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Gender Politics

Personal politics

Four years ago Pam Benton, whose partner I had been for twenty-nine years, died of breast cancer. Breast cancer is almost entirely a women's disease. The medical specialists who treat it, however, are mostly men – as medical specialists mostly are in Australia. And they, naturally enough, have many of the attitudes and styles of interaction that men in the professions are likely to have.

Early in the treatment, Pam was referred to a prominent oncologist. Oncology is specialization in cancer, especially in its treatment through chemotherapy, the use of toxic drugs. This gentleman delivered himself of the opinion that if women would use their breasts for what they were intended for, they would not have so much trouble. Pam was furious, and did not consult him again.

There is, as the oncologist well knew, research evidence that rates of breast cancer are lower in women who have had babies early in life and have breast-fed. That is, so to speak, impersonal fact. (Though even with impersonal fact one may ask why researchers should have been concerned with that particular question rather than studying, say, cancer-causing chemicals in the environment.) The research finding was made into a gender insult – which the oncologist probably did not even realize was offensive – by his bland presumption that what women are 'for' is bearing babies. To him, if they had a different pattern of life, they were asking for what they got.

I tell this story not to attack doctors – I could tell of another senior medical man involved in Pam's treatment who was a model of thoughtfulness and care – but to emphasize how intimate and unavoidable gender politics is.

When the Women's Liberation movement said 'the personal is political', they were making this point. There is a gender politics in our most intimate relationships and decisions. Some issues about power and inequality are mundane, such as who does the dishes, who puts out the garbage and who writes the shopping list. Some are life-and-death, such as how childbirth and cancer treatment are done. Pam had been an activist in the women's movement over twenty years. We had been through the politics of dishwashing, among other things. She could see the gender politics in cancer medicine, and was not willing to be put down again.

The first tumour, which Pam discovered through routine screening, was so advanced that it required a mastectomy, surgical removal of the whole breast. This is a frightening (though not in itself life-threatening) operation which leaves a long scar where the breast had been. Recovering from the operation, Pam made contact with the support services available to mastectomy patients. It turned out that the main services provided were: provision of an artificial breast, individually tailored to replace the one that was lost; women coming to give grooming and dress advice so that the patient could present a normal, attractive feminine appearance to the world; and advice on how to restore family normality, overcome a husband's (expected) sexual disgust at a mutilated body, and deal with children's anxiety about their mother's being taken away from them.

This, too, is political. It is about placing women back in the culture of heterosexual femininity. It is about denying that normality has been rent, about women being held responsible for other people's emotional needs. And – not least – it is about restoring normal services to men.

But this politics operates at so deep a level of emotion that it is hardly perceptible as politics unless one is already aware of gender issues. Many women dedicate their lives to making a family and seeing it through the life-cycle. A sense of being desirable, of having an attractive or at least presentable body, is an important part of our culture's construction of womanhood. Women who are shocked by a major operation, and terrified by discovering they have a deadly disease, are unlikely to revolt against sexist stereotyping (though that is precisely what this 'service' involves), especially when it is presented to them as a form of care by other women.

Gender politics almost always has this dimension of intimacy, as well as involving larger social relations. That is one reason gender change can be so threatening, to many women as well as to many men. Impending changes can upset not only impersonal cultural or institutional arrangements. They also, at the same time and inseparably, upset people's cherished images of themselves, assumptions about personal relationships, and habits of everyday conduct.

Each year there is a women's march through central Sydney for International Women's Day. On one occasion, about fifteen years ago, Pam came home from the march quite shaken. I was in the kitchen when she came in, and she told me the story. A man, evidently hostile to the demonstration, had driven his car into the parade. The women managed to get out of the way, no one was injured – though that was luck. Someone could have been injured or even killed.

We talked about it over coffee. I cannot remember exactly how the conversation developed, though we must have soon found ourselves in conflict about the meaning of the event. What I remember all too clearly is that our disagreement kept escalating, until it blew up into one of the most troubling arguments we ever had.

To Pam this was not an isolated incident. It was part of a massive pattern of threat from men under which women live. She said 'They're trying to run us off the streets', and that was of course literally true in this case. Being a man, I had never been targeted this way. I hadn't been there, and Pam rightly argued that I had no business denying her interpretation of what she had seen. Women's lives had been threatened, and I seemed to her to be excusing the man who had done it.

