The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung presents a political, economic and social programme to decision-makers in the region. The Regional Programme for Southeast Asia focuses on topics such as the Euro-Asian dialogue, politics, participation and the rule of law. Target groups are inter alia, young parliamentarians, representatives of foremost think tanks, academics, experts at the local government level, members of leading non-governmental organisations and journalists.

The Regional Programme consists of the following activities:

❑ Conferences, Seminars and Workshops
These are based on topics such as strengthening of democracy, Euro-Asian dialogues, regional integration, legal reforms, human rights, anticorruption, local governance and political party cooperation.

❑ Publications
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P A N O R A M A

PANORAMA

❖ MAIN TOPICS

PANORAMA

INSIGHTS INTO SOUTHEAST ASIAN
AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

Konrad
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ABSTRACTS

The Beijing Platform for Action (BPA) is one of the most thorough documents produced on the subject of women's rights and progress. Adopted at the Fourth World Women's Conference held in Beijing in 1995 the BPA aimed at eliminating discrimination against women, reducing poverty and adopting measures to place a decisive number of women in key positions. It also recognised the following: the right of women to control their sexuality and reproduction; the unremunerated work done by women; the violence against women; women's unequal access to health care; the effects of armed or other kinds of conflict on women; and the violation of the rights of the girl child.

The BPA is imposing in itself. In the context of the countries in Southeast Asia adherence to the BPA has to be negotiated against a backdrop of diverse cultures and religious practices. Since 1995 countries within Southeast Asia have made some efforts to comply with the BPA – establishing Inter-Ministerial Task Forces, setting up a Women's Ministry, paying heed to BPA's areas of concerns in the reporting to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) at the United Nations.

Even as this process of complying with BPA is sinking some roots, the UN's transition to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) has, according to some critics, caused a distraction. The worry is that governments might veer from staying committed to improving women's condition as the MDGs do not carry the same emphasis and that MDGs make an assumption that Gender Mainstreaming is already a norm in policy-making. While MDGs may subsume the BPA, it needs to be said that there are also many other challenges that can derail efforts to help women up the socio-economic ladder. These include shifting markets to cheaper sources of labour, the rise in fundamentalism across many religions, the lack of governance in governments, the continuing lack of access to opportunities for re-skilling, education or even support services.

Whatever the improvements or the lack of them thereof, women's presence and condition is as such: it is estimated that about 250 million young women will be part of the labour force worldwide between 2003 and 2015; that women form the majority among the estimated 125 million migrant workers worldwide; the girl child in developing countries still has limited access to nutrition, education, opportunities and benefits of childhood and adolescence and is often subjected to various forms of sexual and economic exploitation.

In the context of Southeast Asia many women are still illiterate – two-thirds among adult and young women. Yet in countries like Cambodia there is a significant improvement in girls gaining access to education as Cambodia has been most compliant to the conditions of BPA as much of its foreign aid is linked to such conditionalities. In this seminar, despite the shifting emphasis to MDGs, it is important to appraise the level of women's development within Southeast Asia. Ms. Josefa Gigi Francisco (Southeast Asian Coordinator, Development Alternatives with Women for the New Era, Philippines) gives us an overview on what BPA has meant for the countries in Southeast Asia and emphasises the role that the Association

of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) took on in this area.

It is also important to look at women in leadership roles so that they can be the decision-makers to effect change. Women politicians can influence policies and decisions towards improving the status of women is what we would like to believe. In the discussions from Indonesia, Philippines and Cambodia the presenters gave diverse views on the situation. Ms. Eva Mysliwiec, Co-Director, Youth Star Cambodia traced the history of the women's engagement in Cambodia's politics and assessed their current displaced positions while raising hopes that many women leaders were being nurtured at the grassroots level. Professor Prosperina Domingo Tapales from Philippines registered that while there were two women Presidents it did not mean that there were many political women leaders. Like Ms. Mysliwiec, she too placed political leadership at the grassroots with the strong civil society movement in Philippines. Dr. Claudia Derichs contributed this article to emphasise the role of kinship politics and how religion and politics are intertwined in Indonesian politics, making it difficult ground for women to become independent players.

In the area of women in the workforce, the discussion on the study done by Dr. Eileen Drew on how policies and the lack of them have impacted women in Europe is an important counterfoil to assess the situation of women in urban environments who struggle with their three roles – worker, mother, wife – with little support at both the workplace or at home. Dr. Shirlena Huang's discussion shows another face to the working woman – the migrant worker who leaves home to look after a working woman's home.

Both Dr. Drew's and Dr. Huang's discussions reveal the displacement of women both in the workplace and in the home. Ms. Sharon Loo dissects traditional gender roles and explores the reasons for modern women judging themselves through the male gaze. The analysis of all these contributions show that there is still much work ahead – women in South East Asia also have a struggle on their hands in terms of attaining political leadership though much has improved since 1995 in terms of community and grassroots involvement; and that many women and men are caught, as in many other countries (as the paper on Europe shows), in a work-life warp that is more of an imbalanced than a balanced lifestyle.

Dr. Colin Dürkop
Singapore, December 2006

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MS. JOSEFA GIG S. FRANCISCO is the former Executive Director of the Women and Gender Institute (WAGI) in Miriam College, where she teaches in the International Studies Department. She serves as regional coordinator of the International Gender and Trade Network (IGTN)-Asia and the Development Alternatives with Women in the New Era (DAWN) in Southeast Asia. She is also a co-founder of the Asian Peace Alliance (APA) and the Asia Pacific Network on Food Sovereignty (APNFS), as well as a member of the International Council for Adult Education and the International South Group Network.

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MS. SHARON LOO, former editorial consultant of *Panorama*, received her Bachelors and Masters degrees in political science from the National University of Singapore. Her main interest areas lie primarily in the writings of Plato, Xenophon, Machiavelli, Mary Wollstonecraft, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, as well as feminist re-readings of classical political

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MS. EVA L. MYSLIWIEC is a Cambodian of American origin and has been working for 30 years for programmes concerning relief, rehabilitation, development and post-conflict reconstruction in Southeast Asia and West Africa. She has also managed a policy research and a training institution with a focus on socio-economic development and peace-building for more than a decade. She has worked with various non-governmental organisations that include Oxfam and Peace Corps. Today, she is the founder and co-director of Youth Star Cambodia in Phnom Penh. A graduate in sociology with a post-graduate in international agriculture from Cornell University, Ms. Mysliwiec's diverse interests and passion have also led her to publish widely. She was awarded the Medal of Sahametrei by the Royal Government of Cambodia in recognition of her service to the country (2003).

DR. PROSERPINA DOMINGO TAPALES recently retired as a Professor of Public Administration in the University of the Philippines. She has served as Dean of the College of Public Administration, Director of the Local Government Center, Deputy Director of the Center for Women's Studies and Vice-Chancellor of Academic Affairs of the University's Open University. She has written books and papers on local government, public administration and gender issues in the Philippines. Dr Tapales has trained elected local officials on Gender and Governance issues. She is currently based in New York City.

Snapshots: Women's Struggle for Change in Post-Suharto Indonesia

Claudia Derichs

The history of women's movements in Southeast Asia has always been connected to the nature of their surrounding political systems and the developmental ideology of the powers that be. Women's political role was more or less restricted to a supportive one, that is women were expected to physically and morally assist in the nation's development.

The perception of women changed with increasing tendencies of liberalisation and democratisation, and in particular with the awareness of the importance of women's votes in national elections. This trend became reinforced in the wake of the regional financial crisis of the late 1990s. Women contributed to the political reform movements that emerged within the economic turmoil, and in some countries female leaders became the heads or symbols of reform-oriented political parties. Indonesia's Megawati Sukarnoputri and Malaysia's Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, accompanied by her daughter Nurul Izzah, are prominent cases in point.

While this should be regarded as a positive trend, the ongoing struggle of the women's movements in the region also reveals several flaws that have cropped up despite a growing liberal political atmosphere. Some snapshots of women's

activism in Indonesia during the period of the country's democratic consolidation draw a picture of success as well as setbacks regarding women's efforts to make their voices heard. Although women's groups in Indonesia operate within highly heterogeneous political and social frameworks, one strong message reaches out: the rejection of a patriarchally inspired religious conservatism that gradually encroaches upon women's rights.

Some striking topics of discussion and debate in recent years have been the issue of polygamy, a draft law against pornography, and moral directives including dress codes for women. In some areas of the country, militant groups have taken the initiative to arrange for a 'proper Islamic' social order, for instance by sanctioning of women who violate the given dress code. [ref.: e.g. Edriana Noordin, 2002 (endnote 6)]. 'Indonesia's politicians are reluctant to confront Islamic extremists, even though they claim these views represent only a tiny majority of the population', says journalist Gary LaMoshi. [ref.: Gary LaMoshi, 'Indonesia's Islamists flex their muscles', in: Asia Times Online, Southeast Asia, Oct. 27, 2005 www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/ GJ27Ae02.html (Nov. 11, 2005)]. In this

climate, various women's organisations strive to position themselves ideationally and to articulate their interests.

Women's organisations

Although the surrender of Suharto in 1998 was brought about by a popular uprising 'from below' – the *reformasi* or reform movement – Indonesia is currently undergoing a process that can best be described as a 'pacted transition' in which the former elites are involved in negotiating the process of democratisation, its pace, and the central means to implement policies such as decentralisation. From the presidential elections of 2004 – in fact the first of its kind since Presidents had never been popularly elected before – former general Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono emerged victorious. The military, which had been a strong and influential political agent throughout the years of Suharto's New Order regime, had lost its formerly reserved seats in parliament, but still plays an important role in shaping Indonesian politics. Ever since the country's independence (1945) and despite an overwhelming majority of Muslims in the population, the military has defended the secular state of Indonesia. Suharto himself had been quite hostile towards Muslim groups in general and Muslim political parties in particular during the first half of his reign. It was only in the 1990s that he started to tolerate and gradually promote the formation of various Islamic institutions such as Islamic banks, educational institutions, or an association of Muslim intellectuals called ICMI (*Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim se-Indonesia*; All-Indonesian Muslim Intellectual Association). Yet, Islamic political parties were forced to subscribe to the secular national ideology of *Pancasila*, and

it took Suharto's successor B.J. Habibie who lifted this law. In the national elections since 1999, several newly founded Muslim parties sent their members to stand as candidates. However, until today those parties have not made any significant inroads into the party constellations in Parliament.

Having said that, the picture of party constellations and political representation of Islamism (in the shape of political parties identifying themselves with an explicit Islamic ideology and agenda) is misleading if we take it as a mirror reflecting society's interests and preferences in all their nuances? One of the reasons is that in a country of 230 million people, of which almost 90% subscribe to Islam as their religion, Muslim interests are naturally represented to a great extent in the national political arena. Moreover, many influential actors refrain from espousing explicitly an Islamic ideology and agenda, but are nonetheless concerned with Muslim interests. Numerous members in both Houses of Parliament are at the same time members of one of the two big Islamic mass organisations, *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) and *Muhammadiyah*. Out of 61 female legislators in the current 550 member lower chamber (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat* or DPR), for instance, 15 are members of NU.

A quarter of the women's representatives in the DPR are thus affiliated to a political party and to a religious organisation alike. Although NU and *Muhammadiyah*, which comprise a combined membership of approximately 60 million people, are by no means extremist organisations, their understanding of Islam and of the role of Muslim women is fairly traditionalist in many respects.

The women's wings of NU and *Muhammadiyah* consider themselves to be part of "the organisation", which refers to the term *organisasi massa* or *ormas*, meaning the mass organisations that already existed throughout the Suharto era. To become formally recognised as a national (mass) organisation, a group has to exhibit representation in at least 15 of Indonesia's 33 provinces. This is not as easy as could be expected, given the fact that funding for non-governmental organisations has usually to be raised from international donors and that competition is high. The Indonesian Women's Coalition (*Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia*) which was established in 1998 has managed to set up 13 provincial offices so far; a 14th branch is coming up. It describes itself as a mass organisation, but critics doubt the strength of the coalition on the national level.

Aside from the competition among the numerous issue-oriented women NGOs, the strong imbalance between *ormas* and non-*ormas* in terms of influence on and access to the circles of political decision-making renders NGO activism challenging. Traditional associations of politicians and male heads of organisations at the local, regional and national level have regular exchanges of discussions and wives of these heads can make ample use of the direct access to the decision-making arena to leverage and forward their husbands' causes. This started and was prevalent under Suharto era when wives' associations rather forwarded the positions of their husbands than their own.[1] One such women's organisation is the national confederation of women's organisations KOWANI (*Kongres Wanita*). It serves as the official representative of Indonesia's women at the national level. Its leading members are elite women who can draw support from an extensive network of well entrenched political actors. KOWANI has equivalents at the provincial and local levels. The difference of today's organisations with those of the New Order regime or *orde baru* of Suharto's period, is their greater independence, at least in formal respect. This greater independence is also true for the national commissions in Indonesia such as the National Commission of Human Rights (*Komnas Ham*) or the National Women's Commission (*Komnas Perempuan*). During Suharto's time they had to function as a vehicle for the government's policies, whereas today's independence allows them to attend to their clients' actual problems. *Komnas Perempuan* has thus become an institutional agency for women. Out of its 70 members, 18 are of governmental background or affiliation; all others come from civil society, bringing in their experience from the grassroots level. The commissioners lend an ear to women's NGOs, and they push for policy-making in the interests of women. The fact that the government enacted the Domestic Violence Act in 2004, which women's NGOs had demanded for a long time, is an example for a joint action. Changes in the Family and Marriage Law are expected to become a case of legislative debate in the near future.

The established organisations, which have continued to operate within the comparatively new democratic system, are not regarded as feminist organisations. The term feminism is still a rather negatively connoted label hinting at Western (or Northern) influenced, anti-men attitudes. The promotion of a wider acceptance of the term becomes even more

difficult in an atmosphere of religious conservatism gaining momentum among different layers of society. The local and rural level in particular forms an operational base for religious forces that is hard to approach by urban-centred NGOs. In this regard, decentralisation policies to strengthen local autonomy have not always worked in favour of women's interests or to the betterment of their position in the community, as observations by Indonesian women's groups reveal.

Decentralisation and its repercussions

Indonesia's decentralisation programme has aroused opposition from progressive Muslim women activists in several policy areas. A number of local regulations that are commonly known as *peraturan daerah* or *perda* have come under attack because provincial and district authorities have made rather arbitrary use of the permission to practice autonomous local legislation such as for instance: enacting regulations pertaining to local taxes or to a local 'social order', without seeking permission from Jakarta in advance. By way of *perda*, local governments are expected to meet the need 'to develop and create their own sources of funding'.[2] In practice, the 'needs' that are defined by local authorities exceed the realm of tax policy and often touch moral and behavioural issues. Initially, the post-Suharto central government associated a consistently positive development with its policy of decentralisation, which it put into practice in 2001:

In Indonesia, as elsewhere, de-centralization was accepted as a

reaction to inefficient and corrupt central government bureaucrats and was regarded as integral to democratization. Many politicians remain convinced that decentralization is needed to save money and ensure better delivery of public services.[3]

But the difficulties of implementing the policy in a way to allow for the emergence of the intended results are striking. Meanwhile, the central government has lost a great deal of control over things happening at the local (district) level. The anti-hierarchical relationship between central and local governments has led to a situation that has 'minimised the vertical accountability mechanisms' and thus served to weaken the monitoring and legislative functions of elected local bodies.[4] Under the guise of *perda*, executive bodies in the provinces and districts conduct their budget allocation according to their own preferences and limit the disclosure of the local budget. Apart from weakening the accountability of political authorities and legislative bodies, this 'new habit' has also led to an alarming malperformance – for example spending setting aside only a small amount for policies of gender mainstreaming - and of male-dominated executives being in charge of terms of gender budgeting. Initially, ministries or departments for women's empowerment had been introduced and recommended as units of governance and implementation at both the national and the local levels alike. But decentralisation laws no longer require the maintenance of such institutions. Aside from the fact that the abolishment of institutions for the promotion of women's empowerment and women's policy

interests has been extremely facilitated, even in those provinces and districts where they are still working, the budget allocated for them has often been reduced to a ridiculous amount.[5]

Decentralisation also allows for individual provincial legislation in the field of social policy – social policy in its broadest sense, so to speak, because it includes clauses such as the 'banning and eradication of amoral behaviour'.[6] Once they have turned into regulations, such policies impose on the women how they should dress and behave, whereas men's appearance is of no major interest. Although the term *shari'a* is not mentioned in these regulations, their impact is in fact a clandestine implementation of *shari'a* law on the local level. Made public and oftentimes enforced even before they have formally come into effect, the consequences of moral regulations are discouraging in many regards. Women 'caught' without a veil or a hair-covering headgear are stopped by self-proclaimed defenders of law and order who forcefully shave the women's head. Women get attacked and stigmatised when they move outside at night without a *muhrim* (a male relative) by their side.

The enforcement of laws protecting women from such treatment by local police units is extremely weak. Women know the police are corrupt, and in many cases the mere guess that a rapist might have bribed the police officer prevents women from reporting a rape case. They keep silent instead of raising their voice. Some districts have established a women's police desk in order to encourage women to report cases of rape and domestic violence there. But they are not yet covering the whole country. Women's NGOs which have specialised in finding victims of violence against women and providing them with shelter and legal assistance have established branches in several provinces, but covering a country that consists of thousands of islands is truly a Herculean task.

A distinctive patriarchal culture that is also pervasive within the media becomes an obstacle in raising awareness to the problems of women, an analysis of policy implementation and/or efficacy of the judiciary processes around citizenship, family law, personal status etc. which impact more on women. Gender issues have become commercially exploited by the media, says Rena Herdiyani, executive director of the Women's Communication and Information Center *Kalyanamitra*.[7] When an act of violence against women is to be reported to the police, the media is already there. They seek to make a story of the case often using a discriminating and gender-hostile terminology. In doing so, they render the woman a double victim: of the initial violence and the violence of the media.[8] In the local area, a woman is expected to bear whatever burden she encounters. Once she chooses to go public with her 'story', shame is put on her and the whole family – including, if she is married, the husband's family. She is considered a woman who cannot keep family secrets, hence a 'bad' woman in the framework of traditional moral standards.

NGOs like *Kalaynamitra* or the legal aid workers of LBH-APIK[9] know about the situation on the local level and attend to it, for instance by socialising and careful counselling in the community. It so happens that cases of violence against women become reported by the neighbouring village instead of the village where the act happened – knowing that

this is a protection for the female victim vis-à-vis her family.[10] Yet there is a lot of work lying ahead of non-governmental as well as governmental organisations in order to change the overwhelmingly patriarchal mindset that pervades most public and private institutions. Decentralisation has thus proven not to be a suitable tool in this regard. The introduction of *shari'a* laws on the local level is preferred by many local leaders and authorities. Only a few women's organisations touch it, because it is a highly sensitive issue and trying to persuade the leaders to be careful with *shari'a* implementation requires sharpened instincts and patience. However, even if the local leaders show some sympathy and understanding, there are strong militant Islamist groups like the *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI; Front for the Defenders of Islam) that are only unconvincingly prevented by the police from attacking 'liberal' women.

Religiously inspired national legislation

On the level of national politics, progressive women's organisations currently fight the adoption of a bill against pornography and 'pornographic action', which is unerringly directed at women. This law proposal finds the support of several political parties, sections of the women's wing of *Nahdlatul Ulama* and of the State Ministry of Religion. The draft (as of spring 2006) contains a vague definition of what constitutes female pornography and porno activity, so that the text is open to broad interpretation. As a law, it could easily become exploited by Islamist groups who seek to define 'decency' in women's

dress codes according to their own ideas. If wearing tight clothes or moving erotically in public is a crime according to this bill, who decides how wide shirts and skirts actually have to be in order to become accepted or what an erotic movement is? In 2005, the bill was said to be still far from being discussed in Parliament, because a list of other legislative topics enjoyed priority. The situation changed in 2006, when other bills were relegated to second rank and the pornography bill became a big issue in and outside Parliament. Progressive women's groups all over the country organised their protest against the law's provisions which directly impinged on women's autonomy over their bodies and clothes. In provinces inhabited predominantly by non-Muslims such as Papua, Bali, East Nusa Tenggara or North Sulawesi, the provincial governments have expressed their strong opposition because they feel deprived of their cultural tradition. For a province like Papua in particular, the draft bill is grist to the mill of the secessionists who seek independence from Jakarta.

A question that is raised is, if national legislators have nothing else to care for than women's public appearance. A plausible answer may be that Islamic parties' interests form the backbone to the swift emergence of the Bill in Parliament and that President Yudhoyono wants to cater to orthodox demands in order to secure Muslim votes for his party in the next elections. The crucial point, however, is the bill's target, i.e. women, and the underlying assumption that the nation's morale rests on its females. Men's behaviour obviously deserves no further attention by the lawmakers who have promoted the

bill; it is the women who cause men's leering eyes and arouse their sexual lust. In fact there is an article in Indonesia's criminal code that sanctions the distribution of pornographic material (printed and digital material), but aside from the fact that the sanctions are hardly enforced, it does not include the so-called porno action (*pornoaksi*). Men are not conceived of carrying a moral responsibility for the nation's well-being. In an interview for the English medium paper *Jakarta Post,* the Chairman of Indonesia's Council of Islamic Scholars (MUI)[11] defends the deliberation of the law 'because we are trying to protect women and children, not to criminalize them.'[12] Although the Chairman is well aware of the country's other pressing problems, he considers the porno law more necessary than, for instance, the integration of sex education in the schools' curricula. The demand to handle corruption, terrorism, or drug trafficking notwithstanding, 'we need stern regulations until our people are mature enough to understand that pornographic acts are a private matter, and cannot be shown in public,' he says.[13] While most of his fellow country people would agree to this statement, it does not touch upon the very definition of what constitutes (female) pornography and pornographic action.

All women's organisations are against pornography and pornographic action in public, but the definition of the draft law has such a vague definition of these two terms that even wearing a tank top shirt could be regarded pornographic action. That is why the women's organisations are demanding for precise definitions of the terms. They protested the Bill by just saying "Stop pornography" because that is

commonly understood and makes sense among all groups. But they do not accept a definition of pornography that allows policing personnel to arrest a woman for example who is wearing a kebaya because to them it looked tight.

The struggle against the bill has united a lot of religious and secular women's organisations. Their common denominator is the adherence to the nation's motto *bhineka tunggal ika* (unity in diversity) and the principles of the national ideology *Pancasila*. Artists and celebrities share the alliance which proceeded to the National Parliament in May and organised cultural festivals underlining the belief in the importance of preserving the country's cultural diversity.

