

Women's Activism and Globalization



Linking Local Struggles and
Transnational Politics



Nancy A. Naples & Manisha Desai
Editors

This wonderful collection of essays explores the complicated connections between local and transnational politics. All of the essays illuminate the creative and courageous ways in which women challenge global inequalities from diverse localities."

—**AMRITA BASU**, editor of *The Challenge of Local Feminisms: Women's Movements in Global Perspective*

Women's Activism and Globalization . . . is a marvelous collection of case studies that demonstrates how global and economic change are manifested in women's daily lives and how women have mobilized in response to these powerful forces."

—**JILL QUADAGNO**, author of *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty*

"This exciting book shows us that the many diverse struggles of women worldwide against global restructuring are engendering a complex architecture that is more than the sum of these struggles."

—**SASKIA SASSEN**, author of *Globalization and Its Discontents*

"We need more attention to the diverse and growing nature of women's working contributions around the world, and the new politics of globalization. This collection brings the two areas together admirably. Highly recommended."

—**GILLIAN YOUNGS**, author of *International Relations in a Global Age*

"From global to local and back again, this collection uncovers women's diverse and collective activism in response to globalization and economic restructuring. These stories offer testimony to the possibilities for local and global challenges that engender transformation of ourselves and our world."

—**DEBORAH STIENSTRA**, author of *Women's Movements and International Organizations*

Women's Activism and Globalization is a comprehensive collection of original essays that shows the ways women activists around the globe are responding to the forces of globalization in their communities. The essays examine women in urban, rural, and suburban locations to provide a rich understanding of the common themes as well as significant divergences among women activists in different parts of the world.

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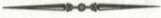
Introduction

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Changing the Terms

Community Activism, Globalization, and the Dilemmas of Transnational Feminist Praxis

Nancy A. Naples



COMMUNITY-BASED SOCIAL CHANGE EFFORTS SEEM ALL TOO LIMITED WHEN PLACED up against the structures of inequality that shape the wider political and economic context. Global processes of economic restructuring are undermining unionization, job security, sustainability of communities and the environment, and social supports, especially those provided through the so-called welfare state.¹ However, political activism designed to challenge the expansion of global inequality has generated worldwide attention, as evident in protests against the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund in Seattle; Washington, D.C.; Toronto, and many non-Western locales that receive little if any media attention. Furthermore, community actions on behalf of progressive agendas remain salient features of local encounters with the state, with corporations, with employers, and with racist and sexist forces pervading many spheres of social life. This book seeks to make visible the relationship between local organizing efforts and global economic restructuring as well to highlight the contradictions of transnational feminist politics.

Much of the literature on globalization concentrates on the broader economic, social, and political dimensions of contemporary global changes and neglects the ways in which these changes reshape the everyday lives of women in different parts of the world, except to highlight the increased participation of women in the labor force and the feminization of poverty among other dimensions of women's economic oppression. The case studies presented in this book demonstrate the diverse ways women respond to these powerful forces as well as how their activism can pose challenges to the "scattered hegemonies" (Grewal and Kaplan 1994) associated with the global expansion of capitalism. While transnational organizing has a long feminist history that the contemporary emphasis on globalization might obscure,² processes associated with globalization are "changing the terms of feminist politics"

(Krause 1996, 225). As Mary Meyer and Elisabeth Prügl (1999) observe in the introduction to their edited collection *Gender Politics in Global Governance*, "international economic and political crises destabilize entrenched institutions, including institutions of gender, thus opening up opportunities for emancipatory politics" (16).

Our collection makes salient the contradictions of transnational feminist organizing for locality-based women's movements and feminist organizing more broadly. As we work toward sustainable transnational feminist movements, many dimensions of power and inequalities of access and resources must be recognized and addressed. For example, many feminist global studies scholars note that "women's groups based in the North or whose members are primarily white, middle-class, well-educated women have usually held a leading role" in national as well as international feminist organizations (Krause 1996, 233).³ Furthermore, as Manisha Desai (personal communication) points out, "while not necessarily elite organizations, certain Third World NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] such as the Grammen Bank in Bangladesh receive sustained attention and support from the West, while others that have more grassroots connections such as SEWA [Self-Employed Women's Association], which was founded by labour activist Ella Bhatt, who pioneered the microcredit movement in India" are marginalized on the international political stage.

The call to reaffirm the grassroots as a site from which more claims take on a more genuine logic runs through much of the feminist literature on women's movements and political organizing. However, this privileging of the so-called grassroots can also lead to a romanticization of this site of struggle as well as a tendency to "other" women said to be of the grassroots (see, e.g., Grewal 1999; Mindry forthcoming). Transnational feminist practice is further complicated by the problem of translation. For example, while I have used the term grassroots to a great extent in my own work on women's community-based activism in the United States, the term may not travel well as we attempt to explore women's community organizing in other contexts. For example, Nawal Ammar and Leila Lababidy (1999) point out in "Women's Grassroots Movements and Democratization in Egypt" that *the grassroots* "has no literal Arabic translation" (151).⁴

In this chapter, I discuss what I term "the politics of naming" including the diverse ways feminists are conceptualizing transnational feminist organizing and globalization. I highlight these issues with reference to the chapters in this collection. In the following chapter, Manisha Desai details the political economy of globalization and the neoliberal policies that support the global expansion of capitalism. In the last chapter in this introductory section we outline the organization of the book and the key issues addressed by each of the authors.

Transnational Organizing and the Politics of Naming

How we explicate and frame our approach to the intersection of global and local organizing says a great deal about our political orientation, disciplinary assumptions, and cross-cultural sensibility. The terms *global*, *transnational*, *international*, and “the” grassroots remain hotly contested among postcolonial, Third World, and international feminist scholars. The terms *Third World* and *postcolonial* are themselves contested constructs. The former became popular in the 1980s and was used by scholars in the fields of international relations, development studies, and the political economy of the world system to describe the uneven development and inequalities among nation-states primarily located in the southern region of the globe. So-called *First World* nations included North America and Western Europe. Although less frequently used, the Second World referred to the former communist nations. Those nation-states considered Third World were defined as underdeveloped or developing nations that were economically disadvantaged and therefore dependent on First World nations for financial, scientific, and technical assistance. This use of “Third World” has been strongly criticized by postcolonial scholars who argue that it discursively justifies the construction of the First World countries as dominant and more advanced (e.g., Mohanty 1991b). “Postcolonial” is typically applied to nations like India where a former colonial power has been removed. Some scholars who object to this term emphasize that it may mask continuing colonial relations that shape the lives of people in these nations. Both terms—*postcolonial* and *Third World*—are used to describe specific geographic and regional locations and nation-states as well as specific inhabitants of these regions. As identity categories, they also have been used to refer to former inhabitants of these regions. This use of the term has also been hotly debated by scholars who argue that this identity construction contributes to “othering” women from non-Western countries. In the context of feminist scholarship, “Third World” has been broadened to include women of color born in the so-called First World. These terms have also been taken up as theoretical frameworks to describe scholarship that focuses on the concerns or perspectives of Third World and postcolonial women. The authors in this collection use the terms *Third World* and *postcolonial* in multiple ways with a sensitivity to the contestations surrounding their usage and an awareness of how “relations of ruling” (D. Smith 1987) infuses all attempts to represent diverse women’s lives and diverse locations with a singular categorization.

Feminist scholars interested in analyzing women’s agency in a globalizing context also prefer the term *transnational* to other conceptualizations like *international women’s movement* or *global feminism*. For example, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (1994) use the term *transnational* in their work on feminist practices and

critique the use of the term *global feminism* because, they argue, it "has elided the diversity of women's agency in favor of a universalized Western model of women's liberation that celebrates individuality and modernity" (17). Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty (1997b), who argue for analyses that intertwine "the global and the local," also use the term *transnational feminism* as a corrective to the notion of "global sisterhood," which, they argue, evokes the "center/periphery" or "first-world/Third-World model" of feminist organizing (xxi). Along with Alexander and Mohanty (1997b), Grewal and Kaplan want to avoid the "the old sisterhood model of missionary work, of intervention and salvation that is clearly tied to older models of center-periphery relations" (1994, 19; see Enloe 1990).

