 percent of all leadership of social movements.

binasr2001: Speaking of India, women's movements were always part of civil liberties groups or networks of environment groups. We were always and still are involved with trade unions and movements for self-determination.

rajeli_drodrologi: Women have always been part of the social justice movements even before the so-called second wave. We never really left them.

susanna1911: We seem to agree here on two things: one, that we have always expressed solidarity with the issues raised by a host of other social movements, and two, that we have more often found ourselves supporting the agendas of other movements, without actually being able to transform the norms of these movements from within. To a vast extent, these movements have remained patriarchal in nature. Would you all agree?

binasr2001: Increasingly though, I think there is a realisation that no social movement can be an island unto itself and there has been greater emphasis on building linkages with other movements. Because we are up against some rather grim realities, and if movements have to survive, we need each other like we never did before.

marilee_karl: Bina, how do you think we could “un-ossify” the issues of division of labour, work in the household, etc. in these movements today?

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binasr2001: Marilee, the only way these tensions can be un-ossified is through a process of dialogue and through a process of working together on campaigns and issues. For example, we have had discussions around patriarchy within labour unions, or violence against women. Again, through the years, despite tensions and so on, certain events have thrown different kinds of movements together. The Gujarat violence, for instance, shook us all up.²

rajeli_drodrolagi: There was just a period when the women's movement seemed to form a separate movement, but it was just essentially defining itself, a period of consolidation. Now, as Susanna said, we've come full circle, seeing the intersectionality of our struggles and integrating with the struggles of the other social movements.

annieserrano2003: The other thing that we in the "mainstream women's movement" should be conscious about is support to the women in other social movements who are trying to change from within. Back to BATU, the women there complained that they felt sidelined in Huairou!³

rajeli_drodrolagi: Annie, what do you mean by "mainstream women's movement?" Do you mean the women's movement working in the mainstream?

annieserrano2003: No, I mean the women's movement. People like us—full-time living and working in women's discrimination and human rights issues.

vangrif: Susanna, everyone, I am really sorry but I have just been interrupted at home and have to go offline. My apologies.

susanna1911: All right, thank you, Vanessa.

Vanessa Griffen has left the conference.

Women's Movement: The Agenda

susanna1911: Okay, let us continue. I think both Bina and Annie have made important points about the kinds of work that we need to do within other social movements: first, we need to close ranks with other movements because of the new global realities we face, and second, we need to more actively support women

working in other social movements as they meet patriarchal norms and attitudes within these movements.

annieserrano2003: How about feminist dialogues with women in other social movements? That is something that we can organise?

susanna1911: Annie, I feel the women's movement has so many different groupings—particularly those who work strictly in a local environment compared with those who choose to intervene in global and UN processes. There is a vast difference between the priorities of women working locally and those working in the corridors of the UN.

annieserrano2003: I understand. There are the feminist academicians, too, many of whom have helped articulate the analysis and insights of the practitioners. Everyone has a role, something to contribute.

binasr2001: Annie, I think that is very important. At the WSF, we had what was called the inter-movement dialogues. These were between representatives of trade unions and feminists—another example [of how to un-ossify the tension]. But we could also have a similar process with women in other movements that do not necessarily call themselves feminists.

marilee_karl: Perhaps we need to work toward a new convergence among parts of the women's movement. One the one hand, it was great when the women's movement became so big that we were able to specialise, but this has also led to fragmentation and lack of communication and interaction.

binasr2001: Very true, Marilee. In a way, this specialisation is in itself a problem. [The women's movement] ended up losing political "rooted-ness."

susanna1911: Marilee, didn't we become fragmented because there were essentially some ideological differences that pulled groups apart?

marilee_karl: Partly, but we also became specialised in human rights, environment, peace, etc., not necessarily "ideological differences." Besides, we can also have unity in diversity, no?

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- Bina Srinivasan



binasr2001: There are many reasons for the fragmentation, not just ideological differences. The world we live in has also become pretty fragmented, and this is reflected in our organisations, our styles of working. For many people, feminism has become a career, and when that happens, obviously, there will be an erosion of political content. We need to find ways through which we can negotiate the diversities and the differences while still maintaining that the bottom line is to stand together in solidarity. Does that sound very romantic!!!

susanna1911: I agree, Marilee. We are now at a point where unity in diversity has become ever more crucial. even as we recognise that we need to be clear about what we agree and disagree on.

annieserrano2003: About specialising without losing our political rooted-ness, what can we do to facilitate that? Any suggestions, Bina? What about the Feminist Dialogue approach, can that be expanded? Who are involved there?

