Feminisms, Empowerment and Human Rights

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INTRODUCTION

Ideologies are belief systems that people use to interpret their environment and determine their behavior. They also inform collective action and public policies. As they may be destabilizing and radical, meaning demanding major changes, they may also serve to sustain the current order. Feminism is an ideology, or a set of ideologies, that challenges patriarchal social order. Although all ideologies that oppose the subordination of women can be called Feminist, beyond this common denominator Feminisms vary in terms of what they see as the cause of women’s subordination, their alternatives to patriarchal society, and proposed strategies to achieve the desired change.

In this paper, I examine the changes in and assessments of women’s rights in the international human rights regime from a Feminist perspective, with an emphasis on their ideological underpinnings. I contend that Liberal Feminism, with its state-centric approach, legalism, emphasis on gender oppression, and seeking gender equality by opening the public sphere and male-dominant institutions to women, has been the most prevalent Feminist ideology, largely due to its consistency and confirmity both with the state-centric human rights regime and with the human rights paradigm employed by powerful states (and to a great extent by their citizens). This Liberal approach, however, is problematic, not only for privileging some women but also for relying upon certain criteria of progress and empowerment (e.g., increased female participation in the workforce), which undermine the emancipatory potential of both human rights and alternative Feminisms and ignore the harm that can be caused precisely by what is considered to be progress. In the light of the Third World Feminist demands, theory of intersectionality, and findings about the impact of neo-liberal economic policies on women’s rights and status, I suggest assessing the progress in women’s rights and empowerment by looking
beyond the commonly used aggregate data, framing women’s human rights struggle as a multidimensional power struggle, and problematizing the persistent structural causes of inequalities and human rights violations.

WOMEN’S STATUS AND RIGHTS ON GLOBAL AGENDAS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The status of women has been on the agenda of intergovernmental organizations at least since the early twentieth century, but it was the establishment of the United Nations (UN) what marked a significant turning point. The UN served as an engine of mobilization and change and addressed women’s status as an issue of discrimination and in relation to human rights since its inception. For example, the preamble of the UN Charter expresses “faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity of human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of Nations large and small” (emphasis mine). All articles that affirm the organization’s commitment to human rights include a clause specifying that the rights will be enjoyed without distinction to sex, and Article 8 asserts that the Organization “shall place no restrictions on the eligibility of men and women to participate in any capacity and under conditions of equality in its principle and subsidiary organs.”

Given these commitments and some pressure from women’s groups, the UN created the Subcommission on the Status of Women on February 16, 1946, with the mandate of submitting proposals, recommendations and reports regarding the status of women to the UN’s main human rights organ, the Commission of Human Rights (CHR), as one of its first order of business. At its first meeting, the Subcommission decided to propose the elevation of its status to that of a commission, and the adoption of that proposal led to the creation of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW or the Commission from here on) on June 21, 1946. Despite facing several constraints and occasional sidestepping, the CSW has played a key role on keeping women on the UN agenda, informing and monitoring various UN agencies and UN-affiliated organizations (e.g., the International Labour Organization, ILO), proposing and organizing conferences, drafting declarations and treaties on women’s rights, and creating other women-focused agencies within the UN.

The principles that guided the CSW, and subsequently the entire UN apparatus, were established at the Commission’s first session held in February 1947: (a) freedom and equality are essential to human development, and therefore women as human beings are entitled to share in them with men; (b) the well-being and progress of society depend on the extent to which both men and women have a definite role to play in the building of their society; and (c) women must take an active part in the fight for peace, the prevention of aggression, and the elimination of fascist ideology. We can note that these principles were articulated as the three goals of the first UN conference on women, held in Mexico in 1975 and subsequently became the three themes of the UN Decade for Women (1976-1985), in a slightly different order: Equality, Development, and Peace.

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4 The League of Nations, established in 1919, included the status of women on its agenda since the beginning, and in 1937, it established a committee to study the legal status of women. The Inter-American Commission of Women was established as early as 1928. See Galey 1995 and Miller 1994.
5 E/RES/5/5(1).
6 E/RES/2/11.
7 See Arat and Reanda (forthcoming) for a review of the history and work of the CSW.
8 See Report of the CSW, E/281/Rev.1 (1947), 11-12. It may be noted that the Subcommission, which had elaborated these guidelines, had not included the third item, which was added by the new Commission on the proposal of the USSR.
Conceived at the beginning of the Cold War, the UN’s work on women has been shaped by the Cold War rivalries and politics, as with all of its activities. Beyond the above mentioned principles, there was little agreement on priorities and strategies. Western Bloc countries were mainly concerned with promoting equal rights for women as individuals; they prioritized problems affecting women because of their sex, with particular attention to civil and political rights and cultural practices that harmed women. On the other hand, Eastern Bloc countries, which were later joined by the non-aligned (Third World) countries, consistently argued that equal rights for women would be meaningless if addressed in isolation from the “global context” – which involved issues of self-determination, independence, and national liberation, as well as peace, disarmament, and development – and the equal rights approach would concentrate on the better educated and professional women at the expense of social welfare rights of large populations of women living in rural areas, the unemployed, and those engaged in domestic service.

As evinced in the CSW debates, as well as in the content of the CSW’s work (e.g., the questionnaires issued, treaties drafted), Western states, with the support of a few Latin American and Asian countries with a similar outlook, were successful and shaped the UN’s approach and priorities in addressing women’s status during the first 20-25 years. The CSW designed a program of work geared to “the examination of existing legal and customary disabilities of women” in the legal, political, economic, social and educational fields, and requested the UN Secretariat to undertake research on the basis of a “Questionnaire on the Legal Status and Treatment of Women.”9 In addition to reviewing a range of discriminatory laws and practices in marriage, parental rights, property and inheritance rights, the penal code and system, nationality rights, etc., the Commission also considered customs and practices that were deemed harmful to women (e.g., female circumcision, polygamy, and bride-price). Though, it also raised questions about the status of women in colonial and trust territories, and working with the ILO and UNESCO, it addressed issues relating to economic and cultural rights, such as equal pay for equal work, non-discrimination in employment, and equal educational opportunities. Finally, the CSW drafted a number of treaties that are adopted by the UN General Assembly (GA): Convention on the Political Rights of Women (GA Res. 640 (VII)(1952)); Convention on the Nationality of Married Women (GA Res. 1040 (XI)(1957)); Convention and Recommendation on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Registration of Marriages (GA Res.1763B (XVII)(1962) and GA Res.2018 (XX)(1965)). However, these conventions had limited impact for a number of reasons, including their narrow focus, lack of implementation provisions, and not being widely ratified (Hevener 1983). Also following the CSW work, in1954, the GA adopted a Resolution Calling on Member States to Eliminate Customs, Ancient Laws and Practices Affecting the Human Dignity of Women.10

