

Oxford Handbooks Online

Gendered Citizenship in the Postcolony: The Challenge for Transnational Feminist Politics

Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay

The Oxford Handbook of Transnational Feminist Movements

Edited by Rawwida Baksh and Wendy Harcourt

Print Publication Date: Mar 2015

Subject: Political Science, International Relations, Political Theory

Online Publication Date: Aug
2014

DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199943494.013.33

Abstract and Keywords

This chapter argues that successful inclusion of feminist ideas in policymaking institutions is reversing the basic tenets of transnational feminist movements, which sought to decompose the production of the Third World woman. There is increasing homogenization of the needs, interests, and histories of the vastly different experiences of women around the world, so that the power to define their needs and interests is increasingly shifting to global policy arenas. There is thus both derecognition of the local and context-specific struggles for women's rights and erasure of the structural and redistributive issues that lead to the denial of rights. Nowhere is this more evident than in the international advocacy for women's rights and citizenship. Transnational feminist politics must find a new basis for solidarity other than the insertion of gender in international agendas and resist assimilation in global agendas through a re-energized politics of recognition and redistribution.

Keywords: global policy arenas, Third World, transnational feminist movements, women's rights and citizenship

Prologue

"No brother, there are only two jatis¹—women and men."—Noor, woman litigant, to her lawyer.

(Mukhopadhyay 1998, 72)

In the early 1990s, Noor, a resident of Calcutta, India, registered an appeal in the lower court that her estranged husband maintain her according to her right by law. Her husband's elder sons by his first marriage had evicted her from the marital home, a move that he felt powerless to prevent. Noor was homeless and had no means of support. Her lawyer instructed her to report to the police station that her husband had beaten her so as to strengthen her case in court, which she refused, because Allah (God) was her witness and she could not lie. Her husband had neglected her and not protected her from his sons, but he had not beaten her. Her lawyer then harangued her, in my presence, that she should never have married a Muslim (this was Noor's second marriage). He argued that it would have been far better to have married a Hindu who could not so easily divorce her (referring to the oft-repeated stereotype that Muslim marriages could be easily dissolved by the man pronouncing "talaq" ["I divorce you"] three times). Noor replied that she had been afraid to marry a Hindu because her community would have ostracized her. Hearing this, the lawyer expansively claimed that all "jatis" were the same, we were all Indians. Having heard him out patiently, Noor made the above statement.

(Mukhopadhyay 1998)

(p. 608)

In summing up her experience, Noor recognized the unequal status of women compared to men and of wives compared to husbands, in their relationships with the state and society. Her experience in many ways encapsulates that of women across the world, even in “modern” Western societies. What is particular to Noor and many other women living in the postcolony, however, is that her relationship to the state as a citizen is mediated through multiple identities shaped by administrative discourses of rulers, both colonial and postcolonial, a phenomenon that is illegible in mainstream state theory, in the political sciences, and indeed in contemporary discourses on governance popularized by global development institutions. Noor is not just a “woman,” but a member of a minority community—a woman with a Muslim identity in India during the 1990s, when Islam was being actively reshaped into a retrogressive “tradition” that oppresses women.

For those of us studying the phenomenon at the time, this was reminiscent of the colonial discourses that had shaped identities on the Indian subcontinent and provided the rationale for the “progressive” forces of colonialism. A central justification of British colonial rule was the “degenerate” and “barbaric” social customs of the Indian people, sanctioned, as colonial rulers believed, by their religious traditions. And nowhere was this more evident than in the ways in which tradition, derived from religion, treated women. Colonialism was therefore seen as performing a “civilizing mission” (Chatterjee 1989, 622; Mani 1989, 120). In the 1990s there were thus parallels with the colonial era. A similar equation existed between the law and religious identity. But this time the “civilizing mission” was being conducted by the Hindu majority, lamenting the fate of Muslim women, who were viewed as being oppressed by their religious tradition (Mukhopadhyay 1998).

Transnational Feminisms: The Heritage and the Present

In the 1990s feminisms and transnational women’s movements became a global phenomenon in ways that they had not been in earlier decades. Whereas feminist activism for equal rights and citizenship had featured prominently in national and local struggles, its emergence as a global phenomenon was definable in the 1990s. What was also evident was that national and local struggles for women’s equal citizenship, while sharing some of the universal claims of feminism, were largely being articulated and represented globally by activists from the global South. These shifts were enabled by numerous events taking place globally, regionally, and nationally. An important prompt was the United Nations World Conferences of the 1990s on various development themes that were critically important for women, where women’s rights advocates articulated a distinctive voice, quite different from that of previous decades. These global conferences provided both the space and the opportunity for organizing, taking action, and influencing the politics of development. (p. 609)

The achievements of this period are evident today. Feminists have a presence in global and national development institutions; feminist knowledge has been deployed in critiquing mainstream development, while at the same time contributing to gender-just alternatives; and women are organized at regional and global levels to monitor the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), act against violence, and advocate for reproductive and sexual rights (among other global women’s rights agendas).

Although the 1990s witnessed the emergence of feminisms and women’s movements as a global phenomenon, the intellectual and political foundations for this had been laid in earlier decades. Numerous shifts had been occurring in global academia since the 1970s. Postcolonial writers and scholars had begun to question truisms about society, peoples, and histories of the hitherto colonized world that had dominated knowledge production and academic disciplines. This was also reflected in the work of feminist movements and academia, with the assertion of difference and critiques of universalism and global sisterhood.

The origins of transnational feminisms can be traced to the intellectual movements of the 1970s and 1980s, in both feminist knowledge production and its political practice. Rejecting the term “international” on the grounds that it denoted all women’s struggles for “equal rights” against oppression as having similar origins and therefore solutions, “transnationalism” signified the recognition of differences in the histories and contexts of women around the world; their colonial pasts; and their race, ethnic, class, and caste markers. Transnational feminisms demonstrated that the nonrecognition of these differences is a political act and leads to domination by those who are in a position to appropriate and codify “scholarship” and “knowledge” about women in the Third World by using particular analytical categories that take as their primary point of reference feminist interests as they have been articulated in the United States and Western Europe (or indeed the interests of intellectual, middle-class elites

in the Third World who take their lives as the reference point in describing the Other in their societies—the poor, rural woman).