From the perspective of its political implications, the issue relates to four questions that have become core questions of political stability in the young democratising nation-state. First and foremost, there is the question of national integration. The draft of the pornography bill has caused opposition from regions that have secessionist aspirations such as Papua and lately also Bali, where calls for the Hindu island's independence have been articulated in light of contesting the Bill.[14] Even though the decentralisation laws have provided the provinces and districts with more autonomy than before, those local communities are highly sceptical of the central government. This applies particularly to the predominantly non-Muslim regions and communities, because they feel pressed to succumb to Islamic culture and values 'through the backdoor'. A second question touches upon the rich heritage of Indonesia's cultural diversity, an asset it has always been proud of. Even if the law were to

allow the mostly Hinduist Balinese to wear their traditional dress for carrying out ritual acts, the stigma of a 'porno island' would certainly fall on them. Banning the performance of traditional dances such as *dangdut* from being shown in public will inevitably eclipse the country's cultural pluralism. It is no exaggerated speculation that this might lead to social unrest and eventually put at risk the country's relative political and social stability. Another question addresses the legislative procedures in terms of Parliament's responsiveness to people's interests. The debate on the Pornography Bill entered Parliament in early 2006 despite several other Bills that were considered priorities, aroused much suspicion. It is suggested that the Bill is not meant to solve problems, but is yet another instrument to win votes. Once the Islamic parties learn that they can shift the President's (and Parliament's) priority setting on the political agenda, they will try to make use of their influence more often. Religious conservatism is thus on the rise in various pockets of politics, and many women are worried about the consequences of this trend.

A fourth question pertains to the ambit of international relations. The Bali bombings and the alleged role of Abu Bakar Bashir in Islamic terrorism have put pressure on the Indonesian government to present itself as an ally in the global war on terror – at least in the arena of international politics. Washington would like to see the archipelago as a model for a moderate Islam that is perfectly compatible with democracy. Therefore, the Indonesian Government is struggling to engage constructively with Islamic militants at home and in the Muslim world. Indonesia's neighbours are monitoring the development of political Islam closely, and they notice that religion maintains a more visible place in society than before. Despite some notable arguments that underline the decline of political Islam in Indonesia,[15] there are valid signs for the rising tide of Islamic fundamentalism in society. 'A recent poll in Jakarta revealed that more than 11% of people surveyed believe that suicide bombings against civilian targets can be justified,' *Asia Times Online* mentions.[16] Liberal minds are by no means absent, but for some reason – maybe because they are considered to be influenced by the West – they have difficulties to become accepted. 'Most progressive Muslim thinkers would not be very happy to be portrayed as liberals,' Islamic scholar Ade Armando is quoted.[17] By August 2005, MUI had already issued 11 *fatwas* (Islamic legal opinions or edicts) against the supporters of a liberal Islam or *Islam liberal* in Indonesian spelling.[18] The President and his Government may pick the 'opportunity' for Indonesia's Islamic moderates and liberals to exert respective influence on the Muslim world. Neighbouring Malaysia is trying this as well by selling the approach of a 'Civilisational Islam' to the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). Yet, the political leadership in Indonesia entertains the more conservative forces within the Muslim world, too, which demonstrates its care for a balanced foreign policy. At home, this may lend the secular government some more Islamic credentials. To the women, however, an increasing religious conservatism poses 'the biggest threat these days in Indonesia', as an activist[19] from Indonesia's Center for Electoral Reform puts it.

Concluding remarks

As new political formations proliferated in post-Suharto Indonesia, progressive women's organisations hoped for the opening of space to articulate their policy interests. While space indeed opened on a formal level, reality shows a different face. National legislation and regulations implemented in the policy framework of decentralisation have severely curtailed women's avenues to move about. Formal liberalization has thus not produced the results that could have been expected if law enforcement and policy implementation operated properly.

An even more significant challenge for the progressive women's groups lies in the increase in takeover of political space by Islamist movements and organisations. The National Government in Indonesia is not the driving force behind this trend, but it fails to make the Islamist forces refrain from their activities. Unlike many other Muslim societies, Indonesia does not have to cope with the conflicts between Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims. The cleavage in Indonesia is formed by Muslims and non-Muslims, although the Muslim majority is strong in numbers and proportion. Aside from this aspect, however, the intra-community cleavages among the Muslims carry weight. Whilst Islamist and fundamentalist attitudes are on the rise, progressive opinions are frequently outweighed by those who lay claim to be the watchdogs and guardians of morality, culture, traditional customs and/or social traditions. In comparison, Indonesia's women can move around much more freely than women in other Muslim countries – at least until today. But on a structural level, the (progressive) women's groups in countries with a strong religious conservatism (including non-Muslim conservatism, of course) face the same obstacles:

o The progressive women's movement is fragmented and constitutes only a part of the women's movement

o Political parties and all kinds of associations – political, social, religious – have female members and women's wings, but their activities are subordinate to the party's/organisation's programme, agenda and ideology

o Female representation in legislative and executive bodies is weak both in qualitative and quantitative terms

o Political opposition to the ruling authorities does not positively correlate with support for women's interests: The principle 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' does not apply, because fundamentalists form a considerable part of the opposition

o Patronage and nepotism are strong elements of the social fabric, and women often find themselves outside the relevant circles of decision-making or are expected to succumb to social pressure that derives from male dominated patronage networks

o A frequently applied weapon to dismiss progressive women's demands is the argument of women's loss of their moral standing; women are expected to carry the moral reputation of the nation upon their shoulders (almost literally!)

Indonesia thereby forms a case in point, but by no means an exclusive one. Patriarchal mindsets diffuse the political structure and the social fabric of the majority of the world's nations.

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Opportunities to change the situation depend on how intensively these mindsets are allowed to prevail – and this is to a considerable extent determined by the political will to generate change. Unfortunately, this political will frequently falls victim to the competition for votes.

Endnotes:

1   See Lies Marcos (2002), Women's grassroots movements in Indonesia: A case study of the PKK and Islamic women's organisations; in: Robinson, K./Bessell, S. (eds.), Women in Indonesia, Singapore, pp. 187-197.

2   Stein Kristiansen and Lambang Trijono (2005), Authority and Law Enforcement; Local Government Reforms and Security Systems in Indonesia, in: Contemporary Southeast Asia 27/2, pp. 236-254 (242).

3   Ibid.

4   Ibid, p. 244.

5   Adriana Venny, Executive Director of *Jurnal Perempuan* (Women's Journal), personal interview, Feb. 14, 2006.

6   Edriana Noerdin (2002), Customary institutions, *syariah* law and the marginalisation of Indonesian women, in: Robinson, K./Bessell, S. (eds.), Women in Indonesia, op cit., pp. 179-186 (183).

7   Personal interview, Feb. 17, 2006.

8   Rena Herdiyani, ibid.

9   Lembaga Bantuan Hukum – Asisiasi Perempuan Indonesia untuk Keadilan (Legal Aid Organization of Indonesian Women's Association for Justice).

10 Zoemrotin K. Soesilo, vice president of the National Human Rights Commission (Komnas Ham), personal interview, Feb. 15, 2006.

11 Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) in Indonesian spelling.

12 Porn bill offers protection to women and children, The Jakarta Post, March 24, 2006, http://www.thejakartapost.com/detailheadlines.asp?fileid=20060324.A01&irec=1 (March 24, 2006).

13 Ibid.

14 Desi Anwar, Indonesia: The politics of bare flesh, in: Asia Times Online, Southeast Asia, March 18, 2006, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/HC18Ae01.html (March 20, 2006).

15 Andrew Steel, The decline of political Islam in Indonesia, in: Asia Times Online, Southeast Asia, March 28, 2006, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/HC28Ae03.html (March 31, 2006).

16 Michael Vatikiotis, Indonesia back on the world stage, in: Asia Times Online, March 30, 2006, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/HC30Ae01.html (March 31, 2006).

17 Kalinga Seneviratne, Islamic edicts rattle Indonesians, in: Asia Times Online, Aug. 27, 2005, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/GH27Ae03.html (Aug. 29, 2005).

18 Ibid.

19 Personal communication with an activist who wants to keep anonymity, Feb. 22, 2006.

Two Steps Forward-One Step Back? Women's Employment in the EU

Eileen Drew

Introduction

This paper examines the growth in women's economic activity in EU economies, which has occurred in tandem with falling levels of fertility and the expansion of the services sector.

It goes on to highlight the characteristics of women's employment and how these differ from men's, as manifested in: working time arrangements, occupational segregation and the gender wage gap. The paper outlines EU policy measures to promote women's employment and concludes with a summary of the legal interventions supporting gender equality in employment in the EU.

Figure 1: Framework for analysing the Relationship between Gender, Employment and Working Conditions
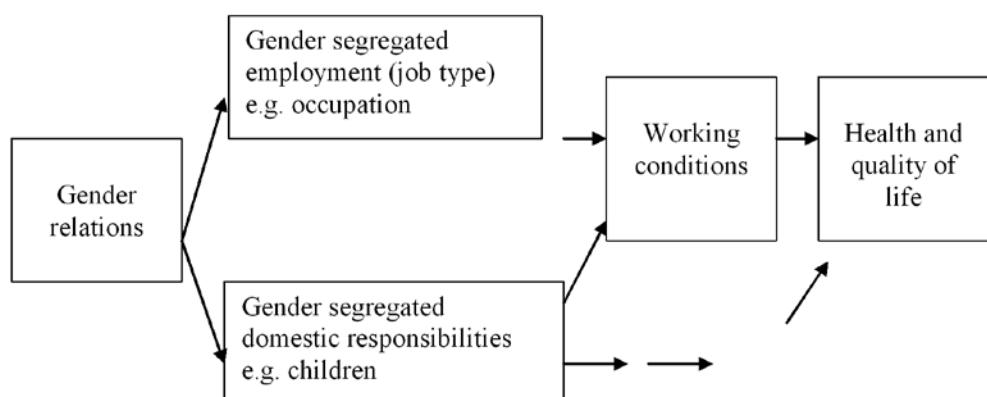
Source: Fagan and Burchell (2002)

Gender and working conditions are inextricably related. It has been hypothesised that this relationship may be due to the fact that men and women choose to enter different (i.e. sex segregated) occupations in which they then experience similar working conditions.

An alternative explanation is that gender relations and inequality in society, for example women's dual burden of paid and unpaid work, determine women's versus men's working conditions. Both hypotheses have relevance to this paper.

Rising Female Participation in EU Labour Markets

Women's ever increasing participation in the labour force in recent decades has become a marked feature of most EU (25) countries. Over the period 1998-2003, the only exceptions were Portugal, (-5.7%), Czech Republic (-2.4%), Slovakia and Estonia (-1.3%), Slovenia (-1.0%) and Latvia (-0.2%). Hence by 2003, women formed an increasing part of the labour force in all countries - on average 43 per cent of the labour force in EU (25) Member States (European Commission, 2004).

The major impetus for labour market change has been the shift from agricultural and/or manufacturing based economies to service based economies, in which service occupations now predominate. Associated with this there has been an emerging orientation to quality and customer service, suggesting that quite different norms and values are emerging within enterprises that wish to remain competitive.

Furthermore, working conditions are no longer bound by 24 hour production cycles, of eight or 12 hour shifts, typical of manufacturing enterprises. Indeed, with the growth of the service sector, there has been a growing demand for uneven, extended hours that may vary throughout the week. Finally, under increased competition, enterprises are demanding changes in the way work is performed, which is undermining the 'male model' of work: the forty-hour week, in full-time, permanent employment throughout a continuous and unbroken employment record, which necessitated a cleavage from any home-based activities and family connections. This pattern is being eroded by employers' need to cover uneven hours in the work place, giving rise to different balances of working time and working place practices, and the simultaneous use of full-time plus part-time arrangements (Drew and Emerek, 1998).

Gender Issues in Employment in the EU

Gender Segregation

Despite employment growth for women, major imbalances persist and one of the most marked of these is occupational segregation, on gender lines.

Gender segregation in paid and unpaid work is a persistent feature of EU Member States. Women continue to shoulder the main responsibility for the 'second shift' of running the home and looking after children, even when employed full-time. Despite women's employment growth and entry to higher level professions and

management, women's employment is concentrated in activities and occupations that are already predominantly feminine (Anker 1998, Rubery and Fagan 1993, Rubery et al. 1999). Segregation is found across a range of employment dimensions. According to Fagan and Burchell (2002), women are over-represented in a limited range of occupations, industrial sectors, in the public sector and in small private sector firms, and in particular, employment contracts such as part-time work. This is known as horizontal segregation. In addition, women are vertically segregated by being under-represented in the higher status and better paid jobs, such as senior government, management and many professions. Vertical segregation also occurs within occupational areas, where women are located at the lower grades. Even within occupations and industries that employ both genders, for example sales work, men and women tend to be segregated into different companies, and to different departments within the same organisation (Fagan and Burchell, 2002).

Anker (1998) showed that occupational segregation by gender is present in *all countries* and that 'female' occupations are associated with lower pay. He also found that occupational segregation differs across regions of the world, with the Asia/Pacific region having the lowest average level. However, levels of occupational segregation in OECD and European Transition Economies are very similar. The expectation had been that prior to the fall of communism, the Central and Eastern European states (many of which are now part of the EU-25) would have had lower gender segregation and pay inequalities, given their political and ideological commitment to equality of the sexes.

Anker (1998) concluded that the long-lasting effect of cultural, historical and social factors has impacted gender-stereotyping of occupations and women's labour market behaviour. More specifically, women's work has:

"...characteristics which are highly consistent with typical female stereotypes in society at large... such as a caring nature; honesty; manual dexterity, especially with fingers; experience and skill at typical household activities; and willingness to be subservient and take orders. There is *clearly a need to break down the very strong gender stereotypes* which exist around the world regarding the supposed capabilities, preferences and abilities of men and women. Only in this way will individual women begin to have the opportunity of a wide choice of occupations." (Anker, 1998: 411)

The European Commission (2006) reports that gender segregation has continued to rise. More than 4 in 10 women work in public administration, education, health or social activities compared to fewer than 2 in 10 men. Private sector job growth has been important for women and men especially in business services. The persistence across countries of 'glass ceilings' and 'glass walls' that prevent women from rising in their careers and diversifying their occupational aspirations in the labour market, is a subject of policy interest and concern.

The segregation of men and women in paid employment is only one dimension of the gendered nature of societal work.

The 'second shift', encompassing unpaid domestic work involved in running a home, rearing children and caring for older family members, is a marked feature of women's work throughout the EU (25) and in all other regions of the world. Fagan and Burchell (2002) show that regular domestic work associated with running a home falls largely on women, typically adding 27 to 33 hours to their total weekly volume of work. This gender difference is more pronounced in households with children and for women working part-time.

This gender division of labour within the household constrains women's economic independence and men's involvement in their fathering role. It also limits the amount of time women have left for leisure, sleep and personal activities. These in turn affect other aspects of women's and men's working conditions such as pay and working time.

The issues of reconciling family and paid work are extremely relevant to the female activity rate for women aged 25 to 49 years. A high proportion of women in this age group have dependent children living at home, or elderly relatives to care for - or both. This age group of women have not only the highest female activity rates but also the highest increase in activity rates compared to women aged 15-24 (whose activity rate has declined due to participation in education) and women aged 50-65. The same tendencies occur in all EU (15) countries so that women aged 25-49 years have an average EU activity rate of more than 50 per cent. In the Nordic countries the activity rate is over 80 per cent (Drew and Emerek, 1998).

Part-time Work in the European Union

In 2003, just over 17 per cent of workers in the EU (25) were in part-time employment and this level is rising (European Commission 2004). Most countries have experienced a similar growth in part-time working. In the Netherlands, part-time employment accounted for 45 per cent of total employment, followed by the UK (25%) and Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany and Sweden with rates of more than 20 per cent. The level of part-time working remains exceptionally low (<5%) in the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary and the Slovak Republic. In contrast part-time working is rising in Austria, Belgium and Germany.

Part-time working remains a feature of women's employment and nearly one woman in three (30%) was engaged in such employment compared with under 7 per cent of men. When men work part-time it is usually during their youth. For women, it is associated with the latter stages of their working lives (European Commission, 2004).

Women's increasing participation in the labour market proceeds in different ways, at different levels and at different speeds in various countries. In some countries, the increase in women's participation has proceeded in an extensive way, by including more women in the labour market - primarily as part-timers, as in the Netherlands, but also as full-time employees, as in Spain. In other countries with a high female activity rate, like Denmark, women's increased participation has occurred through more intensive use of women's labour (from part-time to full-

time). In some countries, such as Germany, women's increased participation has been achieved through extensive and intensive use of women's labour (Drew and Emerek, 1998).

This suggests that the development in women's employment is connected to factors other than the availability of part-time jobs and the need for flexible working time, and that the strategy used to attract women's labour is constrained by traditions, norms and culture as well as the distribution of sectors and labour market regulations in different countries.

Though some part-time work may reflect personal preference, much of it is used mainly by women, to reconcile work and family life. Having children reduces the likelihood of a woman being employed while for a man it increases it. Recourse to part-time work replicates this gendered pattern. This working time difference intersects with gender segregation, career progression and potential earnings over a life span.

> "Part-time work presents a major potential challenge to labour market norms and standards associated with full-time work. Evidence from a variety of countries suggests that this challenge to labour standards can be modified and reduced through the incorporation of part-time work into the system of regulation. The experience for Scandinavia and Netherlands is that part-time work has been incorporated into standard labour market norms and remuneration on a pro rata basis. However even under pro rata conditions part-timers still suffer financial penalties which go beyond the shortfall in

weekly income, part-time workers are less likely to be promoted and part-time jobs tend to be created in sectors, organisation and occupations where relative pay even for full-timers is low". (Rubery 1998)

The Gender Earnings Gap

The EU gender earnings gap shows no signs of narrowing. On average women earn 15 per cent less than men on an hourly basis (European Commission 2006). The gender earnings gap is calculated by comparing the mean (or median) pay of women with the mean (or median) pay of men. In other words, an 'average' woman is compared to an 'average' man. But this average pay differential can hide large variations in the gender earnings gap across the salary distribution. In particular, the gap between the lowest-paid women and the lowest-paid men, and between the highest-paid women and highest-paid men, may diverge substantially from this average figure.

There are marked variations across EU Member States. A study undertaken using OECD data (Arulampalam et al, 2005) compared men's and women's earnings in eleven European countries, correcting estimates for differences between men and women in their labour market characteristics (including education and job type). The authors sought to explain why the observed gender earnings gaps in Europe are:

(i) in some countries, larger at the top of the wages distribution (*glass ceilings*); and

(ii) in some countries, larger at the bottom of the wages distribution (*sticky floors*).

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Gender-specific policies - such as equal opportunities and anti-discrimination laws, parental leave provisions and the availability of childcare – can affect gender wage gaps. These wage gaps are also likely to be influenced by wage setting institutions that do not directly impinge on gender, such as those governing collective bargaining and minimum wages.

Arulampalam et al. (2005) found that, on average, women are paid less (per hour) than men in all the 11 countries studied. The gaps range from 12 per cent in Denmark to 23 per cent in Finland. In over half the countries, the gender earnings gap towards the top of the wages distribution is higher than the gap lower down the distribution. In Denmark, for example, the gender earnings gap is 21 per cent for the top tenth of earners, compared to only 10 per cent for workers in the middle of the distribution. This is consistent with 'glass ceilings' that make it difficult for women to advance to the top of the pay ladder. In some countries, the gender earnings gap is also larger for low paid women than it is for those higher up the earnings distribution, a phenomenon known as the 'sticky floor' effect. For example, in Austria the gender earnings gap is 24 per cent for the lowest tenth of earners, but falls to 20 per cent for workers at median earnings. There were differences observed between the public and private sectors. While the overall gender earnings gap in the UK is high, at 19 per cent, and stays roughly constant across the salary distribution, this masks a 'glass ceiling' effect in the public sector, where the gap ranges from 14 per cent for the lowest tenth of earners, through 18 per cent for average earners to 21 per cent for the top

tenth of earners. In the private sector, the gender earnings gap is higher than in the public sector (22%) and is flat across the distribution.

Many factors contribute to this: disregard for equal pay legislation, labour market segregation, differences in working patterns including exit from the labour market, access to education and training, biased evaluation and wage systems and stereotyping. Arulampalam et al. (2005) compared the different profiles of gender earnings gaps across countries and related these to labour market institutions, especially childcare policies and wage setting mechanisms. Depending on how they operate, childcare policies can have the effect of strengthening or weakening mothers' attachment to the labour market and their links to employers. Wage setting institutions such as minimum wages or collective bargaining can directly affect gender earnings gaps, but can also change the cost of childcare and other domestic services. Overall, there is no simple relationship between institutions and the gender earnings gap, both childcare policy and wage setting are likely to affect the average pay gap and its variation over the wages distribution.

Childcare Provision

To date, the availability of childcare has varied widely across Member States. In Sweden and France there is a strong state intervention, to provide places and subvention towards the cost, contrasting with UK/Ireland where a more *laissez-faire* approach exists and childcare is predominantly a marketable service. There is no *typical* EU country childcare model due mainly to historical differences in

childcare structures and the time and manner in which the childcare market has developed. The Nordic countries, for example, developed their core childcare market in the mid 1990s and are generally seen as the forerunners in European childcare thinking, with some countries learning from their example. Other childcare systems, such as that of the UK, are more indebted to non-European models such as that of New Zealand; however, they too are also learning from the successful lessons of the Nordic countries (European Monitoring Centre on Change, 2006).

This diversity in childcare provision presents many interesting modelling scenarios for policymakers, but it also means that quantitative comparisons across Europe are problematic and inconclusive. For instance, there are no estimates available about the size of the EU childcare market. What is clear, however, is that a strong growth trend took place in the 1990s and that this has continued into the 21st century.

Investment in childcare also varies significantly by country. Denmark and Sweden, for example, have the highest public-sector investment in early childcare. Most other Member States publicly invest only around a quarter of that of Denmark and Sweden. Since the late 1990s, the UK's spending on early childcare has doubled.

Childcare services are at different stages of development in the EU Member States and continue to be one of the fastest growing care markets in Europe. In some of the 10 new Member States, the childcare market is relatively immature and is therefore expected to grow rapidly in the near future. In the former EU15, where childcare services have matured and developed, policy now focuses more on the quality of services provided and on flexibility for parents.

Demographic, economic, social and political factors act together to ensure that childcare in the EU is set to continue growing rapidly as an industry. In some Member States, relatively underdeveloped childcare services have greater scope for growth than in other countries. In other states, which in fact constitute the majority, childcare is better developed and hence, the current tendency is to concentrate on improving the services for pre-school children. Here, the focus lies on the quality of childcare services provided by the carers. Until now, public funding has been directed mainly at children aged from three years up to school-going age, in order to prepare them for the education system. More recently, childcare investment has been extended to care services for children below the age of three.

Perhaps the greatest uncertainty surrounding choice in the future lies in the information available to parents. Over the past two years, there have been several research studies on childcare outcomes, which have provided parents with mixed recommendations about the basis for making a choice. Some studies concluded that the 'best' outcomes for early years' children are derived from formal childcare; others argue that 'close-parenting' leads to better outcomes, while some conclude that there is little difference between formal and informal childcare.

Figure 2 illustrates the types of childcare paths that parents can choose for their children and for themselves, and the impact that their decisions have on the economy and society.