Anne Sisson Runyan (1994) uses the term *inter-national*, inserting the hyphen to acknowledge the continued significance of national borders. In contrast, feminist scholars in dialogue with the international relations tradition of political science prefer the term *global* (Stearns 1998). Meyer and Prügl (1999), who are working to insert a feminist presence in the field of international relations, use the term *global governance* because, they argue, it "signals a movement beyond the narrow study of international organizations" (4). Gillian Youngs, coeditor of the new *International Feminist Journal of Politics* (Youngs, Jones, and Pettman 1999), also views *international* as a problematic term because it "has itself contributed to the power/knowledge hierarchies that structure dominant understandings of the world" (7).⁵

In a 1998 article in *Feminist Studies*, sociologist Karen Booth explains why she too prefers the term *global* to *international*. The latter, she argues, "undergirded the Western powers' founding vision of the UN, which was to be the manager of a collaboration of sovereign and equal nations." The internationalism of the United Nations was used to define it as "a politically neutral space for the representatives of these nations to discuss and debate issues of common concern" (119). In contrast, for Booth, "globalism" is a more radical construct.

Global actors reject the sovereignty, at times even the relevance, of the nation state and the significance of the citizen identity. Instead, they behave as if the political and economic relations forged across geographical boundaries—in multinational enterprises, conferences, and organizations, devoted to specific issues [such] as the environment or AIDS, in immigrant enclaves, over the internet, and so on—were the most relevant sites of decision making and identity formation.

Booth uses the term *transnational* to refer to "any actor, organization, or issue that could be either international or global in orientation" (120).⁶ As scholars debate the terms best suited to describe transnational feminist practices, we remain relatively uninformed about which strategies might be most effective in inserting so-called

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grassroots women's interests in national, international, and global organizing efforts (also see Bystydzienski and Sekhon 1999).

Many feminist geographers and Third World feminist scholars argue that a more effective approach to globalization is to address "the manifestations of the global in [our particular] local" (Eschle 1999, 328 in her review of Miles 1996).⁷ Other global studies scholars interested in differentiating the capitalist form of globalization from a more grassroots or socially just approach distinguish between globalization from above and globalization from below or transnational grassroots politics. In her contribution to Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo's (1998) collection, Sarah Mahler defines "transnationalism from above" as "multinational corporations, media, commoditization . . . and other macro-level structures and processes that transcend two or more states are not produced and projected equally in all areas, but are controlled by powerful elites who seek, although do not necessarily find, political, economic and social dominance in the world" (66-67). In contrast, Mahler explains:

"[T]ransnationalism from below" generates multiple and counter-hegemonic powers among nonelites. Moreover, transnationalism from below describes "the ways that the *everyday practices of ordinary people*, their feelings and understandings of their conditions of existence, often modify those very conditions and thereby shape rather than merely reflect new modes of urban culture." (Mahler 1988, 67, quoting M. P. Smith 1992: 493-94; emphasis added by Mahler)

Mahler recognizes limits to the terms *transnational from below* and *grassroots*. She asks "who is deemed grassroots: traditionally disenfranchised groups, anyone who does not represent state or corporate interests, perhaps elites who take counter-hegemonic positions, or even coalitions that include diverse members?" (69-70; emphasis in original). She references Sikkink's (1993, 439) observation that "[t]he idea of a social movement . . . with its emphasis on bottom-up citizen protest, fails to portray accurately the range of actors involved in human rights issues, including foundations and international and regional organizations" (70). For example, in her study of South African NGOs, Mindry (2001) describes how the term "grass roots" was used by white and middle-class women to refer to black and rural women. Mindry argues, "It is important that we begin to examine the ways in which moralizing discourses such as those concerning the 'grassroots' and 'poor, black, rural women' as targets of intervention structure relationships among women working in NGOs in ways that are remarkably hierarchal.

This construction of the "grassroots" fails to capture the politics of accountability and the extent to which so-called grassroots groups are inclusive and en-

Power / Influence

courage participatory democratic practices. For example, left unanswered are the following: Who gets to define issues to be brought to the transnational political stage, who gets to participate in this form of activism, and whose voices are left out of the dialogue? Mahler fears that the bipolar construction “transnationalism from above” and “transnationalism from below” privileges formal organizations. This distinction also masks the complex ways resistance operates on multiple levels simultaneously and the relations of ruling that may shape so-called grassroots or local organizing efforts. In fact, as Guarnizo and Smith (1998) argue, transnational organizing takes place in multiple sites and at multiple levels:

[T]ransnational political spaces should be treated as the resultant of separate, sometimes parallel, sometimes competing projects at all levels of the global system—from the “global government” agenda of international organizations and multinational corporations to the most local “survival strategies,” by which transnational migrant networks are socially constructed. (6)

Guarnizo and Smith use the term *transnational social formation* to emphasize how “transnational practices, while connecting collectivities located in more than one national territory, are embodied in specific social relations established between specific people, situated in . . . localities, at historically determined times” (11).

In a similar vein, using the plural *globalizations* Jane Jenson and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2000) argue for an approach that views globalizations “as the extension of particular localisms” (12). By highlighting the links between diverse locales and processes associated with globalization, our collection further contextualizes globalizations. This collection demonstrates how globalization must be understood as a process generated from the everyday activities and negotiations of diverse individuals, communities, governmental bodies, and transnational coalitions. In the next section of this chapter, I further clarify the debates over terminology and the politics of location in order to explicate the dynamics of globalization and resistance.

Globalization and Resistance: Defining the Terms of Debate

The term *globalization* is sometimes used as a synonym for *global economic restructuring* of capitalism. It is also used to discuss the movement of peoples, information, and consumer culture. In the first usage it often refers to “a single, though heterogenizing system tightening its grip on the world’s remotest localities and enclaves” (Buell 1998, 550). In the second usage, it is used to refer to “a complex system becoming still more decentered.” Consequently, as Fredrick Buell (1998) points out, “Thought about globalization has thus been deeply uncertain and schiz-

ophrenic: it is centering and decentering, catastrophic and creative all at once" (550).

Feminist scholars offer insights into the contradictions associated with globalization by exploring how gender, sexuality, racialization, and region are mobilized to reinscribe differences through market relations. For example, as ethnic studies scholar Lisa Lowe (1996) argues, "One of the distinct features of the global restructuring of capital is its ability to profit not through homogenization but through the differentiation of specific resources and markets that permit the exploitation of gendered and racialized labor within regional and national sites." Ironically, "the very processes that produce a racialized feminized proletariat . . . displace traditional and national patriarchies," thus generating "new possibilities precisely because they have led to a breakdown and a reformulation of the categories of nation, race, class, and gender" (161–62; also see Kelly, Bayes, Hawkesworth, and Young 2001). As Lowe points out, the contradictory processes associated with globalization reshape the possibilities for political action to "the interstitial sites of the social formation in which the national intersects with the international" (172).

Globalization processes lead many observers to assert that borders between nation-states are becoming "markedly less relevant to everyday behaviour in the various dimensions of economy, information, ecology, technology, cross-cultural conflict and civil society" (Beck 2000, 20). Immigration scholars, however, stress that while capital and goods travel more easily across borders, immigrants do not move as freely, despite their centrality within global economic processes. Saskia Sassen (1998) notes how U.S. domestic policies contribute to displacement of peoples from different regions who then seek emigration to the United States. For example, when the U.S. government provided \$3 billion to ensure a steady price for U.S. sugar producers, an estimated 400,000 workers lost their jobs in the Dominican Republic because producers in the Caribbean Basin countries could not compete. Sassen contends that this domestic policy resulted in the emigration of large numbers of Dominicans to the United States. Yet, U.S. immigration policy, with its focus on limiting entry to the United States, "is increasingly at odds with other major policy frameworks in the international system and with the growth of global economic integration" (60).

Guarnizo and Smith (1998) describe how a number of "historically specific factors" that converged to produce a highly complex form of transnationalism: "the globalization of capitalism with its destabilizing effects on less industrialized countries"; "the technological revolution in the means of transportation and communication"; "global political transformations such as decolonization and the universalization of human rights"; and "the expansion of social networks that facilitate the reproduction of transnational migration, economic organization, and politics"

(8). Each chapter of this book highlights one or more of these dimensions from the point of view of women's local, regional and transnational struggles for social, political, and economic justice.