The process of decolonization that gained a momentum in the 1950s and 1960s increased the UN membership, along with the support for the Eastern Bloc’s conceptualization of women’s issues and human rights. A shift to so-called “Women in Development (WID)” paradigm that focused on integrating women into the development process took place in the 1960s (Jain 2005). The Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which was drafted largely with a concern over development and economic issues and enjoyed the sponsorship of state-socialist countries, was adopted in 1967. The Declaration was the first instrument to address various areas of concern; while it reaffirmed the equality norms contained in the earlier conventions, it also for the

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9 The questionnaire was reproduced in document E/CN.6/W.1 and Add.1-3.
first time addressed issues related to women’s economic and social rights, education, employment, social welfare, maternity protection, and exploitation through prostitution.  

The timing of this declaration coincided with the emergence of Feminist movements and new Feminist discourses, commonly referred to as the second-wave, that raised the issue of discrimination against women in all aspects of life, including the private domain. While radical feminists stressed the need for women to assume control over her body, reproduction, and sexuality, Socialist Feminists problematized the separation of productive and reproductive labor and drew attention to class divisions and oppression that aggravated the gender oppression of the working class and poor women. The consciousness and awareness raised by the women’s organizations led to the inclusion of women in the agendas of development agencies within the UN, other inter-governmental organizations such as the World Bank, and governmental organizations that focus on foreign aid and international development. For example, the Percy Amendment of 1973 required the inclusion of women in all projects of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID); and, in 1980, the British Commonwealth established a Women and Development program that was supported by all member countries.

In 1972, the president of the Women's International Democratic Federation, Hertta Kuusinen, a Finnish parliamentarian, along with some other NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) observers of the CSW, drafted a proposal for the Commission. The proposal, presented by the Romanian representative and seconded by the Finnish one, was accepted by the Commission, which, in turn, recommended the UN General Assembly to declare 1975 as the International Women's Year. Also in 1972, the UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, who was pressured to increase the presence of women in top positions of the UN, appointed Helvi Sipila, the Finnish representative at the Commission, to the post of Assistant Secretary-General. Following the passage of the International Women's Year resolution, the Assistant Secretary-General Sipila organized the International Forum on the Role of Women to incorporate women into the agenda of the World Population Conference in 1974 – the Conference originally had made no connection between women and population issues. Similarly, the Forum emphasized women's contribution to food production at the World Food Conference.

Upon a proposal by the Romanian delegation – a proposal that was later co-sponsored by the United States – the UN called for a women’s conference to be held in connection to the International Women’s Year in Mexico City, in 1975. What came to be known the first UN conference on women, the Mexico City conference led the GA to approve its World Plan of Action and to declare the period of 1976-1985 to be the United Nations Decade for Women. In the course of the Decade, the UN established specialized agencies to foster the programs and policies on women. Given the organization’s emphasis on development, seventeen months after the Mexico Conference, the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade for Women was established by the UN General Assembly. The Fund’s name was changed to UNIFEM in 1985. Working in association with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNIFEM “provides direct financial and technical support to low-income women in developing countries,

11 The Declaration was adopted by the General Assembly as GA Res.2263 (XXII)(1967). For CSW preparatory work, see its reports E/4025 (1965), E/4175 (1966), E/4316 (1967). The question of the exploitation of prostitution, object of a separate convention, was referred to the Commission for the first time through the reporting procedure under the Declaration.
who are striving to raise their living standards. It also funds activities that bring women into mainstream development decision-making” (UNIFEM 1990).12

As required by the Plan of Action adopted at the Mexico City conference, the CSW drafted The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Being a Soviet initiative, drafting process of the Convention was particularly difficult and involved delicate negotiations and considerable compromise. Ultimately, however, the CEDAW was adopted by the GA in 1979 and submitted for ratification at the second UN Conference on Women held in Copenhagen in 1980.13 The adoption of the CEDAW can be taken as a turning point. In addition to offering a rather comprehensive list of areas of discrimination – thus, addressing both civil-political and social-economic rights – the document can also be taken as an important effort to redress the male bias that had been inherent to the UN-led human rights regime.14 The treaty is important also for offering a comprehensive definition of discrimination (Art. 1) and asserting repeatedly that tradition and culture cannot be used as a justification of discrimination and the states parties are obliged “To take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women” (Art. 2f), and to take all appropriate measures “To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women” (Art. 5).

I stress the Convention’s emphasis on culture, because I disagree with analysts who treat the problematization of culture in all international human rights texts and discourse as a Western self-righteousness and ploy to undermine or dominate non-Western societies, the culture of which is essentialized by the West and seen as “the cause” of women’s subordination and human rights violations. Although I agree that such efforts on part of some Western states and even women’s groups have not been absent (as I will discuss later in the paper), I contend that universalism – the notion that all people hold certain rights by the virtue of being human – embedded in the International Bill of Rights and subsequent treaties inevitability involves a critique of all discriminatory, repressive and oppressive practices in all existing cultures, including the Western ones. As I wrote elsewhere, the international human rights follow a

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12 A specialized research and training institute was not achieved until 1985 when the statute of INSTRAW (The United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women) was endorsed by the GA. When the UN Women was created in 2010, UNIFEM, INSTRAW and other women specific agencies of the UN are merged into it.