Figure 2: The Childcare Pathway
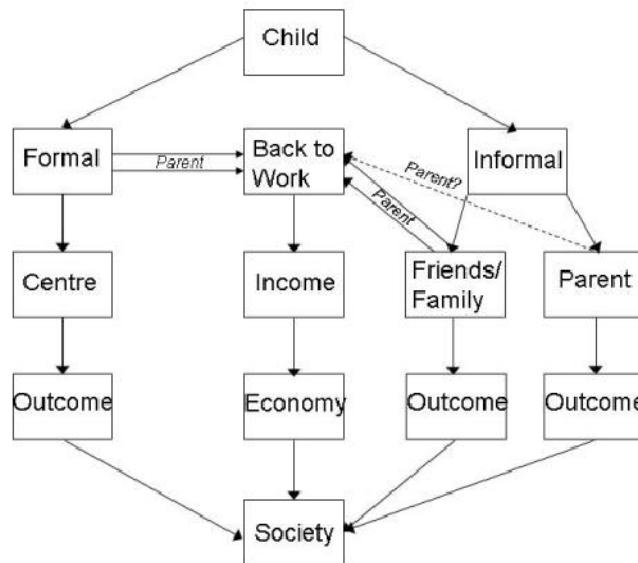
Source: Blackburn (2005)

EU Policy Interventions

In line with the Lisbon Strategy, the new European Employment Guidelines established by the Council in 2003 set three overarching objectives: full employment, quality and productivity at work, and strengthened social cohesion and inclusion. The four recommendations to all Members States are to give priority to:

o   Increasing adaptability of workers and enterprises;
o   Attracting more people to enter and remain in the labour market and making work a real option for all;
o   Investing more and more effectively in human capital and lifelong learning;
o   Ensuring effective implementation of reforms through better governance.

European Employment Strategy

The Lisbon European Council of 2000 sought, over the decade 2000-2010, "*to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with*

more and better jobs and greater social cohesion".

It specifically stated that the overall aim, by 2010, should be to increase the employment rate to 70 per cent and to raise the employment rate for women to more than 60 per cent. In addition to these targets, the Stockholm European Council of 2001 set intermediate targets for 67 per cent employment overall and 57 per cent for women by 2005. The EU's commitment to gender equality is contained in the Social Agenda 2005-2010, which complements and supports the renewed Lisbon Strategy for growth and new jobs. Gender equality is seen as essential in meeting the labour market challenges.

The integrated guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States combine specific measures on women's employment and the mainstreaming of the gender perspective in all action taken.

Childcare Interventions

The current interest in childcare at EU level is to facilitate the entry of parents into the labour market, by making childcare more widely available at an early age. The first EU political commitment to childcare was outlined in a European-wide review of services for young children in 1988. In March 2002, the European Council set out targets for childcare by 2010. More recently, in March 2005, the improvement of childcare was once again described as a key means for attracting more people into the labour market as well as promoting equal opportunities in the workplace.

Politically, the EU (through its Social Agenda 2005-2010) is committed to

expanding Europe's labour market, improving flexibility for working parents, and removing barriers to employment, particularly for women. To help achieve these goals, the EU is encouraging the expansion of childcare services to meet the increasing demand. Targets set out by the Barcelona European Council aim to provide childcare services for 90 per cent of children between three years of age and the mandatory school age, and for 33 per cent of children under three years of age by 2010. In line with the European strategy for growth and employment, Member States will be expected to meet the Barcelona targets for childcare.

As part of the drive to improve flexibility and equality for working parents, a key driver in the childcare market was the EU's directive setting minimum standards for maternity and paternity leave in 1993 and 1996, respectively. Another driver for change in the EU was the cross-national Childcare Network, which ran from 1986 to 1996. This focused on three particular areas, including: services for children; leave for parents; and men as carers.

International impetus for childcare has also come from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). In the late 1990s, the OECD launched a childcare review, which initially involved a comprehensive review of 12 countries including 10 European countries, with a second round of reviews in 2001, including five European countries. As part of this review, the OECD supplied the participating countries with detailed recommendations on how to improve their childcare model. One of UNESCO's

medium-term objectives (2002-2007) is to expand and improve comprehensive early childcare and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

A key issue of European policy is the degree of harmonisation in childcare services across the EU. Arguments in favour of harmonisation purport that it promotes equality for children, for parents and for childcare workers. Certain barriers to harmonisation currently exist because of differences between childcare systems across Member States, including: types of childcare; funding arrangements; school entry; qualifications; training; earnings; and employment benefits of the childcare workforce.

Potential areas for harmonisation in the EU's childcare services include:

o Employment - including entitlements and allowances for maternity/paternity leave;
o Fiscal incentives to use childcare (tax credits/exemptions);
o Regulation of quality standards;
o Poverty rates;
o Qualifications and status, training, and earnings of childcare staff;
o Childcare statistical collection and analysis.

There are considerable variations in these areas. Some, for example, would be much more difficult to harmonise than others. The first three would require primary legislation. Reform and restructuring of childcare labour markets would require a massive level of investment in some Member States to help bring their childcare systems up to the standards of countries with the highest levels of investment per capita in the childcare workforce. Ensuring

standardisation in the collection and analysis of statistics about childcare appears to be the one area that is currently receiving closer attention.

One particular action that is being successfully promoted at present is cross-national learning across Member States. The 'open method of coordination', adopted by the EU in 2000, is one practice aimed at facilitating cross-national learning. Its objective is not to find a common policy or political objective, but rather to share policy experience and best practice. According to the Thomas Coram Research Institute research (2003), there are at least three ways in which cross-national work can be useful: by provoking critical thinking, opening up choices, and enhancing policy learning and innovation.

EU Enactments and Case Law

Heide's (1999) research shows that Europe has contributed substantially to the promotion of equality between men and women throughout the EU, leading to revisions of national law in all Member States. The Treaty of Rome focused on creating a single market and related social issues, though the degree of commitment to social policy has been constantly at issue. Despite this, equal pay for equal work was incorporated into the Treaty (now Article 141 EC) not to promote social justice but to prevent unfair competition. The European Court of Justice (ECJ) has attached great importance to this provision in its rulings, especially in the early years. Since then the adoption of Council Directives on key gender

equality issues, including: equal pay for, and equal treatment of, men and women; maternity protection; parental leave; and part-time working have been enacted by Member States. National courts are bound to observe European law and to interpret national law accordingly. They have the option or, if events dictate, the obligation to refer to the ECJ where European law may be relevant to a case. Approximately 120 ECJ rulings have dealt with equality related matters.

European legislation and case law have given new momentum to legal equality between women and men by contributing to equal pay for work of equal value and to the elimination of discrimination - direct and indirect - in eligibility for particular occupations, part-time work, night work, pensions, pregnancy and maternity.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the changing EU labour markets in terms of women's increased numerical and proportional representation. It shows that despite these developments the progress of women is still impeded by the inter-related issues of occupational segregation and the gender earnings gap, part-time employment among women and the lack of affordable childcare. Policy interventions have sought to encourage women into paid employment, or to remain there after having children. However, the predominant picture across EU labour markets is one in which it is still women who are required to find some accommodation between their paid and unpaid work roles. The redistribution of economic responsibility within paid

employment has not been accompanied by a redistribution of domestic and caring responsibilities within households. Men have been slow to accept parenting and other caring responsibilities. Predictably, it is women who continue to seek ways of reconciling work and family life through flexible working arrangements and/or exiting from paid employment. These options hamper their career advancement, lower their actual or potential earnings and steer them into occupations that best complement (and often mirror) their domestic role (e.g. teaching, nursing and personal services).

This paper confirms that the two earlier hypotheses are relevant to reviewing women in EU labour markets. The level of occupational segregation appears to confirm that women self-select into predominantly female occupations. However, there is also evidence that, in making educational and career choices, women are influenced by historical, cultural and social norms in making these key decisions.

Across the EU it is mainly women who opt for part-time work which often creates a vicious circle in which it is perceived as a 'women's option' only, signalling that these women lack commitment and have limited career aspirations, hence the option is not attractive to men who might otherwise seek to spend more time with their partner/families. This perpetuates a 'twin track' which is geared to a 'male' model of work (full-time, permanent, continuous and uninterrupted until retirement) and discourages men from seeking work/life balance through flexible working and parental/caring leave. Set against this, women can either seek to replicate men's labour market behaviour by 'struggling with the juggling' or opt for a 'mommy

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Engendering the Political Culture: Some Persistent Issues on Women Empowerment in the Philippines

Proserpina Domingo Tapales

The Philippine Political Culture

At first glance, Filipino women seem to be politically empowered. First, the country has produced two women Presidents, has significant numbers of women in government, and has thousands of civil society groups where men and women are active. Second, the UNDP's GEM (gender empowerment measure) which uses as indicators the proportion of women in parliament, in managerial positions, and their earned income relative to the men, has given it a high rank of 48, much higher than its HDI (human development index) ranking.

If gender empowerment is to be gauged largely on actual political office, we must say that the ascendency of two women in the Presidency alone is not enough basis for claiming gender empowerment. Consider three similarities in the peculiar rise of Presidents Corazon Aquino and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. First, both ascended to their posts after people power demonstrations in 1986 and 2001, which toppled two male Presidents. Second, the two women Presidents had claims to power by virtue of their kinship with male political leaders; in the case of Cory Aquino, by being the widow of the martyred Senator Benigno Aquino, Jr., and in the case of Gloria Arroyo, by being the daughter of former President Diosdado Macapagal. Their staunch conservative stand on population and reproductive health is an expected third similarity, given the culture which swings between modern and traditional.

Data from studies make these similarities expected. Many Filipino women politicians enter through the kinship route. (Tapales, 2005; I cited several studies) The unusual manner in which they ascended the Presidency may be explained by the Philippine political culture. Corazon Aquino, who never held a government post before, ran for office during the snap elections called by then President Marcos to continue the battle fought by her slain husband, as Gabriela Silang did, when her rebel husband was killed by the Spaniards as early as the eighteenth century. Gloria Macapagal

Arroyo ran as Vice-President in 1998 and won in the role expected of a woman - second to the man; she became de facto President after the second people power demonstrations in 2001. These all fall within the Filipino politico-cultural script.

Studying women leaders in the Philippines, Mina Roces (2000) juxtaposed Cory's reluctance to use her emergency powers against Imelda Marcos' influence in many affairs of state during her time as first lady to authoritarian Ferdinand Marcos. Roces concluded that women can exercise power even outside the formal positions of government, using kinship ties and personality. She said that political power does not lie in official position but in the ability "to rework traditional codes". In an earlier book (1998) Roces called it "kinship politics".

In my first study of women and power (1984) I advanced the idea that women's political power need not be measured in terms of official political position alone, but in every area of the political process where she has an influence. These areas include policy implementation as well as interest aggregation. I was intrigued by the fact that while few Filipino women ran for political office, they numerically dominated the bureaucracy in technical positions, and were represented, during the time by 26% of the higher civil service. Thus, since Filipino women shunned the political arena, but shone in the bureaucracy, I focused my research on women in the senior executive service in the Philippines who, then and now, are not only active participants of policy implementation processes but also have a hand in policy initiation. I found that indeed, the women career executive service

officers in the Philippines felt potent participants in the policy process, even if many of them were not aware of their covert power.

In this age of governance where the state, business and civil society are considered as three prongs in development, women's participation as grassroots leaders and active non-governmental organisation workers is crucial in the political process. Women in these capacities perform the role of advocates for specific areas of public policy. There are thousands of NGOs and POs (people's organisations) in the Philippines advocating for different causes and assisting government in the provision of services; hundreds are devoted to women's issues and concerns. Indeed, some gains have been achieved in terms of more recent policy, but other issues remain unresolved.

In order to achieve fuller empowerment for women, significant changes must seep into the cultural and historical backdrops which continue to provide the script for political culture. Although women have made significant gains in the arena of politics, some obstacles still have to be hurdled to make for real gender empowerment. There is a need to further engender the political culture, to achieve this goal.

Historical and Cultural Background

Before the relatively recent independence of East Timor, the Philippines was the lone anachronism in Southeast Asia. Colonized by Spain for nearly 400 years and by the United States of America for 50 years, its people carry Spanish names

but speak English rather than Spanish. More than 80% of its present population of 80 million is Catholic.

The Philippine islands, which Magellan saw in 1521, were characterized by more egalitarian relationships among the sexes. In pre-colonial Philippines, girl babies were welcome as much as boy babies, they could inherit from their parents, and could engage in agriculture and trade. In some instances, they even inherited the tribal throne, as Princess Urduja in Pangasinan province and Queen Sima in Bohol. Women in pre-Spanish Philippines played important roles in the village; the *babaylan* served as medicine woman, astrologer and priestess, and was highly respected in the community. (Salazar, 1998)

Hispanization brought about a decreased status for the women; they were relegated to house and church. Americanization introduced a system of public education, and opened schools to women. However, while education provided women with means to pursue professions, the moral code, which had been entrenched beyond 400 years, prevented women from transcending the area dubbed by Elshtain (1981) as the "private sphere". Due to demands of the cultural script, women in general choose not to enter the public domain of politics. Their political participation has been mainly confined to the activity of voting.

Independence from America, martial law under Marcos, the people power revolution, which catapulted a woman to the Presidency, as well as global political changes have slowly altered the Philippine political landscape. Some alterations have been made in the basic cultural scripts of male and female roles in society and politics. It is within the alterations in the

cultural script that gender empowerment is gradually being achieved.

Venues for Women's Political Empowerment

I shall examine Filipino women's political empowerment on four levels: women's participation in electoral politics, in the bureaucracy and other offices of government, and their advocacy of causes at the grassroots level. A fourth area is the policy level, where women contribute or have contributed to the making of policy or have been benefited by such policies.

Data compiled by the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women show, that women elected during the 2004 elections (the latest held) held positions as follows: 25% among 24 senators, 15.2% among the 208-seat Congress, 19.7% as Governors, 16.2% as city and municipal mayors. Women comprised 18.8% as City and municipal councilors while provincial board members have 17.4% female representation. Women vice-governors form 10.8% and women vice mayors make up 16% of the total. (Table 1)

These proportions may be impressive, given that there is no affirmative action policy providing for seats for women in elective positions. There is in fact one, in the Local Government Code of 1991 which provided for three sectoral representatives, one reserved for women. This, not surprisingly, has not been implemented. The Congress has not passed an Appropriations Act for the conduct of such sectoral elections, and local officials have been lukewarm to the idea. They consider sectoral representations

as unnecessary expense for what they think are superfluous positions.

If we look deeply into the profiles of the women elected officials, we can see that earlier studies by Aguilar (1992) and more recent studies (Tapales, 2002, 2005) show that most of the women politicians are relatives of male politicians are validated. In the Senate, for example, two of the women senators are relatives of prominent politicians; one is the wife of deposed President Estrada and the other is the daughter of the late senator Cayetano, who died close to elections in 2004. The other two also come from political families. There are, in fact, a mother and son in the Senate (Estradas), two Arroyos, two Aquinos, and two Cojoangcos in the House of Representatives, as other political dynasties. We can even surmise that the more recent increases in the number of women in elective positions can be accounted for by the fact that wives or daughters of male politicians took over posts they vacated after their mandatory terms of three three-year terms expired. Cases from local governments show this trend. In my study of women local chief executives, I saw that many of them came from political families, and several of those elected for the first time were wives or daughters of immediate incumbents. One woman Metropolitan Manila mayor sat in office for one term until her husband returned after sitting out a term beyond his mandatory three-year term. Other women mayors, I have worked with, reluctantly gave up their posts after one term in favour of their returning husbands who had dutifully served one term away from office.

And yet, voter turnout in the Philippines show consistently higher turn-out by female voters, since elections after the war. More recent elections data illustrate this clearly. The Commission on Elections data for synchronized national and local elections reflect this trend. In 1998, 87% of registered women voters actually voted, as against only 76.7% of the males. In 2004, 85.7% of the females voted, and 75.9% of the males did so. (Table 2) In fact, the women's party KAIBA succeeded in 1987 in having only one woman elected to Congress, and the women's party list Abanse Pinay had only one seat in two elections, and did not get any in 2004. However, the new women's ideological party list Gabriela won two seats in 2004; a victory which can be attributed more to ideology rather than gender.

If we look at the bureaucracy, we can see that as many as 34.8% (Civil Service Commission 1999 survey) of the top officials (career civil service officers) are women. (Table 3) These figures are something to be proud about; it is higher than the 30% target of the UN before, though still below the now ideal target of 50-50%. At the technical/professional level, as many as 71.9% were women; this is accounted for in a large measure by the inclusion of public school teachers in the category. In any case, this is significant because the 34.8% proportion of women in the CESO (career executive service officer) level are among those who spell out details of policy implementation, and in some ways initiate policy proposals affecting vital services.

A vital cog in the government is the justice system, for the interpretation of policies. Figures compiled by the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women from 1996 to 2004 show that the

highest proportion of women judges is in 2002 with 23.4%, with 20% in 2004. (Table 4) The University of the Philippines' Center for Women's Studies partnered with women NGOs and awarded fifteen judges the first Gender Justice Awards for their gender-sensitive decisions.

The 1986 EDSA revolution reflected the active participation of women as advocates for causes. As the world watched on television, women and men marched together, and nuns holding rosaries and kneeling in the streets dramatized, not only the role of the church but also of the women in that significant political activity. Indeed, of thousands of non-governmental and people's organisations which mushroomed after what has come to be known as EDSA I, many are advocates for women and family causes. Active peasant women's groups like AMIHAN and KABAPA lobby in Congress and in the streets; professional women are active in training women leaders, such as WIN (Women in Nation Building), CAPWIP (Center for Asian and Pacific Women in Politics); women concerned with health issues like REPROHEALTH produce materials and assist in health service delivery, and women academicians such as those in the Women's Studies Association of the Philippines provide research, training and consultancy to advance women's interests.

Women have always been active in political campaigns. Campaign groups are mostly led by wives and daughters of politicians, their kin and friends, who recruit other women into their foray. These were documented by Tancangco (1992). Many of these women continue to assist their winning candidates as civic leaders.

However, in the Philippine NGO Report to the United Nations on the status of adherence to the Beijing Platform for Action (2005), the conclusion was that while there have been tremendous advances as far as preparing women for political participation, there have not been much gain in increasing the actual participation of women as political candidates.

These have been the two main goals of the Beijing agenda for women in politics and governance.

Does the gender of policy initiators and implementors account for gender-sensitive policies? Generally, women in Congress and the local councils seek the co-sponsorship of male colleagues for gender-oriented legislation, although more controversial bills do not even get enough support from the women. During congressional debates on the Rape Bills, which subsequently passed, battle lines were drawn between the sexes.

Does kinship matter? As one woman city mayor admitted, it helps in the sense that she can get funding from her Governor husband and Congressman brother-in-law for programmes. However, this may discourage others outside kinship politics to run for office.

Public Policies Affecting Women

We can consider the 1986 people power revolution at EDSA (or EDSA I) as a watershed for people empowerment. President Corazon Aquino appointed a large commission representing different sectors of society to draft the post Marcos constitution. The result was the articulation

of greater participation for ethnic, gender, and grassroots organisations. For instance, Section 14 on State policies specifies that "the State recognizes the role of women in nation building, and shall ensure the fundamental equality before the law of women and men".

Consequently, under the open-arms policy of President Aquino, a law that could not be passed by Congress, which sought for amendment or repeal of unequal provisions of the Civil Code on men and women, was made law under an Executive Order, signed by the President. Executive Order 290, signed in 1987, put forward the Family Code of the Philippines. It provided equal treatment of women and men by removing unjust provisions in the Civil Code, e.g. adultery on the part of the woman and concubinage on the part of the man. More importantly, it skirted the question of divorce, which mere mention made the Congress, and the Church, nervous, by providing for annulment using the grounds approved and used by the Catholic church, including the broadly interpreted ground "psychological incapacity". Still riding on the gender euphoria, a woman senator and a male congressman, who prided himself as an honorary female, sponsored the Women in Development and Nation Building Act, which was passed as Republic Act 7192, signed into law in 1992. This law opened the doors of the military academy to women, as well as those of exclusive male clubs such as the JAYCEES and the Rotary Club. A very important provision is the removal of spousal approval for loans, which largely benefited women. These are landmark measures.

There have been other laws positively affecting women. Day care centres are now provided in each *barangay* (village), advertising for mail-order brides has been banned, increased protection to women workers have been given. The latest laws provide for strict punishment for rape, sexual harassment in offices and schools, anti-trafficking of women, and violence against women and children. These have been sponsored by both male and female legislators.

For their part, women in the grassroots have taken advantage of available credit for livelihood. Some local government units, like the Quezon City government in Metro Manila, provide Grameen Bank type credit for livelihood, and most of its recipients are women. Day care centres provide pre-school education, such that even poor families can now avail of pre-school service for their children. Most government offices now run day care services for employees who have no caregivers for their children at home.

What probably places the Philippines in the gender map is the inclusion, starting in the 1994 Appropriations Act, of the so-called "gender budget" (or, more popularly, the GAD budget), inserted by a woman senator before she stepped down. The GAD budget policy provided for funds of agencies to be earmarked for programmes, projects and activities for gender. In 1995, the provision for GAD was specified as 5% of the budget. By 1997, GAD budgets for local governments were also promulgated. Studies show, however, that this is not evenly implemented, because of confusion in the interpretation of the 5%. (Budlender et al., 2001) For instance, does it include social services already provided for women, like maternal health and social services? But some creative women mayors have made use of meager funds to support

services for women; one resuscitated a dying weaving cottage industry for the women, another one funds her Woman's Council activities from it.

Since the executive branch is an important partner in the policy process, we must look also on how the bureaucracy has been active in the implementation and pursuit, of gender sensitive policies. A major change was brought about after EDSA when academicians and NGO leaders entered the portals of the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women after EDSA I. Taking advantage of the new policies, the NCRFW sought to play an active hand, not only in implementing policy, but in looking deeply into policy issues and bringing them to the forefront. For instance, for the gender budget, it has an active partnership with the Department of Budget and Management; for programmes at the local level, it partners with the Department of the Interior and Local Government. It funds and produces materials on gender issues, and assists in the gender training. The NCRFW also established stronger relationships with NGO and PO leaders working on women's issues, such as the League of Lady Municipal Mayors of the Philippines, the Women's Legal Bureau, and assisted in the organisation of Women in the Government Service (WINGS). Despite changes in the Presidency, the NCRFW has managed to continue its work with diverse women's groups.

A significant development is the recognition of many local chief executives of both genders about the necessity of complying with different laws, including those on gender. Some local government units have established gender offices and councils. The first such innovation is the Provincial Office for Women started in Bulacan by a male governor, the various offices established in the cities of Angeles and Bacolod and the province of South Cotabato. In Metro Manila, Quezon City established the Gender and Development Resource and Coordinating Office under the Office of the Mayor, and in Marikina City the formation of a Women's Council. Most local programmes or offices have been established with push from women councilors and NGO leaders. In Quezon City, for instance, an ordinance was passed in 2001, establishing an office under the sponsorship of male and female councilors, pushed by an NGO, *Sentro ng Manggagawang Pilipina* (Women's Labor Center). These offices have spearheaded gender sensitivity training, and funding of some gender activities. They are able to utilize NGOs for better delivery of services. For example in Quezon City, NGOs conduct pap smears and other services, with funding assistance from the City, conducted through the *barangay* (village) councils.

There are controversial areas where NGOs and even local governments cannot tread. For instance, women Presidents Aquino and Arroyo have not allowed artificial family planning, nor for more liberal population policy. There are, however, open-minded mayors, like the lady Mayor of Marikina who has pushed for vasectomy as an approach to family planning. Another example is the lack of day care as a full-day care activity in *barangays*, beyond the present use as pre-schools. But a town near Metro Manila, responding to the needs of families, working day and night in factories in the area, has stablished a night care centre for

children of working mothers under the leadership of the Department of Social Services with cooperation of NGOs and the business sector. These are initiatives, which local governments do out of their own interpretation of what they can do within the purview of law. Moreover, they have been able to use their own powers provided by the Local Government Code of 1991.