In her now classic work, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” (1988), Mohanty pointed to the remarkably similar effects of various analytical categories and strategies that codify the relationship of the West to the Other in implicitly hierarchical terms. In so doing, the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the Third World are colonized, producing/representing a composite, singular “Third World woman”—an image that appears arbitrarily constructed but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse. For example, an analysis of “sexual difference” in the form of a cross-culturally singular, monolithic notion of patriarchy or male dominance leads to the construction of a similarly reductive and homogeneous notion of the “Third World difference”: “that stable, ahistorical something that apparently oppresses most if not all the women in these countries” (Mohanty 1988, 63). It is in the production of this “Third World difference” that Western feminisms appropriate and colonize the constitutive complexities that characterize the lives of women in these countries. (p. 610)

Similarly, in the field of international development, transnational feminist scholarship revealed the tensions between First and Third World women over how the problem of women and development was to be conceptualized. This was evident from the early days of “women in development” (WID) advocacy. A common feature of dissent from WID was the insistence by Third World feminists that the subordination of women could not be divorced from an analysis of the political and economic structures within which women were located (Kabeer 1994). For example, the Committee on the Status of Women set up by the government of India in 1972 (to prepare the report for the First World Conference on Women, held in Mexico), while agreeing with WID scholars in the North that women had been marginalized in the development process, differed nevertheless in its analysis of the reasons for this marginalization. The committee’s report, *Towards Equality* (1974),² showed that this marginalization was not due just to faulty planning, but also to the structural inequalities within the development process itself, which needed to be addressed at a global and national level. Beneria and Sen, critiquing Boserup’s work, observed that in the light of these broader processes of inequality, Boserup’s recipe for reversing the declining status of women by better education and training was akin to “treating cancer with [a] band aid” (Beneria and Sen 1981, 287).

Challenges to global sisterhood came from Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) and Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD). According to DAWN, many Third World women were caught between their reluctance to separate the struggle against women’s subordination from the struggles against poverty, apartheid, and neocolonialism, on the one hand, and their unwillingness to compromise the struggle against women’s subordination or to postpone it, on the other. Given the very different positioning of Third World women within the intersecting structures of oppression, the ideas of global sisterhood defined by First World women or of integration into development processes initiated by First World donors or the elite classes in their own countries were seen as deeply uninviting prospects (Kabeer 1994). Similarly, AAWORD pointed out that whereas patriarchal views and structures oppress women all over the world, women are also members of countries and classes that dominate others and enjoy privileges.

WID scholarship, writes Kabeer, rarely acknowledged that the distortions brought about by colonial penetration in the global distribution of privilege and resources also extended to the unequal terms on which First and Third World women entered into the development policy domain, whether as researchers, advocates, or practitioners.

Friedman (1999) attributes the development of a transnational women’s movement to the UN world women’s conferences, in particular the two held in Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995). Alvarez (2000), however, shows that international activism (and what came to be referred to as cross-border and transnational organizing) had characterized first- and second-wave feminisms in Latin America and most other world regions since the 1980s. In particular, the Latin American and Caribbean “feminist encuentros” (region-wide feminist meetings, literally “encounters”) in the 1980s and 1990s helped to forge a self-consciously regional feminist political identity, which was assertively distinct from that of North America and Europe. (p. 611)

Thus while the 1990s witnessed the ascendance of a new form of international activism among growing numbers of feminists—one targeting intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and international policy arenas and thereby hoping to gain global leverage in pressuring for changes in gender policy on the home front—in the case of Latin America, the particularities of the regional and national political contexts in which feminisms unfolded also impelled

local movement actors to build transborder connections from the bottom up. The “logics” of the two forms of organizing, one through the *encuentros* and the other through participation in international fora targeting IGOs, were different. Alvarez (2000) argues that an internationalist identity-solidarity logic prevailed in the “encuentro-like” intraregional feminist activism of the 1980s and 1990s, whereas a transnational IGO-advocacy logic came to predominate in the regional feminist organizing around the UN World Conferences of the 1990s, held in Rio de Janeiro, Vienna, Cairo, Copenhagen, and Beijing.

The conferences of the 1990s and the impetus they provided for transnational feminist organizing are most often referred to in a celebratory mode. In introducing the concept of “transnationalism reversed” to refer to the impact nationally and locally of this form of organizing, Friedman calls attention to the ambivalent gains and in some instances deleterious consequences of these processes. Both Friedman and Alvarez show that the impact has been mixed and can have distinct political consequences for activist discourses and practices and intramovement power relations on the home front. However, the different forms of organizing with their different logics—*encuentros* and around the IGOs—have had differential impacts on promoting desired policy changes and on feminist politics. Alvarez explains that whereas the interplay of these two transnational activist logics has brought certain benefits to local movements, the predominance of IGO-advocacy activities among growing sectors of Latin American feminist movements since the 1990s has had more ambiguous and sometimes contradictory local consequences.

Almost two decades since the landmark conferences of the 1990s, in which women’s constituencies played a key role, and a decade and half since Friedman and Alvarez wrote about transnationalism reversed, the term has been used in several ways to critique what happens when advocacy for women’s rights and citizenship becomes global, is taken up by international institutions and donors, and forms part of the agenda for the global governance of gender (Chowdhury 2011; Mukhopadhyay 2014; Nesiha 2012). As Halley (2006) points out, there has been an “incremental but now quite noticeable installation of feminists and feminist ideas in actual legal-institutional power,” which she refers to as “governance feminism” (2006, 340). Prüggl rephrases this as the “governmentalization of feminist knowledge”; “that is, feminist knowledge has been adapted so that it becomes available for the government of conduct” (Prüggl 2011, 72).