Shifting from the local to a regional site of organizing, Sharon Navarro analyzes how women's geographic location along the U.S.-Mexico border affects the structure and content of their sociopolitical identities. Navarro's case study illustrates the ways in which gender, class, race, language, and geographic location intersect to form individual and collective sociopolitical identities and how these constructions of identity shape political activism. Political scientist Rachel Cichowski examines how activists have used the European Union to expand women's rights in member nations.

Moving to examine the interaction between international nongovernmental and financial institutions and local communities, Winifred Poster and Zakia Salime demonstrate how the discourse of microcredit and microenterprise promoted by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank limits transnational feminist efforts to ensure women's economic and social empowerment in the United States and Morocco. They examine how the microcredit projects sponsored by the USAID and the World Bank provide livelihoods limited to the informal sector that, rather than move women out of poverty, exacerbate gender dynamics at the household level. As in this case, international agencies and some NGOs can reproduce inequalities between Northern experts/donors and Southern recipients of aid. Alexandra Hrycak provides further evidence for this process in her study of a U.S. NGO's efforts to support women's political participation in Russia. On the one hand, resources provided by Northern or Western NGOs to women's groups in other parts of the world that emphasize international conferencing and transnational networks can also serve to divert activist attention from local issues, as Elisabeth Friedman (1999) illustrates in her study of Venezuela's women's movement.⁸ On the other hand, activists have taken the vision of a "global civil society" to infuse local community organizing efforts with new strategies for linking community-based economic development and consumption practices with a sensitivity to the interdependence of the local and global dimensions of social life. By situating analyses of globalization in women's community-based efforts and in local feminist praxis, these essays help to deepen our understanding of the limits and possibilities of counter-hegemonic alternatives to oppressive forms of globalization, especially those associated with global economic restructuring.

The global economy has been undergoing a process of restructuring since the early 1970s. Some trace this restructuring to the 1973 oil crisis, "when big companies in the West resorted to international subcontracting to survive" (Stearns 1998, 134). As international relations scholar Jill Stearns notes, transnational corporations

forged a geographic division of labor that had far-reaching repercussions. The knowledge-intensive aspects of the production process remained lodged in the West, but those that were labor intensive shifted

to developing countries where cheap female labour was abundant. In the 1980s as big business emphasized the importance of managerial flexibility and decentralized production, corporate strategies in the West sought a more flexible workforce to undermine the power of traditional unions. (134–35)

Features of global economic restructuring include a decline in organized labor and formal labor contracts; increasing internationalization of capital; growth in informal and part-time employment; loss of local economic and natural resources; cutbacks in social provisioning associated with the so-called welfare state; restructuring of women's work; and a growing disparity between classes. For example, in Bangladesh, young women sewing clothes for Walmart earn up to 20 cents an hour. In 1998, Walmart CEO David Glass took \$40 million in pay, options, and bonuses: compensation equal to almost \$20,000 an hour for a 40-hour work week. Walmart is the largest private-sector employer in the U.S. United States workers earn an average of \$6.10 an hour. One half of these workers qualify for federal food stamps (National Labor Committee 1999).

Poor women, who are disproportionately women of color, bear an unequal burden of the economic and social dislocation resulting from these gendered, racialized, and internationalized processes. The consequences for women in terms of their social citizenship, health, work burden, education, and their access to employment, credit, and income have been well documented (see, for example, Charlton, Everett, and Staudt 1989; Goldberg and Kremen 1990; Peterson and Runyan 1993; Staudt 1990; and Vickers 1991). Jill Stearns (1998) reports: "Where women are encouraged to take up roles in the paid sector—and women now make up some 41 per cent of paid workers in developed countries and 34 per cent worldwide—it is still the case that on average they earn 30–40 per cent less than men for comparable work." In addition, structural adjustment programs and neoliberal policies promoted by national governments, whether consciously or unconsciously, assume that women will continue to expand their unpaid labor in the home and communities to compensate for the increase in poverty and loss of local resources. In response to increased economic, social, and environment pressures, women are organizing within their communities, across national borders, and challenging neoliberal policies as well as oppressive labor demands (e.g., see Mendez, Navarro, and Weber in this volume).

The process of global economic restructuring has been hastened by the *structural adjustment policies* enforced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and

the World Bank in return for loans Third World or so-called developing countries (see Desai in this volume). The goal of structural adjustment policies has been to liberalize economies around the world. Structural adjustment and related neoliberal policies emphasize privatization and production for export over domestic consumption practices. Neoliberal policies also enhance women's unpaid household and caretaking labor as a direct consequence of the decline in public provisioning or welfare supports.

The complex mix of ongoing economic inequalities and new economic restructuring are woven in and through community and household survival strategies that themselves are embedded in cultural practices, local patterns of inequality, and contextualized responses to the economic changes (Jameson and Miyoshi 1999; Ong 1999; Rajan 1993). As Aihwa Ong (1999) emphasizes in her study of the "flexible citizenship" of Asian immigrants, analyses of global economic restructuring should incorporate both "the economic rationalities of globalization and the cultural dynamics that shape human and political responses." Furthermore, she argues,

When an approach to cultural globalization seeks merely to sketch out universalizing trends rather than deal with actually existing structures of power and situated cultural processes, the analysis cries out for a sense of political economy and situated ethnography. What are the mechanisms of power that enable the mobility, as well as the localization and disciplining, of diverse populations within these transnational systems? How are cultural flows and human imagination conditioned and shaped within these new relations of global inequalities? (5)

Our collection seeks to provide such a resource, one that includes richly contextualized ethnographic case studies of individual and organizational efforts to negotiate the political economy that shapes their everyday lives. We also offer an interdisciplinary feminist exploration that highlights the diversity of women's activist responses to globalization. The intersectional, interdisciplinary, and ethnographic case studies presented in *Women's Activism and Globalization* demonstrate the complex material, political, economic, historical, and discursive processes by which global economic restructuring proceeds while illustrating how women and other marginalized actors can resist what Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello (1994) term "downward leveling" (4) associated with the globalization of capitalism.

Conclusion

Our collection is designed to show the myriad ways women are organizing against the gendered, racialized, and regionalized processes of global capital expansion.

Women activists are also challenging militarization, as Yoko Fukumura and Martha Matsuoka illustrate; organizing against regional trade agreements that do not protect workers, as is evident in Sharon Navarro's and Jennifer Mendez's studies of cross-border and regional organizing; fighting for sustainable agriculture, as Betty Wells demonstrates; and using international human rights discourse and international conferences to enhance women's rights, as Susanna Wing documents. Finally, as Bandana Purkayastha demonstrates, women around the world are also helping to empower the next generation of women activists who will build on the valuable foundation laid by the foremothers.

Notes

1. According to a 1999 Human Development Report, the percentage of the population who live on less than \$1 a day in the following countries is: Mexico, 14; Chile, 15; Phillipines, 28; Bangladesh, 29; Brazil, 29; China, 29; Guatemala, 53.

2. For example, as a consequence of transnational organizing on behalf of women's suffrage, women activists from both sides of the Atlantic met in Washington, D.C., in 1888 and established the "first lasting multipurpose transnational women's organization, the International Council of Women" (Rupp 1997, 15). The international council was slow to foster the formation of national councils in countries other than the United States and Canada. However, under the leadership of Lady Aberdeen and through the international organizing efforts of Teresa Wilson, national councils were developed in Australia, Germany, Great Britain, Sweden, and the Netherlands. Historian Leila Rupp reports that, by 1939, 36 councils were affiliated with the international council.

3. And, as Deborah Stienstra (1999) points out, "Gender, race/ethnicity, class, and colonization also shape the internal relations within movements" (264).