For my part, I felt unjustly attacked, or attacked out of proportion to the issue. I wasn't denying that aggression had occurred. But I very much wanted *not* to reinforce Pam's sense of foreboding and fear, her sense of being always under threat of terrorism from men. Therefore I found myself trying to minimize the significance of what she had seen. I'm sure I also felt shaken, given a long commitment to feminist principles, to be lumped together in this argument with a sexist aggressor, or with all men as agents of patriarchy. Both of us went away shocked by the other's incomprehension and anger.

Pam was of course right in her main point. Women in Western urban society do live constantly under threat from men – threats that range from sexual harassment in the office and offensive remarks in the street, all the way to rape, domestic violence, and war. Being threatened is not an isolated or deviant experience. Very large numbers of women really have been jeered at, intimidated, bashed, raped, or pressured into sex.

But it wasn't just the knowledge of these broad facts that made our argument so emotional and difficult. It was Pam's experience of this specific piece of intimidation, my not sharing the experience, and my failure – because I have had few experiences of being intimidated – to grasp its meaning imaginatively. She had come home frightened and disturbed, and I had not given her the support she wanted.

But the personal level of politics is not only a source of difficulty and division. It can also be a basis of solidarity and a source of energy and strength. The International Women's Day march from which Pam had returned is a case in point. These marches are generally occasions of joy and exhilaration. The personal connections made among the women present aren't just an incidental bonus. They are part of the solidarity of women, the process of creating strength, that is the point of the march.

Pam wrote a short story about an IWD march (Benton 1984). This gives the thoughts of a faint-hearted feminist on the bus going to the demonstration, hearing that the bus is being diverted on account of a 'procession of ladies':

What I want are some good songs. Usually I just have a long talk to someone I haven't seen for ages.

Some years there have been good slogans though. Adelaide, 1976: 'Purge the internal patriarch'. All the way down Rundle Mall, along North Terrace past the Adelaide Club, back to Victoria Square.

Silence behind me.

In front, and on both sides, the grumbles:

'Why can't they wait til the shops shut and not interfere with other people?'

'What did he say it was about?' 'Oh some march. That anti-union mob.' . . .

SHIT. HAVE TO DO SOMETHING.

I rehearse: standing, walking to the front, turning, facing the hostility: 'It's not a *ladies'* procession. It's International Women's Day. You should be with us. We're marching to celebrate . . .'

Christ, what *is* it?

Suppose the media are doing 'why are you here?' interviews? Garment workers, first women's strike, equal pay, match girls . . . ?

I get off one block earlier than necessary.

I'm no good at public speeches.

Anyway, they were handing out song sheets to the marchers.

The politics of Gay Liberation similarly combined the personal and the structural. Collective actions in the public domain produced similar feelings of exhilaration and common purpose. Gay politics, however, involved another dimension as well, the process of 'coming out'. Acknowledging gayness to oneself, one's family, one's friends and workmates, can be a difficult and protracted business. Large adjustments and realignments have to be made. The collective process of establishing a gay community, a gay identity in the culture, and a gay presence in politics and economic life, both depends on the individual process and supports it.

A decade after the emergence of Gay Liberation, at a time when the effervescent radicalism of the first years had been tamed, or absorbed into the business of building gay communities, gay politics was transformed by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In the struggle to deal with AIDS, the link between the personal and the structural was reconfigured around new issues in body politics. The response has been vividly described by Dennis Altman in *Power and Community: Organizational and Cultural Responses to AIDS* (1994).

On the one hand a whole new set of relationships, between gay communities and individuals and health authorities and doctors, had to be negotiated. On the other hand, a hostile symbolic politics about infection, pollution and uncleanness, whipped up by the homophobic religious right and tabloid media, had to be dealt with. Both jobs had to be done in a context of illness, bereavement and fear. The fact that gay communities have survived this terrible crisis is an impressive testimony to the culture and solidarity created in the collective coming out of the 1970s.