This chapter argues that the successful installation of feminist knowledge and ideas in policymaking institutions is reversing the basic tenets of transnational feminisms, which sought to decompose the production of the Third World woman. There is increasing homogenization of the histories, needs, and interests of the vastly different experiences of women around the world and the construction of the implicitly consensual (p. 612) priority issues around which all women are apparently expected to organize. Nowhere is this more evident than in the field of women’s rights and citizenship. With the power to define women’s needs and interests increasingly shifting to global policy arenas, there is both derecognition of the local and context-specific struggles for women’s rights and erasure of the structural and redistributive issues that lead to the denial of rights. This calls into question whether women like Noor are served by the universal definitions of and strategies for inclusive citizenship sponsored by global institutions. Is there a feminist politics beyond developmentalism? Have we “governmentalized” feminism?

This is not to suggest that all feminist activism today is governance feminism (Prüggl 2011). There is a diversity in feminist movements and resistance in different social locations. Further, there is also what Alvarez (2009) described as a phenomenon that grew throughout the 1990s and in the first decade of the millennium, the “hybrid identities” of many feminist NGOs in most regions, which despite the NGO-ization of the organization and content they addressed (policy issues and IGO-advocacy), nevertheless remained committed to their feminist roots. I agree with Alvarez, who suggests that feminism in many countries in the region today has not only been “mainstreamed” so that it extends vertically across different levels of government and engages with a variety of national and international policy arenas, but has also been “side-streamed”—spreading horizontally into a wide array of class, caste, and racial-ethnic communities and social and cultural spaces, including parallel social movements. By producing feminist knowledges, disseminating feminist discourses and serving as nodal points for networks on specific subjects, feminists in NGOs have helped to link diverse and dispersed feminist actors. Therefore, when asking whether there is a feminist politics beyond developmentalism and if we have “governmentalized” feminism, I do so reflexively, as an “insider” and “outsider,” interrogating governance feminism today and what Alvarez has termed IGO advocacy transnational feminist organizing.

This chapter has four main sections. The first section traces the rise of the citizenship discourse in development studies, aid policies, and development practice, with the aim of analyzing how changes in development priorities

have shaped and configured citizenship and emptied it of political content. The second part interrogates current understandings of citizenship in the postcolony and elsewhere. It explores how the meaning and practice of citizenship as equal rights irrespective of race, ethnicity, class, caste, or religion has been overtaken by “governmentalities” that have resulted in not one rights-bearing citizen but several population groups, differentiated according to their vulnerability and targeted by government. The third part explores the specific historical processes that have shaped state-society relations in much of the Third World and locates gendered citizenship in the postcolony. The fourth part cites two case studies of transnationalism reversed and shows how there is both derecognition of the local and context-specific struggles around women’s rights and erasure of the structural and redistributive issues that lead to the denial of rights. The conclusion calls for a new basis for solidarity, other than the successful insertion of “gender” in existing international frameworks and through a re-energized feminist politics of recognition and redistribution. (p. 613)

The Rise of “Rights,” “Citizenship,” and “Good Governance” in the International Development Discourse

Citizenship as a concept and practice began to interest the international development community in the 1990s, in the wake of the international rights movements and the “good governance” agenda. A link was made between the main development agenda, poverty alleviation, and the importance of poor people having rights, access to institutions, and a voice in decisions affecting their lives (Mukhopadhyay and Meer 2004). Citizenship in development theorizing and policymaking shifted its meaning from that of a legal conception of rights and formal citizenship to a form of personhood that links rights to agency.

The advent of citizenship in the development discourse is attributed by researchers and commentators to several shifts in development practice that occurred in the 1990s. Among these was a shift in the meaning of the concept of peoples’ “participation,” from participating at the level of community projects to an understanding of citizens having *influence* over wider decision-making processes and the right to political participation (Cornwall 2000; Gaventa 2002). O’Brien and colleagues (2000) suggest that the shift was the result of the pressures generated by global movements for social justice, demanding rights and a say in determining the future of international development. The convergence of the human development and human rights communities in the common purpose of expanding freedom, wellbeing, and human dignity for all (Sen 1999; UNDP 2000) was seen as contributing to the discourse on rights. The construction of the subject of rights, “the citizen,” evolved through related discussions on rights-based approaches to development, poverty, and social exclusion.

By far the most influential shift in the development discourse in the 1990s was the “good governance” agenda promoted by the international development institutions. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s international development institutions and their policies profoundly affected the role and responsibility of the state in developing countries, and they continue to do so in the new millennium. In turn, this has had an impact on state-society relations and the development of citizenship. In the 1980s the international policy agenda, led by the neoliberal framework of the main international financial institutions (i.e., the World Bank and International Monetary Fund), downsized the state and eroded its powers. In the 1990s the state was brought back in as the institution that bore the main responsibility for governance.

The first phase of the “good governance” agenda sought to build a technocratic state that would be an efficient and honest manager (Nunnenkamp 1995). Subsequently, however, there was growing interest in reforming the political state and fashioning liberal democracies. Despite the realization that entrenching democracy and enhancing the role of the state in safeguarding citizens’ rights required rebuilding the political relationship (p. 614) between the state and society, the formula for democratic reform concentrated on the institutional design of the state. It involved reform of electoral, legal, and administrative systems, and decentralization and devolution of government. Development discourses, backed by the power of financing, projects and knowledge production, constructed the idea of a state without politics and proposed a generic model of a citizen unmarked by social relations. A plethora of new sites for “citizen participation” were opened up at the insistence of donors: from consultation exercises around the formulation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (World Bank-driven macroeconomic frameworks for highly indebted countries) to decentralized government—sites where state-society relations were expected to be built.