4. Ammar and Lababidy (1999) note:

The issues of democracy, grassroots movements, and women's rights are not alien to the Egyptian culture, which have a historical heritage of the *shoura* principle, but are hindered by a global economic calculus and a local elite that perceives such issues to be threatening to their power and status. In Arabic the word "democracy" has been adopted from English and arabicized to read *democratiah*. The word is often used in a revolutionary/violent context and, therefore, is never connected to the local democratic practice of *shoura*, which literally means public opinion as well as embodying the notion of consensus, and is part of the overall Arab-Islamic political heritage. Hence, connecting terms such as "grassroots" or "empowerment for women" to the term *democratiah* in the Egyptian context would give them a negative connotation. (151)

Those working in the 1960s and 1970s to challenge elite rule in Arab societies "assumed a Marxist vision of the populace as a base, *al-qa'ida*. Thus the term translated within the cultural and historical context comes loaded with issues that render it suspect or negative."

5. Anthropologist Aihwa Ong (1999) retains the term *globalization* when discussing "new corporate strategies" but prefers the term *transnationalism* when referring "to the cultural specificities of global processes" (4). In a similar vein, immigration scholars Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc (1994) define transnationalism as "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (7).

6. However, Booth (1998) explains, for the most part, UN femocrats working for the World Health Organization draw on the "internationalist constructions of women's needs" because the WHO "derives its legitimacy from member states' perceptions of it as an apolitical agency" (119).

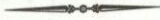
7. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty (1997) emphasize the need to explore, as one reviewer said, "located subjectivities . . . against the backdrop of globalising capitalism and the complex, diffuse ways it builds upon and retrenches colonial relationships" (Eschler 1999, 329 in her review of their edited collection *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*).

8. Elisabeth Friedman (1999) notes that the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) was the primary sponsor of the Latin American regional process that links local NGOs to the UN conference planning process. Friedman reports: "Women's movements throughout the region debated whether or not to accept money from an agency with a history of promoting US interests to the detriment of those of Third World nations" (362). Furthermore, "Argentine feminists found the influence of the dominant Argentine political party so pervasive at the Latin American NGO regional preparatory conference [for Beijing] that they set up an alternative forum at the September 1994 meeting in Mar de Plata" (363). Although Venezuela's women's movement benefited greatly from participation in the Nairobi conference in 1985, NGOs and women's movement organizations did not receive similar benefits from the 1995 fourth world conference in Beijing.

Transnational Solidarity

Women's Agency, Structural Adjustment, and Globalization

Manisha Desai



IN THIS CHAPTER I EXAMINE HOW GLOBAL CAPITAL, STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMS and international institutions such as the United Nations have shaped women's agency around the world. In particular, I focus on two important features of women's agency in the global era. First, just as global capital is fluid and exists simultaneously in multiple spaces, resulting in "scattered hegemonies" (Grewal and Kaplan 1994), so is women's agency evident in multiple spaces from the local grassroots movements and community-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to national and transnational feminist networks. Second, women from around the world have been forging transnational feminist solidarities via networks, regional meetings, and world conferences. At these sites, the flow of ideas and activism is no longer unidirectional, from the North to the South, but multidirectional. The ideas and activism are dispersed into varied local sites where they are picked up and re-fashioned as they resonate in contextualized ways.

While globalization has been variously defined (for example, Wachtel [2001] has collected 450 definitions), many analysts associate globalization with the homogenizing impact of global capital (e.g., Giddens 1990). This occurs via increasing economic integration resulting in one world market. Transnational corporations (TNCs) and international financial institutions shape this market through global production, consumption, and capital flows facilitated by the revolution in information and communication technologies. By contrast, analysts who focus on the global flows of people, ideas, and images emphasize the hybridity, or the heterogeneity that results as people from different parts of the world interact and creatively combine their own patterns of meaning making with those that derive from other cultures (Appadurai 1990; Hall 1991).

These two apparently contrasting views appear not so contradictory when one recognizes that each view tends to focus on only one aspect of globalization—the

political-economic dimensions in the case of the "homogenizers," and cultural practices in the case of the "heterogenizers." Moreover, neither specifically looks at how women are responding to the global political economy through innovative political, economic, and cultural strategies. When one shifts the focus to women's agency in the global political economy, we see a complex set of relations that are built on preexisting patriarchal, racial, and ethnic practices. One also sees women creating new sites for action at the local, national, and transnational levels in which to enact new political, economic, and cultural practices. In this way, women activists offer alternatives to the seemingly inevitable course of global capital. Consequently, women's agency in this era of globalization challenges the dominant framing of globalization and opens up new directions for both feminist theorizing and activism.

The Gendered Effects of Structural Adjustment Programs

Structural adjustment programs (SAPs) are the primary mechanism through which globalization has affected women's daily lives in the South. In the North, similar effects result from economic restructuring of manufacturing and neoliberal policies that emphasize privatization in all aspects of the political economy. SAPs were first engineered by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Sean Riain (2000) argues that globalization has imposed the dominant Anglo-American neoliberal model of the relationship between state and transnational capital on neoliberal, socialist, and postcolonial states. Hence, most states have adopted a package that share some variant of the following features:

- (1) cutbacks in public spending to balance government budgets and service debts;
- (2) monetary policies designed to fight inflation by restricting the money supply (and incomes);
- (3) the selling of government enterprises (privatization) in an attempt to balance government budgets and improve business production efficiency; and
- (4) the shift of manufacturing and agricultural sectors toward production for export instead of the domestic market, in order to improve international balances. (Wiegiersma 1997, 258)

The basic argument scholars have made about the impact of SAPs on women worldwide is that "adjustment intensifies the trade-off between women's producer and non-producer roles, or, in stronger terms, that the 'crisis of social disinvestment (under adjustment) is financed from a "social fund" provided by the superhuman efforts of poor women' (UNICEF 1989)" (Baden 1997, 38).

These policies have had four major effects on women. First, there has been a contradictory impact on women's paid work. There has been a feminization of the

global labor force and an increase in women's employment in the low-paid service sector (Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1983; also see Nash and Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Ward 1990). This is evident in the increasing rate of women's share of paid economic activity all over the South particularly in export processing zones in the North. In 2000, women constituted 36 percent of the total global workforce. In the global trade policy literature this is known as the "employment effect" of international trade. Women are now 33 percent of the Asian labor force as compared to 25 percent in 1970; women are 28 percent of the labor force in Latin American and the Caribbean compared to 20 percent in 1970; women comprise 42 percent of the European labor force compared to 35 percent in 1970, and in North America, women are 30 percent of the labor force compared to 24 percent in 1970 (Neft and Levine 1997). In Sub-Saharan Africa, where agriculture is still the predominant means of support, women have not become a large part of the industrial labor force; rather, they contribute, in large measure, to export-oriented agriculture, and through their unpaid labor in the home (Fontana, Joeke, and Masika 1998).

Second, there has been an increase in women's employment in the informal sector, where workers receive no protections from unemployment, no benefits, and wages below poverty level. Third, women's share of unpaid labor in the home has increased as public funding for health, education, and other social services has declined. Finally, as more and more land is appropriated for global production, land for cultivation and local sustenance diminishes, and environmental damage escalates. Women in the South, who depend on their environments more directly for material and cultural resources, face great survival difficulties while women in the North, particularly those living in poor neighborhoods, find their communities becoming dumping grounds for toxic and other waste generated in an economy that hardly benefits them. Women in the North and South have responded to each of these challenges in multiple ways leading to what is best called scattered resistance.

The Gendered Restructuring of Labor and Women's Resistances

Global capital has a contradictory impact on women's daily lives. Along with the selective increase in women's work there is also evidence of increasing unemployment. For example, in Ghana, 20 percent of women in the traditional trading markets lost their jobs as SAPs provided credits to large-scale trading enterprises controlled by men (Manuh 1997). Small trading markets were made obsolete by these changes. In eastern European countries, where women had high rates of labor force participation compared to the rest of the world, the picture has changed dramatically since 1989. Many of these countries have undergone the transition from a planned economy to a free-market economy. As a result, female labor force activity has declined in 10 of the 14 eastern European countries. An estimated 26 million jobs

were lost in the region from 1990 to 1995, and 14 million of those jobs were women's (Moner Project 1999).

