

Strengthening Counterculture

In their book, *Nation of Rebels*, Heath and Potter show why counterculture advocated for by anti-globalisation movement is counterproductive and has instead helped create the very consumer society that they oppose. They successfully depict how capitalism snatches, distorts, commodifies and sells any piece of social justice resistances and making it palatable and fashionable to digest.

This is true for the women's movement too. As an organised collective force, it rarely intervenes in the cultural sphere to forward its anti-patriarchal message. Instead decisions about how feminist messages are circulated in popular culture (example grrrl power) are made by marketing experts in the fashion and entertainment industries. Sadly, it is this 'lifestyle feminism' that has captured the minds of the generation of young women today. Feminism, today, is equated with "feeling good, being able to make personal choices, breaking through the glass ceiling" even if it means on the backs of less privileged women. Rarely is it about challenging the oppressive political and social institutions that discriminate against women.

On the other hand, social justice movements and activists also have a hand in this appropriation of their political struggles. At the recently concluded WTO 6th Ministerial meeting, activists (from indigenous peoples, farmers, fishers, women, migrant workers, feminists to name a few) vocally protesting the WTO, a hegemonic institution, were united in their position to "JUNK JUNK WTO" and "NO NO TO WTO" and this was conveyed through a rich diversity of cultures, languages and identities in both their seminars, and symbolically powerful protests. Sadly, however, there was very little interlinkages between the different social justice movements and their issues.

- How then do we dismantle the business and culture of neo-liberal capitalism?
- How do we effect a critical shift in the philosophical ground from a neo-liberal model that commodifies culture, enforcing homogeneity and denying cultural self-determination to one that gives priority to cultural diversity, let alone diversity?

Proposals by the anti-capitalist, anti-racist feminist activists on globalisation is a starting point. They have systematically shown that to dismantle

the business of patriarchy, one has to expose and address how capitalism relies on and recreates heterosexism, racism and sexism through the way it organises labour, and exploitation through racialisation and gender. The proposals calls for interlinkages of strategies and solutions from both women's movement and anti-globalisation movements.

If cultural diversity is seen as our self expression of our right to determine how we live our lives – (self-determination) – then it logically leads that our allies are those who insist on the same in relation to water, health, sacred sites, biodiversity or food. This does not necessarily mean having to work actively together. This *Women in Action (WIA)* issue is our modest contribution to saying that it requires social justice activists at the very minimum to be sensitive to the broader diverse issues and strategies while not undermining their individual positions.

I leave you with some questions that we explored in this issue cultural diversity:

- What kinds of dialogues between the State and societal mechanisms do cultural policies reflect towards constructive pluralism?
- Are cultural goods becoming consumer goods in the guise of promoting cultural diversity?
- Have the events of 11 September 2001 and the resulting conflicts between cultural relativism and fundamentalism, secularism and religion affected the production, dissemination and function of culturally diverse goods and services?
- How can a balance be made between the rights of the owners of cultural expressions and the rights of all people to access, enjoy, and participate in culture?
- How are issues of marginalisation, social exclusion, economic and cultural rights being addressed within societies themselves and in relation to others?
- How do differing State conceptions on citizenship and sexual diversity affect the rights of women, children and indigenous peoples?

In solidarity


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