Reviewing Political Patriarchy and Women's Political Mainstreaming in Asia – Breaking Barriers, Fighting Blind Spots, Carving Opportunities

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Asia represents an interesting and diverse laboratory for gender-sensitive policy-making, legislation as well as women's political mainstreaming at various levels of the political system and is home to multiple gender-specific cleavages, contestations and controversies – be it in terms of formal or informal political participation, regimes and processes. Experiences of women politicians in breaking barriers of political patriarchy and carving opportunities for women's sustainable and transversal political mainstreaming have been diverse, sometimes ambiguous or with ambivalent outcomes and implications, more often than not encouraging and continuously widening the public space for women's voice to be heard and agency to unfold.

Assessing a Heterogeneous Region and Introducing Key Concepts[1]

One characteristic feature has been the introduction of different systems of gender quotas at multiple levels of Asian polities – be it in the form of voluntary party quotas, legislative candidate quotas, or reserved seats to be contested directly via elections or to be selected by male gatekeepers. Initially, public and academic debates revolved around the documentation of women politicians' experiences and around the debate of quota designs, issues of representativeness and critical mass theorising. Current debates and analyses of women parliamentarians' experiences have moved away from questions of (descriptive) representativeness towards challenges and gains of substantiveness in participation – from quantity/number games to quality/performance and impact, one could say. This includes reviews of intervening factors such as religion and other sociocultural determinants, strength of local as well as transnational women's movements and other democratic support networks, women's machineries, and external interventions in the shape of Official Development Assistance (ODA) sponsored gender mainstreaming programmes and/or state-/institution-building processes. Bangladesh's Minister of Education Dipu Moni argues that the value of women parliamentarians is no longer debated, but their effectiveness has come increasingly into focus, making it all the more important for the respective political infrastructure to reflect the needs and concerns of women leaders as such. In her point of view, even a small number of women and their effective participation is significant as is the demonstra-

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[1] See evidence drawn from comparative chapters in guest-edited special journal issues, action research papers as well as edited volumes: Andrea Fleschenberg and Farzana Bari, (2015): *"Unmaking Political Patriarchy Through Gender Quotas?"*, Islamabad/Kabul: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, accessible online: https://pk.boell.org/sites/default/files/unmaking_political_patriarchy_through_gender_quotas.pdf (as of 3 August 2020); Andrea Fleschenberg, (2016): *"It's not Charity, it is a Chair of Power" – Moving Beyond Symbolic Representation in Afghanistan's Transition Politics?*, Kabul: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (as of 3 August 2020); Andrea Fleschenberg, and Claudia Derichs (eds.) (2013): "Gender und politische Partizipation in Asien [Gender and Political Participation in Asia]", in: *Femina Politica* 22 (2), pp. 9-16; Andrea Fleschenberg and Claudia Derichs, (2011): "Women and Politics in Asia: A Springboard for Democracy? A Tentative Introduction & Reflection", in: Andrea Fleschenberg and Claudia Derichs (eds.), *Women and Politics in Asia. A Springboard for Democracy?*, Zuerich/Muenster: LITVerlag, pp. 1-17; Andrea Fleschenberg, Claudia Derichs, and Cecilia Ng, (2010): "Introduction", in: *Women in National Politics in Asia: A Springboard for Gender Democracy?*, in: *Gender, Technology and Development* 14 (3), pp. 303-312.

tive effect by having women occupy key government positions, creating the opportunities and allowing for women to imagine, have confidence in and aim for political leadership.[2]

As I have argued elsewhere, central questions which emerge are: (i) whether demands for representation and participation lead to effective political mainstreaming of women as well as a rupture, perforation or even transformation of androcentric political power structures, institutionalised political cultures as well as decision-making processes; (ii) what kind of agency and scope thereof do women politicians have for political agenda-setting as well as what kind of political performance can they display; and (iii) whether participation dividends emerge for other political arenas and public spheres and/or a gender democracy dividend for successful law- and policy-making. Or, in other words, if it is possible that recent initiatives and interventions for women's political participation in Asia have led to (i) the reproduction of structures of inequality, exclusion, and marginalisation, such as manifested by the characteristic features of elite capture of political institutions and the commonality of dynastic politics across the region of Asia; (ii) the continued exceptionalism of elite women's political participation and thus lack of political mainstreaming of women across different social strata; (iii) continued dependencies on and lack of transversal agency of women politicians from male-dominated support systems and networks due to the design of given quota provisions along with predominant, unaltered androcentric structures and institutions; as well as, in some countries, (iv) violent as well as non-violent counter-movements and discourses, most often linked with the nexus of religion and politics.[3]

In order to be able to evaluate such considerations and guiding questions, some conceptual food for thought is required, drawing from feminist political science concepts on the issue at hand in a brief overview.

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[2] Notes taken by the author of presentation held during the regional conference in Singapore, 16 October 2014, convened to formally establish the Asian Women Parliamentarian Caucus (AWPC). The AWPC has a network of 40 women MPs from across Asia and has been meeting since 2011 in Europe and Asia, using strategic networking, dialogue and capacity-building to further women's political participation (see also: https://www.kas.de/en/web/politikdialog-asien/asian-women-parliamentarian-caucus-awpc- as of 3 August 2020).

[3] Andrea Fleschenberg and Claudia Derichs, (eds.) (2013): "Gender und politische Partizipation in Asien [Gender and Political Participation in Asia]", in: *Femina Politica* 22 (2), pp. 9-16.

First, when talking about *political representation* and *political participation,* some terminological clarification and references are required. The seminal work of Pitkin[4] outlines four dimensions of *political representation* – formal, descriptive, substantive and symbolic – and coined the difference between *delegate* and *trustee* when reviewing understandings of parliamentary mandates and agency. Building on this, Mansbridge[5] adds three additional concepts of *political representation* which are of significance: (i) *gyroscopic*, i.e., interests, common sense and principles from one's own background to formulate as basis for parliamentary action; (ii) *surrogate*, i.e., representing constituents beyond one's own spatial electoral basis and those whose values and identities one shares; (iii) *anticipatory*, i.e., based on what one thinks constituents will approve at the next election and not what has been promised previously in electoral campaigns or manifestos. This links the framework of assessing quota women politicians' experiences with questions of performance, outreach, representativeness, accountability as well as transversal agency, moving the academic debate from the question of "Do women represent women?" to questions such as "Who claims to act for women?" and "Where, how and why does the SRW [substantive representation of women] occur?", and thus regarding representation as "dynamic, performative and constitutive".[6]

In addition, such an understanding opens up the concept of political representation in terms of spaces, actors, agency and manifestations, takes into consideration legislative arenas as well as other arenas of politics, a wide range of actors, sites, and goals that inform political processes, and highlights diversity in probabilities, levels, ways, strategies, locations, attempts and expressions/articulations "to act for women as a group" (or not), Celis et al.[7] argue. Substantive female political representation thus needs to be considered to take place and to be negotiated at different

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[4] Hannah F. Pitkin, (1967): *The Concept of Representation*, Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press.

[5] Jane Mansbridge, (2003): "Rethinking representation", in: *American Political Science Review*, 97 (4), pp. 515-528, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055403000856.

[6] Karen Celis, Sarah Childs, Johanna Kantola, and Mona Lena Krook, (2008): "Rethinking Women's Substantive Representation", in: *Representation*, 44 (2), pp. 99-210.