While overt unionizing was, and still, remains difficult in the export processing zones (EPZs), feminist analyses focused on various political as well as cultural resistance of women at the local level. For example, anthropologist Aihwa Ong (1987) discusses the claims of spirit possessions, which require time-consuming rituals to free women workers and/or their machines from these spirits, as among a very resourceful resistance to increased demands and new tasks. These have led to work stoppages as well as garnering certain benefits such as breaks. Similarly, analysts of women in the maquiladoras along the U.S./Mexico border note how women workers engage in work stoppages for cultural celebrations and use religious and other traditional practices to organize workers (e.g., Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Tian 1994).

Transnational solidarity networks have also grown to post a significant challenge to SAPs and other neoliberal policies. These networks include unions, movements, NGOs of local women working in the EPZs as well as middle-class activists from the country and transnational NGOs and movements (see, for example, Mender and Navarro in this volume). Alvarez notes the increasing NGO-ization of women's movements with its attendant decline in radical critique and an increasing role in serving as experts and implementers of government and international donors' programs. Some NGOs are no more than fronts for the government, while others Alvarez calls "hybrid NGOs" maintain links with movements and try to work both within and outside the system. These NGOs simultaneously provide a critique of government agencies and actions as well as mobilize to gain resources for empowering women.

Activist networks are often supported by public consciousness-raising efforts that are mainly located in the Northern countries and whose focus is educating Northern consumers. Many NGOs include consumer education as part of their advocacy work on behalf of maquiladora workers and other low-wage workers in the "global assembly line." For example, Women Working Worldwide in the United Kingdom is an international coalition that highlights the effects of trade liberalization on women workers in Bangladesh, India, Korea, Mexico, Peru, South Korea, Thailand, and the United Kingdom through networking and public education. The Clean Clothes Campaign, based in the Netherlands, supports the struggles of women workers in garment-producing units, sweatshops, factories, and home-based industry for improved working conditions in the South and North by making the European public aware of the situation. Label Behind the Label is a similar effort based in the United Kingdom to promote the rights and working conditions of women workers in the garment industries around the world.

In addition to activist networks, many academic and policy-oriented interna-

tional groups work together with NGOs around the world to contextualize the oppressive features of global economic restructuring. Groups like DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) and the Women's Alternative Economic Summit focus on research and policy through developing regional centers in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. While the local and transnational networks focus on women in the global economy, most women find themselves in the so-called informal sector where the struggle is to assert a right to work.

Asserting a Right to Work

Over the globe, 71 percent of women work in the less visible informal sector where they prepare products for sale in the market, domestic service, and work in their homes to produce goods for subcontractors (e.g., Benería and Feldman 1992; SEWA 1998; Ward 1990). Although such work is unregulated, poorly paid, and involves long hours, it plays a crucial role in maintaining a modicum of livelihood for most poor women in a post-structural adjustment world. In fact, the World Bank and other development agencies like the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have celebrated and supported the microcredit movement, as Poster and Salime detail in their chapter in this volume. These writers emphasize how the discourse of microcredit and microenterprise prioritizes the market rather than women's economic and social empowerment.

Women have been at the forefront of detailing the relationship of their informal work and unpaid household labor to the formal economy. The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India was one of the first organizations to define the various informal activities of women, such as vegetable vending, ragpicking, and producing goods at home for sale *as work*. Established in 1972, SEWA successfully unionized informal women workers who had been prevented from organizing unions because trade union laws in India did not recognize them as workers. In addition to unionizing, women in India have formed cooperatives based on their various economic activities in order to market effectively, share resources, and form support networks. Most important, SEWA has trained community health workers and set up a SEWA university to train women not just in production and managerial skills but to be leaders and organizers who can participate in decisions that affect their lives. SEWA now has close to two million members in cities throughout India as well as in rural areas in Gujarat. SEWA has had the dual focus on "union" and "development" from the start but over time it has become more defined and elaborate. In the process of unionizing, SEWA also fosters a critical understanding about the economy and social inequalities and uses that knowledge to address these inequalities—particularly the impact of religious violence among Hindus and Muslims.

Similarly, women working in the informal economies in Tanzania, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Ecuador, Peru, and other countries have formed networks to pool resources, start savings and credit associations and form solidarities for survival (e.g., Bose and Acosta-Belén 1995; Nash and Safa 1985; Osirim 1996; Rowbotham and Mitter 1994). In addition to local networks, self-employed women, like their counterparts in the EPZs, have also formed transnational networks such as GROOTS (Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood) International, primarily to learn new ideas, share best practices, and influence local and international policy making around informal sector issues. Marina Karides's chapter demonstrates such transnational activism and unionizing efforts of another major sector of the informal economy, namely domestic work. She shows how Trinidad's National Union of Domestic Employees (NUDE) has worked for the rights of domestic workers, who are primarily women, by using the global rhetoric and international agreements signed by Trinidad to make the government accountable at home.

In the North, the informal activity is primarily concentrated among women of color, mostly immigrant women of color, who provide services that cannot be shifted to the South, such as domestic help and low-wage jobs in the food and health services. Sassen (1999) calls this the "de-valorized" sector of the economy as opposed to the valorized, information technology sector, which employs only a small, highly educated segment. White, upper-class women's increased presence in professional sectors of the North has influenced the incorporation of immigrant women of color into what Hochschild (2000) calls "global care chains," a "series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring" (131). Hochschild takes a critical modernist perspective on the global care chain, recognizing the global inequalities of resources as well as care, and does not see it as simply an inevitable part of globalization. At the same time she avoids a "primordialist stance" that mothers should care for their own children and kin and not migrate to care for others' children. She advocates not only better pay and working conditions for the immigrant caregivers but immigration policies that would allow children access to their mothers who have migrated North.

Struggling for a Better Quality of Life

Another major effect of global economic restructuring has been the increase in women's unpaid labor at home. Even before SAPs, women did 70 percent of the world's unpaid work. Now women all over the world are engaged in providing more care for children, elderly parents, and other family members, in addition to their poorly paid work either in the formal or informal sector of the economy. Women thus bear additional emotional stress arising from the "belt-tightening" demanded by economic restructuring (Kirmani and Munyakho 1996; Nzomo 1994).

As the price of goods—especially food—has increased in all parts of the world, women have become even more vulnerable to malnutrition as they eat last after providing for their children and family members. This has led women's groups in India, Zimbabwe, and other countries to demand the continuance and growth of the public distribution system, which in the case of India provides subsidized food to the urban and rural poor. Women's groups are also working with the World Food Program to ensure that women and children are able to get at least the minimum food required to sustain them. As Blank (1997), Naples (1998c), and other scholars have demonstrated, so-called welfare reforms in the United States have also disproportionately affected women-headed households.

The absence from national statistics of women's unpaid work and informal labor continues to be a concern for feminist activists. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action that arose out of the Women's World Conference in 1995 affirmed the need to count women's work in the home and remunerate women for that work, but most countries have not taken any serious steps in that direction. To highlight this noncompliance, women in Ireland called a women's strike on March 8, 1999, demanding an end to the devaluation of women's waged and unwaged labor. Since then the strike has become global as women from 64 countries observed it in 2000. It has also been taken up by the International Wages for Housework Campaign and the International Women Count Network.

In addition to such international challenges, a myriad of local challenges are addressing the "public provision" effect of SAPs. Many local and international NGOs have taken up the task of providing women with education, health services, and political empowerment. For example, programs like Mahila Samakhya in India, partly funded by the state, is a program of education for empowering women based on a process of consciousness-raising, organizing, and broadening the awareness and skills of poor rural women in order to take control of their lives. This program exists in six states in India and is run in collaboration with women's-movement groups, which oversee both the content as well as the process of educating women for empowerment (IAWS 1995).

Other women's groups have organized in urban and rural areas to provide and demand health services from the state. However, many of these services are being dismantled or privatized. Women and children are the main users of health services, and women are the primary providers of health care. If health is taken to mean, in accordance with the World Health Organization (WHO), a "state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being" then women's health has deteriorated in all respects in the contemporary era of global trade.

