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Challenging a Gendered World

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In Chapter 6 we explored the multiple forms of oppression to which women in most societies have been historically subjected. Here, we chart the course of some of the struggles by the women's movement to improve their situation, giving special emphasis to those that have assumed a global dimension. There is a growing literature on the far more numerous local actions by women's groups in ever more countries, including those based in the developing world and you can read about these struggles in books such as those edited by Basu (1995) and Asfah (1996).

As we mentioned in Chapter 6, women became involved in political campaigns during the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, including attempts to secure international peace. For the most part this first wave of feminist struggle can be regarded as an attempt to secure for women the same liberal freedoms and opportunities as those already available to men. Second-wave feminism from the late 1960s was much more radical. It led many women to conclude that they had every right to challenge and re-construct the patriarchal world. As Enloe (1989:17) suggests 'the world is something that has been made; therefore, it can be remade'.

HISTORICAL CHALLENGES

The history of non-violent collective action by women remains to be properly explored. However, there is evidence that it was not unknown for women to take the lead in actions such as street demonstrations against high food prices during ancient and medieval times or even to use group singing and dancing as a vehicle for expressing discontent (Carroll 1989). Certainly, from the late eighteenth century onwards, women increasingly made important and sometimes initiating contributions to revolutionary protest – as in the case of the moves against the monarchy during the summer and autumn of 1789 in France. At times they also resisted slavery in the USA, reacted against colonialism and joined or led strikes. Women agitated for better working conditions in factories and textile mills across the world from Lancashire in the UK to the cities of North America and Tsarist Russia (pp. 4–9).

WOMEN IN THE GLOBAL ORDER: AN OVERVIEW

At first sight gender relationships appear to have little intrinsic relevance to the workings of the world order. Yet further analysis soon reveals a different picture. Indeed, according to Enloe (1989: 7) it is gender relations that actually make 'the world go round'. Thus, governments need more than secrecy and intelligence agencies in their conduct of foreign affairs. They also rely on private relationships; they need wives who are willing to provide their diplomatic husbands with social and entertainment services so those men can develop trusting relationships with other diplomatic husbands. The 'comfort women' provided to Japanese soldiers in the Second World War and the toleration of women providing sexual services to US servicemen, also show how many roles have to be reinforced by the military authorities. In short, governments seek formal recognition of their sovereignty; they also depend on ideas about masculinized dignity and feminized sacrifice to sustain their sense of autonomous nationhood (Enloe 1989: 196–7).

Enloe provides several additional examples concerning the weighty contribution armies of women make to global political and economic life – ones that are obscured by the accepted notions of feminized and masculinized roles:

1. Behind the mainly male officials and leaders who decide national and international affairs lie countless female secretaries, personal assistants, clerks and middle-level personnel who provide everyday continuity and maintain the detailed, routine transactions without which the males would be impotent.
2. As a leading sector in the global economy, the success of tourism often hinges upon huge numbers of badly paid female employees such as hotel chambermaids, waitresses, barmaids, airline hostesses, tour guides, local employees engaged in food preparation and women who provide sexual services for tourists.
3. Women's crucial roles at every link in the commodity chains that bind together the global system of food production and consumption often go unacknowledged. At one end of the food chain are the unpaid wives who

grow subsistence crops to feed their families on local plots while their husbands migrate to work on distant commercial farms for low wages or those women employed as occasional seasonal farm workers on large plantations. Somewhere in the middle are those working on piece rates in food factories perhaps cleaning and packing vegetables or fruit. Yet further along the chain there are the women who work as supermarket checkout assistants selling the final products. Finally, it is the world's housewives who mainly assume the role of consumers.

4. We can add that women also play a central role in social and biological reproduction in childrearing, child care and later preparation of young adults for the marketplace.