[7] Karen Celis, Sarah Childs, Johanna Kantola, and Mona Lena Krook, (2008): "Rethinking Women's Substantive Representation", in: *Representation*, 44 (2), pp. 99-210.

levels – from the local via provincial, national to transnational and international, using strategies of uploading or downloading reference frameworks for policy-making, framing of agenda issues or negotiating issues through the use of various platforms and amplifiers, and not only within the confined space of national parliamentary politics. This also means to review the role of male parliamentarians, cabinet members, civil society representatives or bureaucrats, state agencies and institutions beyond the usually focussed-upon women's policy machineries, state feminism and women's movements.[8]

As I have argued elsewhere,[9] the frequent heterogeneity of women parliamentarians in terms of interests, policy priorities, support system or party obligations and dependencies, ideological differences or other societal cleavages as well as the influence of multiple institutions – be it parliamentary practices, political cultures, gender ideologies, or work cultures – and predominant political discourses shape women's substantive political representation. Consequently, Celis et al.[10] stress that we need to search for critical actors of both genders within and outside political institutions and key arenas, and to explore possibilities of competition, conflict, co-optation as well as cooperation along with multiple directionalities of reinforcement and reciprocity between different actors, sites and levels of political representation and negotiation, which shape the political behaviour and performance of women parliamentarians – be they on quota seats or not.

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[8]   Ibid.

[9]   Andrea Fleschenberg, (2009): *Afghanistan's Parliament in the Making. Gendered Understandings and Practices of Politics in a Transitional Country*, Berlin: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung/UNIFEM; Andrea Fleschenberg and Claudia Derichs, (eds.) (2013): "Gender und politische Partizipation in Asien [Gender and Political Participation in Asia]", in: *Femina Politica* 22 (2), pp. 9-16; Andrea Fleschenberg, and Farzana Bari, (2015): "*Unmaking Political Patriarchy Through Gender Quotas?*", Islamabad/Kabul: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, accessible online: https://pk.boell.org/sites/default/files/unmaking_political_patriarchy_through_gender_quotas.pdf (as of 3 August 2020); Andrea Fleschenberg, (2016): *"It's not Charity, it is a Chair of Power" – Moving Beyond Symbolic Representation in Afghanistan's Transition Politics?*, Kabul: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (as of 3 August 2020); Karen Celis, Sarah Childs, Johanna Kantola, and Mona Lena Krook, (2008): "Rethinking Women's Substantive Representation", in: *Representation*, 44 (2), pp. 99-210.

[10]   Karen Celis, Sarah Childs, Johanna Kantola, and Mona Lena Krook, (2008): "Rethinking Women's Substantive Representation", in: *Representation*, 44 (2), pp. 99-210.

Having said that, an overview assessment of women's political representation – in numerical, comparative terms – is necessary and will be given in the following section in order to outline briefly patterns, trajectories and developments in recent decades in Asia. This overview is based on data provided by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU, www.ipu.org) as well as the Stockholm-based QuotaProject (www.quotaproject.org), headed by leading quota scholar Drude Dahlerup and linked with IDEA (www.idea.int).

Where Do We Stand? – Assessing Women's Political Representation and Participation

Reviewing the data on Asian women's political representation, a significant jump can be identified from the late 1990s onwards until today, outlining women's increased presence as heads of state/government and as cabinet members, parliamentarians and speakers, along with the formation of women's caucuses and the implementation of supportive gender quota systems. Having said that, this did not necessarily translate into women's political mainstreaming or to women substantially challenging political patriarchy across Asia – a region with significantly lower performance indicators in that regard in worldwide comparison in quantitative as well as qualitative terms. However, one has to outline an upward regional trend with a slight increase in numeric terms compared to 2015 or earlier.

Zooming in to the state of political patriarchy, one has to report that it is alive and kicking worldwide (albeit to varying degrees), meaning that political representation, participation and thus decision-making on public affairs is still a predominantly androcentric affair. The higher the echelon of power, the lower women's stake or its female ratio in it, it appears. Take for instance the fact that in mid-2020, only 6.2 percent of heads of government (read: 12) and 6.6 percent of presidents (read: 10) worldwide are women, among them Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh (since 2009), President Bidhya Devi Bhandari of Nepal (since 2015) and President Halimah Yacob of Singapore (since 2017). One could argue to include Myanmar as well in that list, given the powers of State Councillor Aung San Suu Kyi, comparable to those of a prime minister and leader of the ruling National League for Democracy. Hence, within those four Asian nations with women at the top by mid-2020, women's ratio among cabinet members/ministerial positions ranges from 3.8 percent (Myanmar) to

16.7 percent (Singapore). Zooming in further, women have previously held the position of head of state or government in India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka. None of those countries ranks in the top 50 when it comes to women's ministerial positions; in fact no Asian country is listed in this cohort. Among the bottom 50 ranks (out of 182), one can find twenty-one Asian countries, with percentages ranging from a maximum of 10-12 percent of female cabinet members (e.g., India, Pakistan, Laos, Nepal, Bhutan) to none (Brunei Darussalam, Thailand, Vietnam). Of those with women as previous or current head of government or state, seven can be found among the bottom 50: Bangladesh (7.7 percent), India, Pakistan, Nepal, the Philippines (8.6 percent) along with Sri Lanka (6.3 percent).[11]

While until 1997 there was only one Asian country with a female parliamentary speaker, in mid-2020, out of 57 women presiding national parliaments worldwide (20.57 percent), seven were from Asia: Bangladesh, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Vietnam. Previously, diverse countries such as Japan (1993 onwards) and Pakistan (2008-2013) saw female parliamentary speakers for the first time.[12] While in mid-2020, women parliamentarians represented 25.0 percent of the world's national legislators (calculated for all chambers), the Asian regional average of 20.2 percent resides in the bottom half: Nordic Countries 43.9 percent, Americas 31.8 percent, Europe (without Nordic countries) 29.9 percent, Sub-Sahara Africa 24.7 percent, Middle East and North Africa (MENA) 16.6 percent and Pacific island countries 19.6 percent. While reviewing the top fifty as well as the bottom fifty ranks (out of 190) in terms of women's political representation, only two Asian countries with a post-conflict legacy, namely Timor-Leste (no. 30) and Nepal (no. 43), are listed among the

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[11] Data accessed and compiled from the Inter-Parliamentary Union's Infographic *Women in Politics: 2020* (as of 1 January 2020), accessed online: https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2020-03/women-in-politics-2020 (as of 3 August 2020).

[12] Three countries have vacancies for the speaker of parliament, including the Asian nations of Malaysia and Sri Lanka, at the time of writing in mid-2020. Data accessed from and calculated via the global database on national parliaments, compiled by IPU Parline on a monthly basis, accessed online: https://data.ipu.org/speakers?sort=asc&order=Country (as of 3 August 2020). In the subsequent analysis presented in this chapter, only those countries that belong to the subregions of Central Asia, East Asia, South or Southeast Asia were included while countries classified as belonging to North Asia (i.e., Russia) or Western Asia (i.e., the MENA region) were not included in the data set.

world's top 50. Diverse in terms of socioeconomic status, political system, trajectory of women's political participation as well as predominant gender regime (including religious features), a number of Asian countries can be found among the bottom 50 – Brunei Darussalam, India, Japan, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar and Sri Lanka, ranging from 4.6 to 14.4 percent women MPs at the national level.[13] Returning to the issue of diffusion effects of women's political participation from one political arena to another, being a top performer with regard to women's parliamentary representation does not necessarily translate into more women in higher decision-making positions, such as within cabinet. In Timor-Leste, 81.8 percent of cabinet members are men; in Nepal, 89.5 percent.[14]

Worldwide, there are 87 women's caucuses, out of which 23 are established within parliaments across Asia. At least nine of them have been in function for at least a decade or longer, for example in Thailand since 1993, Indonesia since 2001, Timor-Leste and Sri Lanka since 2006 or in the Philippines since 2010.[15] While women's caucuses are regarded as crucial tools to address women's issues and gender equality within parliament, having such a forum in place for longer than a decade does not necessarily translate, as argued before, into women's political mainstreaming or a more substantive share in political decision-making. While in Thailand women currently hold zero ministerial positions and 83.8 percent of MPs are men, both countries which twice had women at the top (the Philippines and Sri Lanka) only have 8.6 and 6.3 percent women in cabinet positions by mid-2020. In terms of women's parliamentary representation, both countries are exemplary for the regional range with 72 percent (the Philippines) to 94.7 percent (Sri Lanka) of MPs being men. Even the top performer in regional terms with a previous female head of government/state, Indonesia,

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[13] Data accessed from and calculated via the global database on national parliaments, compiled by IPU Parline on a monthly basis, accessed online: https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=6&year=2020 (as of 3 August 2020).