13 The Convention was adopted by the General Assembly as GA Res.34/180 (1979). For an insight to the UN debates and negotiations on the “wording” of texts, see Merry 2006.

14 Gender biases have been evident since the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948). For example, many members of the Commission on Human Rights, including its chair Eleanor Roosevelt, were willing to employ the word “man” in reference the holder of the rights. It was thanks to objection of the Soviet Delegate Vladimir Koretsky and persistent efforts of two women members of the committee, Hansa Mehta from India and Minerva Bernardino form Dominican Republic, as well as the pressure from the CSW, the final draft of the UDHR mostly employed the gender-neutral terms of “human being,” “everyone,” and “person” and the Preamble included a specific reference to “the equal rights of men and women” (Glendon 2001, 68, 111-112, and 162). Moreover, despite their clearly and repeatedly stated anti-discrimination clauses, which specify that sex as a characteristic or status cannot be used as grounds for discrimination or to deny human rights, as aptly pointed out by Hilary Charlesworth (1995) and others, human rights documents issued by the UN fell short of ensuring that human rights are equally applicable to both sexes. For more on this bias, see Arat and Reanda (forthcoming) and Thornton 2010.
pattern of *reaction*; as violations are noticed, the rights violated within prevailing cultures are enumerated in declarations and treaties to bring them under protection (Arat 2006).

The CEDAW, however, has had certain limitations, which may be attributed to the pervasiveness of the Liberal Feminist Framework among the drafters, despite the fact that the Soviet delegation was its main sponsor. By requiring the States Parties to ensure that women have “the same rights [as men’s]” in certain areas, and enjoy a set of rights “on equal terms with men,” or “on a basis of equality of men and women,” the Convention employs a language that treats man as the measure, the norm. Although it recognizes certain conditions that are specific to women (e.g., pregnancy and lactating) or more likely to be experienced by women (e.g., trafficking and prostitution), it fails to address gender-based violence, reproductive rights, sexuality, and sexual freedoms. Except its specific references to rural women, it also tends to treat women as a homogenous entity.

The Liberal approach has prevailed, partially due to the UN mode of operation that tries to establish a consensus and depends on a negotiation process that results in many compromises, and Liberal Feminism, which is relatively less challenging, might have established a minimum common denominator. Liberal Feminism’s trust in state is also more in sync with the UN-led human rights regime. Feminist analyses of the state have been complex and inconclusive about its role in advancing gender equality. While Liberal Feminism treats state as neutral and as having the potential to be an ally of women and function as a tool of change, other Feminisms tend to see state as an oppressive and masculine institution, but they have not been able to devise a strategy that would not require engaging the state. The same dualistic position on state is embedded in the international human rights law and regime as well; while the state is recognized as the main [potential] violator to be monitored (and mainly by other states), it is also trusted with the responsibility of promotion and protection of human rights. This state-centric approach of the international human rights regime and its ultimate reliance of the state to protect and fulfill human rights create a milieu that is more conducive to Liberal Feminism. Finally, the prevalence of the Liberal Feminist approach can be attributed also to the fact that, except differences on some issue areas, the Feminist framework employed by the state-socialist regimes was a diluted version of Marxist Feminism, one that did not pay much attention to the reproductive labor and tended to be satisfied by bringing women to the public domain as workers and citizens. This particular interpretation of Marxist Feminism, although seeking the elimination of the private ownership of production as necessary (though could not be insisted on that in negotiating a UN treaty), had no problem in relying upon [the socialist] state to take measures necessary to “emancipate” women.

Some limitations of the CEDAW were later addressed and redressed, stating at the third UN Conference on Women, held in Nairobi in 1985, at the end of the UN Decade for women. The Nairobi conference had certain characteristics that affected the entire discourse. First, an overwhelming number of government delegations (140 out of 157) were headed by women. Second, perhaps partially due to its location and partially due to women’s activism which has been picking up all around the world, the conference was the first such event with mass participation by African and other Third World women. (Over 15,000 activists attended the parallel NGO forum, insert source???). These women brought to the fore their perspectives and critiques of development policies and called for structural transformation of societies, from the household to the global system. In other words, the tension that was building up among women groups at least since the Mexico conference surfaced during the conference preparations and in Nairobi, and the Third

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15 For more on the statism of the international human rights law and regime, see Arat 2008.
World women’s issues and Feminist perspective were articulated. Consequently, the final document of the conference, entitled *Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women*, problematized international power differentials and brought up imperialism, colonialism, neocolonialism, racism and militarism as obstacles to eliminating discrimination against women and meeting the Decade’s goals of equality, development and peace. It problematized structural economic conditions, imposition of policies by certain developed countries on developing countries, and degradation of environment, called for agrarian reform, and addressed the problems faced by “women in areas affected by arms conflict, intervention, and threats to peace” in a separate section. In addition to recognizing the diversity of women (e.g., young, elder, disabled, minority, refugee, etc.; though it failed to mention class and sexual orientation), it introduced “gender” as a tool of analysis. Violence against women, including domestic violence and rape, early marriages, prejudices against single women were problematized, and women’s need to control their own fertility was discretely addressed by requiring improvements in women’s ability to be engaged in family planning. It also defined “development” as more than economic growth and “peace” as not just absence of war. In sum, equality, development and peace were now viewed broadly and as interrelated and interdependent issues that could not be tackled separately but necessitated a comprehensive approach across all sectors of the international system and with the full participation of women as both agents and beneficiaries.16

In 1992, the CSW adopted a resolution that defined the global problem of violence against women, which was recognized for the first time as a violation of human rights.17 In 1993, it drafted *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*, which defined different forms of violence and specified the actions to be taken by States and the UN system; and the Declaration was adopted by the GA the same year.18 The Declaration can be read as recognition of the fact that women experience certain human rights violations that are unique to their gender or distinct from the way they affect men. In fact, the expert committee that oversees the implementation of the CEDAW had prepared the ground by adopting a general recommendation that considered various forms of violence, whether committed by public or private actors, as discrimination within the meaning of the Convention. Subsequent general recommendations by the CEDAW committee elaborated on gender-based violence and incorporated women’s reproductive rights into the issue areas that should be addressed in progress reports submitted by the states parties. The CEDAW committee also called on the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in June 1993, to examine the issue of women’s human rights, in particular the relationship between the provisions of various human rights instruments.19 For the first time, the CHR also condemned violence and human rights violations directed specifically against women, and decided to take initial steps to integrate the rights of women into the mechanisms within its purview.20 The message that

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17 CSW Report, E/1992/24, draft res. VII, adopted as ESC res.1992/20. It is interesting to note that violence in the family had been addressed as a social problem, and not a rights issue, in earlier documents of the Commission. Still in 1985, the *Forward-Looking Strategies* adopted by the Nairobi conference had considered violence as an “obstacle to the achievement of peace”.