raijeli_drodrologi: The FDs represent a space created by feminists in the anti-globalisation struggle, mainly at the WSF, for a venue to discuss and strategise our work on these issues and our relationships with other social movements.

binasr2001: I think we need to set for ourselves very clear goals. Specialisation is needed; we need to understand law, so we need feminist lawyers. But we have to be linked constantly with communities of women—younger feminists, for example

raijeli_drodrologi: Even though we have already debunked the myth that “sisterhood is global,” we should keep looking for commonalities, continue to dialogue, etc. like we did at the FDs/WSF.

marilee_karl: Raijeli, I agree, we have debunked the “sisterhood is global” myth and we have analysed intersectionalities—which I prefer to call interwovenness and this makes it in many ways easier to stand together in solidarity, because we are aware of [our] diversity.

Do we really want to say the principle/position that ‘sisterhood is global’ is a myth? Elsewhere in the discussion, the participants acknowledge “unity in diversity,” which suggest, however limited its context, some common ground. If you want, you could just delete the two pars. above by Raejeli and Marilee.

susanna1911: Let me try to summarise so far: we more or less agreed that the women’s movement, in the past and up to now, engages with other social movements, in solidarity and in various alliances for social justice. We have also said that we do not feel that there has been equal support for feminist issues from other social movements, and this indicates where patriarchal norms refuse to budge, and that we actually have not been able to make much headway. We have been speaking about gender mainstreaming, and women who work at different levels for the women’s cause. But more often these days, we find gender ex-

“Indeed, some of us should focus our energies on engaging the anti-globalisation and other social movements. These movements are counterpoints to the well entrenched institutions and powerful interest groups that certainly do not value the same things that we feminists value. We are better off working with them and influencing them as they also seek to change the course of events.”



- Annie Serrano

perts that are not grounded in the feminist experience, nor rooted in the women's movement.

Gender Mainstreaming: Still a Viable Tool?

susanna1911: Can we try now to discuss in more detail the concept of mainstreaming, and what this means in relation to our solidarity work with other social movements? Do we feel that the concept of gender mainstreaming has been so removed from the feminist reality that it is no longer useful?

annieserrano2003: I think one culprit is the gender experts who are “not rooted in the feminist experience,” as you put it, Susanna.

binasr2001: Gender mainstreaming has to be de-institutionalised, if it has to have any feminist

dynamism. For one, it has to be removed from the clutches of the sort of institutionalised discourse that we now see. This is difficult to explain, but bringing [the women's movement] back to centre stage [the project against] patriarchy, inequality, social justice and all these concepts that gave us the cutting edge is important. To re-infuse gender with complexities is what is required.

marilee_karl: We need to change the mainstream. We need to question and analyse what gender is being mainstreamed into. Gender mainstreaming sometimes sounds like a new version of the old “integrating women into development.” We said no to being integrated into the male structures of development. Mainstreaming is only meaningful if we are strong enough to change that mainstream.

binasr2001: Exactly, Marilee. This is what I had said at the Manila meeting—that we have lost our critique of the state and development paradigms, and are now busy trying to get women into that very development project that we had rejected.

annieserrano2003: The current Beijing + 10 process could be an occasion to reveal the pitfalls of gender mainstreaming.⁴

rajeli_drodrolagi: Gender mainstreaming needs to be re-evaluated. Yes, Marilee is right, do we want to be “mainstreamed” or change the mainstream?

binasr2001: Yes, we have to say that we reject the mainstream.

susanna1911: I have always thought of gender mainstreaming as a very political project of feminists that got hijacked by development institutions and returned to us minus the direct call to dismantle patriarchy. It was reshaped and trimmed down so that it basically does not unsettle anything that meant anything.

annieserrano2003: Well put, Susanna! But don't forget, we pushed it into the official agenda in Beijing!

rajeli_drodrolagi: In changing the mainstream, we have to link with other social justice movements [that seek] to change the mainstream. Gender

mainstreaming has also become a donor-driven agenda.

annieserrano2003: The trouble is there is just so much to do and too few of us! So when the gender mainstreaming approach was institutionalised, we sort of forgot about it, to be hijacked by others!

susanna1911: But precisely, we keep pushing for gender to be mainstreamed and less and less do we have the ability to question that mainstream that we are insisting that gender be [assimilated] into. This is the reason I think that the anti-globalisation movement has gained power—because it has consistently attacked the mainstream and refused to back down.

marilee_karl: But is the anti-globalisation movement male-dominated?