Global and National Concerns

The Philippines is a signatory to several UN conventions. In fact, it is active in the CEDAW (Commission on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women). CEDAW has been influential in the formulation and implementation of policies on providing sanctions on cases of violence against women.

The country is now exerting efforts toward achieving the MDGs (Minimum Development Goals). Two of the MDGs pertain to women: Goal 3 aims to promote gender equality by eliminating gender disparity in education, while goal 5 aims to improve maternal health.

The Philippines' Second Report on the MDGs (2005) shows the fem ales impressive showing in education. Latest data place female literacy at 94.6%, higher than the males at 93.2%. Furthermore, in higher education, 55% of enrolled students are female, and 60% of graduates are female. However, this has less to do than government motivation than historical tradition. As earlier discussed, females entered the public schools when they were opened, to seek occupations. But these data alone are not enough to

reduce the gender imbalance. The Report suggests improving the gender content of education and providing better opportunities to women, since:

> While women appear to be better off in terms of educational participation and performance, these do not spell out improved economic and social development for them.

For instance, gender role stereotypes still appear in some textbooks, workbooks and pedagogy. It should also be noted that minimum wage laws notwithstanding, statistics still reflect that for every peso earned by the male, only 59 centavos is earned by the female. (NCRFW) Another target is reducing the rate of population increase by 60%. Data shows that from a high rate of population increase of 3.7%, the Philippines has only managed to reduce the figure to a still high figure of 3.5%.

The issue of reproductive health has in fact also divided NGOs. During debates on the reproductive health bill, conservative groups and the church in fact called it the "abortion law" and campaigned against it, over the laments of more radical groups. The demise of the Bill echoes the failure of any divorce bill to pass in Congress. For that matter, it is also seen in the failure of efforts to pass other controversial bills.

Engendering the Political Culture

The discussion above shows that while Filipino women have achieved gains as far as forging policies for gender empowerment, there are also needs which

remain unmet.

One issue is greater formal political participation. The UNRISD said in its 2005 monograph on Gender Equality that only 16 countries in the world have reached 30% proportion of women in national legislatures. Conceding that "women's political participation cannot be measured in terms of numbers and proportions in national assembles alone", it said, nevertheless that:

> Enabling more women to succeed in competitive politics remains an important challenge for women's movement around the world, as does the project of building their effectiveness, once in office, in advancing women's rights. Contemporary women's movements are particularly concerned to identify the determinants of higher rates of women's access to formal politics, as well as the features of political systems that support a progressive gender equality agenda.

UNRISD added:

> Despite women's greater prominence in political life, they have in many cases yet translate their visibility into leadership positions and influence over the decision-making process: there are still many instances where they are simply used as extensions of male power structures.

To achieve at least 30% participation of women in legislatures, some countries, following quotas in developed countries like those in Scandinavia, have legislated quotas for local councils. Examples are India and Pakistan. This bold move, however, can not yet be done in the Philippines where a sectoral election for local councils, which have been legislated, has not been held, and where a bill for 50-50 proportion in decision-making posts has had difficulty in passing. The trend of mainly female relatives running for office continues, with only a few women like Governor Grace Padaca of Isabela province, poor and physically disabled, defeating a dynasty, are able to transcend.

So far, what we see in the Philippines are women in politics who have somehow learned about the plight of women and have taken up women's causes. Even the Congressional Spouses Association has opened crisis centres for women. Voices of women in the streets have been heard even in the halls of Congress, bringing forth previously untouched concerns like rape, violence against women and children, and trafficking to the attention of policy makers. Sensitivity training, conducted by NGOs, the academe and the NCRFW in government offices have opened up the minds of women and men alike to gender issues and concerns. Concerned women in local councils and bureaucracies have motivated mayors to establish programmes for women and families.

There are still areas where the gender crusaders are not heard, and areas where politicians of both genders fear to tread. They have to wait till the culture is able to open up more for changes. What has been achieved in the Philippines so far, has been attained through gradual alterations of the cultural script. The political culture is being engendered, subtly but strongly.

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Table 1: Proportion of Elected Women in Government Elective Posts, 2004 National and Local Elections (partial data), Commission on Elections (COMELEC)

Elective Positions	Percentage
Senator	25.0
District Rep	15.2
Governor	19.7
Vice-Governor	10.8
Board Member	17.4
Mayor	16.2
Vice-Mayor	16.0
Councilor	18.8

Table 2: Comparison of Voter Turnout Rate by Sex, 1998 and 2001

	1998 Elections (national/local)	**2001 Elections** (national/local)
Female	87.00%	85.70%
Male	76.70%	75.90%

Table 3: Government Personnel by Levels of Position, 1999, CSC

Levels of Position	**Percentage**	
	Female	Male
Third Level	34.8	65.2
Second Level	71.9	28.1
First Level	34.6	65.4

Table 4: Proportions of Women Incumbent Judges in the Philippine Courts 1996 - 2004, Supreme Courts

Year	**Proportion of Women Incumbent Judges**
1996	15.4
1997	17.7
1999	17.7
2000	19.0
2002	23.4
2004	20.0

Envisioning Women in the ASEAN Community of Caring Societies

Josefa (Gigi) Francisco

Introduction

Following the heels of the large Asia Pacific women's movements review of ten years of the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action[1], some women's movements in Southeast Asia re-focused their attention on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) which is working towards establishing a regional community, based on the three pillars of economic integration, security and socio-cultural development. Central to the regional process is the drafting of the ASEAN Charter which has been unfolding since the adoption of the Vientiane Action Program (2004-2010). Led at this initial phase by the ASEAN Eminent Persons Group (EPG), the ASEAN Charter process has stimulated discussions on regionalisms and regionalization among a wide range of civil society organisations (CSOs) including women's movements that lie outside of the ASEAN's formal structures and mechanisms. These regional processes around market integration and deepening trans-national relations such as those spurred by the institutional arrangement of the ASEAN may be creating spaces for new political imaginations, claim-making and articulations among Asian CSOs and social movements. Certainly, they have provided opportunities for some women's rights activists to begin raising ideas and issues as well as undertaking initiatives around gender equality, women's rights and empowerment in the construction of a regional community of ASEAN states and societies. Rather than substitute for local actions, political practices at the regional sphere remain embedded in national territoriality and are strategically linked back to national political issues and dynamic.

A challenging decade for women's rights & empowerment

The ten-year review of the BPFA that was carried out by the region's women's movements raised major but varying concerns on how national states in the ASEAN are delivering on their promises to their women citizens. In the political sphere, women's movements called attention to the still low numbers of

women in political leadership, the marginalisation of national women's machineries, the frustrations and tensions around gender mainstreaming as a strategy, and the lack of proper implementation of new laws and regulations that ensure political equality between women and men.[2] In the economic sphere, governments were reminded not to forget their commitments to ensuring that trade and other macroeconomic and sectoral policies do not harm women's economic security, rights and empowerment.[3] These include, for instance, the following sections of the BPFA[4]:

o Government Commitment 58(c): "Pursue and implement sound and stable macroeconomic and sectoral policies that are designed and monitored with the full and equal participation of women, encourage broad-based sustained economic growth, address the structural causes of poverty and reduce gender-based inequality within the overall framework of achieving people-centred sustainable development."

o Government Commitment 58(b): "Analyze, from a gender perspective, policies and programmes - including those related to macroeconomic stability, structural adjustment, external debt problems, taxation, investments, employment, markets and all sectors of the economy - with respect to their impact on poverty, inequality and particularly on women; assess their impact of family well-being and conditions and adjust them, as appropriate, to promote more equitable distribution of productive assets, wealth, opportunities, income and services."

o Government Commitment 58(h): "Generate economic policies that have a positive impact on the employment and income of women workers in both the formal and informal sectors and adopt specific measures to address women's unemployment, in particularly their long-term employment."

o Government Commitment 165(a): "Enact and enforce legislation to guarantee the rights of women and men to equal pay for equal work of equal value."

o Government Commitment 165(r): "Reform laws or enact national policies that support the establishment of labour laws to ensure the protection of all women workers, including safe work practices, the right to organize and access to justice."

o Government Commitment 165(h): "Recognize collective bargaining as a right and as an important mechanism for eliminating wage inequality for women and to improve working conditions."

o Government Commitment 58(k): "Ensure the full realization of the human rights of all women migrants including women migrant workers, and their protection against violence and exploitation, introduce measures for the empowerment of undocumented women migrants, including women migrant workers; facilitate the productive employment of documented

women migrants through greater recognition of their skills, foreign education and credentials, and facilitate their full integration into the labour force."

Finally in the socio-cultural realm, women raised concerns on the persistence of patriarchal notions and practices that discriminate against women, the emergence of various forms of neo-conservative and fundamentalist prejudices and movements that act as barriers to women's public participation, and the pervasiveness of "treating women's rights as a welfare issue that is linked to poverty alleviation and the protection of the vulnerable" [5].

With all these concerns having been raised on what seems to be a failure to seriously implement the Beijing Platform of Action, the question remains on whether the document should simply be laid to rest. One wonders as well what value and place the BPFA will have under the new gender structure that will eventually emerge out of the ongoing UN Reform process, what with the CEDAW being at the forefront of normative setting for gender equality and the Millennium Development Goals[6] promoted as the global programme of all states. One thing is apparent though and that is, within the ASEAN as a regional institution the BPFA does not stand and never seemed to have stood out as a major reference document. It appears that the technical people and those in the think tanks that work on ASEAN issues are not mindful of the existence of the document, this despite the visible presence of women's rights advocates who continue to push their national governments to heed the calls of the BPFA. Hence, I call attention to the title of this conference, "Post Beijing: Gender Issues in Southeast Asia – Have Women Moved Up, On or Out?" One wonders whether this title subliminally prompts us to the irrelevance of the BPFA in light of new conditions and realities of say, regional market integration and trade intensification.

Women's initiatives during the Post-Beijing review period

I am not yet ready to give up on the BPFA, if only to remind governments, the think tanks, the technocrats that a comprehensive document for women's rights, equality and peace is part and parcel of the complex of agreements around which global consensus is being built. And that in the contestations around the building and re-building of such consensus, women's groups, civil society organisations and social movements are as much stakeholders as governments, inter-governmental institutions, and the business sectors are. Not that I refuse to recognize the difficult governance environment i.e. persistent patriarchies combined with marketized governance, that make it a lot difficult for human rights, including women's rights, to be upheld. For advocates must persist and so we do, in better and worse times, through offensive as well as defensive strategies, reaching for both short-term as well as long-term solutions, constructing a new ethical order even as we support temporal programmes of unities and solidarities.

The last section is focused on women's initiatives during the Post-Beijing review

(and not simply "Post-Beijing") period. These are projects that from my perspective do not fall within the current "flavour of the month" regional issue, which is trafficking of women and children (that again falls under the "women as vulnerable victims" mode), and which is strongly linked to the agenda of the states and governments. Not that this is not important, but by focusing on other initiatives, one finds the spirit of the BPFA and the expanded agenda of the women's movements more visibly and clearly. As well, these initiatives are undertaken at the regional level and thus have a direct implication on Southeast Asian women's visions of a caring ASEAN community.

The first is a regional study being conducted by the Southeast Asian Women's Watch or SEAWWATCH that looks at how governments are monitoring the expanded commitments to women's rights and empowerment under the MDGs.[7] The countries covered by the study are Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia and Philippines.

One will recall that at the beginning the MDGs were criticised by women's movements for its narrow gender focus. In response to their persistent lobbying, the United Nations General Assembly meeting in September 2005 decided to expand the MDG on gender equality (Goal 3) beyond decreasing the gender gap in education, to include the following: (1) An end to impunity for violence against women; (2) Universal access to reproductive health; (3) The right to own and inherit property; (4) Equal access to labour protections, and (5) Increased representation of women in government decision-making bodies. These additional targets and indicators reflect some of the major commitments in

the BPFA and cuts across women's reproductive, political, economic and socio-cultural rights.

The other initiative is the identification of a selected set of gender indicators for a statistical assessment matrix that may be used to accompany the set of monitoring indicators that the ASEAN is developing to track progress in the achievement of its goals in the three pillars of the ASEAN community.[8] These indicators are by no means exhaustive, but they serve as proxy indicators for measuring women's advancement (or lack thereof) in an environment of regional integration and globalisation. While locating women's status in ASEAN integration encompasses all spheres of life, the project advances key indicators in the "economic leg" to complement the ASEAN Baseline Report. There are two key reasons for this. One is that economic indicators are regularly collected and therefore are easily accessible. This presupposes the opportunity to analyse gender dimensions of economic processes and outcomes. Another is for technical reasons. Economic indicators are generally accepted as rigorous and robust in terms of scope, frequency and quality of data, although much is to be desired to make economic information gender-framed. This does not however mean that socio-cultural and security indicators are less important. Rather the desire to focus on economic indicators builds upon the infrastructure of information already available in the economic sphere and exposes areas that require enrichment, particularly on gender dimensions. These proposed albeit preliminary indicators are:

o   Industry wage differentials by sex – What is the value of female and male labour? To what extent do industry wage differentials indicate gender-based inequality?

o   Unemployment rate by sex – Who is likely to be out of work and therefore constrained to benefit from income opportunities? To what extent do unemployment disparities reveal discrimination on account of sex? What are the barriers to entry to paid employment for women and men?

o   Underemployment rate by sex – Who is likely to suffer from inadequate number of hours of paid work? Who is being denied to benefit from full employment based on capacities and potentials? What are the implications of underemployment to women's well-being?

o   Number of hours per week given to housework by employed women and men – Who works longer hours with combining housework with paid employment? How is housework managed at home? How is time use allocated between production and social reproduction (i.e., caring) functions? What are the implications of gender-based division of labour to general well-being?

o   Informal sector work by sex – Who is being pushed to do informal sector work? Why are some more likely to do informal work than others? What are the implications of informal work to women and men?

o   Proportion of technical and vocational education by cluster programmes by sex – Who is likely to benefit from technical and vocational education? In what cluster do women and men likely participate in technical and vocational education? What are the implications of gender-based patterns in technical-vocational education to securing employment?

o   Science and technology education by sex – Who are likely educated in science and technology? How do gender-based patterns in science and technology education show gender-stereotyping in education and professional opportunities?

The specific indicators are being advanced for various reasons. Indicators in science and technology and technical-vocational education may be considered instrumentalist, but these provide clues as to how education investments are being prioritized for women and men, in an attempt to widen opportunities for employment. On the other hand, employment indicators, including hours spent for unpaid housework, provide information on the structure of women's and men's participation in the economy, including the explicit and implicit barriers to entry or maintaining full, decent employment and the relegation of unpaid household work to women as an extension of cultural socialization. The extent of informal work for women and men also spell out the degree of exclusion from formal employment and the lack of social protection from the vagaries of the economy, the onset of natural or human-made calamities and exploitative work conditions.

Finally, a third regional initiative is the participation of women's organisations in the ongoing regional advocacy around imagining a people-centred ASEAN community.[9] Together with other CSOs and social movements, women's groups are expressing their desire to see a an ASEAN community that is strongly standing on a regime of human rights, including women's rights, where the ASEAN is not just state-led but also communities- and people-led, where economic and security considerations are framed by a rights-based ethical frame of regional governance, among others.

Specific to women's rights and gender equality, women's groups have called for, among others, a stronger state commitments to the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) that was expanded on by the BPFA, the institutionalization and regularization of gender statistics, and the upgrading of the ASEAN Committee of Women in the organisation of the ASEAN so that it can become a more significant body that truly represents one half of the citizens of the ASEAN.

Endnotes

1   The Purple Book. 2005. Document produced from the Asia Pacific NGO Forum on Beijing Plus Ten. Thailand, May-June 2004.
2   Southeast Asia Women's Watch and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. Southeast Asian Women in Politics and Decision-making: Ten Years after Beijing Gaining Ground? 2nd Edition. Manila 2004.
3   International Gender and Trade Network – Asia. Beijing Plus Ten Meets WTO Plus Ten Regional Report. July 2005. www.igtn.org
4   Fourth World Conference on Women Declaration and Platform of Action. United Nations. Beijing 1995.
5   Southeast Asia Women's Watch and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. Op.cit.
6   The Millennium Development goals was criticized by women's movements and feminists as Minimalist Development Goals because it inadequately covered the rights consensus of the 1990 conferences. www.dawn.org
7   Ongoing project of the Southeast Asia Women's Watch and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. Miriam College – Women and Gender Institute in the Philippines.
8   Francisco, Josefa (Project Team Leader). *Third Report on the Advancement of Women in ASEAN: Gender Dimensions of Globalization and Regional Integration.* Final draft submitted by the Miriam College – Women and Gender Institute to the ASEAN Secretariat. Manila, October 2006.
9   See Solidarity for ASEAN People's Advocacy (SAPA) Submissions to the ASEAN Eminent Persons Group on the economic, security, socio-cultural pillars and institutional mechanism.

Cambodian Woman – Pathways to Leadership

Eva L. Mysliwiec

Introduction

Cambodia is a complex country with a fractured history. Decades of conflict have deeply altered the fabric of society but gendered relations and the political roles of women do remain fundamentally unchanged through its various periods of history.[1]

This paper takes a fresh look at Cambodian history and the role Cambodian women have played in the country's history. Cambodian women today are forging new frontiers in public participation and decision making, as due to a confluence of political events and factors in Cambodia's recent history which have given women opportunities to define their roles and to re-invent themselves both as women and leaders. It is through civil society and local government in particular that women's leadership is changing Cambodia's political landscape. However, despite these changes women still face draconian hurdles in their struggle to gain gender equality in the social, economic and political spheres.

This paper will briefly track the political role of women through Cambodian history to the present, give an overview of their representation and contributions in

the political life of Cambodia today, discuss some of the factors that hinder and/or enable women's greater participation in decision making, and highlight promising initiatives that are opening pathways for the next generation of Cambodian women leaders.

Women in the Shadows: Women's Role through History

Although little is written about them in historical accounts, women have played important roles in Cambodian body politic as "lance-carrying warriors and defenders of the Angkorean kingdom, influential consorts of kings, deviant divas, revolutionary heroines, spiritual protectors of Buddhist temples and agents of peace. Cambodian women have not only symbolically embodied the nation but have been tasked with guarding its racial and territorial frontiers".[2]

Women, too, play a dominant role in the family. The title of 'mê pteah' or 'household head' reflects this dominant

position Cambodian women hold in the family. They are managing the household finances, investing, clearing debt, and protecting the family's interests. The men are expected to earn the wages and look after the family. Even though men are the final decision-makers in families, women's roles are not insignificant in a society, which places a high value on the family. Outside the family sphere, women's importance is evident since many work as peasants, marketers, petty traders, handicraft producers, and many today work in the garment and tourism sectors. These developments are challenging traditional concepts of social relations and of the role of women in the family and in society.

Women's prominence in the economic sphere however is not matched in the political sphere as too few have become political leaders in their own right. High profile political roles for women are virtually unheard of, occurring only when they overlap with the careers of husbands or fathers. In public political life, women are submissive to the male hierarchy rather than active and participatory, but behind the scenes, women are often perceived to influence the work of their husbands. Their "political roles have been largely confined to the shadows and they take on a supportive role as mothers and/or wives to enhance the status of the male members of their families".[3]

A woman's authority in the Khmer political sphere is determined by her kin relationships with male power figures.[4] Wives of male leaders are regarded as especially powerful with their own clientele; they are still expected to act in the interest of the family clan. Lon Nol's first wife, for example, was reputed to have considerable influence over her husband's decisions, and her death in 1969 augured his decline. Princess Monique's influence over King Sihanouk is a popular subject of discussion among urbanites. "Pol Pot's first wife, Khieu Ponnary, is alleged to have been his theoretical mentor or gray eminence"[5] as one scholar described her. Modern day Cambodia is no exception. In 2006, the powerful women behind powerful men were instrumental in getting legislation on monogamy drafted and passed in record time, in spite of a backlog of other draft legislation bills. Unfortunately, little is known or written about these important women working behind the shadows.

Throughout Cambodian history, gender socialisation has prescribed a limited public role for Khmer women. "But their importance in the socialisation of the family has been used as a political tool by various regimes since independence (in 1954)."[6] Women are still tasked to bear future generations and also raise them to take on political responsibilities and uphold Khmer values. Women have also been expected to adapt and redefine their roles in both domestic and political fields through the numerous transitions in the Kingdom since the eighteenth century when the country has been cut off, annexed, and absorbed by its neighbours. For example, during the French colonial period, nationalistic media articles encouraged women to participate in the nation's regeneration by focusing on their domestic duties.[7]

The National Congress granted women political enfranchisement in 1955 under a proposal of Prince Sihanouk. In the 1958 elections, two women were elected to the National Assembly, representing 2% of

the 73 elected representatives. The elite women in the 1940s promoted women's educational and political advancement. "The first women's association was established in 1948 by members of the royal family, and urban intellectuals such as Khieu Ponnary."[8] In its inaugural announcement, the group urged, "*Khmer Women!! If you want your nation to be a prosperous one in the Asia region, be aware that your duties right now should be to develop your education so that it is on par with women in other countries*"[9]. In the 1950s, women's advancement was due to state directives rather than from pressure for change from the grassroots. While the Women's Friendship Association, established in 1958, applauded women's political advancement, its loyalties lay with the royal government and women's duties were prescribed in relation to the State's objectives, i.e. women rights were to be applied for the development of the country and the nation. According to the Association's programme of action, this meant preparing food for foreign dignitaries, thus 'saving the national budget'[10]. Khieu Ponnary and her sister Ieng Thirith gave up their bourgeois past to join the Cambodian communist movement in the 1950s and together with their husbands emerged as the most powerful couples in Cambodia.[11] Unfortunately, very little is known about Khieu Ponnary's political life outside of her marriage to Pol Pot or about her ambitions for women in a new society.

Nevertheless, during Sihanouk's Sangkum Reastr Niyum era (1950s and 60s), women had more opportunities to develop professionally and to be educated. Modernity and patriotism was popular particularly among the urban elite who found employment in western offices as administrators, secretaries and bureaucrats, and among the thousands of young women who proudly marched in their police and military uniforms during public ceremonies.

Many women gained an education at least up to primary school level. However, opportunities to go further were limited as it was still deeply entrenched that a woman's place was in the home. In the 1960s with Sihanouk's exclamations for a modern educated citizenry, more women studied up to secondary school level. But it would seem that women's participation in modernisation was rationalised on the basis of national economic development rather than on a conscious intent to alter gender roles. Women were needed to achieve economic goals and so opportunities for their professional advancement administration, in the health and education were made more available.

The 1970s ushered in war and revolution, putting an end to the benign Sangkum era. Both women and men were caught up in violent political movements over which they had no control. The Red Khmer, in their war against Lon Nol and the American imperialists, promised to eliminate all forms of oppression, including those that kept women in their homes. They needed young women to fight in the trenches, dispatch messages to the frontlines, and to carry weapons and supplies where needed. Young village women, too, played a strategic role by providing food, tending to their soldiers' wounds, and emotionally supporting them to keep fighting. Meanwhile, in the bases, older women played an important role disseminating propaganda exhorting the populace to hate the American imperialists.