[14] For details see: https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2020-03/women-in-politics-2020 9 (as of 3 August 2020).

[15] Data accessed from and calculated via the Database on Women's Caucuses, accessed online: http://w3.ipu.org/ (as of 3 August 2020). Detailed background information was not available for all twenty-three of the Asian women's caucuses in terms of date of creation, status within parliament or membership criteria, among others.

is positioned among the bottom half in worldwide comparison with 85.7 percent of cabinet members and 79.7 percent of legislators being male.[16]

In the past decades, gender-specific quota systems were the tool of choice in 127 countries, predominantly in the regions of Latin America, Europe and Africa.[17] In Asia, we can find sixteen countries with national-level gender quotas in both houses by mid-2020: (i) constitutionally codified reserved seats in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Nepal, Pakistan and Taiwan; (ii) legislative candidate quotas in Indonesia, Korea, Mongolia, Timor-Leste and Uzbekistan; (iii) voluntary political party quotas in Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand. In addition, there are subnational-level quota regimes or a combination thereof at various levels of the political system and within different electoral system designs, generating different quantitative outcomes. While, for example, Timor-Leste has 38.5 percent of female legislators within a list-based proportional representation system without explicit quota provisions, Afghanistan has 27 percent women legislators under the rare Single Non-Transferable Vote System and reserved seat provisions, which need to be directly contested in province-based constituencies. India only has subnational-level reserved seats, codified in two constitutional amendments of the early 1990s, under a majority first-past-the-post elections system, ranking 142 (out of 189) worldwide with 14.4 percent of women legislators at the national level. Indonesia combines quota systems at the subnational and national level

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[16]   For details see: https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2020-03/women-in-politics-2020 9 (as of 3 August 2020).

[17]   While most countries employ either legislated candidate quotas (57 out of 127 with an average percentage of 27.1 percent women MPs) or voluntary political party quotas (55 out of 127 and a total of 113 political parties worldwide), reserved seat provisions are rarer (25 out of 127 countries with an average percentage of 26.4 percent women MPs). Data accessed from and calculated via the Global Gender Quota Database, compiled by IDEA, Stockholm University and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, accessed online: https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/database (as of 3 August 2020).

within its list-based proportional representation system, generating 20.3 percent of women legislators at the national level.[18]

Putting this data on gender quota provisions and women's political representation at the national level in worldwide comparison, let us be reminded that the worldwide average of women MPs stands at 25 percent whilst the Asian average is 20.2 percent. The 57 countries with legislated candidate quotas have an average female ratio of 27.1 percent and those 25 countries with reserved seat provisions an average of 26.4 percent, thus performing slightly better than the overall worldwide average in quantitative terms (remember: currently, gender quota provisions are in place in 16 Asian countries). Four out of the five countries (Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Pakistan and Singapore) performing equal to the regional average in Asia have gender quota provisions in place. Of the nine countries performing better than the worldwide average, five also have a national gender quota (Afghanistan, Nepal, the Philippines, Timor-Leste and Uzbekistan). Thus, gender quotas can be regarded as a crucial tool in increasing and strengthening women's political representation, given that nine out of the fourteen top performers in regional and worldwide terms employ this method of positive discrimination – however, this is no indicator of the quality and scope of substantive political representation (read: participation) and women's political mainstreaming.[19]

In conclusion, while Asia has seen a number of women as presidents (in Mongolia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Singapore and India) or as prime ministers (in South Korea and repeatedly across South Asia in Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh), most stem from an elite background of political dynasties, thus cementing the pattern of exceptionalism of women's political participation instead of a cross-sectional trickle down and diffusion of women in politics, originating thus from various social strata, walks of life and societal backgrounds. Furthermore, the conquest

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[18] Gender quota provisions are mostly employed within lower houses of parliament. Only four countries in Asia have codified gender quotas for the upper house of parliament – Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan via a reserved seat provision apart from Uzbekistan via a legislated candidate quota (data accessed from and calculated via the global database on national parliaments, compiled by IPU Parline on a monthly basis, accessed online: https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=6&year=2020 as of 3 August 2020).

[19] Data accessed and compiled from: https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2020-03/women-in-politics-2020 9 (as of 3 August 2020).

of top political offices has not led to an increase at other levels of the polity or overall female political participation – be it in parliament, bureaucracy, government or community affairs. Having said that, women also played significant roles at the forefront of oppositional reform or democratisation movements, engaging in contentious politics within and/or outside formal political institutions, again in diverse countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan, China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, the Philippines and Timor-Leste, among others. Since 1987, a more positive pattern of Asian women's substantive political representation has emerged at the national cabinet level with mostly increasing numbers across Asia and across the spectrum of ministerial portfolios, ranging from agriculture, foreign affairs, resources, justice, infrastructure, social welfare, health, finance, women's affairs, science and technology to defence.[20]

Women have gained inroads into Asian politics in diverse and intricate ways – via dynastic descent, quota regulations, civil society activism, or career (party) politics rising from different polity levels or arenas. While a certain number managed to capture the executive level in diverse portfolios, the overall picture is marked by ambivalence, ambiguity, contradictions and contestations, with the region of Southeast Asia showing a better performance in terms of descriptive representation.

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[20] Detailed information of women's share in ministerial portfolios as well as the policy sectors can be accessed via the annual IPU/UN Women's infographic Women in Politics Data (e.g., https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/03/women-in-politics-2019-map as of 3 August 2020; see also for detailed studies: Andrea Fleschenberg, (2009): *Afghanistan's Parliament in the Making. Gendered Understandings and Practices of Politics in a Transitional Country*, Berlin: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung / UNIFEM; Andrea Fleschenberg and Claudia Derichs, (eds.) (2013): "Gender und politische Partizipation in Asien [Gender and Political Participation in Asia]", in: *Femina Politica* 22 (2), pp. 9-16; Andrea Fleschenberg and Claudia Derichs, (2011): "Women and Politics in Asia: A Springboard for Democracy? A Tentative Introduction & Reflection", in: Andrea Fleschenberg and Claudia Derichs, (eds.), (2011), *Women and Politics in Asia. A Springboard for Democracy?*, Zuerich/Muenster: LITVerlag, pp. 1-17; Andrea Fleschenberg, Claudia Derichs and Cecilia Ng, (2010): "Introduction", in: *Women in National Politics in Asia: A Springboard for Gender Democracy?*, in: *Gender, Technology and Development* 14 (3), pp. 303-312.

To Do List I - Gaps, Blind Spots, Barriers, Challenges and Tales of Political Patriarchy

In their seminal work *No Shortcuts to Power*, Goetz and Hassim[21] argue that women's political effectiveness depends on a "chain of responsibility and exchange", which relies on (i) the type of women elected, (ii) their ability to speak out on certain policy issues as well as agency to follow them through; (iii) a supportive, resourceful gender equity lobby in civil society; (iv) credibility of women politicians and policies in political competition / electoral politics; (v) coalition- and alliance-building across arenas, tiers and levels of the polity; along with (vi) the capacity of the state and the political system to respond to new policy issues, to accommodate a new set of actors and to implement (novel, transformative) women policies. Having said that, Asian women parliamentarians encounter myriad, often intersecting and interdependent challenges that need to be taken into account when discussing women's substantive political representation, which I will outline briefly in the following section. Without clearly mapping, reflecting on and discussing these challenges, it will be difficult to carve out opportunities to turn tales of political patriarchy into tales of substantive and sustainable political mainstreaming of women.