Gender politics may occur, and generate some of this energy, without a gender- or sexuality-based movement. Nancy Naples, in *Community Activism and Feminist Politics* (1998), has recently collected American examples of women's activism, especially in working-class communities. The range of issues is impressive: schools, toxic waste, poverty, domestic violence, racism, housing, support of strike action, ethnic community needs. The bases of this activism often lie in women's position in the gender division of labour, for instance issues that arise in childcare, or feeding a family, or sustaining health. The gendered networks that develop through women's work can provide the framework of political mobilization.

Some of the same energy can also be found in anti-feminist politics. The gun lobby provides an example. The cultural masculinization of

weapons is a fact of culture, not nature, which must be constantly regenerated. A fascinating and frightening study by William Gibson, *Warrior Dreams* (1994), shows some of the mechanisms. Gibson traces the cult of weapons in the hypermasculine 'paramilitary culture' in the United States, which grew after the US defeat in Vietnam. Local bases such as gun clubs and recreational hunting have been worked up, by entrepreneurs and activists, into training camps, militias and sometimes armed sects, as well as the broader 'gun lobby' represented by the National Rifle Association.

These groups exist in a larger context: the arms manufacturing industry (which funds some of their activities), the military, and the intersection of the two that President Eisenhower called 'the military-industrial complex'. Arms dealing ranges from government-to-government sales of extremely expensive airborne weapons systems to the private circulation of handguns, shotguns and hunting rifles in countries whose governments permit arms sales, or cannot prevent them. The largest part of the arms trade is the legal equipping of military and paramilitary forces.

The weapons come wrapped in social forms, and the organizations involved have gender regimes. Military forces are patriarchal institutions. Fascinating research has been done by Frank Barrett (1996) on gender patterns in US naval officer training. He documents an oppressive but efficient regime – emphasizing competition, physical hardness, conformity, and a sense of elite membership – designed to produce a narrowly defined hegemonic masculinity, and therefore creating serious problems for women trainees. The statements by officers who have gone through it show that such a training regime penetrates to basic feelings about the self. The training works by linking the sense of personal worth to the needs of an organization that specializes in violence. Similar patterns have been found in research on military masculinities in Germany (Seifert 1993) and other countries. It is clear that this construction of masculinity is a widespread feature of military life.

By disseminating this organizational culture, the arms trade is a vector of the globalization of gender, much as the international state is (see chapter 6). Indeed, the two overlap, since the arms trade is connected to the globally linked military and intelligence apparatuses of the major powers. In a world perspective, the modest gains of women's representation in bureaucracies and parliaments at a national level may well be outweighed by the growth of the machinery of masculine violence at an international level.

The patriarchal dividend and gender harm

What is political about gender? In one of the foundation texts of Women's Liberation, *Sexual Politics* (1972: 23), Kate Millett defined 'politics' as 'power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another'. What made her argument scandalous was that she applied this definition to the relation between women and men.

The relation of power is only one of the inequalities described by Millett, and by the hundreds of researchers who have filled in the details since she wrote. Systematic inequalities exist in a range of resources, from income and wealth to social honour and cultural authority (see chapter 4). Inequalities define interests. Those benefiting from inequalities have an interest in defending them. Those who bear the costs have an interest in ending them.

Gender inequalities are usually expressed in terms of women's lack of resources relative to men's. For instance, in chapter 1 above I cited statistics that show women's average incomes, world-wide, as 56 per cent of men's. While this way of presenting information makes sense in establishing a case for reform, it continues the bad old habit of defining women by their relation to men. We should also turn the equation around and consider the surplus of resources made available to men. The same figures, read this way, show men's average incomes, world-wide, as 179 per cent of women's.

I call this surplus the *patriarchal dividend*: the advantage to men as a group from maintaining an unequal gender order. The patriarchal dividend is reduced as overall gender equality grows. Monetary benefits are not the only kind of benefit. Others are authority, respect, service, safety, housing, access to institutional power, and control over one's own life.

It is important to note that the patriarchal dividend is the benefit to men *as a group*. Individual men may get more of it than others, or less, or none, depending on their location in the social order. A wealthy businessman draws large dividends from the gendered accumulation process in advanced capitalism; an unemployed working-class man may draw no economic benefits at all. Specific groups of men may be excluded collectively from parts of the patriarchal dividend. Thus gay men, broadly speaking, are excluded from the authority and respect attached to men who embody hegemonic forms of masculinity.