CONSTRAINTS ON WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

In many situations women face more constraints than men when they engage in social movements. Moreover, involvement in social protests often becomes progressively more difficult for women as actions move away from specific localities and contexts. There are several reasons for this dual state of affairs:

1. In many societies women are less likely to have easy access to money and land, they are more likely to live in poverty and tend to be less well educated than men. They are also more likely to be tied down by customary obligations and daily routines that bind them to a host of domestic and productive services of an intrinsically local and fixed kind.
2. Patriarchal social relations reduce women's capacity for autonomy and render them vulnerable and dependent. In some societies they may even be prohibited from participating in any kind of public activity without their husband's permission, including the exercise of voting rights or the ability to pursue outside employment, and may be virtually confined to the domestic compound.
3. All of these eventualities curtail freedom of movement. Unless protests are highly local in orientation and are not perceived as offering some kind of threat to established male rights women's participation may be difficult and dangerous.
4. Especially in the case of women in the South, when they do join protests, these are rarely concerned solely with feminist issues. Rather, their actions are likely to be intertwined either with wider struggles against oppression such as nationalist movements for independence and the demand for democratization (Basu 1995: 9–11) or with environmental threats or peace issues.
5. As the numbers of women engaged in various kinds of protests worldwide rapidly increased, divisions quickly emerged or soon intensified. Of course, these differences can also be viewed as a rich source of diversity offering opportunities for the exchange of ideas and experiences. Yet there is general agreement that they also inhibited progress towards greater world unity particularly in the decade from 1975 to 1985 and probably beyond.

Box 17.1 Power, wealth, work and women: the gender deficits

Inequalities of politics and power

In the mid-1990s women formed half the electorate in all countries but held a global average of only 13 per cent of parliamentary seats and 7 per cent of government posts.

In 1992, the countries with the highest share of parliamentary seats held by women were Finland, with 38 per cent, and Norway, with 37 per cent. In countries such as the USA, France, Russia and Brazil this share was less than 10 per cent. The global average was pulled up by China, with between 20 and 30 per cent.

In stark contrast to these figures, however, a few women have stood out as presidents or prime ministers and were associated with important national policy changes and/or operated successfully in the role of world 'statesmen'. Some highly successful women political leaders were the following:

- *Indira Gandhi*, Prime Minister of India, 1966–77, and 1980–84.
- *Margaret Thatcher*, in Britain from 1979 to 1990.
- *Mary Robinson*, President of Ireland from 1990–97.
- *Sirimavo R. D. Bandaranaike*, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka 1960–5, 1970–75; re-appointed 1994.

Wealth and production: women's burdens

Based originally on data presented to the UN Committee on the Status of Women in 1981, it has long been demonstrated that across the world women constitute half the population, provide one-third of the paid labour force and provide two-thirds of all the hours spent working. *Yet, they earn only one-tenth of the world's income and own less than 1 per cent of all the world's property.* This situation has probably changed little since 1981 except that since then the proportion of women in the global paid labour force has certainly grown considerably.

Women grow half of all the world's food and rather more than this in many African countries. Yet, strangely, in many regions of the world most agricultural advisers are men. For example in Asia during the mid-1980s, women provided 40 per cent of the agricultural labour force but made up less than 1 per cent of agricultural advisers. Comparable figures for sub-Saharan Africa were 47 and 3 per cent.

Employment injustices

During the 1980s the percentages of top management positions held by women at the UN and the World Bank were 3 and 5 respectively. By contrast, the same figures for women employed in secretarial or clerical capacities at these same institutions were 80 per cent and over 90 per cent. In 1989, less than 20 per cent of the members of the diplomatic missions from all the world's governments based permanently at the UN were women. Only eight women among this 20 per cent held positions of ambassadorial rank.

Women often fare little better in the private sector. In 1992, only 1 per cent of the highest executive positions in leading French companies were held by women while the comparable figure for the 1000 most wealthy companies in the USA in 1989 was lower. Even in the case of much less elevated professional positions, women made up only one-fifth of the lawyers and around 17 per cent of the doctors in 1990 in the USA.

Sources: Tickner (1992); Peterson and Runyan (1993); Kidron and Segal (1995); UN Development Programme (1997)

The main overlapping sources of difference are outlined in Table 17.1. By the mid-1980s, these divisions, especially those defined by racial, historical and North-South differences, were on the way to being overcome. All of the following helped to heal earlier wounds:

- greater personal familiarity through contacts established at conferences and other venues
- more humility by western feminists regarding their assumed right to define the terms of the global struggle against patriarchy
- a realization that global trust and co-operation required a willingness to respect the autonomy of each country's movement.