In 1973 Cambodia witnessed some of the worst bombing of the Vietnam War. The Khmer Rumdos (KR) promised to liberate Cambodia in 1975 and set up Democratic Kampuchea (1975-78), a regime that gave state unprecedented power over the individual. Communism mixed with ethno-nationalism led to the most tragic consequences for both women and men. The family unit was dismantled, depriving women of the little autonomy they had in previous times. Men and women were tasked to build and defend the Kampuchean motherland and were given the same arduous labour regardless of physical differences. Jobs were assigned according to age - women over age 50 stayed in their hamlets to care for infants; married women over age 30 worked alongside the men in the rice fields, digging canals, or building dikes; adolescent girls worked in teams as agricultural labourers. Children were separated from their parents and indoctrinated to report on their parents and other adults who criticised the revolution.[12]

This period saw women cut off from traditional family structures that gave them support and love, but were now totally absorbed by work. Many young people were forced into marriages in mass ceremonies, and encouraged to bear children and safeguard the racial purity of the revolution. While women defended the state's interior racial frontiers, men were sent into forays into Vietnam to reclaim territory once held by the Khmer State. By 1978, it is estimated that over 1.7 million Cambodians – men and women alike - had lost their lives to starvation, disease, and political executions.

In late 1978 and in response to incursions into their territory, Vietnamese forces, together with Cambodians who had split from DK in 1977, invaded Cambodia. They drove the KR to the Thai/Cambodian border.

The People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) was established under the protective wing of Vietnam, with a political platform of national salvation. Fearing Vietnamisation, many Cambodians fled to the border where Khmer resistance movements formed a coalition with the remnants of the DK. Subsequently the Khmer nation was embroiled in civil war for over a decade (1979-1991). Women on both sides of the border found themselves trapped in political movements, and women's organisations on both sides were formed to carry out the objectives of the individual warring parties.

The PRK encouraged the return of traditional Khmer social patterns, but within the framework of a communist state. A number of mass organisations were created to mobilise efforts for the reconstruction of the country and to support the on-going war against the resistance forces at the Thai/Cambodian border. The National Association of Women for the Salvation of Kampuchea was established in 1979. With its network extending to the district level, the association acted as a wing of the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party. Its work consisted of promoting party policy to its members, galvanising support for the war, and undertaking social actions to help war widows, orphans and other vulnerable members of society. Its work required substantial propaganda efforts because much of the population was tired of war, emotionally depleted and

fragile. Women in refugee camps suffered the same pressures as those inside the country, to support the war efforts of the resistance forces.

Once again, women were thrown into the role of defending and regenerating the nation. A women's magazine published in 1984, *Revolutionary Kampuchean Women*, dealt with women's issues but linked these to the state's military objectives.[13] The magazine depicted the model woman as one who sacrifices for the nation, offers her remaining sons to protect the Motherland, and works tirelessly in agriculture work to feed the army. The Women's Association had little say in the decision-making structures and could not publish that which did not conform to the Party's needs. They did not receive the training and resources needed to implement their mandate, nor did they receive much support from the authorities. Immediately after 1979, Cambodia experienced a baby boom, a birth rate of 3-5% a natural response of survivors in most post conflict societies. The reproduction of the nation was also a political objective but Cambodia experience done of the highest infant mortality rates, 900 per 100,000 (in the early 1980s), in the world. Khmer women have borne an onerous burden in repopulating a devastated state without adequate health care or education.

Women's Leadership in Post UNTAC Cambodia

The end of the civil war in the early 1990s and the move to a liberal democratic system overseen by the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia

(UNTAC) has allowed women greater independence from the state, although ironically with less formal representation in it. No women were included in negotiations for the Paris Peace Accords in 1991, despite significant contributions by female intermediaries in arranging for these negotiations. Nevertheless, these peace accords and the establishment of UNTAC allowed for democratic values and Cambodian women took the opportunity to engage in the nation's reconstruction. With support from UN agencies and international organisations, they established non-governmental organisations (NGOs) providing basic services and built the space for civil society. The burgeoning number of women's NGOs addressing gender issues has provided women with unprecedented opportunities to challenge and exert pressure on the state. Although this role may not be recognized today, it is clear that these women's NGOs played a critical role in two key processes in particular, the drafting of the constitution and ensuring peaceful elections.

While UNTAC experts assisted Cambodians in drafting a new constitution prior to the first multi-party elections, women in civil society were instrumental in making the process inclusive. "Through an ad hoc network, they held public consultations in cities, towns and provinces; raised awareness with peaceful demonstrations, created alliances with National Assembly members, and regularly offered proposals and draft language"[14]. Their impact is evident in Cambodia's strong liberal democratic constitution with gender sensitive codes that conform to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

As Cambodia prepared for the first post-war elections in 1993, political violence escalated and fear of renewed war was tangible. Drawing on their networks, women joined Buddhist leaders in organising a massive peace movement, characterised by months of peace walks from one end of the country to the other. This served to reduce the level of fear significantly in the country and the elections themselves proceeded with little violence. When the results of the election were rejected by the ruling party, women once again rallied around an event to welcome the new National Assembly and endorsed a government of national unity as a means to avoid war.[15]

In spite of efforts to increase women's participation in the political arena during the UNTAC period, there were few women candidates in the 1993 parliamentary election. Many women, however, chose to continue their efforts through civil society, community activities, and building bridges across political party lines. One NGO in particular, Women for Prosperity (WfP), stands out as a pioneer, implementing a programme that encourages and enables women to enter politics, and effectively engages them at the commune level to work together across party lines. The key to WfP's success is focusing on the common challenges that women face in entering politics, and providing on-going coaching and skill development regardless of ideologies. Leading up to the 2002 commune election, the first democratic election held at commune level in Cambodian history, WfP supported 5,527 women candidates offering a broad range of services and skills such as public speaking and speech writing, answering questions from voters

and responding to challenges from unsympathetic male party members. Since the 2002 elections, WfP has formalised the network of female councillors providing opportunities for discussion, on-going training, and mutual support.

Another sector in which women are providing leadership is in monitoring government accountability and governance. The Center for Social Development (CSD) with a strong female leader at its helm, for example, has been at the forefront of programmes that monitor government and Parliament actions, and raise awareness and educate the public through public forums that engage people from all sectors of society. Through the CSD women have become leading advocates on issues such as human rights, violence, the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, and anti-corruption and they have led the call for legislation on the latter. These social dialogues are broadcast on FM 102 radio by the Women's Media Center, a leader in Cambodia's media sector, particularly on issues that directly affect women.

It is, however, in peacekeeping and promoting non-violence that women have and continue to make the most valuable contribution as leaders. Cambodia is a young democracy; although a peace agreement was signed in 1991, armed conflict did not cease until 1998. Although there are improvements in preventing and managing conflicts at all levels, a culture of violence still plagues social and political interactions. In 1996, tensions escalated between the ruling political parties and disputes over land and natural resources increased. The head of the Cambodia Development Resource Institute, (CDRI) a woman involved in Cambodia's reconstruction since the early 1980s

partnered the Conflict Resolution Centre of the University of Victoria, (Canada) to facilitate a national forum on conflict. This led to the establishment of the Cambodian Center for Conflict Resolution under CDRI auspices. Through its flagship programme, Conflict Prevention in the Cambodian Elections (COPCEL), this Center[16] continues to this day to organise monthly round table discussions among stakeholders from all political parties, government, and civil society organisations involved in elections, in order to peacefully resolve any contentious issues, which could lead to conflict in elections. It is one of the few forums where party officials, government officials and civil society leaders interact in a spirit of mutual respect and genuine cooperation. Unfortunately, women are under-represented in this process in spite of the high commitment shown by stakeholders.

Non-violent activism has grown in recent years with the escalation of conflicts over land, water, fishing logging and access to natural resources. These conflicts tend to have a more detrimental impact on women, who are more vulnerable due to the heavy burden of work that they bear, their lack of education and weakness before the law. Women within the peace-building movement are often at the forefront of disputes between citizens and local authorities over natural resources. According to one environmental activist, a leader in her own right, "women are the backbone of the forestry network"[17]. Taking advantage of their roles as mothers the women often take up frontline positions during protests and verbally engage their adversaries and also diminish the need to use force during such protests.

Although their role may not be sufficiently recognized, women have contributed in building culture of public consultation in politics through their work in civil society. Women's NGO networks have actively sought strategic partnerships with government institutions, particularly with the Ministry of Women Affairs (MoWA), on the development of policies and legislation. These partnerships, including CAMBROW (with 32 member organisations) and GADnet (gender and development network with 62 member organisations) and the MoWA have helped shape legislation pertaining to domestic violence, trafficking and labour.

Structures and Mechanisms to Ensure Gender Equality in Social, Economic and Political Life

Cambodia continues to struggle establish a sound democracy. The Cambodian Constitution contains many provisions to ensure that men and women are equal before the law and in their participation in the social, economic, and political life of the country. The Constitution (Royal Government of Cambodia, 1993) states that every Khmer citizen is equal before the law, entitled to the same rights and duties, without distinction based on race, colour, sex, language, religious belief, political views, ethnic origin, social status, wealth or other circumstances (Article 31). The Constitution does not only guarantee equal rights (Article 35), but also provides different frameworks on how equality can be achieved.

In addition, Article 36 states that 'the work by housewives in the home shall have the same value as what they can receive when working outside the home'. With this, the Constitution also explicitly prohibits all forms of discrimination against women and their exploitation (Article 45).

These principles are recognised in various instruments and policy documents such as the Governance Action Plan 2001, the Cambodia Socio-economic Development Plan 2001-2005, the National Poverty Reduction Strategy 2003-2005, the Cambodia Millennium Development Goals and the Rectangular Strategy 2004 of the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC). The latter is considered as the implementation document for gender equity as it asserts that women are the backbone of the economy and society. In 2005, the government developed the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP), which is based on the MDGs and the Rectangular Strategy and integrates the socio economic plans and the poverty reduction strategies. Gender equality is recognised as a cross-cutting issue in the NSDP.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) is the national machinery for the promotion of women and girl's rights in Cambodia. As part of a five-year strategy, 'Neary Rattanak II'[18] (2004-2008), the ministry ensures that policies are gender mainstreamed and promotes women's entry into-decision making positions. The ministry's task is daunting as it faces deeply entrenched beliefs and practices that discriminate against women, and it lacks the necessary resources to do its job. In spite of this, under the able leadership of one of only two female government ministers, the MoWA is moving the gender equity agenda forward.

There is no doubt that a huge a gap still exists between the principles and policies enshrined in the various government instruments on the one hand, and their implementation on the other.

Women in Government and as Leaders

The extent to which women are present in the higher echelons of government is probably a good indicator of the country's progress in achieving gender equality. Women need to be in positions where they can make an impact on policy making but women continue to be under-represented, if not invisible, at all levels of decision making in Cambodia. They still face attitudinal and structural barriers that relegate them to a back seat in the civil service.

A recent unpublished study of the civil service[19] indicates that men occupy 70% of civil service positions and women hold 30%. However, women hold only 2% of the top decision making positions. Discrimination, based on gender, is widely prevalent in the civil service in spite of the legal provisions for promoting the rights of women enshrined in the Common Statute of the Civil Service. There is a preponderance of women at the lower echelons of the civil service and a marked under representation at higher levels, with the exception of MoWA. Many women in the civil service believe that discrimination is strongest in areas such as promotion, recruitment, access to training and capacity building opportunities, thus

preventing them from accessing uppermost positions in government service. The study said that in cases where women did gain access to senior positions it was because of support from progressive male superiors who had more liberated views on the role of women.

Women are further disadvantaged when education is a factor, as it often is, in recruitment and promotion because fewer women have had opportunities for tertiary education. Of the 1,470 trainees at the Royal School of Administration, which prepares leaders for the civil service, only 6% are women.[20]

A deeply entrenched patronage system and corrupt practices in the civil service negatively impact women more than men. Women who lack connections and networks are less likely to gain access to the civil service than those who have these connections. At times individuals with little or no experience are promoted because they are related to a superior official. Though it is difficult to ascertain the scale of corruption in the civil service, it is commonly acknowledged that corrupt practices exist. Under-the-table payments for positions or promotions affect both men and women, but women who are responsible for managing the household are less likely to use their money in this way. In a country where the civil service is strongly identified with party politics, women are inevitably at a disadvantage because they do not have time to get involved in politics. Eliminating party nominations in lower levels of the civil service would go a long way towards enhancing women's presence and participation in the civil service.

In politics, there are 123 Members of Parliament (MPs) in the National Assembly elected through universal suffrage and 61 Senators who are appointed. The electoral system is based on proportional representation where the people vote to choose a party, with a slate of candidates, rather than an individual. In this system, women are greatly disadvantaged because their status on the list is usually considered lower than that of males. This is not surprising, considering that women in political party structures are grossly under-represented if not invisible. For example, there are two women ministers out of 25 ministries: the Minister of the Ministry of the National Assembly – Senate Relations and Inspection, and the Minister of Women's Affairs. Though they face some daunting challenges, both have the potential to make a significant impact on governance. There are no women represented at deputy prime minister level, seven men hold these positions. Out of 127 secretaries of state, there are eight women; and only 16 out of 135 under-secretaries of state are women. Surprisingly, the Ministry of Education Youth and Sports has one of the lowest representations of women, with 13% women at central level. The Ministries of Agriculture and of Rural Development also have disappointingly low representations of women in decision-making positions, considering that 50% of workers in the agriculture sector are women.

Factors that impede women's participation in politics include entrenched patriarchal systems, perceptions by both men and women, that women belong in the home, and security in terms of the violence around politics.

In spite of this there has been a steady increase of women elected to Parliament.

From 1981-1993 women accounted for 5.5 % of Parliamentarians and one woman held the post of Secretary General of the National Assembly. After the 1993 elections, Cambodia adopted a bicameral Parliamentary system where National Assembly MPs are elected and Senators are appointed. Between 1998-2003 women MPs, both elected and appointed, accounted for 12.2% of all Parliamentarians while from 2003 to the present 17.8 % of Parliamentarians are women.

In 2003 two women to the five-member National Election Committee (NEC), probably the most important structure in the political machinery; previously there were no women in this committee. The two women have been influential in institutionalising the desegregated data collection in the election process.[21]

Rural government in Cambodia reflects a similar imbalance. Among the 23 appointed governors of provinces and municipalities there is not one woman, and only five women hold the deputy governor position. The picture of women's representation in the judiciary is also bleak. In 2003 there were 14 women judges (12%) from a total of 119, and one woman prosecutor out of 63. Among 668 court clerks, 129 were women (19.25%).[22]

One positive development in the last two years, however, is that three women represent the country internationally as ambassadors and one as Consular Representative, where previously there were none.

Equally encouraging is the formation of a caucus among women Parliamentarians that transcends party lines. It is in fact the only caucus in Parliament. With support and encouragement from international organisations, the caucus provides women MPs an opportunity to enhance their leadership skills and parliamentary role through study visits, training, and participation in national and international forums. More importantly, the caucus provides an important support system to women who in their roles as MPs must negotiate and define their identities as women and as leaders in a deeply entrenched patriarchal system.

Decentralisation opens the door for greater participation of women in political life as responsibility for governance and development are devolved to local level government represents. Women already play an important unofficial role in village life, perhaps as an extension of their role in the home and this naturally becomes the best place to start building women's political life is at the local level.

The first commune council elections in 2002 provided a mechanism for political and administrative decentralisation to reach deeper into the countryside where 85% of the population live. Women were elected to 954 (8%) of councillor positions out of 11,261 across the country. Although their numbers are limited, and many elected women hold lower positions in the hierarchy of the commune councils, this development is significant because it is the first time in Cambodian history that women have the opportunity to be democratically elected to represent their communities through political office at the local level. In communes with no females in the commune council, a government sub-decree compels commune councils to recruit a woman representative to assume responsibility for social action and women affairs on the council.

However, these women hold no decision-making power.

Women's participation in commune councils is taking place from the bottom up. Although participation in decision making at the commune level represents a significant victory for Cambodian women, they still face an uphill battle to gain legitimacy in their roles as local leaders. Women from the grassroots trying to enter the political arena face even more daunting obstacles than their counterparts at national level. Whereas Parliamentarians receive reasonable remuneration for their work, commune councillors do not get liveable compensation. This places an onerous burden on women who are expected by their families to contribute to the family income. Lack of experience and knowledge of how the political system works, how appointments are made, and lack of access to party networks are huge obstacles that have hindered women from entering the political arena, from getting higher ranking on the party list and subsequently higher positions within the commune council hierarchy. In addition to this, women face the same prejudices, patriarchal attitudes, and socio-cultural constraints as those women running for office at national level.

With the upcoming commune elections in April 2007, it will be interesting to see whether women in commune councils will seek re-election, and whether their experiences as leaders in the community will encourage or discourage others from following the same route. Research to determine the impact women leaders at the local level have had in addressing and advancing women's agenda and, the extent to which they are changing perceptions and attitudes towards women's

roles, would make a valuable contribution to those seeking to empower women. Research to identify factors that have helped women leaders overcome the constraints they face would also be useful.

In spite of the advances women struggle against traditional cultural perceptions that their place is in the home; the lack of support structures and networks within the civil service; the burden of child care and housework which does not allow time for training outside of normal working hours; the lack of family support especially from husbands. These factors identified by women in the civil service hinder women's access to promotion, recruitment, and training, and discouraging some from even trying.[23]

Robust training policies that increase women's skills and responsibilities, and engendered promotion policies and practice will contribute towards higher representation of women in senior government positions (and indeed, there are many positive initiatives under-way in this regard).

The more formidable challenge is that of changing deeply rooted perceptions regarding the traditional role of women, and the deeply entrenched power relations system that undermines the position of women and permeates all sectors of Cambodian life.

New Women, New Leaders

One factor in particular deserves further discussion, 'identity'. Simply put, the common definition of a leader does not correspond to the traditional cultural ideal of 'woman' or femininity. Leadership is most often associated with male traits

while the Cambodian woman is expected to be virtuous, to speak softly, walk lightly and be well mannered at all times. She is required to stay in the home, and serve as the caretaker of the family and preserver of the culture.[24] She is relegated to the private sphere while men occupy the public sphere. Thus, to be a female public actor is a contradiction in terms.

Not only have women been excluded from leadership positions and political roles due to gender stereotyping, but a hierarchy of power has been established between men and women and through socialisation many women have come to internalise the belief that they are mentally weaker than men and unsuited for leadership or political roles. Being constantly measured against the stereotype of the feminine norm, and in the absence of images of politically active women, Cambodian women wishing to be involved in political roles face a dilemma: how should female leaders behave?[25] Who are the role models? In Cambodia today, we find examples of women who try to embody the traditional image of woman (we sometimes see this among some Parliamentarians) while others behave according to norms associated with male politicians, and tend to be viewed by their peers as troublemakers. Yet, we also have a few examples of 'the new woman leader' - one who is able to conflate her identity as 'woman' with an identity of leader. It would seem that those women able to re-invent themselves as the 'new woman' are better able to secure legitimacy in their roles as leaders from male peers and are therefore more successful in negotiating and influencing decision-making. The two women Ministers in office today are good examples of this 'new woman leader', and

are widely respected by their male peers and by society in general.

However, one question remains: what is the norm or what are the traits that help women gain legitimacy and power, and advance as political leaders? Some women politicians in Cambodian society today suggest that women leaders must prevail as knowledgeable, skilled and capable actors who understand and can relate to their audiences. They must have access to the knowledge and methods of communication used by prominent male leaders, and must be able to mimic an established political discourse and demonstrate intellectual capacity.[26] In order to do this effectively women must have access to the networks of those in power, and the places where knowledge circulates and decisions are made are often inaccessible to them.

Do these same norms then apply to grassroots women aspiring for leadership roles in their localities? Where are the role models for rural women? In rural Cambodia, the perception of women as leaders is starting to change, according to different surveys conducted by NGOs, and women are increasingly viewed as offering an alternative type of leadership. For example, women are seen by some voters as having better knowledge/ understanding of people in their communities and their needs. The traditional roles that have placed women as caretakers and peacemakers within the family make them better suited to care for the community and better negotiators for mediating in community affairs. According to one report, some commune council chiefs admit that women have been particularly successful in raising counterpart contributions to development

projects in the villages.[27] They are better able to communicate with and motivate people. Still, the pressures of conforming to traditional roles as women restricted to the private sphere weigh heavily on rural women engaged in political life, and this is often translated into guilt. Few role models exist for them, as it is the first time in Cambodian history that rural women have had the opportunity to be elected to local political positions.

Important ripples of change are also coming from another direction, an often undervalued and unrecognised sector, Cambodian youth, and particularly young women. It is from this sector that the real impetus for change is most likely to come. Young female university graduates live in a different world than their mothers did at the same age, and these young women are finding their voice and pursuing careers. Unlike other sectors, young women are quite well represented in civil society, and this may well become a stepping-stone to other roles. Many are realising that their identities are not solely prescribed by nature and that they have the potential to be more than the traditional norms suggest. Many young women who have the opportunity to study abroad are returning with a new sense of identity and empowerment, and are playing leadership roles in their sectors of work. These young people are challenging traditional social norms and power relations and are engaging in the policy arena.

My own experience of establishing a new organisation Youth Star Cambodia, which has as its mission to incubate a new generation of women and men leaders through civic leadership and citizen service, is one example.

Youth Star Cambodia: Building Future Women Leaders

Youth Star Cambodia works to build a new generation of women leaders by creating opportunities for young university graduates to serve as volunteers for one year, in under-served rural communities. These volunteers gain work experience while making a contribution to communities by promoting education and youth development, sustainable livelihoods, health and well-being, and business entrepreneurship. Volunteers mentor and tutor children and youth, and share their technical expertise in subjects ranging from agriculture to accounting. They also promote good hygiene and healthy habits, and share information and tools for halting human trafficking.

Recruiting female volunteers is a high priority for Youth Star, and it is challenging due to persisting traditional perceptions about women's place in the home. In spite of these perceptions, Youth Star's experience is that female volunteers are highly valued by communities, and some community partners specifically request females. Youth Star's community partners tell us that the women volunteers are excellent role models for young girls, particularly for those who are at risk of dropping out of school. Less than one-fifth of eligible students – and only 13% of girls – attends secondary school in Cambodia, according to UNICEF. These education and gender gaps are also reflected among adults: the adult literacy rate is just 74% and 64% for women, UNICEF reports. Youth Star's female volunteers are well positioned to help close these gaps.

As Youth Star expands and develops its programme, we have plans to monitor the volunteers' progress as leaders and citizens, to ensure that together we do all we can to achieve Cambodia's Millennium Development Goals and our National Poverty Reduction Strategy. We are eager to follow our female volunteers' journeys, as they gain skills and confidence, and help villages appreciate the full range of gifts offered by all of Cambodia's women.

Conclusions

When assessing Cambodia's progress towards gender equality, it is important to remember Cambodia's turbulent history and to realize that the cessation of armed conflict is as recent as 1998 only. To its credit, Cambodia possesses many structures and mechanisms to ensure gender equality in social, economic, and political spheres. Women, particularly women leaders in civil society and the leadership in the Ministry of Women's Affairs, have played an important role in shaping these instruments. While huge gaps exist between the principles of equality and equity embodied in the various instruments and actual practice, they provide a liberal framework for moving women's agenda forward.