Some women also participate in the patriarchal dividend, generally by being married to wealthy men. Such women get dividends from the

gendered accumulation process (e.g. live on a profit stream generated by women's underpaid and unpaid labour), and are able to benefit directly from other women doing the domestic labour in their households. This became a political scandal in the United States in 1993, when the Clinton administration attempted to appoint several bourgeois women to senior positions, only to find they had failed to pay taxes on their immigrant women houseworkers.

The patriarchal dividend is the main stake in contemporary gender politics. Its scale makes patriarchy worth defending. Those sex-role reformers in the 1970s who attempted to persuade men that Women's Liberation was good for them, and therefore tried to start a parallel Men's Liberation movement, were undoubtedly right about the costs of hegemonic masculinity. Men would be safer not fighting, would be healthier without competitive stress, would live longer without the cigarettes and booze, and would be better off in mutually respectful relations with women. But the same reformers hopelessly underestimated the patriarchal dividend, missing what men stood to gain from current arrangements in terms of power, economic advantage, prestige, etc. Thus they missed the interest most men have in sustaining – and, where necessary, defending – the current gender order.

To argue that the current gender order should be changed is to claim that it does more harm than good. The harm of gender is first and foremost in the system of inequality that produces a patriarchal dividend, a system in which women and girls are exploited, discredited, and made vulnerable to abuse and attack. Those feminists who think that gender is inherently about inequality, who in effect see the patriarchal dividend as the core of gender relations, logically seek to abolish gender. Social justice would require no less.

The harm of gender is also found in specific patterns of practice formed in the gender order that are given power to affect the world by the collective resources of the society. Contemporary hegemonic masculinity, to take the most striking case, is dangerous regardless of the patriarchal dividend. It is dangerous because it is directly connected with inter-personal violence, and because in alliance with state and corporate power it drives arms races, strip mining and deforestation, hostile labour relations, and the abuse of technologies from motor transport to genetic engineering.

But if gender in these respects is harmful, it is in other respects a source of pleasure, creativity and other things we greatly value. Gender organizes our sexual relationships, which are sources of delight and growth. Gender is integral to our cultural riches, from *Noh* plays to rap and

reggae. The joys and strains of gender relations are among the most potent sources of cultural creation.

I would argue, then, that the stakes in gender politics include the value of gender as well as its harm. Gender politics has the possibility of shaping pleasures as well as distributing resources, and making possible a more creative culture.

Given these possibilities, 'gender politics' has to be understood as more than an interest-group struggle over inequalities. In the most general sense, gender politics is about the *steering* of the gender order in history. It represents the struggle to have the endless re-creation of gender relations through practice turn out a particular way.

It is easy to recognize that a struggle over economic resources is 'political', less easy to think that the reconstruction of personality is. But if I am right that personality is a configuration of practice in the same sense – though at a different level – as the gender regime of an institution (see chapter 4), then struggles to change personality are equally political. Existential psychoanalysis and cultural radicalism in the 1960s produced the insight that there is a 'politics of experience' (to quote the title of a famous book by R. D. Laing, 1968), an idea that connects directly to the feminist argument that 'the personal is political'.

The masculinity therapy of the mythopoetic men's movement, then, is political not just because of its patriarchal imagery, but because of what it centrally is, an attempt to create or restore a particular gender configuration of practice. Feminist 'consciousness-raising' (out of which masculinity therapy arose) does not just lead to politics, it *is* politics. Confrontational discipline in families and schools, and confrontational policing ('zero tolerance', three-strikes laws, more prisons and harsher prison regimes), are equally political, applications of power intended to shape personality. These are practices which call out 'protest masculinity' among many working-class and ethnic minority boys and young men.

Gender politics, whether at the institutional or the personal level, always represent a collective project. This is easy enough to see in the case of modern feminism and gay politics. Both are social movements directed against an oppressive established order. But social movements are not the only form gender politics can take.