A considerable volume of research, action, and funding has gone into constructing the “citizen” in the global

South; the voice of the poor; and state accountability (albeit a technocratic state) that could deliver on health, education, and related welfare measures, most often as a regulator. In the post-Beijing era, feminists in international development institutions and in international and national NGOs struggled to insert gender analysis into rights and governance frameworks. Consultancies to produce manuals, checklists, and tools proliferated. States that were recipients of donor funding had to undergo mandatory gender training and show willingness to mainstream gender issues in policies and programs. Increasing the number of women in national parliaments and local government councils was one of the important strategies for building inclusive citizenship. Aligning national legal frameworks to international human rights standards and to CEDAW was also de rigeur.

In the new millennium and as a response to what had increasingly become the technocratic exercise of gender mainstreaming, feminists articulated the notion of gender justice. In defining gender justice and linking it to debates on citizenship, entitlements, rights, and law and development, Goetz (2007) raised a number of dilemmas for feminist politics. Discussions of gender justice have many different starting points: political philosophy discussions of human agency, autonomy, rights, and capabilities; political science discussions involving democratization, citizenship, and constitutionalism; and discussions in the field of law about judicial reform and practical matters of access to justice. Among these discussions, similar unresolved dilemmas persist: Can absolute and universal standards be set for determining what is right or good in human social relations? How should the rights of the individual be offset against the needs of the family, the community, the ethnic “nation,” or the territorial state? What is the appropriate role for the state and the international community in promoting social welfare and human equality?

While these dilemmas persist in feminist politics, the adoption of feminist demands for gender justice, equal citizenship, and rights as global agendas has tended to reduce them to unitary programmatic solutions. This has had consequences for transnational feminisms organizing around global rights agendas that increasingly find themselves out of step with the messy politics of feminist resistance in different contexts. There is a growing disjuncture between the authoritative mantra of “voice,” “influence,” and accountability that reverberates in citizenship discourses promoted by international agencies (p. 615) and feminist experiences on the ground. In a recent study of feminist voice and influence, “Voicing Demands: Feminist Activism in Transitional Contexts” (Nazneen and Sultan 2014), authors from South Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa show that the positive linear connection of voice to influence is questionable and expose the contingent, contextual, and often compromised experience of voice in feminist activism.

Citizenship in the Postcolony and Elsewhere in the Twenty-first Century

Citizenship studies have been largely the preserve of political science and philosophy, which explored state-society relations in primarily Western liberal democracies. It is therefore not surprising that most of what we know about “citizenship” is based on these experiences. They have become the standard by which citizenship in the global South is being reimagined by the global development, governance, and financial institutions, and indeed by nation-states and civil society, despite very different histories and contexts. Western provincialism is circulated as universal. In this meta-narrative the oppression of women, for example, is an aberration, a remnant of the premodern period, part of the religious or some other immutable tradition. This happens in the global South, and it is they who need to catch up. The prescribed cure is modernization and progress and the modern state, which is fully accountable for upholding the rights of the citizen.

These universals³ simply don't lend themselves to understanding Noor's status as a subject-citizen. Her identity is imbricated in notions of womanhood in a particular community, as well as a subject-citizen. As a subject of rights, she asserts both the universality of women's subordination and the state's responsibility toward her. This is the experience of citizenship in most of the world, where the co-presence of several times, or what Chatterjee (2004) refers to as “heterogeneous time,” is the lived experience of most citizens. It refers to the continuity between tradition and modernity in the way most people think and act, challenging the time-space dichotomy of the traditional versus the modern. Chatterjee claims that the idea of time as being premodern (read “traditional”) graduating to modern conveys a utopian homogeneous idea of time; the time of capital which connects past, present, and futures in a linear manner. For example, modern German coal miners, besides using the most advanced technology and being organized in strong labour unions, also celebrate St. Barbara as their patron saint, with an entire day devoted to church services annually. Noor declares her sense of belonging to a particularistic

identity and community, being Muslim, while at the same time claiming her rights as a citizen of India.

The progress from the premodern period to modernity, presupposed in universalisms like the rights-bearing citizen-subject, democracy, and secularism, is the utopia that we all try to live up to; indeed, it is the function of international development to promote these concepts through research, policies, and programs. This obscures what (p. 616) recent ethnography has revealed: that “premodern” customs, traditions, and practices in the present (in conflict with notions of the “modern”) are not remnants of an earlier, immutable past but are new products of encounters with “modernity” itself (Mani 1989; Mamdani 1996; Mukhopadhyay 1998; Chatterjee 2004).

The concept of citizenship holds out the promise of equal rights and a direct relationship between the legal subject of rights and the state. In legal-political theory, it implies that every person, irrespective of race, ethnicity, class, caste, or religion, is entitled to the same rights and treatment as any other person. This does not mean, however, that social and other distinctions between people in a society disappear: “Rather, the universalism of the theory of rights both presupposed and enabled a new ordering of power relations in society based precisely on those distinctions of class, race, religion, gender, etc.” (Chatterjee 2004).

Nevertheless the emancipatory promise of equal rights and citizenship has inspired struggles for equality and social justice over the last two centuries and continues to do so. At the heart of the concept of equal rights and citizenship lies the opposition between, on the one hand, equal rights without distinctions of race, ethnicity, class, culture, etc., and on the other, the particular demands of cultural identity, which calls for differentiated treatment of particular groups on the grounds of historical injustice or vulnerability, or other reasons. This opposition has been regulated through modes of governance that mitigate the conditions of population groups who because of their difference are not equal citizens.

This mode of governance, whereby groups in need of differentiated treatment are identified and become the target of governmental programs, has been around for some time. In Europe, Enlightenment ideas of free will and individual conscience fuelled the struggle for equality and citizenship in the eighteenth century. But the masses of people remained unfree until the Industrial Revolution, which released them from bondage and subordination to ascribed relations. However, they were not “citizens,” since the gap between the masses and the propertied classes persisted and in some cases widened. Kabeer (2002), echoing Marshall (1950), suggests that citizenship was made more inclusive through state provision of social welfare measures. These measures reduced the differences within the population, lessened dependence on patron-client relations, built recognition for the identity and status of workers, and expanded voice and freedoms for the majority (Marshall 1950; Kabeer 2002).