annieserrano2003: That's right, Susanna. But don't you think we need to be realistic, too? The mainstream is THE mainstream. We need to engage it! Not reject it totally! Governments, businesses, churches — they define the agenda. We need to engage some of them, to help transform the mainstream. Is that realistic?

susanna1911: One of the reasons I think that the Feminist Dialogue organisers wanted to keep that discussion located within the broader anti-globalisation movement is precisely because there is a platform for broad-based critique of the mainstream and a direct [interrogation] of the roots of social injustice. What do others feel about this?

raijeli_drodrolagi: The mainstream today is the globalised, capitalist corporatised system and this is not the stream we want to be integrated into.

marilee_karl: Can we engage the mainstream on our terms? And how do we challenge the patriarchal aspects of the anti-globalisation movement?

susanna1911: I would like to hear what others have to say about Annie's proposition that we need to continue engaging the mainstream, and Raijeli's suggestion that this is not the stream we want to be mainstreamed into. Where does that leave us?

binasr2001: In a way, we are all part of the mainstream, whether we like it or not. We all live with our contradictions and our politics. The point is not to lose sight of our politics as we become more and more sucked into the mainstream. Yes, the anti-globalisation movements are largely male-dominated and patriarchal, and this includes the women in [the leadership] too sometimes. But we have to link up with them, and we have to ensure that feminist perspectives become an integral part of these movements. This is also part of the struggle, our feminist struggle.

raijeli_drodrolagi: The challenge of the feminist movement is working within the anti-globalisation movement because we are trying to transform the mainstream and work for alternatives.

susanna1911: I agree with you, Marilee, that the anti-globalisation movement is very male at some level. This is precisely why certain feminist formations have kept steady in that space, to try to influence it. We saw that influence clearly in the last WSF, don't you think?

marilee_karl: Definitely, Susanna. That's why I congratulate all those who worked to bring a feminist influence in determining how the WSF was carried out in Mumbai. We need to continue and strengthen this for the next WSF and all such gatherings.

annieserrano2003: Male-dominated—that is true for most social movements, no? This only reminds us the work is cut out for us: whether we walk the corridors of the UN, in government, or in business, church, anti-globalisation or labour movements, [we should raise] the feminist voice.

susanna1911: So, we seem to agree that we need to try to work on both changing the mainstream while transforming the patriarchal norms within other social movements. But what tools do we have for this? Is Gender Mainstreaming a viable tool or is this something that we should boot out, and start over again?

binasr2001: Not necessarily. In India the most celebrated environment and anti-dam movements are dominated by women. There are women in almost all

leadership positions in these movements. We have our Medha Patkars⁵ and Vandana Shivas⁶. Ironically, they are not necessarily feminist though I would still like to understand what precisely being feminist is!!! But that is another discussion.

Dismantling Patriarchy

susanna1911: What are the feminist ways of dismantling patriarchy, in the final instance? Do you all feel that we still have that goal at the core of our work, or is that concept too archaic to frame in such a manner in this day and age?

binasr2001: Of course, Susanna, we have to keep our eyes on patriarchy and continue to look for ways that we can dismantle it. A new kind of gender mainstreaming would only be one of the tools.

rajeli_drodrolagi: Gender mainstreaming is still a valuable tool, but we need to bring out its transformative, radical elements that look at changing power relations and patriarchal systems and structures.

susanna1911: How do we bring out its radical elements, Rajeli? In concrete terms, within the UN, how can we do this?

marilee_karl: My question is: are we focusing too much on the UN? Maybe we should direct more of our energies to influencing the anti-globalisation movement? Don't get me wrong. I think the women's movement did a tremendous job and made enormous progress in influencing the UN agendas in the world conferences of the 1990s, but is this where we still need to be? To answer my own question, yes, we still need to be there, but maybe not to the same extent. Times have changed.

annieserrano2003: First: it is about clarity of our analysis. and goals. I just erased what I tried to write: a confession that I have been forgetting "patriarchy" when faced with the daily rigors of work in the UN. But going back to Marilee's point: Indeed, some of us should focus our energies on engaging the anti-globalisation and other social movements. These movements are counterpoints to the well entrenched institutions and powerful interest groups that certainly do not value the same things that we

feminists value. We are better off working with them and influencing them as they also seek to change the course of events.

binasr2001: Yes, the UN has been the focus of so much feminist work. And what I find disappointing is that there is very little critique of the UN as an institution and as a system. Even as we work with the UN, it is important to continue our work with anti-globalisation movements.

annieserrano2003: Bina, that is what I probably meant when I talked about taking the opportunity of the Beijing + 10 process.

binasr2001: Ok, everybody, I will have to leave in five minutes. Was great to be part of this discussion. Hope we continue with this.