20 CHR/ res. 1993/46.
“women’s rights are human rights” was heard by all governments.21 The Vienna Conference affirmed that “the human rights of women and of the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights” and declared that “full and equal participation” of women in all aspects of life and eradication of sex-based discrimination are “priority objectives” of the international community. 22 NGOs’ influence at Vienna provided an important model for successful organizing and lobbying at the other global conferences held in the 1990s and later.23 The work at the World Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994, resulted in recognition of women’s reproductive rights, though it fell short of spelling out the right to abortion due to the pressure asserted by the Vatican and a few of allied conservative states. Nevertheless, support for contraceptives and access to safe abortion has started to be expressed in various conference documents, resolutions and general recommendations, albeit in some vague and discrete language (Nowicka 2011; Sen 1995).

The fourth UN Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995 and attended by far more women’s groups and NGOs, created an opportunity to push for and expand the agenda on women by a much more diverse, active and influential transnational women’s movement. The outcome document, The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (the Declaration of the Platform from here on) set “an agenda for women’s empowerment” and called for “removing all the obstacles to women’s active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making” and stated that a “transformed partnership based on equality between women and men is a condition for people-centered sustainable development.”24 It stressed the problems of poverty, economic inequalities, and militarism; it openly criticized the negative impacts of structural adjustment policies, and mentioned the need to address the “structural causes of poverty.” Taking a strategic approach explicitly informed by a gender perspective and human rights principles, it identified 12 “critical areas of concern” that require strategic intervention but are presented as interrelated and interdependent: increasing poverty and its burden on women; inequalities in education, training and health care; violence against women; the effects of armed conflict; inequalities in economic structures and policies, in access to resources, and in the sharing of power and decision-making; insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women; lack of respect for, and inadequate promotion and protection of human rights of women and girl children; inequalities in management of natural resources and safeguarding of the environment.25 Throughout the document, the Platform aimed at identifying the relationships of inequality in each issue-area and generating recommendations for “fundamental change” that arguably went well beyond the earlier calls for “the integration of women” and linked the issues to the goals of the CEDAW.26 It employed the language of human rights but by offering a new holistic understanding of the social transformations

25 Despite the efforts of the CSW and women’s groups, some conservative groups and government delegations managed to block references to some other critical areas of concern such as women’s sexual freedoms and access to abortion, see United Nations and the Advancement of Women,59.
26 On this point see the discussion in a report of the Secretary-General on ”Implementation of the Outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women”, A/51/322. For a comparison of the Platform with the provisions of CEDAW, see Timothy and Freeman 2000.
that are needed to achieve the goals of equality, development and peace. It also called for a transformed institutional structure with clear mandates, a commitment to the norms of equality, and the necessary authority, resources and accountability, as well as the development of a policy of “gender mainstreaming” in designing, monitoring and evaluating policies and programs by all relevant actors. It is important to note that the Platform made it clear that the mainstreaming strategy would not exclude the mechanisms and instruments specifically devoted to women, but on the contrary, would require strengthening them as catalysts that would also monitor developments at all levels.

In 2000, at its Millennium Summit meeting, the UN adopted the Millennium Declaration, which highlighted the importance of equal application of human rights to men and women and implementation of the CEDAW and identified eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with specific benchmarks to be achieved by 2015 or earlier: (1) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; (2) achieve universal primary education; (3) promote gender equality and empower women; (4) reduce child mortality; (5) improve maternal health; (6) combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; (7) ensure environmental sustainability; and (8) develop a global partnership for development. At its 2009 session, following an expert meeting that examined the link between the MDGs and the Beijing Platform for Action, the CSW underlined the relevance of gender equality not only to the MDGs number 3 and 5 but to meeting all goals and concluded that the implementation of policies that address the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform of Action and gender mainstreaming can accelerate the achievement of the MDGs.

ASSESSING THE PROGRESS

The progress in women’s human rights requires assessment at different levels and done in different ways. Here, I will broadly divide them into two, as normative/theoretical and practical levels, and address some problems in each as they are revealed at the global level.

Normative/Theoretical Level

There is no doubt the progress at the normative level, especially as it has been expressed in international law, has been impressive. The account of change in the previous section speaks to both the proliferation of references to women’s rights and sophistication in the conceptualization of women’s issues, experiences and concerns. Although resistance, disagreements and confusion have not been absent, and well-meaning advocacy groups can be puzzled about how to implement and monitor “gender mainstreaming” as much as manipulative government agencies, “gender equality” has been put on the global, regional and national human rights agendas (Arat and Reanda, forthcoming).

These advancements in “standard setting” in declarations and treaties, however, have not led to improvements in the living conditions and status of women (as I will discuss later in this section), partially due to the confusion about some key concepts. For example, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which introduced and stressed the concepts of

28 A/RES/55/2.
“empowerment” and “gender mainstreaming,” failed to define either term. It was not until 1997, the Economic and Social Council of the UN (ECOSOC) acted on the CSWs “agreed conclusion” and offered a working definition of gender mainstreaming to guide action by the UN system as a whole:

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.  

Although many UN agencies, states, regional organizations, and intergovernmental organizations started to incorporate “gender mainstreaming” into their discourse and programs (Arat and Reanda, forthcoming), what it means and how it can be achieved have remained elusive. Thus, it is noted that the confusion about the meaning of “gender mainstreaming,” and in fact that of “gender,” have resulted in basically no change in policy processes beyond the rhetoric, and the diffusion not only weakened the women-focused specialized offices but also caused difficulties in monitoring and lobbying multiple agencies (Lang 2009; Prugl and Lustgarten 2006; Mieki 2005; Porter and Sweetman 2005; Gaer 2002; Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2002).