Chatterjee (2004) disagrees with Marshall’s claim that these measures helped to build sovereignty and equal citizenship. He argues that whereas the social welfare measures alleviated the living conditions of population groups such as workers, the poor, and the extremely vulnerable, they did not eliminate class inequalities in ways that would guarantee equal rights. What these measures did, in fact, was to proliferate governmentalities, leading to the emergence of an intricate “heterogeneous social.” So there was not one rights-bearing citizen but several population groups, differentiated according to their vulnerability, who became the targets of government.

With the emergence of mass democracies in the last fifty years, new challenges and new problems of governance have arisen. The increasing differentiation among citizens (p. 617) and the imperative that government must serve all is one such challenge, necessitating an array of policies to benefit different groups rather than one that might have sufficed in earlier eras. In addressing these new challenges, various governmental technologies have arisen to classify and categorize those needing services. Population groups thus get classified and divided on the basis of being target groups for basic governmental services.

In developing the concept of “governmentality,” Foucault (1991) sought to draw attention to a certain way of thinking and acting embodied in all those attempts to know and govern the wealth, health, and happiness of populations (Rose and Miller 1992, 173–205). *Governmentality* refers to the act of governing to produce the citizen best suited to fulfil its policies and to the organized practices through which subjects are governed. The implication is that governance in the modern era is not only about using coercive power to dominate citizens, but a rational exercise of power that tends to make the fullest use of knowledges capable of the maximum instrumental efficacy (Gordon 1991). New forms of political rationality represent the reality that has to be governed, making it possible to deliberate on it and to construct the means through which it will be addressed, managed, and changed. Simultaneously, governmentality also transforms subjective realities and desires, making it possible for individuals

and groups, citizens and subjects to participate in the projects of power, and to reimagine themselves in the light of the political rationalities that have represented their realities.

In international development, an array of governmentalities differentiates among groups, categorizes populations, and produces knowledge and expertise on how to address them. In this sense, development interventions are about the differential treatment of groups because they are poor, women, ethnic minorities, or some other group classified by development institutions as being vulnerable and in need of assistance. That this mode of governing does not promote equal citizenship has been discussed, and perhaps it is not the intention of global development agendas.

Feminists and Gendered Citizenship in the Postcolony

Feminists have long critiqued the liberal conceptions of citizenship and equal rights on the grounds that these do not accommodate the reality of social relations and difference. While acknowledging that liberal conceptions of universal rights—that a person is entitled to the same rights and treatment irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and caste—have profound emancipatory potential because one's identity and entitlement are not tied to ascribed relations, they have nevertheless limited rights to formal guarantees. Rights in the liberal framework are conferred on the human subject unmarked by gender, class, caste, race, ethnic, or community status. Legal personhood is based on this human core, and the law is then seen to be a neutral instrument that confers (p. 618) rights conferred on this essence (Mukhopadhyay 1998). The citizen thus created, who is the bearer of rights and can act politically to secure more entitlements, is considered to be neutral (i.e., sexless, classless, etc.). While seemingly neutral in that they are conferred on the undifferentiated human subject, rights are in reality standards built with elite males as the norm in a given society. This is manifested in the substance of laws and policies and in their interpretation and implementation.

In the last three decades feminist critiques of universal rights and citizenship have been immensely influential and have fueled transnational feminist organizing on rights. This has led to changes in human rights policies and discourses in the international arena and to laws in the national arena. While changes in the formal laws have been secured, there has been little progress in making these rights real on the ground (Molyneux and Razavi 2002).

However, these critiques insufficiently explain why women in much of Africa, South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa must relate to the state in terms of their relationships with men, families, and communities (as opposed to being the individual subjects of rights). It does not quite explain why customary and personal laws exist side by side with civil law and are more authoritative and binding in regulating gender relations within the family and community. Most explanations by international and national gender experts (some of whom are self-declared feminists) resort to oft-repeated “culture, tradition, and backwardness” arguments or blame state agencies for not implementing equality clauses in national constitutions and equal rights legislation.

Charrad (2007) locates the problem of differential and unequal citizenship for women and men in the present-day articulation of state-society relations in the Middle East and North Africa, in relations based on particularistic and ascribed identities of religion and kin-based formations. Mukhopadhyay (2007) similarly alludes to the historical processes through which the relationship between the colonial state and the individual was in reality a relationship between the state and groupings representing particularistic identities, a relationship that has been difficult to reverse in the postcolony. This set limits to what the state could intervene in to reform women's position. These processes have also influenced how women's rights are framed and fought for in different contexts.

As mentioned in the “Prologue,” what is particular to Noor and many other women living in the postcolony is that their relationship to the state as citizens is mediated through multiple identities shaped by administrative discourses of rulers, both colonial and postcolonial, a phenomenon that is illegible in mainstream state theory, in the political sciences, and indeed in contemporary discourses on governance popularized by global development institutions.

These scripts, shaped by administrative discourses of rulers, both colonial and postcolonial, have profoundly affected citizenship in the present. Despite the protracted anti-imperialist struggles that led to the formation of nation-states in Asia and Africa and the incorporation of all the trappings of modernity in the new states, identities based on religious affiliation, tribe, and ethnicity continue to persist and form the basis of state-society relations. The nation-states that emerged from colonialism in South Asia and in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa were

unable to undo the legacy of state-society (p. 619) relations produced through years of the colonial enterprise. This mode of relating to the state had made ascribed relations the basis of identity and relationship with the state. Colonial statecraft involved building a centralized authority (the colonial state) by replacing the heterogeneous and fluid social and political arrangements through which relationships within and between diverse communities had been managed. This was done by codifying the practices of the diverse communities and in effect setting up separate “bounded” communities based on ascribed relations (caste, ethnicity, and religious community), each governed by its own customs and traditions.