What feminism is fighting against, for the most part, is not a countervailing social movement. Though there have been efforts to create Men's Rights groups or 'masculinist' movements, most such attempts have been small-scale, cranky and short-lived. The more successful 'men's movements' in recent years have pursued agendas of therapy (the

'mythopoetic movement'), racial justice or religion (the 'Million Man March', the 'Promise Keepers'), and gender reform aligned with feminism (men's anti-violence groups). These agendas are either marginal to, or opposed to, the defence of patriarchy.

This is not to say the defence of patriarchy has been neglected. But the collective agency of dominant groups of men is expressed in other ways than social movements. Patriarchal power normally operates through the routine functioning of the institutions in which the dominance of men is embedded – corporations, churches, mass media, legal systems and governments. To the extent the dominant interest needs articulation, it is done by establishment figures (popes, generals, chief justices, chairmen of the board) who declare the perspective of authority, or by non-establishment media figures (Rush Limbaugh, John Laws) whose job it is to ridicule the opposition (for instance, by attacks on 'political correctness').

Thus the defence of hegemonic masculinity normally goes on as a collective project without a social movement. In situations of dire upheaval, however, a social movement with exceptionally clear-cut masculinity politics may emerge. The most striking case is fascism. The Italian and German fascist movements of the 1920s and 1930s are better known for their class, nationalist and racist projects. But these movements, whose activists had often been soldiers, also attempted the restoration of a hegemonic masculinity severely disrupted by war and economic upheaval. The neo-nazi and racist fringe groups of the 1980s and 1990s have tried to re-create aggressive gender politics along with the rest of the package.

Gender politics, then, take a variety of forms. It is not helpful to regard *every* aspect of gender as 'political'. That would foreclose what ought to be an empirical question – what in any given situation is actually involved in the 'steering' of the gender order. But there is no doubt that gender politics are generally complex and extensive, and laden with consequences for humanity. In the final section of this chapter I will explore some of these consequences as they appear on the world scale.

Gender politics on a world scale

A structure of social relations, having come into existence in history, is open to change in history. A structure of inequality can, in principle, move in a democratic direction. Whether it does so or not is a question of social struggle. The analysis of the global gender order in chapter

6 suggests two basic arenas of struggle for democratization: in global institutions, and in the interactions between local gender orders.

Democratization in the first arena, global institutions, is straightforward in concept if difficult in practice. It is the same kind of process as the democratization of organizations at the national or local level.

In practical terms it means:

- attempting to get equal employment opportunity in transnational corporations,
- ending the misogyny and homophobia in international media,
- gaining equal representation of women and men in international forums and agencies,
- ending gender discrimination in international labour markets,
- creating anti-discrimination norms in the public culture, etc.

A world-wide agency of change is already in existence. There is a women's movement presence in international meetings (recently described by Deborah Stienstra, 2000). This works to some extent through official delegations, more consistently through the growing presence of non-government organizations, now a recognized category of participants in United Nations activities. Women's units or programmes have been set up in some international organizations, such as UNESCO, and are now coordinated through the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women. There is also a certain international presence of gay and lesbian movements, and (on a smaller scale) pro-feminist men's groups.

These social forces have been able to place some issues about gender relations on the agendas of diplomacy and the international state. In doing so they have been greatly assisted by the 'human rights' agenda in international organizations. The United Nations set up a Commission on the Status of Women as early as 1946. Article 2 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights banned discrimination on the basis of sex, as well as race, religion, etc. It has been followed by specific agreements about the rights of women, culminating in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, introduced in 1979. The human rights agenda has been far more important than the 'men's movement' in winning support for gender equality from men in international organizations – support that has been vital in creating the spaces in which women's groups have operated.

Among the consequences of this pressure are: increased recognition of the gender dimension in development aid, and concern by aid agencies to support the interests of women; the growing global commitment

to the secondary and higher education of women; a growing concern with gendered violence and with gender issues in peacekeeping; recognition of the voices of women and gay men in the global programme against AIDS.