Another normative development area, which has been also impressive, is the advancements in Feminist theory in academia and beyond. Simplistic assumptions about gender oppression and treatment of women as a “natural” solidarity group with common interests have been challenged by those who stressed differences in women’s demographic characteristics such as class, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, age, etc., as well as the differences in the countries in which they live, and developed theories of multiple jeopardy and intersectionality.  

As already notated, despite the claims of “sisterhood is global” or a genuine desire to establish solidarity among women all around the world, there has been a tension among women’s groups within and across countries. The importance and primacy assigned to gender oppression over other forms of oppression (e.g., class, race, nationality) experienced by many women was the central issue raised by Third World Feminists in local and international publications, as well as at various international forums, such as the Mexico conference (1975), the 1976 Wellesley College Conference (el Saadawi, Mernisi and Vajarathon 1978), and the Nairobi Conference (1985). The Nairobi Conference can be considered an achievement for Third World Feminists for making their points on a number of issues, some of which were articulated in the outcome document of the conference: racism; diverse experience of women and resistance to homogenization; prioritization of gender oppression over other forms of oppression; questions about the legacy of colonialism and neo-colonialism, especially as felt under structural adjustment policies; the impact of global capitalism and western women’s participation in and benefiting from it at the expense of the Third World women; militarization and the gendered impact of wars and other armed conflicts on the Third World women.

30 ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions on Gender Mainstreaming (1997/2), A/52/3, Chapter 4.
31 Citations to be added: Feminist Frameworks and other readers; Naples’ article on intersectionality (ask for her permission).
Making their points and having them understood and accepted by Western feminists, however, cannot be treated as a total victory, because they resulted in an ironic or paradoxical outcome. As some premises of Third World Feminism have been embraced by Feminists in other parts of the world, the theory/ideology came to be known as Global Feminism or Transnational Feminism. While the change may be seen as a step toward global solidarity, it also constitutes a problem for transnational gender justice. Amrita Basu (2004) argues that Transnational Feminism is a new version of the 1970s “sisterhood is global” approach because both include a certain group of women who makes claims on behalf of all women.

Patronizing attitudes aside, even if “transnational” is used as a descriptive term, meaning that some concerns and demands of Third World Feminism is incorporated into an agenda shared by women across nations, it becomes problematic when “Transnational Feminism” replaces “Third World Feminism” in discourse, and no one hears about a Third World Feminist theory any more. Though perhaps unintentional, this means claiming authorship, or at least creating a certain kind of unanimity. While theorizing in the Third World has not been absent (Sen 1996; Sen and Grown 1987; Shiva ???; they are not necessarily published or published only in local vernacular (Demirdirek ???). However, while Third World Feminists – as theorists, local activists, and some as international actors – inform the world about the problems of women of the Global South, their concerns and lives are then theorized in the Global North, by others, and sometimes by scholars immigrated to the West and engaged in Postcolonial Studies (e.g., Mohanty 2003; Kaplan 1999; Shohat 1999; Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Mohanty, Russo and Torres 1991). While the term “Postcolonial Feminism” conveys the “roots” of issues and ideas more than does Transnational Feminism, as W.J.T. Mitchell (1992) aptly comments – writing more broadly on literature and literary criticism – although new and exciting literature is coming out of the postcolonial world, the literary criticism and theory, including Postcolonial theory, are still produced in the center/empire. In case of Feminist theory, we may contend that the established differentials in power and its sources (both material and cultural, including the dominance of English), create a global division of labor among women and women’s movements, as the “theorist” Anglo-European West and the “activist” Global-South/Third World. Such a separation would not only undermine the theoretical contributions of the Third World women but would also sustain an interdependency based on inequality, rather than genuine solidarity, and poses the danger of repressing local autonomy, reducing the Third World women’s ability to control their agenda, and treating their lives and struggles as objects of study.

Assessing the Progress in Practice and the Criteria Used

Assessing the progress in terms of what is happening in practice may appear to be simpler. However, the present assessments do not yield a clear picture, as most analysts point to a “mixed outcome,” where improvements coincide with stagnation and deteriorations. Nevertheless, while some tend to be critical of the direction of change and pessimist, others

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32 It is important to point out that while “global” and “transnational” terms are often used interchangeably, many analysts separate Global and Transnational Feminisms, considering the former as casting the old Liberal Feminism in a different light and the latter as a more inclusive theory that includes the voice of the Third World women. Though, critical analysts see claims made under either as homogenizing and repressive (e.g., Choudhury 2010 and forthcoming). Recognizing the hegemonic tendencies, some others propose giving more voice to the non-Western women and equalizing the terrain of discourse. See Zwingel 2012; Reilly 2011; Brenner 2003.

33 It is also noted that since the bulk of the Postcolonial Theory is coming out of the metropolitan centers, the Postcolonial Studies, as a field, creates unequal economic and cultural relations by “adding value” to the literary “raw material” imported from the post-colonial societies (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995, 2).
accentuate the positive. There is a body of literature that point to the increasing use of quotas and consequent increase in women’s representation in parliaments, increase in women’s participation in non-agricultural work, the reduction in global poverty levels (as measured by the World Bank) within the last couple of decades until the global recession emerged in 2008, and the wide use of microcredit programs that support microenterprises owned by women. These are viewed as improvements in women’s living conditions, opportunities that help close the gender gap, and tools or evidence of women’s empowerment (Howard-Hassmann 2011a and 2011b, add other sources ??). Others, on the other hand, emphasize the persistence of some problems (e.g., violence against women), increase in inequalities, child labor, trafficking of girls and women, sweatshops, fundamentalism of sorts, militarism, armed conflicts (Peterson and Runyan 2010; Bales 2004; Razavi 2001; Sadasivam 1997; Vickers 1991; add ???), and the lack or ineffective implementation of progressive laws. Some Feminist analysts see the emergence of the second-wave Feminism and global women’s movement coinciding with the rise of neoliberalism as a misfortune and an obstacle to the fulfillment of the transformative promise of the movement, and note that “the rise of neoliberalism dramatically changed the terrain on which the second wave Feminism has operated” (Fraser 2009, 108), and the transformative feminist agenda was blended into identity politics.