National differences arise in a number of respects. For example, during the 1970s in countries such as Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Vietnam, many women were caught up in national liberation struggles against colonial or foreign domination. Many Southern women in other countries had shared similar experiences during earlier anti-colonial struggles. In these situations, men experienced oppression just as much as women. The need for unity in struggle persuaded many Southern women to assign gender issues a second-order priority.

Similarly, US and European feminists might have sound reasons for demanding abortion rights for all western women or campaigning against the sexual exploitation of women through media trivialization, beauty shows or pornography. But Southern feminists might have quite different priorities. Here, we might include such problems as repressive forms of state birth control that bear down most heavily against the poorest groups; incidents of rape by police and other state officials committed against those within their jurisdiction; or the widespread death of young wives linked to pressure from in-laws for dowry payments after marriage as in India – the so-called dowry deaths (Kumar 1995).

It would be misleading to suppose that Southern women were not aware of the endemic gender inequalities they faced within their societies or that they were prepared to completely submerge such concerns in the interests of national unity. The desire to tackle such issues was merely postponed. Rather, the way in which women in poor countries differ most from their Northern counterparts lies more in their realization that patriarchy is an aspect of inequality that has to be confronted alongside other injustices: all forms of inequality need to be tackled simultaneously as part of the same struggle. In any case, soon a profusion of Southern groups were finding ways to express their own concerns both at national and regional levels.

By the early 1990s it was evident that these streams feeding into the global flow of women's struggles were becoming stronger and more diverse. Moreover, those contributing to this flow were more and more interested in participating in worldwide as well as purely local feminist debates. What helped to make this easier for Southern women was precisely the fact that they had previously worked to carve out their own areas of independence (Miles 1996: 57–60).

Table 17.1 Diverging goals and interests in women's movements, 1960–90

<i>Main reason for division</i>	<i>Key concerns and goals</i>	<i>Main sources of support</i>	<i>Preferred type of organization</i>
I. Liberal versus more Radical, second-wave feminists (from the late 1960s)	Liberals: pushed for equal citizen rights at state level and tried to raise the status of women at UN and other IGOs. Not trying to change women's wider conditions	Mainly older, educated, middle-class western women. Some were involved in pre-Second World War peace movements and worked for equal recognition for women in the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights	Prepared to work within conservative, male-dominated state institutions or IGOs and through global networks of elite women. Sought change through personal influence
	New-wave feminism: wished to remove all forms of male oppression including in domestic life. Celebrated female strengths and values	A younger generation, reflecting the broader class base of educational attainment. Influenced by 1960s' idea that politics is personal	On stream from late 1960s. Sought change through a broad spectrum of activities including own media/publications, research and independent forums
II. Established mainstreamers working in IGOs versus an emergent more disengaged group (from the early 1970s)	Mainstreamers worked to extend state and UN awareness of women's needs mostly in 'traditional' areas such as health, food and education. Also worked to increase knowledge of gender relations at UN	As above	Lobbied states and key UN agencies via consultative status (right to observe and submit statements at some UN forums and other IGOs). Also worked through the UN Commission on the Status of Women
	Outsiders: more focused on specific issues linked to a wider feminist agenda such as male violence against women, prostitution and the right to choose one's sexual orientation	Mostly western women as above, but beginning to include flows of educated women from the South and/or those previously involved in struggles for national independence	Exercised pressure mainly outside formal institutions especially via networking and own separate groups. Preferred co-operative and non-hierarchical organizations and direct links with grass-roots
III. Rising Southern women's groups versus those with a western membership as in I and II (from the mid-1970s)	Concerned with the limited benefits of economic development for poor women. Carving out own versions of feminism reflecting local not western needs. Some rifts with Northern women over their alleged ignorance of South and racist paternalism	Despite disputes with Northern women, from rather similar backgrounds; privileged, educated, academic, middle class. Not always representative of the interests of poor rural and urban groups though trying to bridge this class gap	Linking to more radical western networks but also forming own regional and global groups; for example, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), launched in 1984 by Southern activists from Asia, Africa and Latin America. Partly dependent on financial assistance from North

Sources: Bystdzienski (1992); Stienstra (1994); Miles (1996)

GROWTH OF THE WORLDWIDE MOVEMENT

Several significant changes and tendencies boosted the rising volume of effective women's movements from the 1970s and gradually contributed to greater unity and mutual understanding. We outline these changes and then discuss each in more detail:

- the UN and the activities of the older generation of liberal feminists who worked within its institutions helped to create a framework for increased networking
- the women's movement worldwide was invigorated both by the rise of second-wave radical feminism, mainly in the North, and the women's groups emerging in the South
- women worked to create their own autonomous facilities for representing women's views and achieving effective communications.