Gender relations and women’s entitlements were key in defining the identity of these bounded communities. One of the ways in which the delineation of these “bounded communities” was achieved was through the construction of personal law and customary law to govern private relations in the family (Mamdani 1996; Mukhopadhyay 1998). For the Indian subcontinent, this meant the “discovery” of religious and scriptural tradition as the basis of morality and customary obligations, which was then turned into “law.” In Africa, a dual legal system—a European system governing relations among the colonizers and a subordinated and regulated version of indigenous law for the colonized—was instituted (Mamdani 1996). This had two kinds of effects. First, gender relations and women’s position became emblematic of the authentic tradition of particular groups, giving meaning to specific forms of ethnicity, caste, and religious community belongingness. Second, the collaboration between indigenous male elites and colonial officers in the process of codifying custom and practice resulted in male elite interests being codified into law and reducing women to legal minors and dependents of men (Currie 1994; Mukhopadhyay 1998). No matter how constructed these norms were, in contemporary societies these norms, rules, and laws constitute the lived reality and identity.

This particular mode of state-society relations, wherein ascribed relations become the basis of identity and relationship with the state, has profound implications for women’s citizenship. Women’s rights cannot be discussed, claimed, or fought for separately from those of the “bounded” community.

The challenge for transnational feminist politics is to recognize these historical processes through which gendered citizenship in the postcolony have been shaped. Otherwise, advocacy for women’s citizenship rights can and does run into the quicksand of debates about the rights of a particular “bounded” community vis à vis the state.

Transnational Feminism Reversed

This chapter began with the tenet that despite the many successes of transnational feminist organizing, and perhaps because of the successful installation of feminist knowledge in global policy arenas, the basic tenets of transnational feminisms are in reversal. The power to define women’s needs and interests is increasingly shifting to global policy arenas, and there is both derecognition of the local and context-specific struggles around (p. 620) women’s rights and erasure of the structural and redistributive issues that lead to the denial of rights.

Two recent studies reveal the processes through which powerful global narratives about women’s rights and citizenship hegemonize and thereby erase context-specific struggles and with them the structural and redistributive issues that have led to denial of rights.

In *Transnationalism Reversed: Women Organizing against Gendered Violence in Bangladesh*, Chowdhury (2011) uncovers the genealogy of the movements against anti-acid violence in Bangladesh led by the NGO Naripokkho in the 1990s, which mobilized both national and international attention to the issue. The study begins with a ceremony in New York to honor the work of a Western television journalist who had received an award for “discovering” this form of violence. The ceremony presented two women who were survivors of acid violence and had been aided by international institutions and philanthropists to undergo reconstructive surgery in the United States. They were presented as the trophies of successful international efforts to rescue victims of acid violence. In the process, the struggles that had been waged by Naripokkho at the national and international levels, the struggles over discourse (the deliberate naming of those affected as “survivors” rather than “victims”), the struggles to put government policy and programs in place to prevent and to treat women affected by this and other forms of violence, and the founding of the Acid Survivors Foundation were erased.

Chowdhury’s study deliberately focuses on the genealogy of the struggles against acid violence, the role of Naripokkho, and the issue of gendered violence in the specific context of Bangladesh. This deliberate focus is

juxtaposed with the other focus of the story, which is the co-optation by certain local and international institutions, resulting in the rewriting of the complex genealogy that led to the public recognition of acid violence as an issue. Chowdhury is concerned not just with the erasure of local activists' efforts in global initiatives to fight gender violence, but also with the dominant narratives of global feminism that only enable certain, partial stories to be told. The dominant narrative she discusses is that of human rights being brought to Third World victim women by international agencies and governments that rescue them from the tyrannies of Third World states, tradition, and culture. She charts the distinct and evolving narratives of multiple actors' entry into and engagement with the campaign and a critique of the very frameworks that make stories like that of acid violence intelligible to a global audience. Thus the study does not celebrate local women's activists struggles, but rather illuminates the challenges of transnational feminist organizing.

Vasuki Nesiah (2012) analyzes the impact of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and international conflict feminism in Sri Lanka in "Uncomfortable Alliances: Women, Peace and Security in Sri Lanka." A fact-finding initiative by a network of multi-ethnic women's groups in Sri Lanka in 2002 (just as the Norwegian government's brokered peace process was gaining momentum) had drawn attention to women's experience of the war and priorities for peace. Its report led to the formation of the all-woman (p. 621) Sub-Committee of Gender to explore the effective inclusion of gender concerns in the peace process. This mechanism was probably the first of its kind established within a formal peace process, and the report of the subcommittee, which was inserted into the official process, was heralded as a success story for UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Initiatives like the fact-finding mission were not unique in the Sri Lankan women's movement, which has had a long history of analyzing the ethnic conflict. However, after Resolution 1325 was passed, these initiatives became assimilated into a global narrative about women, peace, and security.

Nesiah's article focuses on international conflict feminism in Sri Lanka rather than on Sri Lankan feminisms. It shows how the assimilation of national feminist initiatives into the global framework of the resolution created a dynamic whereby the global shapes the legibility of the local and the local makes itself legible through the frameworks of international conflict feminism and Resolution 1325; the political economy and the discursive capital of this assimilation thus has implications for national women's movements seeking international recognition, funding, and collaboration.

International conflict feminism is part of the international corpus of conflict resolution engagement. It produces a conflict zone in order to intervene in it. A conflict zone is imaged as an ahistorical, irrational arena saturated by violence and the failure of modern institutions so that it now requires international intervention to restore order. Thus countries as diverse as Sri Lanka, Central African Republic, and Colombia become recognizable through the lexicon of violence. International engagement introduces similar recipes for ending violence couched in the language of peace and security. Within this broad recipe are political choices that seemingly appear as common sense but are in reality globally hegemonic: liberal governance and neoliberal economies. In this process, the structural causes and the context-specific politics of redistribution and recognition fall by the wayside.