Gender Roles Ascriptions and Transversality of Parliamentary Mandates

Most women parliamentarians continue to operate in a predominantly androcentric, patriarchal political setting that impacts on their agency as a parliamentarian in terms of territorial and functional dimensions, which I would like to sketch out in the following section, and which need to be addressed not only by repetitive exposure, experience-gathering, networking or capacity-building, but also, and maybe even more so, by changes in the overall political culture, political dynamics and power structures.

Misogynist political cultures within political institutions as well as in other societal domains, be they private or public, result more often than not in gender biases, segregation or mobility restrictions of women

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[21]   Anne-Marie Goetz, and Shireen Hassim, (2003): *No Shortcuts to Power. African Women in Politics and Policy Making,* London/New York: Zed Books.

parliamentarians in interacting with fellow stakeholders, constituents and society at large. Decision-making is still considered a male prerogative at multiple levels, from community representation, conflict deliberation and mediation to provincial or national governance processes. This can lead, for example, to negative attitudes, gossiping, harassment and other forms of gender-based violence and ultimately in self-censorship of women parliamentarians, curtailing the transversality of their mandate as well as discouraging other women from following in their footsteps. With such a visible communication that politics is defined as a political *malestream*, it becomes more difficult to argue and ally against discriminatory laws and practices, and the assignment of less powerful and/or resourced portfolios and positions to women, regardless of the extent of their descriptive and substantive representation in governance structures.[22]

Women often hesitate to address women's issues in order not to alienate male colleagues and constituents. Nepalese politician and trade union activist Binda Panday explains that women politicians are challenged by the slow speed of changing attitudes and behaviour of male counterparts, who, in addition, repeatedly cite alleged non-gendered policy priorities and concerns as more significant than women's rights issues. However, she also pinpoints dominant patriarchal attitudes among female political leaders and activists along with the lack of role models as problematic. Gender biases and subsequent patriarchal attitudes shaping women's political participation are pervasive in multiple arenas and at multiple levels, from the grassroots to the top of a given polity, thus amounting not only to a glass ceiling but also to multiple glass walls that women need to circumvent. Vietnamese legislator Pham Khanh Phong Lan (in office since 2011) adds that, as pointed out by other Asian women legislators, gender biases need to be addressed from the grassroots level, the family

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[22] For instance, then Malaysian legislator Chua Yee Ling reported that it was difficult to translate women's organising power at the grassroots level due to power struggles when it came to seat negotiations. Women are often assigned to remote, less developed and/or less resourced constituencies, making it difficult to advance in terms of political career steps as well as sustainable political mainstreaming. For Chua Yee Ling, the key obstacle is a male-dominated patriarchal culture, which also became visible in deliberations over the 2015 budget where the women's affairs portfolio focussed on women's welfare issues rather than, for example, on gender-sensitive education and thus changing mindsets (notes taken by the author during the AWPC conference presentation, Singapore, 16 October 2014).

and community onwards, an issue that she identifies as the biggest challenge. For her, changing communities' perceptions on women's leadership capacities and gender roles is as important as quota provisions for allowing women to be able to perform and prove themselves while performing political duties. Consequently, championing gender concerns, with or without the label of "feminist" or "womanist", might still be considered by far too many as amounting to political suicide, requiring discursive mediation and containment in a wider, hegemonic androcentric political *malestream* where more often than not women's parliamentary caucuses remain volatile or where women politicians' networking, in cooperation with civil society activists and academia, remains a scarcity or insufficient, as outlined by a number of women parliamentarians in Singapore. A rare exception is the experience of Mongolian member of parliament Erdenechimeg Luvsan within the country's post-2006 Women's Caucus. Representing five different political parties, its members, she argues, were able to work together on a range of issues, including child protection and care, women's rights, violence against women, maternal health challenges due to insufficient service delivery, a demand for changes in the gender quota provisions toward a zipper system, and support in financial and economic resources needed for women candidates to be successful. In a similar vein, Binda Panday emphasises that gender can serve as a crosscutting issue for the whole of society, even at a rhetoric level to frame and speed up changes in women's attitudes, values and perspectives, which are changing at a faster pace than men's. For former Malaysian legislator Chua Yee Ling, this might also be an issue of adequate framing of policy approaches and agenda issues, as, in her words, "we don't talk about gender equality, women's rights, or feminism but about women's participation". Former Gabriela Women's Party Congress legislator (2007-2016) and current Social Welfare Undersecretary in the Mindanao region Luzviminda Ilagan agrees that framing is key as laws often benefit men as well, which needs to be highlighted more than that a particular law is primarily targeting or aiming for women.[23]

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[23] Notes taken during proceedings and informal conversations by the author at the AWPC conference, Singapore, 15-17 October 2014.

Linked to this are two contrasting aspects. First of all, this opens the way for an elite capture or dominance of politics, including quota provisions, because the price to be paid to be part of politics, to survive political competition as well as everyday parliamentary politics, might require a higher level of resources and a solid, vast support system that women outside a specific socioeconomic class, political families or political parties cannot access or afford to maintain. Such resource differences might be one reason for the elitist nature of (electoral) politics in many countries across Asia, regardless of a parliamentarian's gender. Women parliamentarians from numerous countries across South, Southeast and East Asia[24] discussed that a quota should be evaluated with regard to which women make it into parliament, as the presence of politically strong women, which have the required capacity-building as well as are able to address women's concerns (which many do not, participants added), is crucial.

Given the predominance of dynastic politics, the current Vice-President of the Philippines and former legislator (2011-2016), Leni Gerona-Robredo, argues that feedback loops from the grassroots level are important, as is a multi-level approach to avoid elitist women's participation. In that regard, local governments can be enabling arenas to train and gain credentials for a national environment through community-based political work. Moreover, she opines that diversity is key, i.e., to move beyond the same faces and voices at the national level for more diversity in women's descriptive and subsequently substantive representation. Similarly, former Cambodian Minister for Women's and Veteran Affairs (1998-2004) and former opposition parliamentarian (1998-2003, 2013-2017) Mu Sochua questions why women are in politics and whether (elite) women politicians, which partake in a male-dominated political game, have not become part of the problem: "I used to be in the system but left it not to be caught in the system. … the

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[24] Women legislators at the 2014 AWPC conference came from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Laos, Nepal, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Timor-Leste and Vietnam.

temptation was always there. That's why I joined the opposition", trying to opt out of the elite appropriation of common resources.[25]

Along those lines, Malaysian parliamentarian Kasthuri Patto refers to her experience of patriarchal mindsets and their gender impact on women politicians' participation, in nexus with the issue of corruption: in a false notion, constituents might consider that women needed to bend the rules of the system to be in power, which might also mean the need to be corrupt. However, she also observes that women politicians might be treated harsher than male colleagues by the media and the general public in case of corruption allegations or charges. Maria de Lurdes Bessa Martins de Sousa Bessa, former Treasurer of Southeast Asian Parliamentarians Against Corruption, Timorese legislator (2012-2017) and current Vice-President of the Democratic Party (PD) in Timor-Leste, provides related additional evidence from her own work in the field when she questions why Timorese women ministers have been easier targets, charged with facilitating contracts for their husbands' companies, and why only women politicians have been imprisoned so far.[26]

But the question remains about the sequencing of efforts: numbers in terms of critical mass first and then quality or not? Gerona-Robredo regards the numeric gender ratio as an inadequate measurement of gender equality and women's empowerment; however, seasoned Afghan woman politician Shukria Barakzai highlights the importance of quota provisions in ensuring women's presence as well as the fact that male legislators might also lack in expertise and experience but do not publicly talk about this lack of capacity-building. Having served her country since 2003 as parliamentarian as well as ambassador, she regards a quota as

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[25] Notes taken during proceedings and informal conversations by the author at the AWPC conference, Singapore, 15-17 October 2014. Currently, seasoned politician Mu Suchoa serves a five-year ban from politics after the dissolution of the country's main opposition party, the Cambodia National Rescue Party, under the authoritarian rule of Prime Minister Hun Sen (see: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-42006828 as of 3 August 2020).