The UN framework for networking

Despite their conservatism, the work carried out by the older, more privileged generation of liberal feminists and those operating within mainstream governments and IGOs began to bear fruit. Partly because of earlier contributions to the peace process during and after the First World War international women's groups were able to influence global affairs especially through the auspices of the UN from 1945 onwards. Thus, the UN Charter of 1945 specifically referred to the equal eligibility of women to participate in all UN debates and organizations. It also granted consultative status to the representatives of several international women's organizations; the right to attend certain UN sessions and to submit documentation. Further, it set up the Commission on the Status of Women to consider the special needs of women worldwide (Stienstra 1994: 75–86). In addition, the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly stated that entitlement to such rights could not be denied on any grounds, including sex.

In the view of many radical feminists these gains did not go nearly far enough towards meeting women's real needs. Nevertheless, they provided a platform from which the influential mainstreamers and liberals could make the case for additional changes while continuing to infiltrate male-dominated institutions. Such pressures along with the rising tide of women's discontent associated with second-wave feminism created a powerful momentum for further change led by the UN. The result was the 1975–85 UN Decade for Women built primarily around three conferences, although others were organized both during and after these years (see Box 17.2).

In some respects the direct results of these three conferences have been meagre. As we have also seen, the first two conferences in 1975 and 1980 exposed certain divisions among women from different world regions and cultural backgrounds although some reconciliation was later achieved. Moreover, many of the more radical feminists preferred to work through their own grass-roots organizations largely outside these official forums until the mid-1980s. Nevertheless, the UN Decade 'was a watershed both for placing women on the international intergovernmental agenda and for facilitating women's co-operation' (Friedman 1995: 23).

Box 17.2 The global women's movement: key events and selected achievements

The UN decade of women, 1975–85, key UN-sponsored conferences

- 1st World Conference on Women, 1975, Mexico City. Attended by 6000 delegates.
- 2nd World Conference on Women, 1980, Copenhagen. 7000 delegates.
- 3rd World Conference on Women, 1985, Nairobi. 15 000 delegates from 150 countries. 2000 workshops held.
- 4th World Conference on Women, 1995, Beijing. Attended by 8000 delegates.

Key consequences of Nairobi conference

- Far more representatives came from the developing countries and they were much more inclined to declare their own aims. The animosity between North and South delegates evident at the previous two conferences was much diminished.
- Several new regional and international networks were formed in 1985 or soon after. For example: the Latin American Committee for the Defence of Women's Rights (CLADEM); the Asia-Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWD); and Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) formed by representatives from eight Muslim countries. All sought to facilitate exchanges of information on legal matters pertaining to human and legal rights.
- Also focused around the issue of women and human rights was the International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAP) launched following Nairobi in 1986. Its purpose was to lobby governments and international bodies including NGOs on the issue of human rights and women while promoting and monitoring the progress of the UN's work.

Other important conferences and events

- UN General Assembly, 1979. Worldwide pressure from groups demanding change to protect women from discrimination contributed to the UNGA's decision to support the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). States accepting the convention have to take all steps needed in order to prevent discrimination. By 1994, CEDAW had been ratified by 133 countries but 40 of these had made 91 reservations, mostly on religious or cultural grounds.
- Bangkok, 1979. A small group sponsored by the Asian and Pacific Centre for Women and Development met to try and heal North–South differences on issues relating to feminist ideology.
- Bangalore, 1984. A conference to discuss the effects of political crises and large-scale development programmes on poor women in the South. Led to the formation of the international organization, DAWN, in 1984, but also to several regional networks such as Women and Development based in the Caribbean. DAWN became an effective international research organization holding many workshops mostly in the South.
- Vienna, 1993. The UN Second International Conference on Human Rights. Building on their earlier dialogues on women and human rights issues, women's groups were very well-organized and successfully lobbied 160 governments present at the conference. Also called for an end to gender bias due to religious extremism.
- Bangkok, 1994. Conference on empowering women in their relations with the media.
- Cairo, 1994. UN Conference on Population and Development. Women strongly present.