Nevertheless the forces pushing for gender democratization are still weak in relation to the scale of the problem. The most important limit is that they still have very little influence in transnational corporations and global markets. A notional obedience to anti-discrimination laws in the countries where they have their head offices does not prevent transnational corporations maintaining sharp gender divisions in their workforce in reality. Their characteristic search for cheap labour around the world often leads them, and their local suppliers, to exploit the weak industrial position of women workers. This is especially the case where unions are hampered or where governments have set up 'free trade zones' to attract international capital, or where there is a demand for cheap domestic labour (Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1983, Marchand and Runyan 2000).

Even in public sector agencies there is far from being a unified force for change. Conferences of the UN Decade for Women, for instance, have been vital in articulating world agendas for gender reform. But among the national delegations attending them have been some headed or controlled by men, some headed by women with no commitment to gender equality, and some dominated by patriarchal ideologies actively opposed to gender equality. These conferences have been the occasion of sharp conflict over issues such as abortion and lesbianism. Even the concept of 'gender' was under attack at the 1995 Beijing conference, because it was supposed by right-wing forces to be a code word for feminism (Benden and Goetz 1998).

Some of these divisions arise from the second dimension of global gender politics, the relations between local gender orders. As observed in chapter 7, during the 1980s it became common to speak of 'feminisms' instead of 'feminism', and divergences between first-world and third-world feminisms were widely canvassed. While support for equality between women and men could be seen as a mark of modernity, it could also be seen as a sign of cultural imperialism. Certain forms of Western feminism which emphasized gender difference and women's autonomy aroused opposition from women who did not want to be separated from the men of their communities in struggles against racism, colonial or neo-colonial domination (Bulbeck 1988).

Even conceptualizing a democratic agenda in this dimension is difficult. The interplay between gender orders arises historically from a system of global domination, that is, imperialism and colonialism. A

democratic agenda must oppose the inequalities that have been inherited from this system, between global 'North' and global 'South'. This is a strong point made by those women who argue against separate political organization.

Yet the gender alignments here are complex. The colonial system, and the globalized world economy, have been run by men. But the anti-colonial struggle, too, was almost everywhere led by men. Post-colonial regimes have generally been patriarchal, and have sometimes been violently misogynist or homophobic. For instance, Robert Mugabe, leader of a bitter struggle to end colonialism in Rhodesia, as president of Zimbabwe is running the most openly homophobic campaign of any government in the contemporary world.

In post-colonial regimes the men of local elites have often been complicit with businessmen from the metropole in the exploitation of women's labour. Multinational corporations could not operate as they do without this co-operation. In places like the Philippines and Thailand men of local elites have been central in the creation of international sex trade destinations. Arms trafficking similarly involves an interplay between the men who control local military forces and governments, and the men who run arms manufacturing corporations in the metropole.

A further complexity, explored in Dennis Altman's important new book *Global Sex* (2001), is that the interplay between gender orders within global capitalism has produced a range of novel identities and patterns of relationship, sexual communities and political processes. They belong neither to local nor metropolitan cultures, but in a sense to both – and more exactly, to the new global society that is emerging.

The criterion of democratic action, in this dimension of the world gender order, must be what democracy always means: moving towards equality of participation, power and respect. The difficulty is that this criterion must apply at the same time to relations in the local gender order and to relations between gender orders. The resulting complexities are so great that gender-democratic practice must often be ambiguous or contradictory.

For instance, action to strengthen the bargaining power of women factory and agricultural workers may weaken the position of the local bourgeoisie in the global economy. A weakened national economy may (as the countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have found) push many women towards prostitution. Attempts to strengthen the position of homosexual men and women by public campaigns and actions to reinforce a sense of community may also expose them to attack from political leaders who picture homosexuality as Western decadence.

Yet progressive movements cannot evacuate these arenas simply because democratic practice is difficult. Anti-democratic forces are certainly not evacuating them. In many parts of the world the rise of feminism has been followed by a backlash, as the journalist Susan Faludi (1991) argued in the case of the United States. This has mostly taken the shape of informal cultural movements which reinforce the supremacy of men, argue that gender hierarchy is biologically fixed, or claim that women's advancement is damaging to the family, to children, or to religion. In the 1990s a campaign against 'political correctness', begun in the United States and circulated internationally by neo-conservative networks, attacked measures against sexism on the grounds that these violate free speech, and programmes for women on the grounds that these discriminate against men.