[26] On a different note, Mu Sochua incriminates the complicity of wives as part of a corruption system run by male politicians, abusing their elite societal position as carte blanche for subsequent undertakings. Opposition parliamentarian Kasthuri Patto seconds with cases from Malaysia, where a number of elite women politicians have been implicated in key corruption scandals, thus demanding that "[w]omen shouldn't vote for women but for good women, not to have donkeys again in power (...)". (Notes taken during proceedings and informal conversations by the author at the AWPC conference, Singapore, 15-17 October 2014).

a first step to keeping the door open for women "to get in" and stresses that it is crucial to frame the discourse more strategically, in the sense that quota politicians need to talk about obstacles, rather than just about their own inadequacies. *Let's not question our qualities and hinder our progress*, Minister of Education Dipu Moni argues and points towards the need for mentoring, supporting gender quotas as an important, but not the only, step to be taken, as well as another necessary conditionality, namely, political parties' commitment to appointing women to leadership positions in different arenas of public affairs and its necessary demonstrative effect for society at large and women and girls in particular.[27]

This is further complicated, secondly, by (i) the lack of quota-within-quota provisions to have diverse women legislators from different socioeconomic strata as well as (ii) specific education clauses (e.g., Pakistan) which bar, for instance, community-level women politicians without tertiary education from rising up the ladder of political success.

In contrast, the case of the Philippines is interesting, where the 1986 post-transition Constitution established party lists in order to represent marginalised social groups instead of gender quota provisions. Luz Ilagan, former legislator in the Lower House for Gabriela Women's Party and herself not free from controversy given her support of current President Duterte and his misogynist, sexist leanings[28], outlines that it was founded in October 2000 as a women's party with a hundred thousand registered members country-wide, and that it has successfully contested elections since 2004 on a platform of promoting women's rights and issues of marginalised women with regard to empowerment, justice and equality, fair and non-sexist participation in all public spheres, and access to basic service delivery. Only those laws are drafted, which are approved by Gabriela's country-wide chapters, thus ensuring that the respective legislative agenda is based on grassroots women's direct input, consultation

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[27] Notes taken during proceedings and informal conversations by the author at the AWPC conference, Singapore, 15-17 October 2014.

[28] In contrast to her statement from 2014 and breaking with Gabriela's feminist stance, Ilagan, who hails from Davao as does Duterte, defended his sexist behaviour and remarks as a specific cultural expression, not to be considered as sexual harassment (see for details on this controversial statement and the party's response: https://rappler.com/nation/luz-ilagan-appointed-dswd-undersecretary, https://rappler.com/nation/gabriela-clarifies-catcalling-duterte as of 3 August 2020).

and voice.[29] Among the issues addressed are controversial ones such as reproductive health, divorce, violence against women and children, and reformulation of penal code provisions on rape, along with focusing on marginalised segments of women, such as overseas workers, and females working poor in rural and urban areas.[30]

Evidence from (post-)conflict countries like Afghanistan and Timor-Leste, among others, suggest that being a novel entrant to politics can also mean that particular expectations have to be met – regardless of a more hostile environment towards women's political participation.[31] Especially in post-conflict scenarios, women might be able to convince voters that they have not been involved in conflict dynamics or human rights violations and are thus considered a symbol of change. However, international interventions – military or non-military in nature – have left an ambivalent legacy for gender mainstreaming efforts, if one reviews the cases of Afghanistan, Cambodia, Timor-Leste or Aceh, Indonesia. Key seems to be a political will and commitment to mid- to long-term resources to allow for established women's machineries to be successful and for newly codified laws and mechanisms of positive discrimination, such as gender quotas, to be internalised, implemented and sanctioned beyond the presence of international intervention actors supporting them. While one could consider the brevity of time as a key factor for limited norm diffusion, one might also charge the often-experienced overriding securitisation paradigm of international interventions as a key obstacle, overriding other civilian and gender political concerns by its prioritisation. In that regard, Vietnamese legislator Pham Khanh Phong Lan hints towards the importance of choosing the right value and policy frames to be politically successful in ensuring gender mainstreaming policies. Apart from important international documents such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of

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[29] Gabriela members are now running as local and city councillors, but on a ticket with a traditional party as, she admits, it is difficult to run on a women's party ticket and muster the extensive financial and economic resources needed to run as a candidate in traditional politics (notes taken by the author during the question and answer session after Luz Ilagan's presentation, AWPC regional conference, Singapore, 16 October 2014).

[30] Notes taken by the author during the presentation of Luz Ilagan, Singapore, 16 October 2014.

[31] Andrea Fleschenberg, (2016): *"It's not Charity, it is a Chair of Power" – Moving Beyond Symbolic Representation in Afghanistan's Transition Politics?*, Kabul: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (as of 3 August 2020).

Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), national action plans and policy frameworks are required.[32]

Irrespective of their transformative potentials and opportunities, such post-conflict contexts are not clean slates: they build on pre-existing socio-political hierarchies, gender ideologies and conflict legacies, regardless of the opportunities of a temporary power vacuum or international intervention might bring. Similar to the experiences during Latin America's transition processes, women might be at the forefront of pro-democracy and peace building struggles, but loose out when political institutions consolidate at the next stage of political change or when there is a need to re-strategise agendas, arenas and tools of political participation within and outside of key institutions such as parliament, government, ministerial bureaucracy and civil society.

Expectations and Failures to Deliver

At best, being a novel entrant into politics might mean that women parliamentarians are regarded as change agents compared to traditional (male) politicians. However, being considered a change agent, i.e., someone who will alter the way politics is done, the way the power dispensation operates, the way the socio-political culture frames means and ways of political communication among decision-makers as well as vis-à-vis the constituents, the way alliances are formed and which issues are on the agenda, often of reformatory if not transformative content and extent, raises expectations. If women are considered as change agents, they face high expectations to make a difference and to make a difference fast, within only a few legislative periods, regardless of their status of subaltern actor in terms of voice and agency within the given political institution. And this is complicated further by the fact that institutional legacies in terms of processes and work/decision-making cultures do not necessarily work in favour of women, who are rather more likely to meet with resistance from veto-actors as well as societal counter-movements within as well as outside of political institutions, and formal as well as informal power brokers, opinion makers and spoilers. Such counter-movements and discourses

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[32] Notes taken during proceedings and informal conversations by the author at the AWPC conference, Singapore, 15-17 October 2014.

can also originate in gender mainstreaming interventions of external as well as internal actors, becoming part and parcel of a wider, transnational political contestation.[33]

According to Goetz and Hassim[34], the gender equity lobby and gender agenda commitment posits that institutional constraints can limit a change agent's voice and agency, especially if supportive alliance-building among colleagues and civil society as well as necessary political will from key power brokers are not formed. Women parliamentarians may end up in a position where they have to overstretch their capacities through engaging in activism at multiple fronts, sites and levels while at the same time learn on the job as novel entrants and push the boundaries of an institutional culture to become more gender-sensitive and accommodating to women's political participation and thus less androcentric. All of this is done within the temporal confines of electoral politics – be it four or five years of a legislative period when one has to face constituents and compete in electoral politics, demonstrating what has been delivered with little space to negotiate why promises have not been delivered or why change just might simply take so much longer, while the crucial, small, often less visible institutional changes are so much more difficult to communicate to a populace interested in concrete policy outcomes and impact.