Sources: Stienstra (1994); Peters and Wolper (1995); Miles (1996)

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Second-wave and Southern feminism

Second-wave feminism sought nothing less than a root and branch attack on patriarchy; a rejection of male pretensions to superiority in all spheres and not simply at the level of formal institutions. Thus, the focus of its critique and challenge was much more comprehensive than anything offered by earlier feminist ideas. All of this created a sense of intellectual and moral coherence, which some people might fear but few could ignore. The impetus generated led new-wave feminists to explore many new avenues with energy and confidence. They sought to invade or seek alliances with all previously male-dominated organization including NGOs, trade unions, churches and religious bodies, sports and arts organizations, local and national politics, the professions (especially health, medicine, law) and all knowledge-creating centres such as universities.

Women's groups in the developing countries increasingly joined second-wave feminists. Among the issues included in this widening agenda were the following:

- sex tourism and prostitution across the world
- all forms of public and private violence against women
- the need to persuade governments and the UN to accept that women's rights must be incorporated firmly within the human rights agenda. The issue of women's rights is one of human rights
- the often adverse working conditions experienced by a the growing number of women worldwide employed in export-processing manufacturing industries
- the need to urgently re-think the development aims and priorities promoted both by states in developing countries and powerful IGOs such as the IMF and the World Bank.

Women representing themselves: independent communications

From 1975 onwards women's groups challenged the male-owned and male-oriented world media industries. They knew that how women and their needs are represented – or perhaps misrepresented and trivialized – in the media was critical to any attempt to assert autonomy and counter patriarchy. For example, during the 1970s, less than two per cent of the items included in world news programmes were about women or related to their needs (Byerly 1995: 106).

The first communications network to be established was the International Women's Information and Communication Service (ISIS). In addition to providing a direct channel of international communication between affiliated groups, it also amassed knowledge of interest to women and offered technical training in media skills. Its first task was to publish the proceedings of the International Tribunal on Crimes against Women held in Brussels in 1976. Later, it began to publish various women's journals, among other things. A similar organization, the International Women's Tribune Centre (IWTC), was founded in 1976. It publishes in several languages and aims to be accessible even to poor, semi-literate women (Stienstra 1994: 103–5). In the early 1990s IWTC provided communication and technical services to groups in 160 countries (Miles 1996: 111).

With UNESCO assistance, feminists also set up their own press service in 1978, the Women's Feature Service (WFS). Eventually, various governments, international media organizations and subscribers from eighty countries turned the WFS into a permanent organization based in New Delhi. It supplies programmes and articles on a range of topics relevant to women including the environment, social customs, health and politics. Demand worldwide, but especially in Latin America, has continued to expand (Byerly 1995). Since the 1970s, feminists have also set up study and research centres with educational courses specifically designed to promote an independent perspective. They have also founded women's publishing houses and organized global events in the arts including theatre, music, dance and crafts.

UNIFICATION IN THE FACE OF COMMON PROBLEMS

Increasingly, women have realized that they face common problems. This has encouraged some women's groups to sink their differences and seek various forms of collaboration designed to influence governments, IGOs and other powerful elite institutions. What are these common difficulties?

Environmental degradation

There is growing evidence of global environmental devastation some aspects of which are briefly explored in Chapter 18. Some eco-feminists such as Shiva (1989) have argued that women share a much greater affinity to nature than men and so are more disposed to protect the natural world. They also believe that the burdens of environmentally destructive commercial development projects pushed by governments in the developing countries tend to fall disproportionately on women. Jackson (1993: 405), while expressing caution at the general argument, suggests that:

[The] impact of environmental degradation is often greater on women because of the over-representation of female headed households among the poor, and because of gender divisions of labour within households which allocate work such as firewood and water collection to women, precisely tasks which become much more difficult with deforestation and falling water tables.