"We have to bring back the radical elements—which were always there—[our take] of the different levels of discrimination experienced by women (race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, etc.) and not just gender itself. This is what gender mainstreaming is about and when we work with other social justice movements, this is what we feminists bring in."

- Rajeli Nicole

susanna1911: Bina, would you have some final statement on the direction you think the women's movement should be heading for?

binasr2001: A final statement... sounds a bit daunting. I personally feel that women's movements have to do some very honest and critical re-thinking and assessment. This can be done through discussions among each other, and through [soliciting] feedback from others, people outside the movement. We need to see how others see us, what the view from outside is. Secondly, all that we said about being a "live part" of other social movements. I agree with Marilee that we need to start easing out of the UN, at least to some extent. And of course, continue to organise more and more FDs!!!

susanna1911: Thank you so much, Bina, for your time on such short notice.

Bina Srinivasan has left the conference.

rajeli_drodrolagi: Yes, gender mainstreaming has been tied to the UN so much that we need to critique it, too, but we [should also undertake] some critical evaluation of how we in the women's movement have been engaging in those spaces.

susanna1911: Annie, could you elaborate on what you mean by the opportunity of the Beijing +10 process?

annieserrano2003: Re Beijing + 10, to call the UN to account for what it has done to implement the BPFA and gender mainstreaming.

marilee_karl: What about the governments supposed to be implementing the platform?

annieserrano2003: Banging our heads on the concrete wall: that's my imagery about working with government! The National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) in the Philippines has been at it for close to 20 years now! What have we achieved? The secretary for health just said that family planning is not his responsibility! Ugh.

susanna1911: I agree with Annie, and Marilee, that we need to keep a strong presence [in the anti-globalisation and other social movements], work to-

gether with, and mutually strengthen each others' fronts of activism, but [this means] getting these social movements to understand feminist perspectives at a deeper level, and not at the level that gender mainstreaming has put forward women's issues. Strengthening our presence in these other social movements is about actually being there in those discussions, and not in a diluted, compromised way. Too often, we curb ourselves from getting to our core agenda because we do not want to sound too strident. I agree with Bina that we should be a "live part" of these movements.

rajeli_drodrolagi: We have to bring back the radical elements—which were always there—[our take] of the different levels of discrimination experienced by women (race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, etc.) and not just gender itself. This is what gender mainstreaming is about and when we work with other social justice movements, this is what we feminists bring in.

susanna1911: Yes, I fully agree Rajeli that we need to bring back into the discussion of the mainstream the issues that got cut out because they were too controversial for the level of governments and the UN. We need to not back down because we have seen in the past 20 years what gender mainstreaming has NOT gotten us.

marilee_karl: To take the example of the WSF in Mumbai, it was great to see strong women speakers on all the main panels, to have major events devoted to women and war, etc., but there were many, many smaller panels and events where there were few or no women speakers. Can we organise ourselves to have a strong presence and to speak up at many more events and panels?

Next Steps

susanna1911: Alright, we are getting close to the end. Let me try to summarise again: we have agreed that we need to bring back more radical feminist politics into the work that we do, our lobbying, be it at the UN or with governments or within other social movements. We have also said that mainstreaming needs to be radicalised to include not just gender but the other ways in which women are discriminated. We have also said that we perhaps need to pull away from

“...we need to expand our ranks as an important strategy, not just among the younger women of our own class, but more so with poor and marginalised groups of women, and getting them involved in a feminist struggle, which works in synch with their other struggles against other social injustices they experience.”



- Susanna George

UN-determined frame of work, and to look at how to dismantle patriarchy in all its manifestations, and in all institutions and groupings. We have also said that the best way to move forward is to continue to dialogue among ourselves and among other groupings, and the best way to influence and radicalise these institutions and movements is to stay engaged. What else can we say about our strategies forward? What other thoughts would you like to add to this discussion?

marilee_karl: That we share examples of how we women have succeeded in carrying out dialogue, in pressuring, influencing or otherwise changing other social movements to question and change male domination and patriarchal attitudes.

rajeli_drodrolagi: Yes, dialogue, but also the recognition that we use different frameworks in applying gender mainstreaming.

annieserrano2003: That dialogues among feminists and gender experts be encouraged. How do we expand the ranks? I mean, I don't know how well we are reaching out to the young women who will continue our work.

marilee_karl: Off the top of my head, Annie, would the “old-fashioned” consciousness raising groups with young women work?