International conflict feminism similarly normalizes globally hegemonic political choices in the name of women affected by conflict. The framing of feminist agendas in Sri Lanka in terms of Resolution 1325 was an example of this. Women's physical insecurity necessitated the promotion of liberal governance to restore security and order. In Sri Lanka, as anywhere else in the world, conflict feminism initiatives were of two kinds: good governance and the promotion of reconciliation. Within the good governance agenda, conflict feminism's invocation of 1325 is limited to three strands: rule of law advocacy, inclusion policies, and civil society promotion. The rule of law initiatives adhered to donor agendas for political and economic reform. For example, the regularization of the regime for private property rights became a 1325 issue because it privileged land titles for women. The domain of political inclusion was narrowed down to that of elections and the establishment of a regulatory order to guarantee security in property and contract. Resolution 1325 promoted an arithmetical approach to gender distribution in which increasing the representation of women was the sole objective. It treated women as a homogenous group. Its implementation was therefore not attentive to how ethnicity, class, or other social fissures shape reality. Civil society promotion privileged and funded NGOs that had considerable political capital and (p. 622) were better positioned to navigate internationalized political discourses, practices, and institutions.

The field of reconciliation is diverse, and Nesiah focuses on those strands that were primarily targeted in Sri Lanka: women's dual realities as agents of peace and victims of war. In regarding women as agents of peace, international

conflict feminism essentializes women's role as almost "natural." Although heavily critiqued, this mode of understanding women's role was given a new lease on life by Resolution 1325. Nesiah shows that Resolution 1325 inspired peace activity by feminist groups in Sri Lanka focused on bringing together women from the north and south of the country and enabling interethnic interactions. The primary problem addressed by these initiatives was building understanding and intercommunity rapport rather than the larger structural issues, thereby deflecting attention from the political and socioeconomic issues that had given rise to the conflict in the first place.

Nesiah contrasts these initiatives by international conflict feminisms to the "motherhood" movements of the late 1980s and early 1990s, cross-class social movements that thousands of women across ethnic lines had identified with and that brought the government to its knees and led to the defeat of President Jayawardene. No similar mass movements have been inspired by the international instruments. Nesiah attributes the changes of national feminist priorities to their assimilation into the international conflict feminisms and Resolution 1325 implementation, a move that has ensured funding, visibility, and international support. This reality has pressured national women's groups to negotiate their interventions in ways that produce, enable, and constrain their own priorities, and to concede to global agendas that determine which projects are viable.

Conclusion: Negotiating Citizenship in an Era of Governmentality and Neoliberal Globalization

Both Chowdhury and Nesiah relate a cautionary tale for transnational feminisms. Making context-specific struggles legible to global institutions is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, identification with and participation in transnational feminist movements for women's rights gives visibility to local concerns in international policy arenas. On the other hand, the power of international governmentalities ensures that these concerns can only be read in the light of global agendas. These hegemonize liberal governance and neoliberal economics. Liberal rights for women and gender inclusion are fundamental to these agendas insofar as these rights release the subject "woman" from her tradition-bound role and make her free to participate in the neoliberal economy. Addressing the structural causes of gendered citizenship in the postcolony does not feature in this agenda. The socioeconomic and political changes necessary to end poverty, enable distribution, and ensure security are also not part of this agenda. (p. 623)

Harcourt (2006) has pointed to the problematic nature of feminist engagement in international policy arenas. Whereas distinct periods of feminist activism from 1990 to 2000 made the gender and development discourse acceptable to global development institutions, inevitably the process simplified and codified the vastly different experiences of women around the world. Through the UN official texts, background reports, statistics, and evidence, these experiences became the generic gendered female body: the poor woman with an expertly understood set of needs and rights. It created a colonized poor and marginalized woman who needed to be managed, educated, trained for work and local decision making, and controlled sexually and reproductively through a series of development processes designed for "women's empowerment." Gender was made governable through the organized practices of transnational, global, and national development authorities.

There is no going back from where transnational feminisms have got to, but there is a need for finding new bases for solidarity other than the successful insertion of "gender" in existing international frameworks. A new and not new basis has to be the reenergized and combined politics of recognition and redistribution that can create solidarities with other social and political movements (Fraser 2012). The need to bring redistribution and the political economy back into the discussion of citizenship and rights is fundamental to resisting the litany of culture, tradition, and Third World state irresponsibility as a cause of gendered citizenship in the postcolony.

References

- Alvarez, S. (2000). "Translating the Global: Effects of Transnational Organizing on Local Feminist Discourses and Practices in Latin America." *Meridians 1*, no. 1: 29–67.
- Alvarez, S. (2009). "Beyond NGO-ization? Reflections from Latin America." *Development 52*, no. 2: 175–84.
- Beneria, L., and Gita Sen. (1981). "Accumulation, Reproduction, and 'Women's Role in Economic Development': Boserup Revisited." *Signs 7*, no. 2: 279–98. (p. 624)