Religious fundamentalism

Another unifying threat during the last decade or more has been the resurgence of various forms of religious fundamentalism and right-wing thinking, the two often being synchronized. These have appeared in countries as different, for example, as the USA, India, some Muslim countries especially in the Middle East, Israel and parts of the former Soviet Union. In the USA, right-wing religious fundamentalism has played a leading role in the movement to reverse the trend whereby many women increasingly seek personal fulfilment and relative autonomy through careers instead of choosing to remain tied predominantly to the home. Opposition, sometimes violent, by 'pro-life' groups in the face of women's desire to control their own bodies through legalized abortion rights has figured prominently in these campaigns. The desire to restore fundamen-

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talist religious values and social practices is associated with the fear that any real increase in women's freedom of choice and action will undermine the foundations of tradition, religion, morality and, it could be argued, male control. Women as the homemakers and childrearsers have cemented the main links between respect for a deity and the upholding of religious belief, on the one hand, and the reproduction of society's moral codes from one generation to another, on the other. Because this leads fundamentalists to regard women as both embodying and preserving all that is most sacred and valued in society, they have often insisted on ruthlessly conserving or reinstating women's traditional positions.

India offers an interesting example of the dilemmas faced by women's movements for change. Although there has been a resurgence of Hindu fundamentalism, India is usually and rightly respected as a tolerant country with a cherished regard for the pursuit of democracy and with a long history of social reform and modernization. However, even before the recent rise of religious fundamentalism, governments found it difficult to tolerate or encourage the extension of some constitutional freedoms to women and family life. Thus, the Indian constitution allows governments to intervene in order to prevent discrimination against members of certain lower castes – the latter a legacy of long-established customary practices. However, it does not permit such state interference in customary law where this relates to family life and the domestic position of women (Jaising 1995; Kumar 1995). This state of affairs, in turn, has led women's movements in India to politicize the private realm of husband-wife relations, marriage and family life.

One of the many difficulties that feminists have with fundamentalist religious arguments is that it is not easy to square the contradiction between the supposedly pivotal and elevated position held by women with the frequent evidence of experiences of powerlessness and sometimes abuse at the hands of male kinsmen, husbands and patriarchal institutions. Is the latter *really* so necessary for the preservation of the former and which groups attach such significance to the preservation of tradition at all costs and why? Ultimately, solutions to these dilemmas can only be found by local women's movements struggling to confront them in their own ways and on their own terms. Nevertheless, the spread of right-wing nationalism and religious fundamentalism across many societies has given women yet another reason for seeking global collaboration (Basu 1995: 19).

Accelerating economic globalization

A further recent cause for global concern has been rapid economic globalization. As we saw in earlier chapters, capital has become increasingly foot-loose. TNCs, for example, have become much freer to move plant, technology and goods across the globe while fragmenting production operations between sites located in different countries. In doing so they have remained relatively unencumbered by global or state regulation. At the same time, competition for markets between a growing number of industrializing economies has risen dramatically. Globalization has further highlighted the plight of women worldwide and the need for co-operation by women's groups – including across the North-South divide – in order to construct forces capable of countering the power of mobile capitalism (Basu 1995: 19; Valdiva 1995). We discuss examples of such actions later.



Figure 17.1 Women delegates assemble for the world summit at Beijing, 1995

Neo-liberal ideology and economic policies

Coinciding with economic globalization has gone the rise and spread of neo-liberal economic policies. These have prioritized government spending and tax cuts, the privatization of industry, the de-regulation of markets – including reduced protection for local industries and jobs – and the importance of creating ‘flexible’ labour markets. Supposedly the latter renders employees more efficient and cheaper even while the same reforms increase the power of capital over labour. Since the mid-1980s, the IMF and the World Bank have imposed neo-liberal ‘reforms’ on many Southern countries as a condition for help in arranging debt re-scheduling and further loans. Such policies led to higher food prices with the abolition of subsidies, increased unemployment and widespread cuts in welfare spending on things such as rural clinics as governments were forced to reduce their spending. Much of this has hit the poorer groups hardest and a large proportion of the most disadvantaged consists of single-parent households headed by women.

Box 17.3 Women, health and globalization

The sociology of health

Sociologists argue that illness is not determined solely by biological or physical causes. Rather, they link the incidences of different diseases to such factors as occupation, income, gender and nationality. Alternatively, sociologists have explored how patient experiences are socially constructed when doctors, family members (and patients themselves) develop certain expectations concerning the role of the ‘invalid’.