Research has so far predominantly looked at the outcome and impact on women's machineries / women's policy agencies and their nexus with women's movements in Western democracies in Europe and the Americas

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[33] See evidence drawn from comparative chapters in guest-edited special journal issues, action research papers as well as edited volumes: Andrea Fleschenberg and Farzana Bari, (2015): *"Unmaking Political Patriarchy Through Gender Quotas?"*, Islamabad/Kabul: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, accessible online: https://pk.boell.org/sites/default/files/unmaking_political_patriarchy_through_gender_quotas.pdf (as of 3 August 2020); Andrea Fleschenberg, (2016): *"It's not Charity, it is a Chair of Power" – Moving Beyond Symbolic Representation in Afghanistan's Transition Politics?*, Kabul: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (as of 3 August 2020); Andrea Fleschenberg, and Claudia Derichs (eds.) (2013): "Gender und politische Partizipation in Asien [Gender and Political Participation in Asia]", in: *Femina Politica* 22 (2), pp. 9-16; Andrea Fleschenberg and Claudia Derichs, (2011): "Women and Politics in Asia: A Springboard for Democracy? A Tentative Introduction & Reflection", in: Andrea Fleschenberg and Claudia Derichs (eds.), *Women and Politics in Asia. A Springboard for Democracy?*, Zuerich/Muenster: LITVerlag, pp. 1-17; Andrea Fleschenberg, Claudia Derichs, and Cecilia Ng, (2010): "Introduction", in: *Women in National Politics in Asia: A Springboard for Gender Democracy?*, in: *Gender, Technology and Development* 14 (3), pp. 303-312.

[34] Anne-Marie Goetz and Shireen Hassim, (2003): *No Shortcuts to Power. African Women in Politics and Policy Making,* London/New York: Zed Books.

rather than in Asian contexts. Evidence suggests that such women's machineries (or so-called insider agency alliances) are important entry points, negotiation sites and allies to not only represent women as a group along with women's movements as a collective actor at the state level, but also to initiate and follow through with procedural access along with state feminist approaches to gender-sensitive policy-making.[35]

Less research has been done to highlight the experiences of parliamentary commissions on women's affairs or national commissions on the status of women in the region of Asia, which might be key bridges and alliance-building institutions between women politicians, women's activists and other policy-making stakeholders. A review of women's commissions in South Asia conducted by Pakistani gender and development expert Saba Gul Khattak led to the following assessment: a proper functioning is constantly threatened by bureaucratisation, precarious mandates, symbolic consultations and gender rhetoric, inadequate allocation of resources and lack of policy-influencing. Transformative powers / mandates for such commissions are therefore crucial. International experiences seem to indicate, says Khattak, that such commissions are more often than not crushed within the wheels of a patriarchal state machinery and system, circumventing attempts to transform dominant traditional practices and values in the field of religion and culture. In addition, the membership is also important for the commission's work performance as is the question of the selection mechanism, status position assigned, remuneration as well as power devolution model assigned. Experiences shared from representatives from the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with the first provincial commission on the status of women set up post-2008, highlight that preference was given to female district members and that female provincial assembly members were involved. However, difficulties in enacting laws were again due to the lack of technical infrastructure, eligibility criteria for members and how they were selected, i.e., the need to avoid political influences, and to ensure mixed membership from politics as well as civil society, beyond government-driven nominations. Thus, a critical distance from government departments and a rootedness in civil society

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[35] Dorothy E. McBride and Amy Mazur (2012): *The Politics of State Feminism*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press; Judith Squires, (2007): *The New Politics of Gender Equality*, Houndmills: Palgrave McMillan.

were considered important by gender expert Simi Kamal (formerly of Aurat Foundation, a leading country-wide women's organisation, and now with Pakistan's Poverty Alleviation Fund). In the exemplary case of Pakistan, not only are internal factors to blame, but also the project-based approach of UN or other bilateral donor agencies, resulting in project-drivenness and funding issues instead of ensuring an adequate government endowment and a subsequent autonomous space and mandate for such commissions to operate efficiently and effectively. Given the multi-level realities of policy-making in many decentralised and/or federal political systems, former leading woman MP (2008-2018) and senior party leader of the Pakistan People's Party Nafisa Shah argues that linkages between the local, provincial, national and international levels become all the more important. "We are not able to consolidate gains", she criticises, as reporting on gender policies and women's rights issues under the CEDAW umbrella requires a coherent, streamlined planning process, a focal ministry at the federal level, parliamentary caucusing, and a national framework.[36]

Challenges of Quota Mandates and Status Ascriptions

In my research conducted in Afghanistan and Pakistan, reports of gender quota politicians being challenged over the perceived *quality* or *status* of their mandate surfaced repeatedly over the past decade, but this might be more common across various Asian countries as informal discussions with colleagues and legislators suggest.[37]

Depending on the provisions of gender quotas, women either have to compete directly in an election (Afghanistan) or are selected by a male peer college (Pakistan) for reserved seats, depending on the electoral outcome

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[36] National Commission on the Status of Women, National Consultation on Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment Post-Devolution, Islamabad, 14-15 December 2011 (notes taken by the author during presentation and discussion rounds).

[37] Notes taken during proceedings and informal conversations by the author at the AWPC conference, Singapore, 15-17 October 2014; see for detailed case studies on Afghanistan and Pakistan: Andrea Fleschenberg and Farzana Bari, (2015): *"Unmaking Political Patriarchy Through Gender Quotas?"*, Islamabad/Kabul: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, accessible online: https://pk.boell.org/sites/default/files/unmaking_political_patriarchy_through_gender_quotas.pdf (as of 3 August 2020); Andrea Fleschenberg, (2016): *"It's not Charity, it is a Chair of Power"* – *Moving Beyond Symbolic Representation in Afghanistan's Transition Politics?*, Kabul: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (as of 3 August 2020).

of a particular political party or parliamentary group. At the same time, the vote threshold might differ between directly contested seats and reserved seats, not to mention indirectly selected reserved seats. Some gender quota legislators subsequently faced comments and challenges from male colleagues over the status of their mandate, given that they might have needed less votes or no electoral competition at the constituency level to become a parliamentarian. Depending on the electoral design, the lack of a specific constituency base or an allegedly weaker one given the number of votes tallied might impact on a woman parliamentarian's standing with male peers.

Furthermore, having no direct constituency-based vote might impact on the necessary resources – be they financial, economic or social in nature – a parliamentarian can rely on in her/his parliamentary work. Asymmetries in access to resources and in the perceived status of the mandate might lead to a higher dependency on male support systems, such as male-dominated political parties, or in terms of political positions assigned, thus moving from allegations of window-dressing, symbolic presence and gender rhetoric to substantive representation. A constituency base is not only key for re-election, but also for a woman parliamentarian to move away from temporary quota provisions to sustainable political competition in electoral politics. Therefore, constant grassroots engagement and available feedback loops from constituents one claims and attempts to represent are crucial for a sustainable and successful parliamentary career and for gathering political experience and standing in terms of social capital.

Asymmetries in status ascriptions can also originate from the perceived nature of politics as something filthy, violent, corrupt and clientelistic, and as something detrimental and in contradiction with dominant gender roles ascriptions. Therefore, women engaging in politics might (i) lack, at least at the initial stage, role models along with the support of their families and communities; (ii) be further compartmentalised into what are considered *safe* institutions and arenas of politics, which have a different status in the wider political system but do not threaten to tarnish their reputations required to be a votable candidate; or (iii) face an uphill battle to not only learn, adjust and/or change the rules of the political game but

also the perceptions thereof in order to be able to compete and be considered capable and of *appropriate* reputation for the leadership job.[38]

Multi-Level Contestations: Gender Mainstreaming Interventions and Counter-Movements

Such asymmetries in status ascriptions and agency (perceived or actual) can also lead to women parliamentarians being hijacked or exploited by other political actors. In countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan, but not exclusively there, where gender policies crystallise wider socio-political contestations, ideological discourses and power bargaining, this hijacking or exploitation can occur on multiple levels of the polity.