Starting in the early 1980s, the World Bank promoted a series of health-related initiatives to pressure Third World governments to control population growth. It recommended universal measures for reform that did not take into consideration

Third World women's economic, social, or cultural realities. These initiatives emphasized privatization of health care to be understood as introduction of user charges in state health clinics and hospitals, especially for consumer drugs and curative care (the rationale was that the rich would be made to pay, thus leaving the government free to pay for community services and public health for the poor); promotion of third-party insurance such as sickness funds and social security; promotion of hospitals, nursing homes, and clinics; and decentralization of planning, budgeting, and purchasing for government health services (Turshen 1994). Such privatization recommendations are especially problematic in countries where the people already assume a greater share of health care burden than in First World countries. In the latter, especially Scandinavian countries, governments assume more than 90 percent of health expenditure. By contrast, in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, governments contribute only about 52 to 57 percent of the total health budget.

One of the consequences of privatization of health care in Third World countries has been a cut in public health services, particularly primary care, and the increased use of nongovernmental and private voluntary organizations to deliver services (Turshen 1994). In Africa, NGOs provide between 25 and 94 percent of health services. For example, 25 percent of hospital care in Ghana is private; in Zimbabwe 94 percent of services for the elderly are private; and in Uganda and Malawi 40 percent of all health services are private. Privatization has greatly reduced government-funded primary care, thus limiting the access of poor people, particularly women, to health care. In some cases, health care is completely inaccessible to poor women. When poor women have to pay for health care from their meager earnings, they do so for their children but not for themselves (Butegwa 1998).

In the United States the linking of health care to employment has meant that women who are unemployed or work part-time have no health care. The introduction of managed care in the United States and the crisis in socialized medicine in western and northern Europe has meant a decline in the availability of health care for many women and their families. Women are expected to make up the cuts in public services by providing unpaid care at home and by buying it in the marketplace. One of the sharpest measures of women's deteriorating health can be seen in eastern European countries undergoing transition. The UNICEF-sponsored Moner Report found that in 16 of the 23 countries in the region, life expectancy has declined. In Russia, women have lost 3.2 years since 1989.

Women have responded to declining health services by developing community-based health projects, making demands on the state to be more accountable, and linking with groups in their country and around the world to influence national and international policies. In India groups like the Centre for Enquiry into Health

and Allied Themes (CEHAT, which also means "health" in several Indian languages) are at the forefront of providing services to women and of researching and providing critiques of the impact of SAPS on women's health. Studies by CEHAT reveal that the state has never committed more than 3.5 percent of its gross national product to the health sector. This small percentage has further eroded since the 1970s and reached a low of 2.6 percent in 1994–1995, at the peak of the liberalization effort. The public health expenditure's share in the national income since SAPs is less than 1 percent. Most of the health budget comes from the state and not the national government. At the individual level, the CEHAT studies found that given the paucity of public health availability, 80 percent of health care costs come out of people's own pockets.

In addition to conducting research, CEHAT has a number of activists who live in urban and rural poor communities and develop health education and primary health care projects alongside the people in the communities. Many CEHAT members are founders of the second wave of the women's movement in India. Through their effort, they have incorporated a feminist perspective into the health debates and have added a concern for health to the women's movement agenda. CEHAT's assumption is that equitable and appropriate health care can be possible only in a context of economic and social equality. Hence, CEHAT has worked with local women to form village-level women's health teams, to establish a bank run by women, and to provide training for health work.

In addition to community-based work, a national network has emerged through CEHAT's efforts. Called HealthWatch: A Network for Action and Research on Women's Health, its major objective is to increase the attention paid to women's health needs and concerns in public debates and national policy. HealthWatch has begun a dialogue with the government at various levels. For example, in 1998 it brought together activists from the western region in India to discuss a new government initiative known as a "target-free" approach to population policy. This initiative provides for a more woman-centered approach to reproduction and eliminated the quotas that local health practitioners had to meet for population control.

CEHAT is also part of international networks such as the International Network of Health and Human Rights Organizations, ISIS-International, the Women's Global Network on Reproductive Rights, and the International Women's Tribune Center. It was the mobilizing efforts initiated by such international networks that led to the presence of many women's health NGOs like CEHAT at the Cairo Population Conference in 1994. The declaration from the population conference in Cairo, which emphasized the need to empower women and protect their human rights as the best strategy of population control, was an important victory for the international women's movement.

Nurturing Nature

Whether it is the destruction of the rainforest in Latin America, the felling of trees in the Himalayan Mountains in India, desertification in Africa, or toxic dumping in the United States, the environmental desecration caused by global economic policies have led to increasing material and cultural hardships for women (Mies and Shiva 1993). For women in the Third World, **destruction of the environment means that women have to spend more time every day to gather wood for fuel, fodder for cattle, and fetch drinking water.** Many women have been at the forefront of environmental movement (e.g., Agarwal 1997; Braidotti et al. 1997; Kapla 1997; Shiva 1987; Westra and Wenz 1995). While the efforts of women in the Chipko movement in India may be familiar to many, there are numerous other women's groups in India and elsewhere that focus on the material and cultural relationships of women and nature. For example, in India, women in the *Stree Mukti Sangharsh* (Women's Liberation Struggle) were at the forefront of building an ecologically sound small dam, despite much government resistance, to address the issues of recurrent droughts in the area. In the process of building the dam women also organized to gain land rights and water rights for women and landless community members (Desai 1995). Other women's groups in India have been active in gaining fallow common land and experimenting with organic farming to produce food for local consumption.

In Latin America many of the environmental organizations focus on environmentally appropriate technologies, forming extracting reserves for the indigenous tribes' cultural and material survival, calling for the ecological use of the rainforest and more recently focusing on the issue of intellectual property and biological diversity in the region. For example, in Ecuador the *Fundacion Ecuatoriana de Tecnologia Appropriada* works on biogas, rural housing, and small hydraulic turbines. *SAEMTA* in Bolivia focuses on organic potato farming, biological pesticides, medicinal plants, and small-scale irrigation. *CENDA* in Bolivia, which is a bilingual (Spanish and Quechua) grassroots support organization, takes action in the poor isolated areas of the Andes on reforestation (Fisher 1993). In Kenya, activists in the Greenbelt focused their attention on reforestation and sustainable rural development. In the United States, women of color have been at the forefront of the environmental justice movement (e.g., Faber 1998; T. Kaplan 1997).

In all cases cited, environmental activists attempt to develop sustainable alternatives to the industrial development model that reduces food available for local consumption, destroys the local ecology, and produces toxic byproducts. The struggle against all these environmental ills has been strengthened by the emergence of transnational feminist solidarities. In some cases, the UN and its various world conferences have helped to create such solidarities and have brought them public visi-

bility; however, as Alvarez (2000) and Basu (2000a) note, such solidarities are not top-down orchestrations but have emerged from specific political and social local movement contexts.

The UN and Transnational Feminist Solidarities

International women's networks and transnational organizing date back to the middle of the nineteenth century, when women from the United States and Europe came together around antislavery efforts (Rupp 1997). At the turn of the twentieth century, women from Europe, the United States, and India joined to fight colonization. In the early part of the twentieth century, women from Europe and the United States lobbied the newly formed League of Nations and the Pan American Organization to lay the groundwork for what was to become the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. One of the major differences between earlier transnational activism and current activism is their scope and the variety of actors engaged in them.

The UN's efforts for women have evolved in four phases (UN 1997). In the first phase (1945–1962) the UN worked to secure women's legal equality. In 1946 the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) were established. In 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted and became the foundation for establishing the legal basis for equal rights for women. The early focus of CSW was a worldwide survey of laws that affected women, compiling data related to women, gathering public opinion on women's issues and organizing a forum to hear from experts and "launch a worldwide campaign to inform the public about women's issues" (UN 1991, 12). Both CSW and CHR agreed that while they would hear violations of women's rights they had no legal authority to take action. In 1952, the UN adopted the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, which became the first international instrument to recognize and protect women's political rights. During this phase the UN also worked on equality for women in work and education as well as legal equality for married women and gathered data on traditional practices and customs around the world that affected women. While there was consensus around the need to abolish practices that harmed women and children, there was little agreement on how to achieve this.