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Women and illness

Gender affects distribution, severity and types of illness. The low status of female children and adult women in poor countries often means they are likely to receive less nutritious food and are often less well-educated compared to males. Women are also subject to specific health conditions arising either from motherhood or their exposure to socially imposed conditions including early marriage and male preferences for a large family. Many consequences follow but here are just three:

- Every year around 500 000 women worldwide die from problems associated with pregnancy or childbirth.
- The average risk of such deaths among women in many developing poor countries is often about 200 times greater than for women in North America or Europe.
- Such risks are especially high among adolescent girls under 20 years of age.

Globalization, women's health and the diseases of modernity

- Communicable diseases, for example through poor water supplies, illnesses caused by infections, parasites or malnutrition are slowly declining throughout most of the developing world.
- Illness caused by lifestyle changes associated with increased smoking, the higher consumption of sugars, alcohol and drug abuse or greater sexual promiscuity are increasing dramatically.
- The latter include various cancers, heart diseases, strokes, cirrhosis of the liver and AIDS.
- Until recently, women in developing countries have been much less likely to smoke than men. But there is growing evidence that like their western counterparts, their cigarette consumption is increasing rapidly. In part, this is linked to advertising campaigns.
- Future rates of lung cancer and other smoking-related diseases among women are therefore expected to increase dramatically.

Source: Smythe (1993)

PROTECTING HOMEWORKERS

In combination, economic globalization and neo-liberal policies have weakened labour's bargaining power and increased economic insecurity through the creation of an ever larger, casualized labour force – worldwide. Women are certainly not alone in being exposed to these changes. However, they have often taken the brunt of them. In this final section we show how some women have begun networking worldwide in order to counter their situation.

Historically, women have always made a considerable contribution to manufacturing. But much of this has been hidden from view because many women have worked in tiny unregulated enterprises or in homeworking. The 'sweatshop' conditions typical of these activities leave much to be desired. Under homeworking, very low rates of pay, poor, sometimes dangerous, working conditions, the need to meet employer deadlines and the absence of legal rights are all hard for workers to resist because they are dispersed and

therefore find it difficult to organize. Work can easily be shifted elsewhere. Moreover, family poverty and the absence of alternative work – especially for women with young children – makes workers dependent upon employers. Employers are also often able to reduce the costs of training the workforce since in industries such as garment production girls often will have already received a basic domestic education in such skills within the family.

The growth of homeworking has been most pronounced in garment making. Here, it has not been confined to the developing world but has spread widely across the cities of the North – often based on the employment of illegal immigrant workers (Ross 1997: 13). Homeworking has also spread to other industries including carpets, shoes, toys, consumer electronics, auto parts and so on (Rowbotham 1993: 9–24). The retailers who sell on such goods increasingly operate as 'hollow companies' (Mitter 1994: 20) because they breakdown production into numerous specialized work tasks and then subcontract these as vast orders to integrated chains of firms across the world. These, in turn, then employ millions of homeworkers. It has been the ability to attain greater producer flexibility and to cheapen costs partly through the increased resort to homeworking that has made it easier for retailers to compete successfully. Their power also enables them to earn very high profits by placing huge mark-ups on the imported price of the final products.

However, it appears that not all the cards are stacked in favour of these powerful retailing companies. Their business strategy carries several risks. Probably the most serious stems from the fact that these goods mostly carry designer labels much prized by consumers, and so they command high prices. But, by the same token this exposes companies to 'potentially embarrassing... human rights violations'. They 'cannot afford to have the names of their designers, endorsers, or merchandising labels publicly sullied [or be] embarrassed by revelations about the exploited labour behind their labels' (Ross 1997: 25). Thus, the public esteem in which a brand-name image is held is worth a great deal of money. Increasingly, the various groups campaigning on behalf of women employed as homeworkers have sought to educate consumers into the principles of ethical or fair trading.

While organizing homeworkers into trade unions at the point of production is very difficult, persuading consumers to join boycotts against companies that condone exploitative work conditions used by their subcontractors can be highly effective. This was shown in the case of the partly successful 1995 campaign in the USA against the clothes retailer, GAP. Then, a coalition of university, consumer, trade union, human rights, church and other groups obtained the company's agreement to impose and monitor codes of conduct with respect to the labour conditions prevailing in one of its Central American subcontracting firms (Ross 1997: 26–7; Cavanagh 1997: 40–1). Unfortunately, GAP and other companies depend on such subcontracting relations with many hundreds of similar firms in Central America and elsewhere and the 1995 campaign was unable to change conditions in these.