It is through civil society and local government in particular that women's leadership is changing the political landscape. Cambodia's shift to liberal democracy in the 1990s provided space and opportunities for women to assume leadership roles, particularly in civil society and local government. Women leaders have distinguished themselves especially in their roles as peacekeepers and in forging new frontiers in public participation and decision-making. It is women who today are addressing some of the most complex and sensitive issues that affect governance and who are at the forefront of the struggle for non-violent transformation.

The introduction of decentralisation reforms in 2002 opened the pathway for women's leadership in local government. For the first time in Cambodia's history, rural women had the opportunity to be elected to political office at commune level. To engage in local politics represents an enormous act of courage for rural women who face many challenges including social and cultural perceptions of women and their place in the home, and deeply entrenched patriarchal power relations.

New women and new leaders are emerging in Cambodia today. In their struggle for greater participation in decision-making and political leadership, women have had to re-invent themselves both as women and as leaders. Women, who have been able to conflate their identity as 'women' with an identity of leader, have been better able to secure legitimacy in their roles as leaders from male peers, and have therefore been more successful in negotiating and influencing decision-making.

Important ripples of change are also coming from another direction – the Cambodian youth who make up almost 70% of the population. It is from this sector that the real impetus for change is most likely to come. With globalisation, increasing migration in search of employment, and expanding opportunities for education and travel abroad, women are gaining exposure to a much broader range of role models and ideas about

alternative ways of behaving. Many young women who have the opportunity to study abroad are returning with a new sense of identity and empowerment, and are playing leadership roles in their sectors of work. These young people are challenging traditional social norms and power relations and are engaging in the policy arena. Pioneering programmes, such as Youth Star Cambodia, offer the next generation of women a pathway to develop themselves as civic leaders and social entrepreneurs.

A new generation of women leaders is emerging in Cambodia: civil society leaders, grassroots activists, heads of communes, village chiefs, Ministers, other politically active women, and Youth Star volunteers. These women are prime movers in the process of transformation. As female pioneers in the social and political arena, they serve as role models for other women.

Endnotes

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2   Kate Frieson, 2001.
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4   Judy Ledgerwood, Changing Khmer Conceptions of Gender, Ph.D. thesis, (Ithaca: Cornell University), 1990.
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10   Nayan Chanda, Brother Enemy, (McMillan Publishing).
11   Kate Frieson, 2001.
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13   Laura McGrew, Kate Frieson, Sambath Chan, *"Good Governance from the Ground*
14   *Up: Women's Roles in Post Conflict Cambodia"*, Women Waging Peace Policy Commission, March 2004.
15   Ibid.13.
16   The center has since been fully integrated in the CDRI as one of its programmes, and is now simply known as the Peace and Development Programme.
17   Laura McGrew, Kate Frieson, Sambath Chan, 2004.
18   Neary Rattanak means "women are precious gems", to counter the old Cambodian saying 'men are like gold, and women like cloth', which suggests that women are less valuable than men.

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Women's Labour Migration in Southeast Asia: Foreign Domestic Workers and Worklife Balance in Singapore

Shirlena Huang

Introduction

Since the mid-twentieth century, many have noted an increasing feminisation of international migration. Currently, about half of the world's 185-192 million international migrants are women (IOM, 2003:5 & IOM, 2005: 379) and as Castles and Miller (1998: 3) have observed, women have become increasingly vital and visible in all forms of migration in many regions and across the globe in this "age of migration". Southeast Asia is certainly no exception. Female labour migration in many Southeast Asian countries has not only grown exponentially in recent years but in some countries, has overtaken the level of male migrants.[1] Among the many streams of permanent and temporary women migrants from Southeast Asia who move as independent individuals, the most visible in the public's imagination today are perhaps those who migrate for marriage as international brides, and those who move for work at the lower end of the skills ladder.

It is the labour migrants that are the primary concern of this paper.[2] While the emergence of large-scale transnational labour migration in Southeast Asian nations is recent (only since the 1960s) – as both a cause of and a response to the growth in demand for labour in the service and entertainment industries of the Middle East and Asia – most countries in Southeast Asia today participate in some way or other in the broader network of transnational labour flows of different skill levels, either as sending or receiving countries, or both. Indeed, Southeast Asia is currently home to two of the world's largest exporters of overseas workers labour – Indonesia and the Philippines – and two large labour receiving countries – Singapore and Malaysia, while Thailand is both a significant importer and exporter of migrant labour. Countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia have created elaborate networks of government and private agencies to facilitate the placement

and travel of workers abroad, while countries such as Vietnam are planning and negotiating for major expansion of their labour exports both within and outside Asia[3] (IOM, 2005: 104). Scholars generally agree that migration from the developing countries of Southeast Asia to the richer countries within and beyond the region is tied to global restructuring. However, until recently, most analyses of the socio-economic changes that have transformed Southeast Asia into economic tigers have given little weight to the role of intra-regional migration in sustaining the development of the region's high performing economies.

The links between intra-regional migration in the past 30 years and structural changes in the region are, however, now receiving attention (e.g. Iredale *et al.*, 2003). The road to industrialisation in Southeast Asia has been marked by labour shortages not only in small and medium-sized industries but in households as well and, like the path taken by the now developed countries in the west, industrialised and rapidly industrialising Asian countries have had to import workers from less developed neighbours, often in Southeast Asia, to fill chronic labour shortages. Although there are flows of skilled migrants from and amongst Southeast Asian countries – for example, there has been an increase in the outflow of skilled and professional migrants from the Philippines, Malaysia and Thailand in the post-Asian economic crisis period (IOM, 2005: 106) – both male and female migration in Southeast Asia has been primarily associated with the transfer of less-skilled labour in the form of low-wage, low-end jobs rejected by local workers. In particular, female

migration has been concentrated in domestic services (also entertainment work) as local women are increasingly absorbed in paid work outside the home. For this reason, female migration in Southeast Asia is mainly associated with the transfer of reproductive labour, or what has been called "care work" needed to maintain and sustain human beings throughout their life cycle (Truong, 1996: 32), although export-led industries located in industrialised and industrialising economies have begun to recruit a large number of migrant women from neighbouring countries for their factories, e.g. many Filipino women are working in factories in Taiwan, and Indonesian women are doing the same in Malaysia (Oishi, 2005).

The gendered nature of labour migration in the region calls to mind the productive/reproductive or public/private divide in the spaces inhabited by men and women, and how their location in these spaces define their life chances. Women migrants fill a very specific labour niche in the countries of destination, such as care-giving or reproductive work, which is very much associated with women. Thus, we see labour migration in Southeast Asia proceeding along two tracks: male migration responding to labour shortages in the public/productive sectors of the economy (e.g. construction, manu-facturing, plantation) and female migration responding to labour shortages in the private/reproductive sector. The spatial pattern of emigration from within Southeast Asia is also gendered: while men emigrate from almost all developing countries in the region, women tend to emigrate from only a few countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia, with

smaller streams from Thailand (Oishi, 2005) and more recently, Vietnam. Despite these observations and a growing number of empirical studies to support them, one of the most pervasive assumptions about global economic restructuring is that it affects men and women in similar ways and mainstream migration theory has been slow to incorporate gender into analysis, leading the International Organisation for Migration to observe (somewhat belatedly) that "there is insufficient gender analysis in the migration field" (IOM, 2005).

Part of the problem has been the focus given to the nation-state and supra- or multi-national organisations in globalisation and transnationalism research, often at the expense of considering other scales critical to analysis. Feminist geographers have argued that the "relations of *social reproduction* (and their confrontation with gender systems and patriarchy) are as important as capitalist *economic production* to understanding the politics of scale" (Marston, 2000: 232-234; see also Nagar *et al.*, 2002). Thus, cross-border activities are not only constructed and maintained by the economy (as represented by flows of capital and labour), but also through the social bonds of family, kinship, and the gender inequalities therein. As such, more research on migration needs to be done at the level of the household level to highlight how migration is not only tied up with macro factors such as economic structures, laws and administrative mechanisms, but also with micro factors such as the family and community networks. Thus, for example, studies which adopt a household level analysis of foreign domestic workers have shown that it is very much the social

processes of "being family" – how migrant women and their family members define and negotiate family ideals, gender identities and family relationships not only in their decisions to migrate but also in sustaining their family's transnational configuration – that are key processes in supporting the transnational transfer of reproductive labour from sending countries to receiving countries in Southeast Asia and elsewhere.

Indeed, if we are to understand how the feminisation of migration has affected women's negotiations of the work-life balance, we must adopt a household level of analysis. Using the case of foreign domestic workers in Singapore – of whom there are 150,000 in Singapore[4], the rest of the paper examines not only how this particular group of migrant women negotiate their own sense of work-life balance issues (particularly as transnational mothers), but also how their presence in Singapore families can both facilitate as well as raise issues for life in the employing household – both for members of the employing families (in terms of helping their employers straddle work and family responsibilities) as well as for the domestic workers themselves (in terms of their own lack of a work-life balance).

Moving Home, Sustaining Families

(a) Sustaining the Transnational Family

The globalisation of migration is characterised by a variety of transnational social practices and networks at various scales including that of the "family" (Glick

Schiller et al. 1995). Migrants develop and maintain activities to maintain family networks and retain its significance in the face of distance, dispersal and translocality of its members distributed in two or more nation states. However, as Lam et al. (2002:137) note, "the desire to go on being a family under such conditions means that the shape the family takes must be reworked" as (trans)migratory moves often reconstitute the "family" in ways which are sometimes destabilising, sometimes affirming. Research has affirmed that "transnational families" often continue to share strong bonds of collective welfare and unity but also face sources of tension and discord among family members. Ideological and material mechanisms may be employed, by both the migrant and the left behind family members, to retain family coherence in the face of physical separation.

Although there are migrants who leave for other reasons (e.g. for adventure), work on migrant domestic workers highlights the women's role, both real and perceived (by self and family) in direct relation to the family – as martyr mothers, dutiful daughters or sacrificial sisters (Huang et al., 2005; Parreñas, 2001). For migrant mothers especially, the strength of mind and pragmatic persuasions to leave one's children in the hands of others so as to undertake domestic service abroad (which may ironically involve caring for the children of others) defines acts of motherhood in terms of self-sacrifice and toil. Migrant women are also well aware that transnational motherhood has to withstand the distancing effects of space and time; the fear that the emotional (as opposed to material) ties that bind children to their mothers may gradually unravel is very real. While many foreign domestic workers recognise the imperatives behind their overseas employment, they lament the slow but inexorable erosion of communication with their children through the years. Migrant mothers try to cope with the doubt and guilt of having to leave their children, sustain strong maternal bonds with their children, as well as ease their family members' pain arising from their absence by buying gifts, remitting money and keeping in constant communication with their left behind families. The latter has been facilitated by recent developments in information and communications technology (especially SMS as it allows for cheap and almost instantaneous exchanges). At the end of the day, migrant mothers realise the inadequacies of transnational parenting against the inexorable effects of space and time, and struggle to come to terms with the remorse and regret of having neglected their role and duty as mother to their children.

Research (see, for example, Wille and Passl, 2001) suggests that more often than not, left behind families do adjust well enough to the migration of wives and mothers, especially when the extended family helps to fill the void left by migrant members. The research, however, also clearly demonstrates that there are problematic areas – cases of infidelity (by the spouses left behind and migrants), second spouses leading to abandonment and divorce, delinquency, or children dropping out of school, emotional estrangement between mothers and the children left behind – and these concerns are certainly real for migrant women. Their anxieties are also fed by stories of betrayal and rejection at the end of many

a domestic worker's economic pilgrimage; these stories circulate among the women on their off-days.

While the motivation to sustain their own families across borders remains strong, many migrant women – single and married – also re-work the notion of who and what constitutes "family" for them. For example, foreign domestic workers in Singapore often make families out of other relatives, friends, employers, and members of the employer's household with whom they have established a supportive, open and trusting relationship. The whole notion of "family" is thus opened up to take into account migrant women's double, or multiple, presence in the family in the country of origin as well as in the other families they construct in the country of destination. In their (re)constructions and (re)negotiations of their everyday lives between work and a semblance of family life even transnationally, women migrants remind us of both the flexibility of family forms and the stickiness of gender roles and identities.

(b) Sustaining the Singapore family

Singapore's initial rationale for allowing foreign domestic workers into the country in 1978 was primarily economic: on the one hand, it needed women with higher skills to remain in the workforce to ease the country's labour shortage; on the other hand, it needed the women to have children (*The Straits Times*, 6 March 1992). This same economic logic – the ability of women to participate in the formal economy and have dual-income households as the presence of foreign

domestic workers frees them from their reproductive chores – continues to drive the employment of foreign domestic workers in Singapore even today. Feminists contend that by employing a female to take over the reproductive sphere, middle-class women are complicit in further entrenching the patriarchal nature of gender roles in society because it replaces one woman for another without challenging the assumption that such work is rightly a woman's. The strength of this gendered mode of labour substitution is apparent when we compare who is primarily responsible for domestic responsibilities in Singapore households that employ a foreign domestic worker with those that do not. Figure 1[5] strongly suggests the low level of involvement that most men have in the day-to-day running of their households, regardless of whether it concerns childcare or general household chores; more significantly, it demonstrates that men's involvement declines substantially in households where there is a live-in foreign domestic worker.

Given these findings, it is not surprising then, that being able to employ a live-in foreign domestic worker does not only allow Singapore women to work but also enjoy a better work-life balance. Women employers in Singapore see the main role of their foreign domestic workers, whether married or single, with or without prior experience, as largely relieving them of basic and mundane household tasks, thereby freeing them for other activities that were luxuries before, such as being able to spend quality and quantity time with husbands and children. Thus, one woman's rights to quality time with her family have been purchased by employing another woman to take over selected

household responsibilities.

Beyond basic household responsibilities, having a live-in foreign domestic worker helps to facilitate business travel for *both* men and women, and indeed, it is more critical for women – especially if they are mothers – than for men (see Huang *et al.* (forthcoming) for details). Data from the survey noted above indicate that the presence of children in discouraging men's and women's travel has a higher likelihood of dampening business travel for them in households where there is no transnational domestic worker (the relationship is statistically significant at 95%) than where there is one present. Indeed, regardless of whether there are children, lower proportions of men from households without a live-in domestic worker undertake business travel than those with a live-in domestic worker. Thus, for men with children, only half as many men from households with no live-in domestic worker undertake business travel (27.3%) as those from households with live-in domestic workers (54.5%); for those without children, only one-third as many men from households with no live-in domestic worker (15.7%) undertake business travel as those from households with live-in domestic workers (43.3%). For women, the impact of having a live-in transnational domestic worker as enabling their own business travel is similar but even more dramatic: for women with children, only 5.2% from households with no live-in domestic worker undertake business travel compared to 18.6% for those with live-in domestic workers; for those without children, the figures are 16.7% and 36.4% respectively.

These observations demonstrate that employing a live-in transnational domestic worker is a vital strategy to manage the multiple demands that work and family life place on married men and women. Indeed, almost three-quarters of the women in the survey who had at least one live-in transnational domestic worker currently employed agreed that it would be difficult for their families to manage without one. Thus, foreign domestic workers impact the family roles and relations of their female employers in very real ways. It would appear that the presence of foreign domestic workers contributes to both the economic and emotional well-being of their employing families and, as such, perpetuates traditional cultures of domesticity, which valorise the 'home' as a site of physical, emotional and moral nurturing for the family.

Moving Home, Sustaining Self?

(a) Maid abuse

Ironically, foreign domestic workers may find themselves in abusive situations in the homes of their employers. Indeed, for most if not all of the growing number of these women who have left their homes and homelands to work as live-in domestic workers on (repeated) short-term contracts in the homes of employers overseas, the process of leaving home and recreating it elsewhere is fraught with the emotional disruptions and disconnections of mobility and moving. For them, the notion of "home" is "neither here nor there" and must be renegotiated in their everyday lives in the homes of their employers with each new move. But it is precisely the contradictions between the notion of the

home as the site of positive familial emotions on the one hand, and that of the home as a work site with grossly unequal power relations between people who are essentially strangers and alien (in culture, class, race and nationality) to one another, that transform the mundane spaces of the home into covert spaces of abuse where everyday streams of emotions are interrupted when emotional expectations of employers – for obedient, efficient workers – and of the foreign domestic worker – for sympathetic, patient employers – are mismatched, and thus violence erupts.

In fact, the paradoxes of home space for women in general are intensified for the domestic worker as she seeks to negotiate daily the blurring of productive and reproductive spaces and roles of her everyday life as someone paid to perform emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) within a family not her own, but which takes place within a site where power relations are often masked by the discourse of the domestic worker being "one of the family". At once "worker" and "one of the family", the constant struggle of these migrant women to control how their daily performances of identity and emotions are "read and received" by other household members not only robs the home of its meaning as a place of retreat and respite for these women, but it may also catalyse emotional outbursts. As a worker, the domestic worker is subject to the "appropriate rules of conduct" (Jacobs, 2003: 262) under the constant surveillance and control of her employers; she is also required to remember her place as someone paid to selectively take over part of the physical burden of domesticity previously borne by her (female) employer. On the

one hand, as someone taken into the household, she is expected to willingly contribute to its nurturing and welfare, not drawing the boundary between the private and the public, between her space and time and that of the family in which she is embedded. On the other, she must never assume that she will ever be one of them or forget that she is dependent on them for her own welfare. Above all, she must remember to always manage her emotions to portray an air of subservience and obedience (Huang and Yeoh, 1998). Consider the following set of rules issued by an employment agency in Singapore to its Indonesian domestic workers (cited in Abdul Rahman et. al, 2005: 244), prescribing the attitudes and behaviour expected of each domestic worker:

o   You are required to work in Singapore for two years with no rest days.
o   You are not allowed to request a change in employer.
o   You must be willing to be reprimanded by employers.
o   You must always be humble.
o   You must apologise to employers if you make a mistake.
o   You must not talk back to your employers.
o   You must not pull a long face in front of your employers.
o   You must not meddle in your employers' family affairs.
o   You must always be eager to learn.
o   You must not be choosy about chores assigned to you.
o   You must always follow your employers' instructions.
o   You must never damage any property in your employers' house.

- o You must never physically abuse your employers' children.
- o You must not go to sleep before your employers and other family members unless it is exceptionally late.
- o You must discuss any problems with your employers or your agent.

Any slippage between the foreign domestic worker's performance and the expectations of her employer can act as a catalyst for emotional outbursts and even violence. Under such circumstances, we must ask, what kind of work-life balance can these women expect?

Many of the incidents of abuse perpetrated by female employers in Singapore often centre around the daily routine of household chores.[6] Physical acts of violence occur when the expectations of the employer of what is deemed an ordinary task are not met by the domestic worker's performance. Such misdemeanours more often than not, include perceived incompetence (such as being too slow, doing housework the wrong way, or delivering poor quality results) in the handling of laundry, ironing, cooking and household chores, as well as in the care of children. Women's groups, psychiatrists and sociologists recognise that women's greater contact with their domestic workers place them in a potential conflict-ridden position, resulting in domestic workers becoming convenient targets for venting frustrations; they also point to the need to examine work-life balance issues for female employers so as to understand the underlying strains and stresses that multiple demands of work and family place on women (*The Straits Times*, 24 March 2002). However, there has also been unanimous public agreement that "nothing, not even anxiety or stress, can be an excuse for abusing a maid" (*The Straits Times*, 24 March 2002). Notably, and sadly, "maid abuse" is not just a Singapore phenomenon; cases of abuse are documented the world over.

The Singapore state has moved to send a strong signal to employers who abuse their foreign domestic workers that the law will deal harshly with abusers. For example, the Penal Code was amended in April 1998 to enhance penalties for offences (including causing grievous hurt, wrongful confinement, and the outrage of modesty) against foreign domestic workers.[7] However, while the law has an important role to play in sending the "right signals" and hopefully catalysing social change in the longer term, it is by no means clear that its powers and protection can be accessed by foreign domestic workers confronting abuse in an unproblematic way. The kind of work they engage in and the conditions they work under, more often than not, restrict their freedom and curtail contact with the outside world. The perpetuation of abuse cases highlight the importance of instituting "off days" for foreign domestic workers in Singapore.

(b) "Off Days"

> How could they treat me like a slave? I am so tired, I sleep at 1 am and wake up at 5 am every day. I want to be free, but now I can only cry. (Nur, 24, Indonesian domestic worker who has worked in Singapore for two years, cited in *The Straits Times*, 6 November 2006).

Beyond the need to ensure that women who need it will have recourse to help from the "outside", it is part of every worker's right to have a day off not only as "a chance for rest and recreation [but] also a chance to relieve stress" (TWC2 press release, 29 May 2006). Foreign domestic workers have a right to a work-life balance as much as their Singapore employers. The Singapore state, however, has to date rejected calls to make a regular day off for foreign domestic workers mandatory as it would result in "rigidities and in-convenience" for households which may "have elderly or infirm members with special needs who require constant attention and may find it difficult to release the domestic worker for a prescribed period every week" (Hawazi Daipi, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Manpower, cited in *The Straits Times*, 9 March 2006). Although advocacy groups like TWC2 continue to uphold that rest days are every worker's entitlement and not something to be negotiated by employer, worker and agency, the Ministry of Manpower's *Employment Guidelines for Employer[s] of Foreign Domestic Worker[s]* simply states that employers "are strongly advised to draw up an employment agreement/ contract with [their] worker from the start of her employment"; they "should also grant [their] worker rest day(s) every month based on mutual agreement, or provide monetary compensation in lieu of rest day(s), in accordance with the employment agreement or contract" (MOM website, http://www.mom.gov.sg; accessed 1 November 2006).

While a new standard contract for domestic workers and employers has just come into force (with effect from 15 September 2006), a recent media report (*The Straits Times*, 24 October 2006) suggests that employers and agencies have indeed exploited the Ministry of Manpower's guidelines to circumvent giving their domestic workers an off-day. Some agencies are offering employers the option of giving the domestic worker an extra $20 to work in lieu of a day off; others simply stipulate a higher salary inclusive of the $20 compensation, with no mention of a day off. One agency noted:

> You can put in a request to say you don't want to give [the maid] an off-day and we will tell the other side. But most Indonesians will be okay if you don't want to give them a day off (*The Straits Times*, 24 October 2006).

Newly arrived foreign domestic workers interviewed for the article said that "agents in their home countries told them to agree to whatever Singapore agents and employers asked for. Many said they were afraid they would be sacked if they asked for a day off, or they would lose their jobs to another maid willing to work without time off" (*The Straits Times*, 24 October 2006). Their fears are not entirely ungrounded as several employers interviewed for the article noted that an off day was a non-negotiable issue or that domestic workers should be content with breaks during the day and an occasional off day on festival days (such as Christmas or the Muslim New Year). Such thinking basically reflects employers' apprehensions that allowing the domestic workers into public space will cause the latter to succumb to social and moral transgressions (Yeoh and Huang, 1998).

The state, since 1 November 2006, has instituted random interviews with foreign domestic workers, particularly those working in Singapore for the first time. It is a measure which hopefully will throw up any cases of "abuse or… any adverse conditions that the maids are facing" (*Channel News Asia*, 2 October 2006). This is still a far cry from legislating a weekly or monthly day off as has been done in Hong Kong and Taiwan (as well as annual leave) (Wee and Sim, 2005; Lan, 2005). As noted by Abdul Rahman et al. (2005), it is imperative for the state to legislate standard employment terms for transnational domestic workers spelling out minimum wage, number of days off, meal provisions, medical cover, repatriation costs and maximum working hours. Due to the wide ranging nature of domestic work, such legislation is a necessary and crucial first step forward in correcting the imbalance of power in the foreign domestic worker-employer relationship, reducing the former's vulnerability and recognising that these women, like all other workers, deserve space and time outside their work.