In South Asian countries, in particular Bangladesh as well as Afghanistan, gender quota systems, part of a wider gender mainstreaming agenda, have been understood by male and conservative stakeholders as a ceiling rather than as a floor for women's political participation. Having said that, women politicians – be they in formal political institutions or operating within civil society – are also characterised by heterogeneity and ideological differences, which might lead to (i) political contestations over gender policy approaches, agenda-setting contents and strategies, along with (ii) a subsequent lack of dialogue as well as concerted action, such as caucusing, to bridge such divides among women politicians and activists, who are not representing a homogenous social group, but rather a socio-culturally, economically and politically clustered group of citizens.

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[38] See Andrea Fleschenberg and Farzana Bari, (2015): *"Unmaking Political Patriarchy Through Gender Quotas?"*, Islamabad/Kabul: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, accessible online: https://pk.boell.org/sites/default/files/unmaking_political_patriarchy_through_gender_quotas.pdf (as of 3 August 2020) and Andrea Fleschenberg, (2016): *"It's not Charity, it is a Chair of Power" – Moving Beyond Symbolic Representation in Afghanistan's Transition Politics?*, Kabul: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (as of 3 August 2020). on evidence from Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as further evidence drawn from comparative chapters on cases across Asia in guest-edited special journal issues as well as edited volume: Andrea Fleschenberg and Claudia Derichs (eds.), (2013): "Gender und politische Partizipation in Asien [Gender and Political Participation in Asia]", in: *Femina Politica* 22 (2), pp. 9-16; Andrea Fleschenberg and Claudia Derichs (2011): "Women and Politics in Asia: A Springboard for Democracy? A Tentative Introduction & Reflection", in: Andrea Fleschenberg and Claudia Derichs (eds.), (2011), *Women and Politics in Asia. A Springboard for Democracy?*, Zuerich/Muenster: LITVerlag, pp. 1-17; and Fleschenberg, Andrea, Derichs, Claudia, and Ng, Cecilia (2010): "Introduction", in: *Women in National Politics in Asia: A Springboard for Gender Democracy?*, in: *Gender, Technology and Development* 14 (3), pp. 303-312.

Assuming women's a priori solidarity and gender difference of experi-ences, needs and political interests amounts to problematic essentialism, extensively discussed in the literature at hand. Molyneux highlighted al-ready decades ago that we need to be cautious about assuming women's interests and agendas, and that we have to differentiate between strategic women's interests (read: feminist/transformative) and practical ones (read: ranging from various ideological standpoints on gender to intersectional fragmentation).[39]

This is further replicated in many heterogeneous, if not fragmented, civil societies and women's movements across Asia, with conservative fringes related to gender equity concerns, and problematised by often under-resourced and marginalised women's policy machineries, which thus need to carefully strategise in their lobbying and advocacy work as well as policy counselling. This then might lead to further contestation with civil society and its representatives, whether they are women's activists or not. Razavi and Jennichen[40] point towards a "rising political prominence of religious actors and movements", be they at the local, national or transna-tional level with specific gendered prescriptions and societal positioning for women, using more often than not the informal power of religion in terms of diffusing ideas and norms, thus shaping the political arena and predominant societal culture in a way which is difficult to counter-argue and counter-act. One example is provided by seasoned Afghan woman politician Shukria Barakzai on the attempt to codify the Elimination of Violence Act beyond a temporary presidential decree, linking it with the issue of religion and its interpretation, when she stresses that, in her experience, the more one tries to ally with the religious clergy for gender-specific policy issues, the less one achieves it.[41]

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[39]   Susan Francheschet, (2011): "Conceptualizing the Study of Women in Public Office", unpublished conference, European Consortium on Politics and Gender, Budapest.

[40]   Shahra Razavi and Anne Jenichen, (2010): "The Unhappy Marriage of Religion and Politics: Problems and Pitfalls for Gender Equality", in: *Third World Quarterly* 31 (6), pp. 833-850.

[41]   Notes taken during proceedings and informal conversations by the author at the AWPC conference, Singapore, 15-17 October 2014; see also Andrea Fleschenberg, (2016): *"It's not Charity, it is a Chair of Power" – Moving Beyond Symbolic Representation in Afghanistan's Transition Politics?*, Kabul: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (as of 3 August 2020).

The impact of unwritten constitutions – be they of a religious nature or not – on norms, discourses and practices of politics cannot be highlighted enough although research findings are scarce. Overall, the impact of informal institutions, such as, but not limited to, religiously gendered rules on mobility or dress code, on the arenas of formal politics, its key institutions and civil society are diverse and create a difficult field for women parliamentarians to navigate in:

> A crucial part of achieving gender equitable institutional change (understood here as any institutional change that contributes to lessening gender inequalities) is, therefore, to improve our understanding of not only the outputs of institutions but also the institutions themselves in both their formal and informal guises. This will, for example, help gender scholars to understand why the outcomes of institutional change, such as the creation of women's policy agencies (WPAs) and the implementation of gender mainstreaming, are often not as hoped for, or how change efforts are subverted.[42]

Subsequently, we can find women also on the move in counter-movements; women from religio-political groups and parties re-appropriating and redefining gender vocabulary and gender mainstreaming interventions for a different societal project, which is not marked by gender equity in the feminist sense but rather highlight gender differences and women's patriarchal subordination, regardless of whether it is working for safeguarding women's rights and capabilities within a larger gender conservative reference framework[43]. Examples in point are female members of conservative political parties championing the abolishment of gender quotas and/or women's domestication, as well as the recent cases of young women joining militant fighters in Syria, which drew worldwide media attention and sensationalised hype given their small numbers.

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[42]   Georgina Waylen, (2013): "Informal Institutions, Institutional Change, and Gender Equality", in: *Political Research Quarterly* 20 (10), pp. 1-12.

[43]   Amina Jamal, (2012): "Feminism and Fundamentalism in Pakistan", in: Tahir, Mediha R., Memon, Qalandar Bux, and Prashad Vijay (eds.), *Dispatches from Pakistan*, New Delhi: LeftWord Books, pp. 141-160; Afiya Shehrbano Zia, (2009): "The Reinvention of Feminism in Pakistan", in: *Feminist Review* 2009 (21), pp. 29-46.

Instead of Conclusions: To Do List II - Carving Opportunities for Women's Political Mainstreaming

Here I would like to remind readers again of Goetz and Hassim[44] and their seminal writing on women's political effectiveness, which they regard as being dependent on women politicians' and their allies' ability to build a "chain of responsibility and exchange", i.e., the (i) ability to speak out on policy issues and the ability to follow them through, (ii) gender equity lobby in civil society, (iii) credibility of women politicians and policies in political competition and electoral politics, (iv) coalition- and alliance-building across arenas, tiers and levels of the political system, along with (v) the capacity of the state / political system to respond to new policy issues, to accommodate a new set of actors and to implement women policies.

Many Asian parliamentarians agree that, ultimately, power relations and political cultures – thus societal and political patriarchal values, practices and discourses – have to change, and have to be transformed, apart from women using various empowerment, alliance-building and networking strategies across major sociopolitical cleavages.[45] Similarly, research findings, for example that authored by Karam and Lovenduski[46] and presented as part of a comprehensive IDEA effort on strengthening women's political, in particular parliamentary, participation, highlight the importance of networking as a crucial socialisation mechanism in terms of knowledge, for deliberating on experiences, expertise and concerns, and to enhance their own political effectiveness within their political groups and political parties as well as within the specific political arenas and institutional settings they are operating in. Both authors stress the significance of cross-party alliances for legislation and policy-making – a necessary ingredient for strengthened standing in electoral politics /

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[44] Anne-Marie Goetz and Shireen Hassim, (2003): *No Shortcuts to Power. African Women in Politics and Policy Making,* London/New York: Zed Books.

[45] Notes taken during proceedings and informal conversations by the author at the AWPC conference, Singapore, 15-17 October 2014.