Feminist groups and some homeworkers themselves are also contributing towards fair trade and other campaigns (Boris and Prugl 1996: 6). Despite the enormous obstacles they face, homeworkers have formed effective organizations in several countries and in some instances these have also engaged in useful international networking activities. For example, the International Labour organization (ILO) is an arm of the UN based in Geneva. Among other

If you would

roles, it tries to establish worldwide standards for the treatment of workers while monitoring the conditions pertaining in different countries. At a conference held in June 1996 under the auspices of the ILO, an international coalition of feminists, trade unions, homeworkers' associations, NGOs and fair trade organizations were successful in obtaining the adoption of a new ILO Convention for Homebased Workers. Much more work needs to be done in this area. However, in the words of Ela Bhatt, a long-term fighter for homeworkers' rights and general secretary of the Self-Employed Asian Women's Association (SEWA), 'homeworkers are no more invisible' (cited in Shaw 1998: 5).

REVIEW

Women's struggles have made important contributions to the growth of an emergent global society from below – ones that increasingly bind individuals and groups together irrespective of national and cultural identities. The women's movement satisfies the primary criterion of a global social movement, namely 'global reach'. There is hardly a country in the world where gender relations have not been profoundly altered by its impact. Moreover, the time scale for this transformation is impressively short; most of the force of the movement having been evident since the 1970s. The movement was able to spread so fast partly because of its attractive participatory forms of grass-roots organization, and partly because the speed and density of communications allowed the global transmission of positive images of women.

Like other social movements, the women's movement has been partly borne along by its more or less universal appeal. However, in common with other movements its expansion has also been propelled by the compulsion to respond to vast and sometimes threatening forces for change. These appear to be encompassing all the world's inhabitants, especially the less well-off. But perhaps these global changes offer an even greater challenge to women. Partly, this is because the realities of patriarchal oppression and economic disadvantage faced by most women create an almost unprecedented potential for unity of thought and action. However, the resources associated with globalization, especially the communication technologies, faster, easier travel, and with these the ever more rapid dissemination of all kinds of knowledge, also offer women particularly exciting opportunities to benefit from shared experiences and the pooling of acquired knowledge.

If you would like to know more

Bananas, Beaches and Bases, by Enloe (1989), is not meant to provide an especially sociological analysis. However, it is witty and accessible and offers a useful way into theorizing about gender.

Miles's *Integrative Feminism, Building Global Visions, 1960s–1990s*, (1996) provides a clear, overall picture of the evolving face of women's thinking and actions worldwide.

Similarly, many of the readings in *Women's Rights, Human Rights*, edited by Peters and Wolper (1995), are excellent in disentangling the important subject of women's rights within a legal and cultural context. Try especially the first four chapters along with 13 and 28.

Rowbotham is a central figure in the development of feminist thought. Her 1993 book, *Homeworkers Worldwide*, gives a lively and simple introduction to this topic.

Group work

1. Students will read this chapter before the seminar. Working in two groups and drawing on the text, one group will compose a list showing all the feminist directions and priorities pursued by women in the North since the 1960s and the other will conduct a similar exercise for Southern women. After hearing each group's arguments the class will try to explain the differences.
2. Adopt the same procedure as in 1. While one group compiles a list of the women's organizations and networks mentioned – and then tries to categorize them under different headings – the other will assemble a picture of all the different ways various IGOs have played some kind of role in facilitating global feminism since 1945.
3. Four students will agree to prepare a debate around the topic, 'Northern women have more to learn from their sisters in the South than vice versa'. After hearing both sides each class member will give two reasons why they agree or disagree with this proposition.

Questions to think about

1. What have been the constraints on women's actions and to what extent has globalization provided opportunities for overcoming them?
2. Assess the relative significance of the UN and its associated institutions in strengthening the world feminist movement compared to other factors.
3. Drawing on case study material, assess the impact of recent worldwide changes in encouraging women to collaborate transnationally.

chapter

18

The **biosphere** consists of the atmosphere, the oceans, lakes and rivers, the soil and complex systems of plant life and all the other living organisms from bacteria to fish, animals and humans.