The research of the first phase documented the unequal status of women worldwide and the deteriorating status of women in the newly independent and post-colonial countries of Asia and Africa that, along with Latin American countries, had undertaken the path to development based on the liberal modernization model. These findings shifted the focus of the UN in the second phase, 1963–1975, from legal rights to the economic and social context within which

legal rights can be meaningful. The continuing poverty in the world also challenged the development efforts of the UN, resulting in its move away from the modernization approach of the 1950s and 1960s to the basic needs approach in the 1970s and then sustainable development and empowerment approach in the 1980s and the 1990s.

Troubled by women's economic and social inequalities, the UN first embarked on integrating women into development, without recognizing that perhaps it was the very process of development that was leading to some of these inequalities. The focus of UN development efforts for women in this period concentrated on their role as economic agents whose economic potential should be enhanced by providing them income-generation schemes and birth-control information. The UN efforts also initiated the emergence of the field of "women and international development," which began questioning the inadequacy of the UN's efforts and developed a critique of its role in promoting a form of development that ignored the needs of women (see Benería and Sen 1982; Boserup 1970; Elson and Pearson 1981; Tinker 1990). They began to articulate a people-centered approach to development that became a precursor to the sustainable development and globalization discourses of the late 1980s and 1990s.

During the second phase, the consolidation of the Cold War led to challenges of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from the Soviet Union that insisted that human rights should not be defined as just civil and political rights but should also include economic, social, and cultural rights. As a result, the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights was passed in 1966 to augment the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights proposed by the West. The latter covenant has often been referred to as the "first generation of rights" while the former is often called the "second generation." Historically the West has supported the enforcement of the civil and political rights, for which member states have legal obligations, while the former Soviet Union and the Third World countries have been promoters of the economic and social rights for which there is very limited enforcement. It is these latter rights that have been used in the 1990s by the transnational women's movements to forge solidarities and demand accountability from their governments (e.g., Bunch and Reilly 1994; J. Kerr 1993; Peters and Wolper 1995).

In order to enhance efforts on behalf of women's economic and social equality, the UN adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which brought together the issues of legal equality and economic development. Following this declaration, the UN made resources available to gather women's NGOs from around the world to discuss how they could collaborate to advance women's social, economic, and political rights. In 1970 the UN General Assembly passed a resolution titled "Programme of Concerted International Action

for the Advancement of Women." The resolution was targeted for all UN agencies to address the objectives of the program and make resources available for them. Given these commitments, CSW recommended that the UN declare an International Women's Year to "remind the international community that discrimination against women, entrenched in law and deeply rooted cultural beliefs, was a persistent problem in much of the world—and that governments, NGOs, and individuals needed to increase their efforts not only to promote equality between men and women, but to acknowledge women's vital role in national and international development efforts" (UN 1997, 33).

In 1975 the UN declared International Women's Year with a focus on equality, development, and peace. The last focus was added by the delegations of Greece and Guatemala, which contended that women's role in peace and disarmament should be recognized and furthered. That year was highlighted by the First Women's World Conference in Mexico City. Two thousand delegates from 133 countries (women headed 113 of these delegations) attended the conference. Around 6,000 women and men from NGOs attended the parallel International Women's Year Tribune, which had been organized following similar gatherings of NGOs at the 1972 World Conference on the Human Environment and the 1974 Bucharest Population Conference. The Mexico City's Tribune was unique in its scope and intensity. Women gathered from around the world for what was dubbed "history's largest consciousness raising session" (UN 1997). For many of the participants, the discovery of their common and divergent issues was a transformative experience. This level of engagement was possible because of the emergence of a second wave of women's movements in many countries of the North and South.

The conference adopted a World Plan of Action on the Equality of Women and their Contribution to Development and Peace, and regional follow-up meetings were held throughout Africa, Asia, and the Pacific regions. The UN subsequently declared 1975–1985 the International Women's Decade and scheduled international conferences for 1980 in Copenhagen and for 1985 in Nairobi. The International Women's Decade, the third phase of the UN's efforts for women, promoted and legitimized the already growing international women's movement and marked the beginning of the transnational feminist solidarities that have come to characterize women's agency in the global era.

In this third phase of the UN's efforts the big shift in focus was on recognizing that there could be no equality, development, or peace without women's full participation. It was during this phase that the UN committed resources for women's advancement and created institutions that were to become an important part of transnational feminist solidarities. The two main institutions were the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the main purpose of which was to conduct research and training in issues related to

women and development, and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (also known as UNIFEM), formalized in 1984, which was to fund specific projects for women around the world. Despite the institutional establishment of INSTRAW and UNIFEM, the resources committed to them were limited. For example, during the International Women's Decade UNIFEM funded only 400 projects around the world for a total cost, in U.S. dollars, of \$24 million. In addition to establishing these institutions, the UN also finally adopted in 1979 the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which had been formulated as a nonbinding declaration in 1967. However, many countries, including the United States, did not ratify it, and those that did sign it had reservations about so many issues that for all practical purposes it was meaningless.

The most enduring accomplishment of the decade was its creation of transnational solidarities. Prior to each world conference there were local, national, and regional meetings that led to the formation of many local and national grassroots groups as well as international NGOs that wanted to participate. Though the world conferences were limited to formal governmental delegations from each country, the NGO forums, which were organized parallel to each world conference, provided the opportunity for women from around the world to meet and discuss women's issues. Approximately 6,000 women met at the Mexico Tribune in 1975, 15,000 women attended the Nairobi conference in 1985, and at least 30,000 women convened in Beijing in 1995.

These world conferences and their accompanying NGO forums, however, were highly contentious occasions. For example, most Third World women's groups and governments were still influenced by the nationalist rhetoric that had informed their freedom struggles. The decolonization of most countries in Africa and Asia following World War II, together with the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, shaped the sensibilities of governments as well as women's groups. The postcolonial states were defined in opposition to the Western colonial empire. In this context, women were constituted as the bearers of tradition and posed against the modernizing influence of the colonial powers. Such self-understanding was further consolidated as Western women cast Third World women as "the oppressed other" of their more liberated self (Mohanty 1991b; G. C. Spivak 1987; Trinh 1989). Therefore, early encounters between so-called First World and Third World women were strained.

The conferences in Mexico City and Copenhagen were particularly volatile (Basu 2000; Desai 1995; Peters and Wolpert 1995). Women from India, Brazil, Palestine, and other Third World countries, based on their own anticolonial struggles and assumptions of the role of the West, challenged First World feminist claims that women were universally oppressed because of their gender and that sisterhood was global. They countered that for women in the Third World, class, nation-

nality, race/ethnicity, and religion intersected with gender in both oppressing them and providing spaces for liberation. Some of the differences among women at these world conferences also reflected the geopolitical tensions of the time. For example, two of the most heated issues were, first, whether Israel was racist in its relationship to Palestinians, and, second, the role of the West in perpetuating neo-colonial strategies.

Such critical confrontations were resolved not by the force of the better argument but by the reciprocal recognition, fueled by women's grassroots organizing around the various issues, of the validity of various claims. The breakthrough for transnational solidarities came at the Nairobi conference in 1985, which, because of its location, drew many women from Africa and Asia. The timing of the conference, at the end of the International Decade, when women from all parts of the world had a chance to interact for ten years, contributed to the recognition that women's issues vary by society and require multiple strategies of liberation. In addition, Third World women were able to show First World women their own privilege and complicity in the oppression of women in the Third World. Learning about the common goals of freedom, justice, and equality variously defined, and of apparently different women's movements around the world inspired, reflective solidarity among women who otherwise were on different sides of the East/West, North/South, left/liberal, white/black, lesbian/straight, feminist/nonfeminist divide.