Although optimism tends to be more common in intergovernmental organizations, they also often complain about the slow pace of change. On meeting the MDGs, for example, the CSW report of 2009 notes the lack of progress, and a fact sheet issued in September 2010 by the UN Department of Public Information indicates that the progress on all three indicators of gender equality and women’s empowerment – (1) male-female enrollment ratios in primary, secondary and tertiary education, (2) women’s share in non-agricultural wage employment, and (3) percentage of seats held by women in national parliament – has been very small, making the goals unachievable by the targeted 2015 date. The same observations are made, albeit with less emphasis on missing the benchmarks, in The Millennium Development Goals Report 2011. 

I think what is more problematic than the slow pace of change as reflected by these indicators is the indicators themselves. Limited to aggregate measures of women’s access and integration, our current assessment of progress reveals a tacit subscription to Liberal Feminism, which prioritizes gender oppression and seeks integration of women. But what are the stories

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34 Despite the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, for example, transitional justice and reparation procedures continue to be male-centered, inadequate and insensitive to the violations experienced by women (Rubio-Marin 2006).

35 EGM/BPFA-MDG/2009/REPORT. http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/impact_bdpfa/EGM%20Report_BPFA-MDG_FINAL.pdf. (Accessed November 8, 2012). The data on poverty reduction are not necessarily positive or interpreted as progress. It is noted that the size of population living in poverty follows an upward trend when China is excluded (Razavi 2001, Table 1). More recent reporting from the World Bank notes that the global poverty rate has been declining during the 1981-2005 period but the progress has been neither even nor stable: “...the number of poor people living in Sub-Saharan Africa almost doubled and its share of the world’s poor increased from 11 percent to 27 percent” and “Rising food prices have driven an estimated 44 million people into poverty in developing countries between June and December 2010” (World Bank 2010). Women continue to constitute a much larger portion of the poor (Razavi 2001) and of the increasing number of people employed in non-standard work (ILO 2008, 118).


38 As I use Liberal Feminism broadly here, I do not mean to imply that the ideology has been static. In fact, as all belief systems. Liberal Feminism has been adjusting to changing circumstances. As women enter male dominant
behind these aggregate figures? Are we making progress in fulfilling all women’s human rights or those of some already privileged ones at the expense of others? Are there any casualties of progress?

For example, the right to work is a human right, and those who are prevented from seeking work or unemployed are denied this right. Thus, would a decline in unemployment statistics or increase in workforce indicate getting closer to realizing the right to work? Do women who join the workforce enjoy this right and feel empowered? The answers to these questions would depend on what is behind those numbers, which would raise another set of questions: What kind of jobs are they getting? Do they settle for part-time jobs or full-time jobs with meager wages, unhealthy work conditions, and no benefits? Are they paid livable wages? When a woman enters the labor market, does she do so willingly or is she forced into it? Even if it is her decision, is it a voluntary step toward fulfilling her capacity, or because her family needs the additional income, she has to compensate for the income loss caused by the unemployment of her husband, and/or she needs to make up for the reduced subsidies or privatized social services? Is anyone assuming her reproductive responsibilities at home, or is she on a double/triple shift and simply overburdened? Is her right to work fulfilled, or is the right to rest and leisure violated?

Increases in women’s economic participation rates, however, are typically treated as progress not only for signing women’s penetration into the male/public domain (integration) and fulfilling her right to work, but also for empowering women. Gainful employment, income, and social network, which is likely to be broaden due to work outside home, are treated as markers of women’s autonomy and empowerment. Indeed, the theoretical propositions and some empirical studies establish positive relationships among different dimensions or forms of power. Hence, a woman’s increased access to income (financial power) or getting out of the domestic sphere and interacting with others (social power) may enhance her decision-making power. However, the terms under which she enters the work force may curtail the gains on each power dimension. Thus, the issue of autonomy raises further questions: Is the earned income controlled by women? Is she freer or subject to more control due to the stigma attached to working outside home? Are there additional hardships (e.g., sexual harassment), elements of stress, and various forms of violence?

The assumed empowering effect of women’s participation in the workforce lacks empirical support, since survey data fail to provide consistent evidence. While some studies find that educated and working women are more likely to leave an abusive relationship or have a say in matters regarding their children and other family affairs (add sources??/), other studies note that women (especially those from working class, rural or low income families) tend to hand in their earning to their fathers/husbands, use their income to support their husband’s education or business, and would prefer to stay home and be “the mistress of their house,” if their husbands’ income were sufficient to support the family (Tekeli ??; add sources). A union organizer in the United States notes that many working-women whom she tried to recruit as

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institutions and integrated into the economic life and become more visible in the public domain, they encounter new problems and forms of discrimination. Thus, acknowledging these “new” issues, Liberal Feminism has been adjusting and expanding its demands to encompass equal pay for comparable work, elimination of occupational segregation, preventing sexual harassment at work, etc.

39 For brief references to women’s control over their income and decision-making within family, see The World’s Women 2010, Chapter 8.
union members would say “I need to ask my husband first,” while no man ever felt the urge to check with his wife before signing a union card (Vargas-Cooper 2011).

In fact, if employment and earning income were to empower women, shouldn’t lower class women who have been working for generations due to the economic need be considered empowered and ranked as more powerful than upper class women who have “stayed home” and lacked “independent income”? Yet, even if the omnipresence of power related to class is not acknowledged, upper class Liberal Feminists sensing their power and the hardship of women of poor classes and countries have been trying to emancipate their less fortunate sisters (though according to their ideological framework).40 Again, it is the same unspoken, yet subliminally present, awareness of power differentials what leads to the treatment of an educated upper/middle-class woman’s decision to leave her professional career to take care of her children as an autonomous choice but viewing poor women who are staying home and taking care of their children as oppressed and need to be empowered by entering the market.