Conclusion

Migrant women working as live-in domestic workers are now a feature in an increasing number of societies across the world (Huang et al., 2005). However, while women have pushed the gendered frontiers of the productive sphere forward through their participation as independent labour migrants across international borders, little has been done to move the borders of gendered norms with respect to women's roles and identities in the reproductive sphere. This paper has argued

for the need for micro-scale analyses, such as those done at the level of the household, to focus attention on the lives of individual women and the negotiations they have to make in becoming migrant workers.

Moving out of their countries to work in the hope of helping their families move up in society often entails a sacrifice of their personal lives and brings new challenges to their familial roles (especially as mothers), and the women have to work hard at negotiating their everyday lives between work and a semblance of family life. Their moves across national borders also bring into play other axes of asymmetry (such as race, nationality and class) that produce different degrees of marginalisation and vulnerability for these workers in the homes and societies in which they find themselves. Given that they play such a crucial role in helping the families of their employers negotiate the work-life balance, it is also imperative that their moves across borders are supported by state legislation and civil society action – in both sending and receiving countries – to ensure that their rights and entitlements to a work-life balance that all other workers aspire towards, are not thwarted.

Figure 1: Persons Identified as Primarily Responsible for Domestic Responsibilities for
Households With and Without a Live-in Foreign Domestic Worker (FDW)
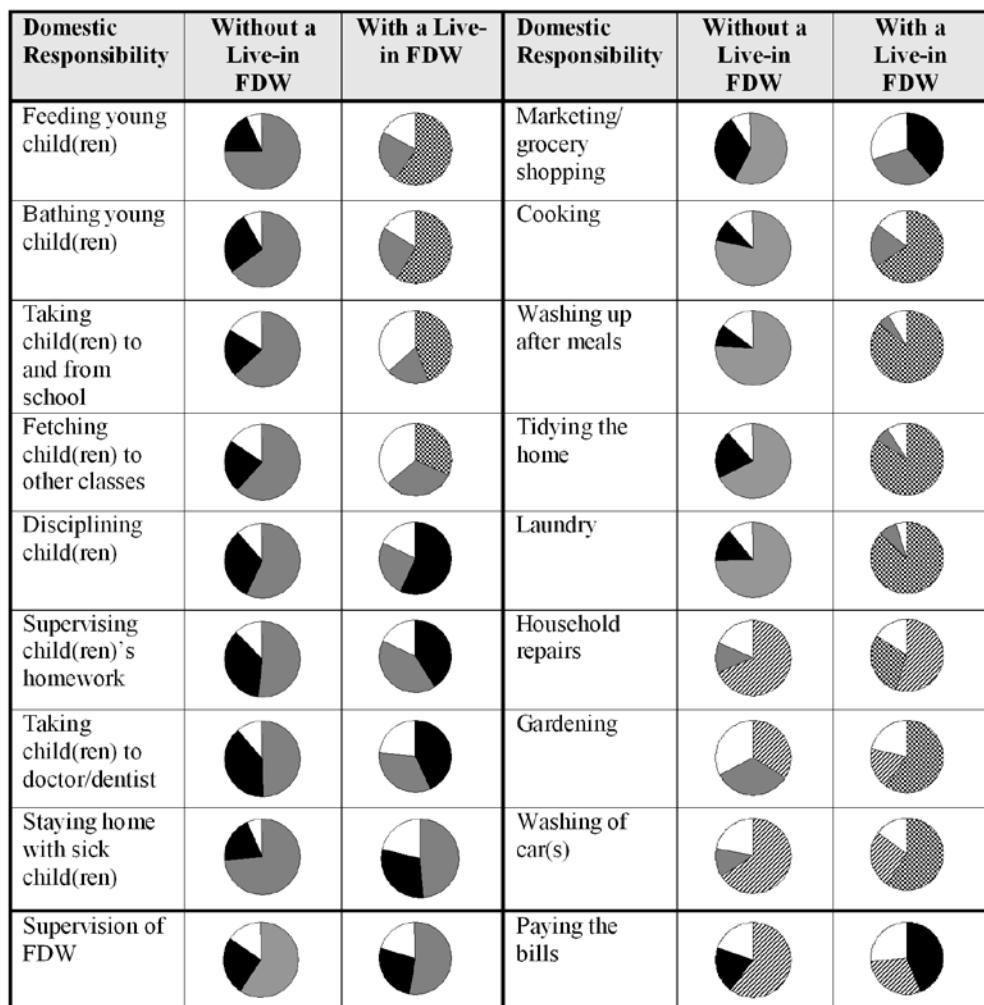
Legend: ▨ Wife
         ■ Husband and Wife
         ▨ Husband
         ▨ TDW
         ☐ Others

Source: Huang *et al.* (forthcoming)

Endnotes

1   For example, women comprised 69.2% of the 682,300 temporary migrants from the Philippines in 2001, and 75.7% of the 480,400 migrants from Indonesia in 2001 (Oishi, 2005).

2   The discussion in this paper is primarily drawn from on research on foreign domestic workers that I have done with Brenda Yeoh, and on the Singapore family with Lai Ah Eng and Paulin Straughan.

3   Most of Vietnam's estimated half a million migrant labourers are currently in Asia, with Malaysia being Vietnam's largest market, employing over 72,000 in 2004. The government is actively signing MOUs with various countries in a plan to export thousands of workers to South Korea, Japan, China and even Africa (IOM, 2005: 104).

4   As of the 2000 census, migrant labour of all skill levels comprised 29.2% of Singapore's 2.1 million strong workforce (Leow, 2001: 43), of which 150,000 are foreign domestic workers. The majority of these foreign domestic workers are from the Philippines and Indonesia, and the rest are from other neighbouring countries in the region such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar and India. Since the late 1960s, Singapore has designed a migration policy to respond to labour shortage and has managed migration through the quota system (to ensure that local workers are not displaced by cheaper foreign workers) and the imposition of a levy (to discourage continuing reliance on less skilled foreign workers).

5   The data for the table is taken from a survey, conducted by the author (with collaborators) in 1999-2000. The survey was based on a probability sample of household addresses from across Singapore, stratified by household types. Only households with at least one member of the family identified as a Singapore citizen were included, and the respondents were either female heads of household or wives of the male heads of household. Altogether, 908 respondents were successfully interviewed, comprising a response rate of 80%.

6   There are many cases of sexual abuse as well but for purposes of this paper, I have chosen to focus primarily on physical abuse. In Singapore, most (estimated by some local lawyers as about nine out of ten) of the cases of physical abuse are perpetrated by women (while those of sexual harassment are almost always by men, occasionally abetted by their wives) (*The Straits Times*, 24 March 2002).

7   Beyond increasing the fine of S$1,000, the maximum jail term was increased by 50 percent to between one and a half and ten and a half years (*The Straits Times*, 22 February 1998; *Associated Press*, 20 April 1998).

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The Aesthetics of Sex: Reconstructing Gendered Sex Roles

Sharon Loo

'But I hate to hear you talking so, like a fine gentleman, and as if women were all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures.'

Jane Austen, *Persuasion*

George Orwell wrote in *Animal Farm*, 'All animals are equal, but some equals are more equal than others.' Since human beings are animals of a kind, the saying also applies to humanity. While we presently would like to think that we are all equal, the truth is some among our number are 'more equal than others'. Who are these 'more equal' souls? Are they world leaders, politicians or diplomats whose decisions affect the lives of everyone else? No, for the decisions of leaders and politicians are merely instances of *males* looking out for the interest of their *fellowmen*. The 'more equal' among us have almost always been men, and the lessers have almost always been women. Modern men and women fail to realise that even among those who *allow* both sexes to be equally capable on the job-front, the workers are still judged by their biology. Corporations everywhere are less inclined to hire women because their perceived role in society is the maintenance of welfare for those workers (invariably male) who really need the money. Women (even in the United States as late as 1985)

are perceived as 'having no urgent need for money' because "they were married, or single and living at home, or doubling up with friends'[1] or because it was thought 'women did not depend on their own wage to support themselves'.[2] Thus, most sectors of the public sphere are disinclined from hiring women regardless of their capabilities and promise because they are perceived as poor investments who will eventually marry, have children and devote themselves to the home. Like it or not, the truth remains that despite the modern premise of equal opportunity, old prejudices of the 'more equal' persist and the plight of the discriminated female is anything but ameliorated. Women are still judged by their biology and as such, are deemed (consciously or otherwise) to be naturally inferior in their bodily make-up and therefore unfit for public and political life. Their reproductive role, perceived by most members of both sexes to be 'natural' to women and 'functional' for the community, is understood as an indicator of women's unsuitability for public life and embeddedness in private life.[3] I shall

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attempt to unravel the reason for the continuation of these prevailing attitudes of the sexes by first examining the place of women throughout history. In so doing, an understanding as to women's perceived differences from men will be obtained. It is my contention that the perception of women's differences from men is antithetical to the modern way of life, which advocates and celebrates individuality, independence, as well as personal satisfaction in both the public (work and politics) and private (home/domestic) spheres. Until this is realised and both sexes are re-educated to see the truths in their situations, they will continued to be trapped in the cycle where the compliance of the 'less equals' to the judgement of the 'more equals' are de rigueur, and where the myth of biology is destiny causes them to lose their very individual identities. To reconstruct these gendered sex roles, I posit the theory that gender is merely for aesthetics, and that the constructed notion of biology is destiny is unjust as it disregards modern sensibilities and generates inequality of outcome for women and men.

Place of Women throughout History

In ancient Greek and Roman civilisations, women led severely circumscribed lives. Respectable Greek and Roman women were expected to be entirely domestic. Ancient Greek women, particularly, led severely restricted lives. In 4th Century B.C. Athens, respectable women were kept in a separate part of the house and not allowed to go out except on festivals.[4] Most respectable Greek gentlemen in ancient Athens concurred with

Demosthenes' view of women as 'courtesans for pleasure, concubines/mistresses to serve men's day-to-day physical wellbeing, and wives to beget legitimate children and be trustworthy guardians of men's households'.[5]   In ancient Roman society, the highborn women had much more freedom than their Athenian predecessors. Although Roman law stated that women as *infirmitas sexus* (literally, the weaker sex) were to be held in custody of the eldest male member of her family, Roman women soon managed to diminish the authority of the *pater familias* over them. Hence, while a guardian was legally required when a Roman woman performed important transactions, such as accepting an inheritance, making a testament or assuming a contractual obligation and all transactions requiring sales (including selling land and manumitting a slave), a woman could apply to the magistrate to either have her guardian's assent forced if he withheld it or apply for another guardian whose views matched hers.[6] This was slightly better than the treatment of highborn women in Ancient Greece who were regarded as chattel. Marriage contracts were not as strictly enforced in ancient Rome as they were in Greece for the bride was allowed to refuse the match if she could prove her betrothed was morally unfit. Roman women, unlike their Greek predecessors were allowed to dine with their men folk and attend respectable parties and political gatherings. Thus, the highborn Roman women were able to assert some influence in their society. Although they were not as isolated and excluded from activities outside the domestic sphere as Greek women, Roman women were still bound by the societal

constructs governing the lives of their Greek predecessors. On the other end of the spectrum, lowborn Greek and Roman women could work outside the home in 'traditionally feminine occupations' such as midwifery, weaving, washing clothes and so on. Despite their jobs, they were still the properties of their men and their salaries accordingly went to the management of their men. In contrast, the courtesans, in both ancient Greece and Rome, enjoyed more freedoms than the ordinary woman. They were highly desired and prized because they were more than more mere prostitutes. They were well versed in philosophy, history, politics, science, art and literature. For instance, both Socrates and Pericles credit the *hetairai*, Aspasia, for teaching them rhetoric. Pericles so valued Aspasia's wisdom that he took the courtesan as his lifelong companion. However, such men were few and rare indeed. Due to their insecurity in their own manliness, most ordinary men preferred common prostitutes to courtesans, as they thought of courtesans as too 'masculine' in their 'accomplishments' and derided their interest in politics and philosophy.

The societies of ancient Greece and Rome believed that there were three kinds of women, as evinced by the female goddesses in their pantheon. There are five Olympian goddesses, and between them are split the roles of virgin, whore, and virago. Athena/Minerva is the goddess of war and wisdom, and the patroness of weaving. However, as she judges men's actions and inspires them intellectually, she is rendered 'masculine' and is therefore, denied any sexual inclination or sexual activity. Artemis/Diana is the twin of Apollo and a huntress and warrior. Hestia

is a vestal virgin, the goddess of the hearth and the goddess of the religious centre of the household. She is worshipped in every household and is respected as an old maid. Aphrodite/Venus is the most sensual of the female Olympian goddesses; she exercises her sexual love freely and indiscriminately among gods and mortals, much to the chagrin of the other gods and mortal men. Hera/Juno is a wife, mother and powerful queen of the gods, the protecting deity of married women. She had to tolerate her husband's (Zeus/Jove) numerous infidelities by remaining faithful to him herself. She is most frequently depicted as a violent, jealous and vindictive termagant who vented her anger from the insults of her husband's infidelities on his mistresses and his illegitimate children. The goddesses, as Charles Seltman reminds the researcher, are different kinds of mortal women as perceived by males.[7] The distribution of desirable characteristics among a number of females rather than their concentration in one being is appropriate to a patriarchal society – the reason for this is simple, as Sarah Pomeroy informs us:

'A fully realized female tends to engender anxiety in the insecure male. Unable to cope with a mul-tiplicity of powers united in one female, men from antiquity to the present have envisioned women in "either-or" roles. As a corollary of this anxiety, virginal females are considered helpful, while sexu-ally mature women like Hera are destructive and evil. The fact that modern women are frustrated by being forced to choose between [being] an Athena – an intellectual

asexual career woman – or an Aphrodite – a frivolous sex object – or a respectable wife-mother like Hera shows that the Greek goddesses continue to be archetypes of female existence.'[8]

Precisely because an amalgamation of the traits of the Olympian goddesses reveal a being with unlimited potential for development (in other words, we have a true female equivalent of Zeus), men fear such women who are as sexual, intelligent, capable and respectable as they. This then is the cause of most ordinary men's fear of courtesans who were well-educated and embodied all the 'manly' traits in their women's bodies and minds. This fear of such women leads people of both sexes who have thoroughly absorbed the notion of the sex roles to condemn men who love such women as 'feminised' and 'odd'. This fear then provides men with the impetus to keep such women in their place by portraying these goddesses as embodiments of women's 'proper' roles in society – that of homemaker, wife and mother. Thus, Athena was also created the goddess of weaving, Hera, the goddess of marriage, and Artemis, the goddess of childbirth. As a result, the cult of fertility goddesses came to be. While some sociologists and historians might argue that fertility goddesses showed the worship of women's 'natural' abilities and therefore empowered them, I believe that such cults only served to entrench the old belief of women's biology as her destiny. Men (in ancient and modern societies) only revered these fertility goddesses for two reasons – their desire for a legitimate male heir to succeed them, and for their womenfolk to be exactly like these goddesses – fertile wives

and mothers with skills at weaving, household management and sexual pleasure to the men who own them. Through the fertility goddesses' examples, women came to internalise the view that fulfilment of their needs lay in accepting and playing their 'proper' roles in society.

The belief that womanliness meant being confined to the home as a good wife and mother carried on throughout history and to the present day. After the collapse of the Roman Empire, Europe was plunged into the middle ages where they were once again regarded as chattel like the ancient Greek women. Women in the Middle Ages were only kept in families for their reproductive abilities and roles in alliance forming through marriage. Women then could not hold property for everything they had, even their persons were held by fathers, their eldest male relative or husbands. Rare exceptions occurred when women inherited thrones and proved themselves to be as capable as male rulers. However, due to their gender, female monarchs such Eleanor of Aquitaine and Elizabeth I of England, were vilified as tyrants or whores with voracious sexual appetites at best or overly sentimental creatures with excessive penchant for religious devotion. Up to the 19th century, women were not seen as capable leaders. Female monarchs were often advised to marry so as to provide the kingdom with strong male leadership and the possibility of a male heir to the throne. While such views did not prevent royal mistresses and mistresses of noblemen from influencing politics through their relationships with monarchs or powerful men, this form of distinction between men and women continue to the present day due to the public-private divide. Women have

traditionally been regarded as without function in the public realm because of their allegedly lesser capacity for violence, while the civic actions of men in that realm were to be judged not by their intentions or motives but by a consequence of those actions.[9] Thus, despite all the displays of equal opportunity for all human beings, the view of biology as destiny is still very much alive today. As such, this ongoing interest in the roles of modern women both within and without the domestic sphere has fanned the flames of the debate on women's abilities to juggle work in both the public and private spheres. Although women work along side men outside the home, they still perform two-thirds of the world's work, earn ten percent of the world's income, and own less than one percent of the world's property.[10] The reason for this lies in the fact that women are still seen as part of the things coming under the male's governance. In other words, like it or not, the way men perceive women, judge them by their looks, fertility and amiability vis-à-vis the male populace are all instances of 'natural' male aggressiveness. Consequently, women during the ages have always been a site for male imperialist ambitions.

Land is feminised with terms such as virgin territory and virgin land; and like land, women can be conquered and ploughed. The object of men's '*natural* imperialist aggressiveness' is to be the first subjugator and to hold the women (as he does land) as prized possessions that could have great yields and can be used as bartering chips. Given the preponderance of this outlook, it is unsurprising that most men still regard the women they have slept with or dated as 'conquests'. Likewise, it is not surprising that women feel they have to meet the expectations of male scrutiny and appraisal.[11] However, in so doing, the women (and some respect, the men too) have lost themselves. And as an upshot, the researcher finds the absence of women's voices (and thinking men's voices) in the 'imperialist' context. There are women who are as virile, ambitious, intelligent, resourceful and violent as men who conquer lovers as men do. Instead of being given their due, society and its long entrenched 'observation' of each sex's biology heralding their destiny denounces these women (and the few men who support them) as unnatural, whores and de-feminised, de-sexed creatures. It is these so-called traditional views of delineating each sex to their 'proper' roles in society It is these so-called traditional views of delineating each sex to their 'proper' roles in society and the accompanying notions that result in the present day 'war of the sexes' because these constructs seek to confine each sex to a separate realm with different moral standards for each for distinguishing good from evil.[12]

Even the so-called attempts to empower women within the structures of the family and existing societal beliefs do nothing but encourage the myth that women are ultimately bound to the domestic sphere and unfit for anything outside of it. Political philosophers such as Rousseau held that traditional sex roles need to be preserved because it is necessary to have 'an eye out to its political repercussions' namely, that 'the private and the public affect each other in numerous and central ways; sex roles serve political ends and teach us lessons that give birth certain desirable social possibilities' and 'reflect assumptions and choices about what kinds

of communities are possible, necessary and desirable' because women as the private becomes 'the parent and servant of the public [men]'.[13] All this is mere 'metaphysical double talk' designed to stroke the egos of men by creating the impression that they are still the heads of the household and that women are still beholden to their lords and masters.[14] It is unlikely that men as intelligent as the male writers claim they are, would allow themselves to be swayed by their wives' sexuality to permit the women to do as they chose in the domestic sphere. Even though the wife and mother are the so-called rulers of the hearth, they still must acknowledge their husbands as their head, whose will is to be obeyed in every aspect of their lives together; after all, she did promise to 'love, honour and *obey*' in her wedding vows. Modern men and women in Asia are also caught in this uncomfortable aspect of their wedded lives. As the typical Asian man sees the domestic sphere as belonging solely to his wife, he leaves for her all the tasks at home even though she has had a hard day's work at the office. Likewise, because the modern Asian woman has been so conditioned into thinking that their husbands are the head of the household, they consult him in everything, seeking his approval for everything and in so doing, they take great care not to antagonise him or to earn more than him, or to bruise his fragile ego.

Perceived Differences between the Sexes

All the differences between the sexes (save one – the female's ability to give birth) are merely matters of social construct. Indeed,

Plato showed himself aware of this fact in his *Republic* 455d, 'there is no practice of a city's governors which belongs to woman because she's woman, or to man because he's man; but the natures are scattered alike among both animals; and woman participates according to nature in all practices, and man in all.' In other words, women are as capable as men in the public sphere and should be given a chance to reach their full potential there; likewise, men must do what women do – if women keep house and do the domestic chores, men must do so too because there is no task solely belongs to each gender. Throughout the *Republic*, Plato consistently states socialisation causes people to *think* and *feel* differently about each sex in 451d-453c: since 'women [are used] to the same things as men… a woman doesn't differ in her nature very much from a man. How can it be then, that you aren't contradicting yourselves, when you assert that men and women must do the same thing [i.e. work in the public sphere and do housework alike] if they have a nature most distinct? What have you as an apology in light of this?' As the most potent influence of socialisation is the family, followed by society, our beliefs are shaped by our upbringing and our interactions with others. The unwillingness of most people to change their perceptions of gender specific roles or biology as destiny belief is the cause of the perpetuation of this 'war of the sexes'. So many people have been imbued with the notion that a woman's nature is 'naturally' defined by emotionalism and lack of rational restraint that they think women are 'naturally' suited to childbearing and childrearing, and men are 'naturally' responsible, rational and naturally

equipped to deal with the 'real' matters outside the private sphere. How does one know that it is 'natural' for a woman to be a wife and mother, and for a man to be the sole breadwinner and leader? How do we know that it is 'natural' for women to put their family before themselves and everything, and for a man to sacrifice everything (including his family) to get his job done? These notions of 'what is natural' are defined by traditional societal and male constructs of sex roles, which restrict *a priori* what each gender is fit to do.[15] The unwillingness and inability of most modern men and women to see past these constructs have resulted in a 'woman – you can-have-it-all' myth, which propagates the myth that a modern woman can enjoy the 'satisfaction' of childbearing, childrearing, domestic activities, keeping house while excelling in their careers and intellectual pursuits with *no cataclysmic changes* in the existing social structure.[16] This lack of radical change in the existing social structure does not help the modern woman who buys into the 'you-can-have-it-all' myth, for she believes she must juggle the dual roles of homemaker and career woman at the same time; to do so, she believes she must sacrifice her own desires, wants, needs, and self to provide for the sexual and emotional needs of a spouse, provide for the emotional and intellectual need of 2.2 children, maintain her sexual attractiveness, perform at least three-quarters (if not all) the manual tasks necessary for maintaining a household and succeed at work before she can be considered a truly happy, capable and successful woman.[17] The modern emancipation of women (in giving them equal opportunity to work alongside men in the former male reserve of the public

sphere) has meant that whilst they have gained new functions, they have lost few of the old ones.[18] The old functions being the traditionally prescribed roles of women as wives, mothers, and domestic help. The continued interest in the naturalness and desirability of gender and biology affecting the roles of the sexes makes this 'war of the sexes' more relevant in an age when even respected scholars such as former Harvard University President, Lawrence Summers suggested that 'innate differences between men and women could be one reason women are under-represented in the upper strata of the science and engineering fields' [and by default, other occupations as well].[19]

Plans to enable women to better cope with their present dual roles of homemaker and career woman, or schemes to get men to help in the housework are still dependent on perpetuating the differences between the sexes and rely on the traditional mindset of 'biology is destiny'. The retention of this view leads to the debate as to the extent the roles of the sexes should be identical – a debate which is in turn governed by notions as to whether the plans to aid women in their quest to have it all by either helping around the house or re-educating both sexes are 'just' and 'natural'. The increasing interest of preserving men's personal individual identities and women's collective identities as domestic drudges in the face of globalisation has led political philosophers and sociobiologists to return to the examination of the sexes in a bid to determine whether the 'innate biological and psychological natures' of human beings are gendered in order to see how they cope with their changing roles in society. This study has inevitably split

scholars into traditionalist and feminist factions, with the traditionalists believing 'biology is inevitably affects one's functioning and reactions to changes in society'[20] and the feminists propounding 'every scientist… every intelligent person knows that human behaviour is a complex and indivisible mix of biological and social issues; the issue is not whether nature or nurture determines human behaviour, for they are truly inextricable, but the degree, intensity, and nature of the constraint exerted by biology upon the possible forms of social organizations'.[21] Despite all their fine words, both these factions still cleave to the manmade construct that there is no escaping from biology's destiny as men and women are fundamentally different. However, it is my contention that males and females have only one difference.