The breakthrough in women's transnational solidarities at Nairobi, and later in Beijing, was also a result of other social forces playing out in their respective locales (Desai 1995). For example, in the United States and United Kingdom, women of color were challenging the white feminist understanding of the category "women" and introducing race, class, and sexuality as among the factors destabilizing "sisterhood." In the Third World countries, the postcolonial governments based on constitutional equality for women were still defining women in circumscribed roles in nation building. The rise of religious fundamentalism, which defined women as only culture bearers, further sharpened women's feminist consciousness. Such larger social forces as well as the ongoing encounters among women enabled them to create solidarities based not on preconceived identities but on historically specific circumstances of the global economy that were constraining the lives of women around the world. This mutual understanding was further consolidated in Beijing in 1995 because the collapse of the Soviet Union and the consolidation of the global economy had enabled a framing of issues in terms other than the nationalist, First World/Third World terms of earlier decades. It was at this conference that human rights discourse became the language for demanding women's rights. Thus, the third phase of the UN's efforts helped catapult transnational women's networks and brought women into the center stage of world politics. The networks established during the decade became the basis for solidarity and action in the current

phase of the UN's work, from 1986 to present. It was very clear to everyone at the end of the International Decade that despite the energy and optimism it had aroused, it had failed to achieve the goals of sustained progress for a majority of women. The 1990s posed a further challenge to women's equality as capitalist expansion and political displacement further interfered with women's social, economic, and political empowerment. In response, the UN called a series of world conferences in the 1990s that were to measure the success of its various efforts in the previous decades, particularly those efforts devoted to women's rights, human rights, population, development, and environment.

This last phase demonstrates the power of women's transnational solidarities. The World Environmental Conference in 1992 in Rio, the World Human Rights Conference in 1993, the Population Conference in Cairo in 1994, the World Summit for Social Development in 1995, and the World Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995 all capitalized on the networks women had established during the previous decades. Women's NGOs were at the forefront of these world conferences. For example, in preparation for Vienna in 1993, the Center for Women's Global Leadership, based at Rutgers University, helped to coordinate a Global Campaign for Women's Human Rights. In 1991, the center organized a leadership institute in which women from all over the world explored the relationship between human rights, women's rights, and violence against women. Women organized on both Human Rights Day and the International Day against Violence against Women to generate a petition drive calling on the World Human Rights Conference to "comprehensively address women's human rights at every level of its proceedings" and to recognize gender-based violence as a "violation of human rights requiring immediate action." The petition garnered 300,000 signatures from 50 countries and had been signed by 800 organizations when it was delivered to the world conference.

At the World Human Rights Conference, women's groups were the most organized and vocal. They held more than 60 workshops, seminars, and lectures at the forum on women's human rights. They also coined the now famous slogan "Human Rights Are Women's Rights and Women's Rights Are Human Rights" popularized by Hillary Rodham Clinton at Beijing in 1995. Similarly, the international conferences at Rio de Janeiro, Copenhagen, and Cairo were occasions for women's transnational networks to influence the agenda and policies of the UN and its member states. They also provided additional opportunities for women's groups from around the world to network and forge more strategies for action. According to Alvarez (2000), this activism embodies the "transnational IGO (Intergovernmental Organizations)-advocacy logic," which focuses on influencing policies. Since these transnational IGOs are dominated by Northern feminist nongovernmental organizations, they have a contradictory impact at the local level (Friedman 1999; Sandberg 1998). However, most women who participated at the NGO

forums of these conferences were more interested in what Alvarez (2000) has described as "international identity-solidarity logic." Women's NGOs at the world conferences adopted two different strategies (see Clark, Friedman, and Hochstetler 1998). The more prominent national and international groups tended to caucus to influence the agenda setting of the world conferences and the UN bodies, while the vast majority of the NGOs focused on sharing information and experiences and networking for collaborative action in the future.

It is this last phase of the UN's efforts for women that has helped cement the nature of women's agency in the global era. Women's networks have now taken over the review processes following the world conferences, namely the Beijing Plus 5, Copenhagen Plus 5, and Cairo Plus 5, to assess what has been achieved and to make their governments accountable for their international agreements. Women's groups have learned to negotiate the national and international arenas, as shown by many chapters in this volume (see, for example, Cichowski, Karides, Mendez, Weber, Wells, and Wing). However, as Basu (2000a) argues, transnational activism for women's political and civil rights is much more likely to succeed than similar activism for economic rights. As I have indicated earlier, this stems in great measure from the dominance of these forms of rights claims in the West as opposed to the second generation of rights.

While transnational solidarities among women have grown, they are not without problems. As Nancy Naples and others discuss in this volume, these solidarities often reproduce existing inequalities. For example, women from the North and educated women from the South are more dominant in the international networks and NGOs than are grassroots women. Of the 30,000 women present at Beijing, more than 8,000 were from the United States alone. Furthermore, as Basu (2000a) argues, transnational activism creates divisions at the national level between the elites who belong to such networks and the vast majority of grassroots women who don't.

Another problematic aspect of the transnational solidarities is the continuing reliance of women and NGOs of the South on Northern donors and funders. The Ford Foundation, in particular, has been responsible for supporting a great deal of such transnational activism (Alvarez 1999; Basu 2000a). As Weber's chapter in this book shows, however, many Northern groups are aware of this and have made attempts to make their Southern partners more independent by enabling them to look for sustainable alternatives. In addition, other Northern NGOs are actively engaged in understanding and publicizing the ways in which Northern women's consumerism implicates them in global inequalities; the Label behind the Label and the Clean Clothes Campaign are two examples of activists' efforts.

Transnational solidarities have also been accompanied by an increasing NGO-ization of the women's movements, with its attendant decline in radical critique and

an increasing role in serving as experts and implementers of government and international donors' programs. But as Alvarez (1999) shows for the women's movement in Latin America, NGO-ization is extremely complex and different in each country. Some NGOs are no more than fronts for the government; others, which Alvarez calls "hybrid" NGOs, maintain links with movements and try to work both within and outside the system. These NGOs simultaneously provide a critique as well as mobilize resources to empower women.

Alvarez (2000) has identified yet another problem with transnational solidarities, in the contradictions between the two different kinds of transnational logics: the internationalist identity-solidarity logic and the transnational IGO-advocacy logic. She sees the first logic as guided by identity, reciprocity, affinity, complementarity, and substitutionism (33), and as having very benign effects on local progressive politics. Transnational IGO advocacy, by contrast, is guided by experts with special skills shaping international gender policy. Though Alvarez acknowledges that these two logics can work in tandem, the contradictions concern her. I think that as with all binaries, this one overstates the differences and selectively highlights contradictions of one logic while understating those of the other logic.

The Prospects of Women's Agency in This Era of Globalization

Research by academics, policymakers, and various UN agencies overwhelmingly shows that women and children have suffered disproportionately as a result of global economic restructuring (e.g., Afshar and Dennis 1992; Blank 1997; Naples 1998c, Visvanathan et al. 1997). Policies associated with economic restructuring use existing patriarchal assumptions about women's labor and endurance abilities and therefore reproduce inequalities. Furthermore, women are considered only as economic agents rather than central political actors on the global stage. Globalization has reduced the ability of women around the world to find paid work that offers security and dignity. The UN's perspective is that the harm caused by the policies is short term. There is also a gendered division in the implementation policies of international institutions. The IMF and the World Bank institute structural adjustment policies while UN agencies promote legal and cultural changes that would allow women access to the new market forces. The flaw in this analysis is that it misses the gendered nature of most economic policies.

Women have organized in response to the hegemonies of global capital. Their new political presence has been defined alternately as "global civil society" (Wartman 1998) or "globalization from below" (Falk 1993). While some analysts see these scattered counterhegemonies as ineffective against the hegemonizing presence of global capital (e.g., Sklair 1991), others celebrate the new global solidarities (e.g., Brecher, Costello, and Smith 2000). As I have shown, however, the important point

is that global capital is not unchallenged. Many resistance strategies embody a radical critique not just of global capital but also of preexisting social inequalities based on race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality. Many activist women's efforts focus, to varying degrees and in various ways, on developing concrete economic alternatives based on sustainable development, social equality, and participatory processes, though such economic initiatives have not been as successful at the transnational level (Basu 2000a). These counterhegemonies have succeeded in transforming the daily lives of many women at the local level. This, in my view, is what gives women's agency immense potential. Similarly, the transnational feminist solidarities, while they reproduce existing inequalities, are forged not on preconceived identities and experiences but in the context of struggle and as such are more reflexive about these inequalities. To what extent can these fluid, multiple, reflexive transnational feminist solidarities change the shape of the global political economy? We offer this collection of case studies as an indication of the limits and possibilities of transnational feminist organizing to improve the lives of women in diverse locales around the world.