What appears to be progress or empowering may also have some dire consequences. For example, some survey studies on the social impact of access to microcredit, which has enabled many poor women to become successful microenterprise owners, reveal increase in domestic violence (Ahmed 2008).

In addition to what lies behind the commonly used indicators of progress, the evenness of progress should be a part of the assessment process. Liberal Feminism and human rights advocacy that focuses mainly on anti-discrimination tend to devote attention to the extent to which policies and institutions discriminate against particular segments of society, in this case women. The effort is geared toward eliminating discrimination in recruitment, promotion, etc., and making institutions more inclusive. The adverse function and hierarchical structures of institutions are not questioned. But the “integrative” progress that does not touch structural obstacles to equality can benefit only some and continue sustaining human rights violations of others. I have tried to address these less ostensible implications of what we tend to see as progress elsewhere, and a quotation would help illustrating the point:

According to a certain feminist approach, we can interpret women’s ability to penetrate into some androcentric institutions and increase women’s representation in these institutions as a favorable development, as an indicator of progress. For example, women’s recruitment to the military in the United States of America and their participation in combat can be viewed as an achievement of the women’s movement. But, for a woman living in Iraq or Afghanistan, would it matter that the bombs falling on her head, destroying her home, and killing her children are dropped by a plane steered by a female pilot, instead of a male one? Or, most of us desire women to break the glass ceiling and reach top management, to positions where important decisions are made. But, for a woman – let’s say in Mexico – who leaves her younger children to the care of her slightly older 12 year-old daughter and sweats at a job for fourteen hours a day to earn hardly livable wages, is it important that the company for which she works is run by a woman? (Arat 2010, 25, translated for this essay).

While these “integration” examples indirectly address the issue of representation, increases in political representation of women as measured by the share of women’s seats in public office – where decision-making power is exercised – pose more direct questions about its

40 See Başcı (1998) on how the 19th century American missionary women used their “recent liberation” and to define the problems of their Ottoman sisters and emancipate them.
meaning for women at large. Does “descriptive” representation result in “substantive representation” of women’s interests and formulating policies that address women’s issues? (insert source???) What are women’s interests and issues?41 The latter question, in particular, takes us to the importance of acknowledging the diversity of women, different stand points held by women, and different Feminist analyses.

DEFINING EMPOWERMENT AND SOURCES OF POWER

Empowerment is repeatedly mentioned in The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action but without a clear definition. A wording that comes close to a definition is offered in paragraph 12 of the Declaration, which reaffirms member states commitment to “The empowerment and advancement of women, including the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, thus contributing to the moral, ethical, spiritual and intellectual needs of women and men, individually or in community with others and thereby guaranteeing them the possibility of realising their full potential in society and shaping their lives in accordance with their own aspirations” (emphasis mine). The Millennium Summit Declaration, which sets gender equality and women’s empowerment as a goal, fails to provide a definition, and this omission continues in subsequent “assessment” reports and fact sheets on the MDGs. The World Bank, which also subscribes to gender mainstreaming and the goal of women’s empowerment, offers a definition of empowerment mainly in relation to poverty reduction that became one of its primary goals in the 1960s. Its 2002 sourcebook on “Empowerment and Poverty Reduction” states that “Empowerment refers broadly to the expansion of freedom of choice and action”; and noting that poor people’s “freedom is severely curtailed by their voicelessness and powerlessness in relation particularly to the state and markets,” and “powerlessness is embedded in the nature of institutional relations,” it “adopts an institutional definition of empowerment in the context of poverty reduction” (World Bank 2002, v, emphasis mine), as follows: “Empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives” (World Bank 2002, vi). Then, it specifies the institutional barriers that should be targeted:

Empowering poor men and women requires the removal of formal and informal institutional barriers that prevent them from taking action to improve their wellbeing—individually or collectively—and limit their choices. The key formal institutions include the state, markets, civil society, and international agencies; informal institutions include norms of social exclusion, exploitative relations, and corruption (World Bank 2002, vi).

Although it does not elaborate on the hierarchal character of these institutions and their structural foundations, this multidimensional approach that recognizes flows in markets and the state and society could mean endorsing substantial and transformative reforms. However, the indicators employed by the Bank to assess women’s empowerment are not much different than those of the UN’s. In addition to sex ratios in school enrolments, women’s share of non-

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41 The purpose of some inclusive or women friendly policies should be examined carefully as well. As access to birth control devices and abortion is often supported or extended by states for purposes other than empowering women, the recent inclusiveness of the military (opening it up to women and gays) in some countries may stem from a desire to increasing the pool of recruits in a militarized world, rather than allowing for equal opportunity to the traditionally excluded groups. (add source??)
agricultural work force, and percentage of seats in parliament held by women, the World Bank includes contraceptive prevalence rate, adolescent fertility rate, proportion of females among professionals and technical workers, ratio of female to male labor force participation rate, number of weeks of maternity leave, and maternal leave benefits as percentage of wages in covered period.\(^{42}\)

All of these indicators employed to measure empowerment actually use power and sources of power interchangeably. Power can be defined as the ability to influence the behavior of others. Empowerment of a person would, then, mean acquiring this ability, but first in the form of ability to assert control over her own body and life. Sources of power would be many, including economic, political, physical (both muscles and arms), institutional, traditional/customary, psychological, collective/organizational, knowledge/experience, formal education, physical/erotic attractiveness, etc. These sources may not only overlap but also reinforce each other.

People have access to all of these sources in various degrees. While some sources may be finite or near finite (e.g., money, seats in parliament) others may be acquired by one without necessarily by subtracting it from others (e.g., knowledge). In interpersonal and social relations, however, power is a zero-sum-game. If I am empowered, some of those people who used to have power over me would have less of it. However, having power does not necessarily mean that one would use it. In addition to voluntary delegation of power, one may choose not to use the power she has at a given time with the fear of triggering some action by other parties, who may activate their power, and causing an undesirable change, a situation that is less tolerable from her perspective. The eternal question about batter women who are stuck in an abusive relationship, “Why can’t she leave him,” can serve as an example of the disempowering quality of fear.