- Chatterjee, P. (1989). "Colonialism, Nationalism, and the Colonized Women: The Contest in India." *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4: 622–33.
- Chatterjee, P. (2004). *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Politics in Most of the World*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Charrad, M. M. (2007). "Unequal Citizenship: Issues of Gender Justice in the Middle East and North Africa." In *Gender Justice, Citizenship and Development*, edited by M. Mukhopadhyay and N. Singh. New Delhi: Zubaan; and Ottawa: International Development Research Centre. 233–262.
- Chowdhury, E. H. (2011). *Transnationalism Reversed: Women Organizing against Gendered Violence in Bangladesh*. Praxis: Theory in Action [series]. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Cornwall, A. (2000) *Making a Difference? Gender and Participatory Development*, IDS Discussion Paper 378.
- Currie, I. (1994) 'The future of customary law: lessons from the lobola debate', in Murray, C., ed. *Gender and the New South African Legal Order*, Kenwyn, Juta and Co. 146–162.
- Foucault, M. (1991). "Governmentality." In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, edited by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 87–104.
- Fraser, N. (2012). *Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History: An Introduction*. Working Papers Series, No. 17. Paris: Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'homme.
- Friedman E. J. (1999). "The Effects of 'Transnationalism Reversed' in Venezuela: Assessing the Impact of UN Global Conferences on the Women's Movement." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 1, no. 3: 357–81.
- Gaventa, J. (2002) 'Introduction: Exploring Citizenship, Participation and Accountability', *IDS Bulletin*, 33 (2): 1–11.
- Goetz, A-M. (2007). "Gender Justice, Citizenship and Entitlements: Core Concepts, Central Debates and New Directions for Research." In *Gender Justice, Citizenship and Development*, edited by M. Mukhopadhyay and N. Singh. New Delhi: Zubaan; and Ottawa: International Development Research Centre. 15–57.
- Gordon, C. (1991). "Governmental Rationality: An Introduction." In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, edited by G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and Peter Miller. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1–51.
- Government of India. (1974). *Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India*. New Delhi: Government of India Press.
- Halley, J., P. Kotiswaran, H. Shamir, and C. Thomas. (2006). "From the International to the Local in Feminist Legal Responses to Rape, Prostitution/Sex Work, and Sex Trafficking: Four Studies in Contemporary Governance Feminism." *Harvard Journal of Law & Gender* 29: 335–423.
- Harcourt, W. (2006). *The Global Women's Rights Movement: Power Politics around the United Nations and the World*. World Social Forum Civil Society and Social Movements Programme Paper, No. 25. Geneva: UNRISD.
- Kabeer, N. (1994). *Reversed Realities: Hierarchies in Development Thought*. London and New York: Verso.
- Kabeer, N. (2002). "Citizenship, Affiliation and Exclusion: Perspectives from the South." *IDS Bulletin* 23, no. 2: 12.
- Mamdani, M. (1996). *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. (p. 625)
- Mani, L. (1989). "Contentious Traditions: The Debate of Sati in Colonial India." In *Recasting Women*, edited by K. Sangari and S. Vaid. Delhi: Kali for Women. 88–126.
- Marshall, T. H. (1950). *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Mohanty, C. (1988). "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse." *Feminist Review* 30: 61–88.

- Mukhopadhyay, M. (1998). *Legally Dispossessed: Gender, Identity and the Process of Law*. Calcutta, India: Stree.
- Mukhopadhyay, M. (2007). "Gender Justice, Citizenship and Development." In *Gender Justice, Citizenship and Development*, edited by M. Mukhopadhyay and N. Singh. New Delhi: Zubaan; and Ottawa: International Development Research Centre. 1–14.
- Mukhopadhyay, M. (2014). "Mainstreaming Gender or Reconstituting the Mainstream? Gender Knowledge in Development." *Journal of International Development* 26, no. 3: 356–67.
- Mukhopadhyay, M., and S. Meer. (2004). *Creating Voice and Carving Space: Redefining Governance from a Gender Perspective*. Amsterdam: KIT Publishers.
- Molyneux, M., and S. Razavi. (2002). Introduction to *Gender Justice, Development, and Rights*, edited by M. Molyneux and S. Razavi. London: Oxford University Press.
- Nazneen, S and Maheen Sultan (2014) "Introduction Voicing Demands: Feminist Activism in Transitional Contexts" in *Voicing Demands: Feminist Activism in Transitional Contexts* edited by S. Nazneen and M. Sultan, London and New York: Zed Press. 1–28.
- Nesiah, V. (2012). "Uncomfortable Alliances: Women, Peace and Security in Sri Lanka." In *South Asian Feminisms*, edited by A. Loomba and R. Lukose. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 139–161.
- Nunnenkamp, P. (1995). "What Donors Mean by Good Governance: Heroic Ends, Limited Means, and Traditional Dilemmas of Development Cooperation." *IDS Bulletin* 26, no. 2: 9–16.
- O'Brien, R., A-M. Goetz, J. A. Scholte, and M. Williams. (2000). *Contesting Global Governance: Multilateral Economic Institutions and Global Social Movements*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Prügl Elisabeth (2011). Diversity Management and Gender Mainstreaming as Technologies of Government. *Politics & Gender* 7, 71–89.
- Rose, N., and P. Miller. (1992). "Political Power Beyond the State: Problematics of Government." *British Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 2: 173–205.
- Sen, A. (1999). *Development as Freedom*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- UNDP (2000). Human Development Report 2000 Oxford University Press: Oxford, New York. (p. 626)

Notes:

- (1.) *Jati* refers to a Hindu caste or distinctive social group, a special feature of which is the exclusive occupation of its members. The term *jati* or caste has a variety of meanings, but they are always related to the classifications especially of social groups.
- (2.) Government of India (1974).
- (3.) These universals refer to familiar concepts of social theory. *Citizenship* is a formal and legal identity, implying rights and obligations by virtue of a person having been born into a specific nation-state. *Rights* are conferred on the human subject who does not have a gender, class, caste, race, or ethnicity. The *state* is a just arbiter conferring and adjudicating rights and releasing the citizen from the bondage of ascribed social relations, from having to make claims based on norms, charity, benevolence, or patronage. The state is the formal structure of constitutions and laws, and all society is civil society; everyone is a citizen with equal rights and therefore to be regarded as part of civil society.

Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay

Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay, Ph.D., is a social anthropologist who has worked in gender and development theory and practice. Her special focus is on gender, citizenship and governance, themes that she has researched and published on. Dr. Mukhopadhyay works at the Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam, The Netherlands and has led a team specialising on gender and development.