The only difference between the sexes is the female's potential ability to give birth. It is not a skill as some scholars and men claim. It is merely a biological function that a woman can choose not to exercise. Such a view holds women's 'natural' roles of childbearing and childrearing as her 'only competent fields' and any foray into the public sphere must be countered by some form of guilt coming from her 'natural' and 'inescapable' obligations in the private sphere, for the latter is 'a position in which they [i.e. women] would rather be left. Furthermore, in emphasising the importance of biology over personal inclination, the myth of women's 'superior skill' in giving birth is propagated – a skill that some feminists claim, 'even those women least skilled in this task [of giving birth] do it better than men'.[22] Giving birth is not something that women do better than men because it is the only thing women can do that men

cannot. It is most certainly not a skill because giving birth is the outcome of sexual intercourse and pregnancy. Where do women who neither possess nor wish to utilise this 'skill' in which they are allegedly so superior in, fit in? Such women are condemned as unnatural and de-sexed or deemed to be possessing defective sexual organs at best; alternatively, they are seen as promiscuous women seeking to evade or resisting the 'natural inclination' of motherhood. These notions continue to flourish because men fear the Athena-Hera-Aphrodite amalgam; a woman who behaves like a man and does things like a man instead of casting herself in the role of the 'normal' woman is dangerous as she will 'feminise' and 'emasculate' men. As Jane Austen puts it, the reason for the continued propagation of this myth is because, 'Men have had every advantage of us [women] in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands.' Like her, 'I will not allow these books and ideas written by and propagated by men [and the women who have imbibed such ideas] to prove anything'.[23] As these advocated constructed norms only forward the 'natural observation' that biology is destiny, working women today are caught in the have-it-all myth and are expectedly unhappy and dissatisfied. Terms such as *mothering* only further advance the view that motherhood is inevitable, desirable and essential. Where *fathering* does not connote the meaning of primary caregiver to children but 'begetter' or 'progenitor', *mothering* implies active, exclusive and selfless attention and care to children at the expense of the mother's self and time. This account of motherhood not only highlights that biology as destiny is

natural, it also implies that femininity is based on biology as well. These accounts that women can and should have both families and careers at the same time These claims that women can and should have both families and careers at the same time, that all women's psychological development, emotional development, and femininity are constructs created by males fearful of the female's sexual and intellectual power, and accepted without questions as 'natural' by most females. Hence, the notion of motherhood as destiny for *all* females explicitly makes clear that women who do not manifest the qualities required for mothering and/or refuse mothering are deviant or deficient as women, and no longer attractive or feminine.[24] In short, lacking this desire and failure to buy into biology as *the* determinant for femininity and thus ultimately destiny renders one less than a woman.

Injustice of the gendered sex roles

Femininity and masculinity then, are manmade constructs so ingrained in people that they believe biology endows the two genders with not only different roles and destinies but different abilities as well. Society is so caught up in these so-called differences between the sexes that it has not considered the similarities between them. As a result, a tension exists between a woman's individuality, the choices offered to her to have-it-all without stressing over it, and accepting her fate by returning to the safety of the home. In surveys, most women state that they are demoralised with one in four women of

various ages wanting and failing to get married.[25] As such the number of never married women have tripled over the past two decades and these women are increasingly unhappy with their lots because they blame their success in the public sphere as damaging their femininity and destroying their chances of ensnaring a husband.[26] Many modern women may have marriage and a house in the suburbs as their goals, but before they get there, they might choose to cohabit with their partners.

In fact, the modern woman need not stress herself out thinking about their so-called 'domestic duties', which if they cared to think on it – aren't natural at all. They may believe that they are unlike men in that men have their traditional historic prerogatives of the initiative, double standard, promiscuity, mate trade-ins, domination, and domestic copouts.[27] However, modern women should realise that they have the opportunity to fully concentrate on their careers without bothering about housework because they can hire professional domestic help specialising in keeping house. Modern women have the option of not having a partner or spouse or indeed sexual relations should they want their own biological children because professional surrogate mothers can be found, and artificial insemination may be done. When the children are born, modern women need not bother with the hassle of childrearing, for professional childcare providers can be hired. All these options free the modern woman to pursue her own career without impediments should she wish to have-it-all. However, tell this to modern women and most would be scandalised. They would invariably express guilt at neglecting

their 'womanly' duties for their men are 'naturally inapt' at home. When they do get retrenched from work due to pregnancy or get offered humiliating contracts because of their gender or perceived to be future baby producers, women in Asia generally take it all in stride without realising that they are being discriminated against. They have been conditioned to think that they are nothing without their families and that everything they do is for the sake of the family, never themselves. Such treatment of themselves is unfair to women, for it only highlights and reinforces the traditional view purported by Rawls and many others that the family is 'the basic structure of society'.[28] The family, according to such accounts, is the 'ideal unit of man, wife, and children maintained by the earnings of the first alone' as 'reasonable security of employment for the breadwinner is the basis of all private duties and all sound social action.'[29] If anything, this is a subtle form of discrimination that most women are not aware of, because even females look at women's right to work in half-hearted acknowledgement, for they look on themselves as men do – as wives and mothers.[30] This means that women are not even seen as individuals; they are only seen as a sex. That in itself is offensive and discriminatory. To remedy that, I propose that the truth about gender be told. Gender is not a matter of biological function determining destiny, rather gender is purely a matter of aesthetics.

Gender as Aesthetics

In viewing and judging women through the 'biology as destiny' glasses, women are

not seen as individuals. By the same yardstick, the notion that biology is destiny also pigeonholes men into traditional notions of masculinity so much so that men are also seen as a sex (albeit the sex meant to rule and be strong) rather than individuals. All this makes the assumption that there are set rules as to the constituents of 'naturalness' in humanity. By assuming that women are to be wives and mothers of men, and men are naturally to be leaders, providers and protectors of women, the erroneous view that all men and all women are heterosexual is perpetuated. Isn't this a sexist way of looking at both genders? This only results in crises for homosexuals and lesbians who have to ultra-masculinise and ultra-feminise themselves to fit it with the 'normal' and 'natural' heterosexual crowd. Looking at themselves through these constructed sex roles, homosexuals and lesbians are torn between their inclinations which have nothing to do with biology, and the social construct that tells them it is normal to be a breadwinner and a mother. Aren't men and women (of whatever sexual orientation) stripped of their individuality in this case? Who is to say that heterosexuality is normal and natural? If, as I have highlighted, biology as destiny only forwards constructed sex roles that emphasise each gender's masculinity and femininity, then it follows that a 'straight is normal and natural' sexual orientation is also constructed from the biology as destiny myth.

Gender as aesthetics dismisses the biology as destiny myth and its attendant arguments of 'natural' sex roles for men and women. It is my belief that individuals are the basis of society, not the family. Even in the traditional 'biology as destiny'

argument, families are not the basis of society because a group of citizens (i.e. the men) are deemed to be the breadwinners and thus the chief contributors to society's upkeep. No matter how men are rendered collectively 'macho' by the biology as destiny myth, they are still looked on as individuals by and in society. This is despite the fact that they have all become drones to the myth of 'naturally' constructed sex roles. Females on the other hand, are excluded from the upkeep of society because they are judged by their abilities to 'perform normal household duties' rather than 'fitness for work'.[31] Thus, women accept their roles as stay-at-home wives and mothers and the 'fact' that should they venture out into society to work, they 'deserve' less monetary rewards for their skills rendered. Any inkling of woman's individuality is crushed by her biology, which makes her 'naturally dependent' on men. Making women dependent on men, and men dependent on women's constant affirmation of their masculinity, goes against the modern ideas of individual identity, personal satisfaction in both the public and private spheres, and personal independence. More often that not, when one conditioned by gendered sex roles looks at a man, (s)he sees an individual who is strong, virile and in possession of an active occupation; however, when this same person looks at a woman, (s)he sees a wife and mother with or without beauty and a figure. Why is it that these gendered sex roles cause a man to be looked on as a person, an individual, while the woman is cast into a sex role? Is not the man in a traditional sex role, like all the other men sharing the same mindset? Does not a woman have her own identity as well? Women and men both

deserve individual identities not tied to their biology.

To achieve this, a radical change in mindset is needed. Instead of gender constructed along the lines of sex roles, gender should be seen merely as a form of aesthetics that render human beings individual and different from one another. The only difference between men and women is that men cannot give birth even if they should wish to. Beyond that single difference, men and women are exactly alike. We have the same number of chromosomes and body organs with the same functions. We both stand a chance at getting breast cancer; we both have sexual desires and basic needs. We both have reproductive organs that can be stimulated for pleasure. We both have the right to exercise our choice *not* to want children, as it is neither a male reserve nor a female responsibility to bear the cost of an unwanted pregnancy. We both have brains and want to be appreciated for who we really are rather than what we are (i.e. as just a person). While scientists and sociobiologists may inform us that the 'naturally different structure' of men and women's brains translate into different specific skills such as the typical male predilection for numbers and spatial questions, and female preference for languages,[32] all these studies prove is that electrical currents send different impulses to different parts of male and female brains when processing the same information. It has nothing to do with one gender being more intelligent or capable than the other. Due to all these similarities, men and women are, in my opinion, at the very basic level, the same kind of animal. Thus, it is my contention that gender is purely for aesthetics as it is part of that which

makes us individuals rather than merely a sex role. The theory of gender as aesthetics looks at both men and women as independent, rational and capable individuals, each with their own individual identities and preferences. The theory of gender as aesthetics does not tie men and women to any role and the only thing that is 'natural' in this theory is the fact that they are Homo sapiens. Since gender is only for aesthetic purposes, men and women are free to whatever roles they choose for themselves. If we were all truly homogenous and looked completely alike and were exactly the same, we would not be individuals at all. With the aesthetics of gender, we each have a distinct look and a distinct identity of ourselves. This look and individual identity then becomes part of who we are. There are tall and plump female physicists just as there are short and thin male physicists. These two different people in the same job are as fully capable in their responsibilities and differentiated by the aesthetics of their appearances – appearances which are governed by gender. In short, gender and our way of expressing that gender is just a means of distinguishing ourselves from the crowd. Gender does not mean naturally heterosexual or natural biological roles – it is merely a means through which we can make ourselves seen and heard in this world full of other animals. Gender does not shape us, nor does it make us what we are; rather, it is part of who we are.

Similarly, sexuality and sexual preference as off shoots of gender, also do not shape us, they make us who we are. Gender as aesthetics is not used as a measure of beauty, but as an expression through which we are able to become our own persons. For instance, I may be a female, but that does not mean that I am like the other females on this earth. My state of being female is merely an aesthetic expression of who I am – a contributor to a journal with my own opinions contributing an article to a journal, *not* a potential wife and mother.

If gender were to be understood as merely aesthetics, then sexual discrimination would no longer take place. This is because we would all know that we are effectively the same save for that one difference. This also means that all human beings will always be assessed by their own worth, their true merits, their real talents and abilities, and not through their 'natural destined' roles. Gender as aesthetics will herald a world where we have better appreciation for ourselves where we love ourselves and no longer seek to fit into a societal or sex-roled-construct of beauty or normalcy. In better appreciating ourselves and loving ourselves for we are, we will be able to shape our own destinies. How do following these ersatz constricts of our abilities and roles make us individuals? It only succeeds at making us drones to the myth that we are all assigned a place (invariably shaped by 'natural' sex roles) in our lives from which there is no escape; it makes us mindless slaves to the system where any difference, creativity and eccentricity away from the long accepted norm is condemned. While I am certain that there are individuals in the world opposed to these traditional views, I believe their voices are not heard because they are afraid and unwilling to speak up against norm. This is because they are unwilling to face the ridicule and contempt of the others. The others who cleave to 'biology is destiny' outlook are unwilling to accept another viewpoint on the

meaning and purpose of gender, as they do not wish to sacrifice their dearest *convictions* and *interests*. Such a sacrifice would be so great to the men and women of the traditional mindset that they do not appear worthwhile. It is not worthwhile for them as the heterosexual men propagating 'biology as destiny' would lose their fulltime free domestic help and heterosexual women who believe that their gender governs their destinies would lose the security of male protection, their femininity and identities as wives and mothers. This unwillingness to sacrifice traditional gendered sex roles is the reason why most men and many women shun the notion of the unnaturalness of biology as destiny. This unwillingness of modern people of both sexes to see that gender is merely aesthetics, an aid in individual self-expression and those traditional sex roles only breed conformity rather than individuality lies in their unwillingness to accept that men and women are more alike than they care to realise. As an attempt to teach people that gender is only a matter of aesthetics will be met with much resistance from many sectors in society, it would more feasible to begin by teaching men and women to rethink the gendered sex roles. Once they are able to see through the constructs of gendered sex roles, they would be free from this 'traditional, artificial restraint of society', leaving the individual man and woman answerable to no one but themselves, as they 'no longer serve any moral or political authority in maintaining the false manmade entity of the family'.[33] Both sexes should be given the same education in the aesthetics of sex so that they will realise that there is 'no innate psychological differences between the sexes'[34] and be more inclined towards inculcating real individuality identity, true independence, and genuine personal happiness. In doing so, the socially conditioned beliefs that the 'maternal instinct and love is natural' and that woman must remained confined to this role because of 'her natural sex differences' may be removed.[35]

Conclusion

Having discussed the problems caused by prevailing gendered sex roles and the reasons for their continued propagation, as well as their apparent opposition to the modern way of life of individualism, independence, and personal satisfaction, I hope I have elucidated the ills of such a mindset, through advocating that gender is aesthetics, a new way of looking at human beings as a means of re-educating society was proposed. Hopefully, this will enable people to be less entrenched in the traditional views of men and women's role and place in society as well as their gendered notions of masculinity and femininity and sexual orientation. Until modern women cease looking at themselves through the male gaze as disseminated in gendered sex roles and biology as destiny, they will never like themselves enough to respect themselves. Unless women are fully able to like themselves and respect themselves for who they really are, i.e. an amalgam of Athena-Aphrodite-Hera, men will not take them seriously and will continue to discriminate against them subtly in every aspect of their lives. Unless men willingly and fearlessly accept women for what they really are – every bit as equal a *Homo sapien* as they are, with only a vagina instead of a penis, they will continue to visit their inadequacies on women. I

realise as Nancy Fraser points out, 'the making of mainstream public opinion is a routinised affair, the business of pundits as opposed to lay citizens'[36] like myself. However, by highlighting the plight of women (especially Asian women), I hope women will come to respect themselves as the property in themselves, thus enabling all of us to see the myth of gendered sex roles for what they truly are – repressive and in poor taste.

Endnotes

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Web Links on Europe and Asia

Timely and up-to-date information is a necessity for policy-makers and researchers. In an increasingly information-dependent world, the Internet is an unsurpassed medium for rapid dissemination of news. The following is a compilation of websites that offer invaluable insights and timely information on Southeast Asian issues and Asia-Europe relations.

ASEAN Secretariat

http://www.aseansec.org

The homepage of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat, this site provides information on the latest ASEAN meetings as well as archived documents.

Asia Daily

http://wn.com/s/asiadaily/index.html

Part of the World News Network, Asia Daily offers news pertaining to Asia as well as links to the various Asian news sites.

Asia-Inc

http://www.asia-inc.com

Asia-Inc is a monthly regional business magazine targeted mainly at Asian executives, with emphasis on business news in Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia. The website offers articles featured in its publication, which provide insights into the Asian business community.

Asia News Network

http://www.asianewsnet.net

Established with support from Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, the Asia News Network (ANN) website offers news updates and commentaries from 13 major dailies in Southeast Asia who are members of ANN.

Asia Source

http://www.asiasource.org

A project of the US-based Asia Society, Asia Source provides information on various aspects of Asia, such as arts and culture, business and economics, policy and government and social issues. It also offers access to information by experts and also links to pages that focus on Asian lifestyle, education and statistics.

Asia-Europe Foundation

http://www.asef.org

The Asia-Europe Foundation was established by the members of the Asia-Europe Meetings (ASEM) on 15 February 1997 with the objective of promoting better mutual understanding between the peoples of Asia and Europe through greater intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchanges between the two regions. The website provides a listing of the activities and events of the Foundation as well as speeches delivered at ASEF events, media articles, press releases and book reviews with special interest in Asia and Europe.

The Asia Society

http://www.asiasociety.org

The Asia Society is an American nonprofit, non-partisan educational organisation dedicated to fostering understanding of Asia and communication between Americans and the peoples of the Asia and the Pacific. The website features details of the events organised by the Society, the speeches delivered and a selection of the Society's publications.

BBC News Asia Pacific

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asiapacific/default.stm

Part of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Internet network, this site is updated daily with top stories from the Asia-Pacific region.

CNN Interactive – World Regions – Asia Pacific

http://edition.cnn.com/ASIA

Part of the Cable News Network (CNN) online news portal, this site is updated daily with the top stories from the region. It also has links to other media such as TIME magazine and The New York Times belonging to parent company AOL Time Warner.

The East-West Center

http://www.eastwestcenter.org

The East-West Center is an education and research organisation that helps promote the establishment of a stable, peaceful and prosperous Asia Pacific community. It is a source of information and analysis about the Asia-Pacific Region, including the United States. Some 2,000 scholars, government and business leaders, educators, journalists and other professionals throughout the region work with Center staff annually to address issues of contemporary significance.

European Institute for Asian Studies

http://www.eias.org

The European Institute for Asian Studies is Brussels' research and policy think tank analysing political, economic and security relations between the European Union and Asia. The Institute is particularly concerned with developing the European Committee's relations with the countries of South and Southeast Asia that have grouped themselves into regional associations, such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the ASEAN. The EIAS web site contains information about the Institute, details of their seminars and research programmes as well as a list of related websites.

The European Union Online

http://www.europa.eu.int

The server of the European Union provides access to the homepages of the EU institutions with news, press releases and on-line documentation of EU meetings in several European languages.

Far Eastern Economic Review

http://www.feer.com

The online version of the weekly magazine on Asia's economic and business news. It contains some of the stories and features carried in the magazine. FEER also offers a free e-mail news service which is a digest of the major features carried on their website.

German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP)

http://www.dgap.org/english/ summary.htm

The main goals of the German Society for Foreign Affairs (DGAP) are: to stimulate interest in international questions, to promote worldwide scholarly cooperation, and hence to increase understanding between nations. The DGAP was founded in 1955 as an independent, non-partisan, non-profit association. Its aims, organisation, and mode of financing are similar to those of the Council on Foreign Relations in New York and the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) in London.

Institute for Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS)

http://www.iseas.edu.sg

Established in 1968, ISEAS is a regional research centre dedicated to the study of socio-political, security and economic trends and developments in Southeast Asia and its wider geostrategic and economic environment. The ISEAS website provides details of its research programmes as well as a full catalogue of publications.

Nouriel Roubini's Global Macroeconomic and Financial Policy Site

http://www.rgemonitor.com

The homepage of Nouriel Roubini, Associate Professor of Economics and International Business in the Stern School of Business, New York University, and Presidential Economic Advisor. It contains detailed reading materials on the Asian Economic Crisis, policy papers and links to other useful resources on the subject of economics.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

http://www.oecd.org

The OECD has an exclusive membership of 30 developed economies that share a commitment to democratic government and the market economy. Since its establishment three decades ago, OECD has moved beyond a focus on its own members to embrace the entire global economy, with active relationships with some 70 other countries, NGOs and civil societies. Its website contains an on-line bookshop covering the policy studies undertaken by the OECD as well as details of the workshops.

JOSEFA GIGI FRANCISCO emphasizes the role of ASEAN and the need to undertake gender equality as part of an ASEAN Community of Caring Societies. She also discusses the ten-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) and raises concerns about the losing number of women in political leadership, the marginalisation of national women's machineries, the frustrations and tensions around gender mainstreaming as a strategy, and the various forms of neo-conservative and fundamentalist prejudices and movements that act as barriers to women's public participation.

PROPERINA DOMINGO TAPALES discusses how Filipino women seem to be politically empowered due to the perception of having had two women as Heads of States and the number of women in government. She critiques this notion, saying that mere numbers do not mean political empowerment for women and that it is important to measure women's political power in every area of the political process. In her discussion, Dr. Tapales says that women's participation as grassroots leaders and active non-governmental organisation workers are crucial as women in these capacities perform the role of advocates and play a role in the script for political culture.

CLAUDIA DERICHS discusses in her paper that there is an increase in women's movements and rising awareness that women should be involved in politics. While this is a positive trend, the ongoing struggle of the women's movements in the region also reveals several flaws that have cropped up despite a growing liberal political atmosphere. She gives some snapshots of women's activism in Indonesia during the period of the country's democratic consolidation and highlights how patriarchal attitudes are influencing interpretations of religious practices that are gradually encroaching upon women's rights.

EVA MYSLIWIEC presents an overview of the socio-political and historical positioning of Cambodian women. Outlining the key issues concerning Cambodian women, she covers three main aspects: the differing roles Cambodian women played throughout history and the evolution of women's leadership through the civil society and local government. The speaker also points out that women elected at local levels are able to empathise with the local Cambodian women, and that at the grassroots, voters demanded a different type of leadership i.e. local women leadership within local government.

EILEEN DREW discusses the rise in women's employment in the European Union, the falling fertility rates and EU policies that aim at promoting women's employment. She also evaluates the systemic occupational segregation along

gender lines within the EU and that the 'second shift', comprising unpaid domestic work involved in running a home, rearing children and caring for older family members, is a marked feature of women's work throughout the EU and in all other regions of the world, that still goes unrecognised as proper work. She also appraises EU policy interventions in righting the balance.

SHIRLENA HUANG focuses on Foreign Domestic Workers in Singapore and discusses how this particular group of migrant women negotiates their own sense of work-life balance issues as transnational mothers and also how their presence has brought about changes in how women and men in Singapore take on domestic chores. The presence of the Foreign Domestic Worker, she argues, has enabled Singapore wives and husbands to have a work-life balance while she struggles for her own balance. She also discusses the policies that have been put in place to protect the foreign female worker.

SHARON LOO dissects traditional gender roles and explores the reasons for modern women judging themselves through the male gaze. She hypothesises that women are feared because they are really an amalgam of Athena-Aphrodite-Hera. To remedy this, she recommends that the prevailing gendered sex roles be abandoned, and that we look at gender as purely a matter of aesthetics.