In other words, while an opposite of empowerment may be subordination, another one should be fear. It is the ability to overcome fear what Gandhi alluded to when he described non-violent resistance as a strategy of the strong, not the weak as it has been commonly understood and depicted.

While access to sources of power may result in one’s empowerment, the complexity of social interactions, which involve power relations, and value systems, which enforce power structures, confound the relationship between power sources and empowerment and make the conversion of a particular source into a tool of influence or autonomy less than automatic.\(^{43}\) Our tendency to assume an automatic relationship, however, leads to measuring women’s empowerment by their access to some sources of power, instead of seeing the cumulative effect of sources and their meaning in social relations. We first make assumptions about the impact of access at the individual level and then measure the progress in aggregates – we look for closing gaps in school enrolments, increases in percent of parliament seats occupied by women, or the number of women who become “economically active” by taking jobs outside home. In this


\(^{43}\) Perhaps it is necessary to note that in societies that went through Marxist revolutions, the elimination of the private ownership of the means of production did not “automatically” lead to the empowerment of the proletariat and a classes society but to the emergence of “a new class” of partisan bureaucrats that controlled the production, as well as the lives of people (Djilas 1990).
process of generalizing from certain experiences and then inferring from the general to the particular, we commit a series of fallacies.

If we imagine the gender gap in access to power sources as analogical to an old fashion measuring scale, the closing of the gender gap in case of a finite source (e.g., number of seats in parliament) would look like as illustrated in Figure 1. As the number of women in parliament increases, the share of the seats held by men would decline, and the equilibrium would be established at 50 percent for each sex.

![Figure 1. Balancing access to a finite power source (redistributive).](image)

In case of an infinite or relatively more expandable source (e.g. school enrollments), the goal and equality may not necessarily require reducing the share of males but increasing the opportunities for females. (Resources needed for creating these opportunities are likely to be limited and thus expansion of opportunities for one group may require a reduction for the other, thus create an opportunity cost for the already advanced group.) In this case, improvement for females would be the elevation of the base of the scale (see Figure 2).

![Figure 2. Balancing access to a finite power source (redistributive).](image)

However, any distribution or redistribution within existing structures, without removing hierarchies and addressing a range of inequalities, may result in sex balance, but a kind of
equality achieved by creating a different equilibrium for each stratum (Figure 3). In other words, theoretically speaking, gender equality would be achieved at the aggregate level, but without empowering or emancipating some women.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND FEMINISM FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

The post-World War II notion of human rights, as articulated in the International Bill of Rights – consisted of three documents, (1) the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR, 1948), (2) *the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR, 1966), and (3) the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966) – is significantly different from what is promoted in earlier “liberal,” “natural right,” or “social contract” philosophies and documents that centered on men, focused on property rights, and served the already privileged (e.g., *Magna Carta*, and the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*). In addition to including a broader scope of rights, the International Bill of Rights is stronger and more explicit on universalist and egalitarian principles. Human rights belong to all, regardless of “race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status” (e.g., UDHR, Art. 2; ICESCR Art. 2(2); ICCPR Art. 2(1)). Moreover, as spelled out in the preamble and the first Article of the UDHR, human rights are put under protection because “human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (UDHR, Article 1, emphasis added).

The emphasis on *equality in dignity*, in a world of unequals, also calls for the conceptualization of all rights as positive rights, rather than negative rights. Conceptualized as negative rights – which can be translated as “let them be, let them enjoy what they have” – would protect the privileged. But promoting human rights for all to enjoy regardless of their status would mean removing obstacles and taking positive action, which may need to be redistributive. It is an approach that brings those who are currently lacking rights to the forefront as the primary subjects of rights. What makes human rights appealing to the disadvantaged, which include both men and women, is precisely this trust in equality in dignity and its promise to have an equalizing impact on the enjoyment of human rights. If we consider the universalism of human rights as being about the dispersion of power, then the fulfillment of human rights for all would require a number of steps:

- acknowledging power differentials;
identifying the structural foundations of power differentials;
creating redistributive mechanisms that would disperse power on all dimensions of power – economic, political, and social; and
transforming or replacing hierarchical structures. 44

Intervening to change the structural causes of violations is, of course, more difficult than dealing with the symptoms and providing some relief. The difficulty involved makes human rights advocates (including Feminists) seek “the art of the possible.” Kenneth Roth, Director of Human Rights Watch, has been pretty frank about this. Facing criticisms about Human Rights Watch’s choice of focusing on civil and political rights, he defends the organization’s approach for being cost effective and notes that the strategy of shaming governments would not work in the case of economic and social rights violations, where the responsibility is likely to be diffused and the remedy is costly. In order “to embarrass a government to change its strategy,” he says, “clarity is needed about three issues: violation, violator, and remedy. That is, we must be able to show persuasively that a particular state’s affairs amounts to a violation of human rights standards, that a particular violator is principally or significantly responsible, and that there is a widely accepted remedy for the violation” (Roth 2007, 173).

The pitfall in this approach is focusing on the agency (the violators) and “acceptable” remedies. Limiting action to the easier and relatively palatable course of action poses the danger of being stuck in a system that allows redressing some violations but continues to reproduce the conditions that would permit, if not encourage, violations. Since each human rights violation is one too many, we cannot give up on short-term “individual” or “partial” improvements, but I contend that they should be carried out with an eye on the larger prize.

Establishing equality in dignity and enjoyment of human rights by all human beings is a revolutionary idea that does not necessarily call for a revolution but demands a revolutionary approach that would look at the root causes of violations and remove oppressive and hierarchical structures. That means politicizing human rights advocacy, with attention to power relations and needs of the most destitute, and developing a progressive program of political action. In academia, our research needs to be “scientific” beyond the methodologies employed. It should search for the structural causes of violations, or potential violations, and identify the effective mechanisms and strategies that would transform social relations and societies. I think Third World Feminism and theories of intersectionality have already paved the way.

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