Political agendas reflecting these arguments have been advanced in individual countries, from the de-funding of women's groups in Australia to the restriction of abortion rights in the United States. They have also been pursued in international forums, such as the Cairo international conference on Population and Development in 1994. At this conference an alliance against women's reproductive freedom was put together by the Vatican, certain Catholic countries influenced by the Vatican, and some Islamic governments including Iran (though in this case the alliance had little effect). Backlash ideas are also given wide publicity in international media.

Perhaps more powerful than all backlash movements put together is the impact of neo-liberalism. This has been the dominant movement in world politics in the last two decades. Neo-liberalism was already on the rise before the collapse of Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union and its satellites around 1989, but was given a tremendous boost by those events. Neo-liberal agendas, closely associated with the power of global markets, have attempted to 'roll back' the state through deregulation of markets, privatization of public services, and reduction of public expenditure. In international finance, agencies such as the International Monetary Fund have used a continuing debt crisis to force neo-liberal policies on many governments which were needing loans, or needing to re-finance old loans.

The resultant weakening of welfare states has broadly been to the detriment of women. Because of the gender division of labour and inequalities of income, women have been more dependent than men on public services and on income transfers through the state. Men control almost all market-based institutions, such as corporations, and acquire most of the income distributed through markets, such as salaries and

wages. Neo-liberalism, in exalting the power of markets, has thus tended to restore the power and privilege of men. It is not surprising that the installation of a market economy in former communist countries has been followed by worsening conditions for women.

The 1990s saw the appearance, particularly in the rich countries, of 'men's movements' of several kinds. These movements have mostly been inspired by what I have called the 'toxicity' of the gender order. They have offered psychological or religious solutions to the damage (the 'wounds', as some put it) suffered by men. Most have had little to say about gender democracy. The main exceptions are the small but active men's anti-violence movement, and the longest-established 'men's movement', the gay community politics descended from Gay Liberation. Gay men's groups have struggled against prejudice and homophobic violence, and have in some situations (though not all) been aligned with feminism.

At present there is a spectrum of masculinity politics in the rich countries ranging from explicitly pro-feminist to distinctly anti-feminist; the American sociologist Michael Messner has provided a useful map of this terrain in *The Politics of Masculinities* (1997). Surveys of broader populations of men have found similar divisions. For instance, a 1988 survey of men in Norway found them dividing into three groups of roughly equal size, one-third supporting gender equality, one-third negative towards women and equality issues, and one-third in the middle (Holter 1997: 131–5). A German survey in 1998 also found a national sample of men dividing into 'new' vs. 'traditional', plus two intermediate groups, 'pragmatic' and 'uncertain' (Zulehner and Volz 1998). I do not know of any study which has looked at the gender ideologies of men in international organizations, but I think it probable there is a similar range of views.

The diversity of men's gender outlooks makes possible a range of political responses and alliances. However strong the combination of neo-liberalism and gender backlash is in particular cases, there are also possibilities for progressive politics among men, and possible alliances with women's groups. This can be seen, for instance, in international discussions of violence and peacemaking, where feminist concerns with gendered violence have recently been brought together with masculinity research and men's groups (Breines, Connell and Eide 2000).

We are still in the early stages of the struggle for gender democracy on a world scale. As that struggle develops, gender theory and research will have a number of roles to play.

Simply documenting the patterns of gender inequality, as Valdés and Gomáriz (1995: 12–13) argue, helps overcome the invisibility of women

and the taken-for-granted character of gender oppression. Providing accounts of how gender inequality is produced can be important in contesting the ideologies that present gender inequality as biologically driven or god-given. Documenting changes in gender relations and struggles for gender democracy (e.g. Naples 1998) is a significant way of circulating knowledge and models of action, and thus disseminating tools for democratic politics. Gender theory, specifically, makes it possible to communicate ideas between people in different situations.

None of this means that familiar Western models of gender can or should be imposed on the rest of the world. As feminism itself has found, one cannot go global without being profoundly changed. Gender theory and research will need to reconsider themselves again and again, in the light of the diverse cultures and forms of knowledge that appear in world gender politics. Given willingness to learn, gender theory and research can play a significant role in making a more democratic world.