annieserrano2003: That we tap the women's studies groups because they are better able to reach the youth. Then, we have to think about the out-of-school. How do we reach them? I agree, Marilee.

susanna1911: I agree with Annie, that we need to expand our ranks as an important strategy, not just among the younger women of our own class, but more so with poor and marginalised groups of women, and getting them involved in a feminist struggle, which works in synch with their other struggles against other social injustices they experience. Sharing examples continues to be a very important strategy but I think we really need to look for feminist-inspired activism in unusual places. Feminist activism seems to very much be taking places in anti-establishment spaces these days. I feel there are now women, particularly young women, in communities that are staging rebellious acts, and anti-patriarchal acts that cannot easily be framed as activism. For example, the underground “zine movement” among young, angry women who are very much against the norms of society but do not feel comfortable in the more cautious spaces of the women's movement. There are groups of workers, for example, here in the Philippines, lesbians in local government, that have organised for greater visibility of lesbians in government, but again, they are not a part as such of the women's movement.

rajeli_drodrolagi: Agree, Susanna. You refer to areas that the women's movement has given space to—VAW, reproductive rights, poverty. But we have not focused consistently on fundamental survival issues such land, water and food security.

marilee_karl: To reiterate an old feminist slogan: land, water and food are feminist issues!

susanna1911: Yes, I agree, feminist struggles are all those things, Marilee and Rajjeli. I think we should disabuse other social activists of the simplistic notion that feminists are interested only in VAW or reproductive rights. About the forming of an informal network, I think the Feminist Dialogue process is one informal network and I agree with Annie that we should start more of our own dialogues—for example, feminists with the gender experts within the UN, or feminists with women in other social movements. Clarifying these issues and giving time to clear thinking and analysis will help us put the fight against patriarchy back at the core of our activism.

annieserrano2003: I like that, including, interacting with other feminists in unusual spaces.

marilee_karl: I am going to have to run to my “straight” job as consultant to FAO! It was great being part of this discussion. A real inspiration!

susanna1911: Alright, I think we should wind up here. Marilee, could you make a last statement on where you think we should be headed? Annie, Rajjeli, Mari and Necta, could you also give your last statements before we conclude?

rajjeli_drodrolagi: Continue to create spaces for analysis and dialogue. For example, at WSF2005, we plan a series of dialogues (and not just one workshop) with other players (usual and unusual) in the social justice movement. This online discussion is one of these dialogues.

susanna1911: I think Marilee has left the discussion now...

annieserrano2003: We are just but part of the broader movements for social transformation... fighting social injustice in its many forms. We do our share and we should try to do our best. One way is to strengthen our ranks and the support system, and maintain solidarity with women in the other movements.

susanna1911: Yes, good! I think that we can bring this discussion to a close. I just want to thank you all for your participation, especially Annie, on such short notice! ☺

Footnotes

- ¹ The Feminist Dialogues (FD) refer to an initiative of several feminist organisations that was held for the first time in conjunction with the World Social Forum (WSF) in January 2004. FD was designed to be space for feminist organisations, as well as feminists working with non-feminist organisations, to express their support to feminist principles, processes and actions. Another such event is planned for January 2005 in conjunction with WSF in Porto Alegre, Brazil.
- ² This refers to the spiral of violence and recriminations triggered by the Hindutva fundamentalist attempt to demolish the Babri Masjid mosque in Gujarat, India, since 1990. The mosque was successfully demolished two years after by a crowd of fundamentalists that resulted in riots and more than 1,000 fatalities. The fundamentalist agenda to build a temple in place of the mosque has become more and more aggressive, claiming lives and property from all sides of the conflict.
- ³ This refers to the NGO Forum in Huairou held in conjunction with the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing, China.
- ⁴ The Beijing +10 global review process refers to a series of regional and global processes to review the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, signed by 189 governments at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, in 1995. Coordinated by the UN Division for the Advancement of Women (UNDAW), this review process will culminate at the next UN Commission on the Status of Women meeting in March 2005.
- ⁵ Medha Patkar is an awarded and well-known environmental activist who founded and leads the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), a people's movement organised to stop a series of dams planned for India's largest westward flowing river, the Narmada. Patkar also helped establish the National Alliance of People's Movements, a network of more than 150 political organisations across India.
- ⁶ Dr. Vandana Shiva is a well-known physicist, philosopher, ecofeminist, environmental activist and writer. She has led a movement to protect the diversity and integrity of living resources, especially native seeds, and is globally recognised for her contributions to the fields of women and environment, biodiversity, biotechnology and intellectual property rights, and ecological issues related to agriculture.