[46] Azza Karam and Joni Lovenduski, (2005): "Women in Parliament: Making a Difference", in: Ballington, Julie and Karam, Azza (eds.), *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, revised edition, Stockholm: IDEA, pp. 187-213.

political competition.[47] The case of the Pakistani Alliance Against Sexual Harassment (AASHA) legislation is a key example of how a network governance approach, linking parliamentarians, civil society representatives, entrepreneurs, bureaucrats and government representatives, can provide an effective platform and working mechanism for sociopolitical and legislative change. One key experience of AASHA is also the importance of framing, i.e., the need to flexibly address different policy stakeholders and audiences through adequate reference frameworks so as to be able to follow through with policy/legislative changes and also ensure proper implementation across society and polity.[48]

In the IDEA handbook *Women in Parliaments*, edited by Julie Ballington and Azza Karam,[49] key guidelines are presented for women parliamentarians' effectiveness that merit being mentioned here, distinguishing between *institutional/procedural representation* and *influence on output and discourse* and three different steps – *learning the rules, using the rules* and *changing the rules*. In those guidelines, the following measures are highlighted, to paraphrase key ideas and points:

- *training* and capacity-building on becoming effective voices, communication, lobbying and parliamentary procedures, networking, mentoring and media competence;

- *caucusing* in the sense of network governance across institutions, arenas and different types of stakeholders;

- *ensuring visibility* in key political institutions, such as committees, and in key political discourses, with a clear understanding of different framings of what women's or gender issues are;

- *establish supportive institutional structures and critical mass,* such as women's machineries, supportive policy networks across political and gender divides, and nomination campaigns for women's

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[47]   Ibid.

[48]   Sadaf Ahmed, (2012): "AASHA's approach to instituting sexual harassment legislation in Pakistan", in: Roy, Srila (ed.), *New South Asian Feminisms. Paradoxes and Possibilities,* London/New York: Zed Books, pp. 44-65.

[49]   Julie Ballington and Azza Karam (eds.), (2005): *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, revised edition, Stockholm: IDEA.

nomination to leadership positions and presence in key political institutions;

- *be proactive in framing* issues by linking them to non-gendered debates and alliances, using the public space to raise concerns and get on the parliamentary agenda – be it in debates or through the use of consultation and inquiry mechanisms;

- *change the rules of the game and of power configurations* – be it how candidates get selected, how parliamentary procedures and communication flows operate, how policy measures and legislative drafts are reviewed (or not) in terms of their compatibility with and accountability to gender mainstreaming concerns as well as how women parliamentarians and women activists in multiple political arenas, including civil society, organise and cooperate among themselves.[50]

In our own action research project *Reviewing Gender Quotas in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, leading women's activist and gender studies specialist Farzana Bari and myself have argued that there are context-specific as well as more general volatilities and vulnerabilities encountered by gender quota politicians. While we highlight that gender quotas do work, their impact and scope can be enhanced by addressing the disconnect between women's descriptive representation, and promoting and safeguarding women's citizenship rights, issues and interests through:

- *reviewing the rules of the game* as quota modalities, and thus electoral systems, matter to allow for women's sustainable political mainstreaming;

- *accompanying quota provisions within parliament with an increase in leadership positions in other areas and sectors of public affairs*, be it within government or parliamentary commissions/committees, the judiciary, ministerial bureaucracy or political parties;

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[50] Azza Karam, and Joni Lovenduski, (2005): "Women in Parliament: Making a Difference", in: Ballington, Julie and Karam, Azza (eds.), *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, revised edition, Stockholm: IDEA, pp. 187-213.

- *tackling the elite capture of parliamentary politics and thus cater for intersectional concerns*, i.e., more socio-economic diversity among gender quota politicians, in particular, in terms of class and rural-urban divide, among others;

- enhancing women's political effectiveness with other support mechanisms and institutional setups – including a greater linkage with supportive social movements and civil society organisations *to develop a conducive environment and opportunity structure*;

- *shifting the focus* from individual woman politician's agency and performance towards structural and institutional constraints;

- moving beyond difference and competition within political parties/alliances/networks and state institutions via s*trategic essentialism as one key step forward.*[51]

The transformation of androcentric, undemocratic and often dynastic political parties, and gender biases in terms of values, discourses and practices in key state institutions, like the parliament or the ministerial bureaucracy, can only come through collective voice and the agency power of marginalised communities (as diverse as they may be). Gender quota politicians could lead the way by cracking, and ultimately unmaking, patriarchal political institutional structures to deliver on women's substantive representation and political mainstreaming with diffusion effects for women's empowerment across society, we argue.[52]

Having said that and in light of rising misogynist right-wing populisms as well as reemerging conservative authoritarianisms (not just in Asia, but worldwide), there is a caveat: gender quotas should not be taken for granted or treated as an inalienable right in the struggle for women's political mainstreaming and against political patriarchy.

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[51] Andrea Fleschenberg and Farzana Bari, (2015): *"Unmaking Political Patriarchy Through Gender Quotas?"*, Islamabad/Kabul: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, accessible online: https://pk.boell.org/sites/default/files/unmaking_political_patriarchy_through_gender_quotas.pdf (as of 3 August 2020).

[52] Ibid. See also Andrea Fleschenberg, with Khurshid Nighat, Jeannette Higiro and Denice Heiselbetz, (2016): "*Unseating Political Patriarchy. A Toolkit for Debate and Action"*, Islamabad: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, accessible online: https://pk.boell.org/sites/default/files/toolkit_20122016_updated-final_version.pdf (as of 3 August 2020).

> Quota for me personally, I always felt uncomfortable with the concept of quota, because they are being like a charity of right to me, just because I am a woman. My hard work, my efforts and, maybe, if I was lucky to build up some kind of skills was undermined. (…) For me, it was like mercy. For him, it was like he deserved it. He was qualified. (…) It is not charity, it is a chair of power and when you are there, you have to get tough with all the vulnerability you face.[53]

It is important to move beyond a reliance on gender quotas, as essential and indispensable as they are right now, and engage (i) in constituency-building to transform the political malestream into a gender-inclusive political mainstream, (ii) with gatekeepers and institutional constraints (thus deeper structures of gender inequality and their intersectional ramifications); apart from (iii) demonstrating and communicating (political) performance, thus the transversality of one's mandate and political credibility-cum-leverage. It is about moving from the margin to centre, it is about reconceptualising power, as argued by bell hooks[54]:

> Before women can work to reconstruct society, we must reject the notion that obtaining power in the existing social structure will necessarily advance feminist struggle to end sexist oppression. It may allow numbers of women to gain greater material privilege, control over their destiny and the destiny of others, all of which are important goals. It will not end male domination as a system. The suggestion that women must obtain power before they can effectively resist sexism is rooted in the false assumption that women have no power. Women, even the most oppressed among us, do exercise some power. (…) Failure to exercise the power of disbelief made it difficult for women to reject prevailing notions of power and envision new perspectives.

Asian women politicians have come a long way in the past decades in terms of descriptive and substantive representation across the region. Having said that, there is a continuous need for further strategising on what obstacles we are actually looking at to change the overall power of political patriarchy, to increase women's political effectiveness and

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[53] Interview with Farkhunda Zahra Naderi, Kabul, April 2015 as quoted in: Andrea Fleschenberg, (2016): *"It's not Charity, it is a Chair of Power" – Moving Beyond Symbolic Representation in Afghanistan's Transition Politics?*, Kabul: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (as of 3 August 2020).

[54] bell hooks, (2000): *Feminist Theory. From Margin to Center*, 2nd edition, Cambridge, MA: South End Press, pp 92-93.

to carve out opportunities for substantive representation from diverse Asian women politicians, moving beyond elite politics and the challenges of counter-movements and their misogynist discourses. Caucusing across political, socioeconomic and national divides is a crucial step and might become a watershed event in the history of Asian women's political partici- pation and performance. In addition, context-sensitive approaches and a certain degree of *strategic essentialism* (in the sense of Spivak), tailored and responsive to local geographies of political patriarchies, are key, too.