Women Talking Politics

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Women and Development

When I first decided to focus this edition of the newsletter on women and development, I contacted Priya Kurian at Waikato for some thoughts and advice. Her response was enthusiastic, prompt and very rewarding; she put me in contact with others in the field, and also co-ordinated the discussions between the authors to produce the fascinating discussion you will read here. I am extremely grateful to the entire group for their effort; I continue to be heartened by the goodwill women show in so happily giving their time and expertise to the newsletter.

You will notice a new style to the newsletter; it will also soon be on the web! If you have links of interest to readers, please forward them to me. The site will include a complete set of back issues of the newsletter. Stay tuned to further details in the summer edition later this year.

Thank you for your continued interest and support. I look forward to bringing you the next edition.

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In this issue:

Notes on Development: Towards a 'Women, Culture and Development' Approach

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As an academic writing on issues of 'development', my eyes have always turned to the 'Third World', a term that conjures up not merely the geographical specificities of once colonized states, but also the myth and ideology imbued in its construction.[1] But increasingly, I think, we need to examine more closely how the global project of 'development' fits into national contexts of the First World. There is, for instance, the on-going disaster in Iraq, where the promise of emancipatory national development (in the absence of any weapons of mass destruction) helped justify the US-British invasion. Many would see the invasion as being more about the hopes for US and British 'development' (seen as control over oil resources, for instance), than about the 'salvation' of the Iraqi people. It is a context where we must ask whether we need to abandon the development project altogether, or whether we can salvage some locally-specific, meaningful notion of 'good development'?

'Development', understood too often as being synonymous with economic growth, is partly a product of western imperialism. It was a project that emerged from the ashes of WW II and was embraced by the national leaders of newly independent countries and by First World political and economic leaders. Development was deemed to be the most significant tool of decolonization, facilitating a process of nation building that would allow sovereign states everywhere to stand side by side as equals. The reality, of course, has been quite different. The last 50 years have seen an increasing concentration of the world's resources into the colluding hands of First World states and Third World authoritarian governments. A globalised economy that has seen the ever faster circulation of global capital has been paralleled by higher and higher barriers to the movement of peoples from the Third World to the First World. The poor are poorer, the rich richer. 'Development as freedom', in the words of Nobel Prize-winning development economist Amartya Sen (1999), is still an illusory goal for two-thirds of the world's peoples.
Yet, the obsession with getting the notch on the belt that proclaims one to be a developed state remains unsated. Even though, unlike the US and Britain, New Zealand is an exemplary world citizen (seen, for instance, in its commitment to peacekeeping globally and its resolute refusal to participate in the Iraq war), it too remains anxious about its status as a First World nation. For example, a dominant concern for New Zealand politicians and the public is to ward off the label 'Third World' from being ascribed to New Zealand (see Munshi & Kurian, forthcoming). New Zealand's seemingly fragile national identity is constantly being bolstered by a robust rejection of the 'Third World' within – 'be it in the shape (or colour) of immigrants from the Third World, the presence of 'Third World' diseases such as meningitis, or the inadequate pursuit of such markers of development as biotechnology…' (ibid).

A recent comment in March this year by the Deputy Prime Minister, Michael Cullen, illustrates how pervasive such thinking is. In the aftermath of the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, defending the per-

formance of New Zealand athletes during a debate in Parliament, Mr Cullen stated that the only country smaller than New Zealand to do better at the Games was Jamaica, and given its crime rate, he would not swap places with it any time. This is no doubt typical of Mr Cullen's idea of a witty rejoinder. But it speaks volumes that a man of his rank and status could only think of defending New Zealand's performance by commenting disparagingly about a Third World state. If the very idea of what it is to be New Zealand is shaped by what it is not – an inferiorised Third World – then what does it tell us about the goal, the process, and the focus of 'good' development?

We must perhaps begin with the acknowledgement that much of what passes for development may be seen as a deeply flawed project. The dominant model of top-down, 'mainstream' economistic development, driven by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other international institutions, has largely failed the poor of the Third World. It has failed not just because of the usual litany of causes droned out by international agencies – corruption, poor leadership, poor infrastructure, illiteracy and the (often) low status of women, for example. Many, if not all of these reasons, are mediated and refracted through the extended period of colonisation, exploitation and the violent reshaping of societies and cultures to serve the needs of the colonisers. That history of a violent, brutal colonialism has transmogrified in recent decades into the amnesia-ridden celebration of economic globalisation that sees the transfer of Third World resources into First World hands, aided by the willing complicity of Third World political and economic elites, in the name of 'development'. In Bolivia, for example, the contract for the privatisation of water was given to Aguas del Tunari, a subsidiary of the multinational corporation, Bechtel, leading to protests by the local people at the spiraling costs, which resulted in police firing and deaths. The Bolivian government was forced to cancel the contract in the face of sustained protests (see Olivera, 2004). Indeed, indigenous people everywhere – such as the Ogoni in Nigeria (Rowell, 1996), the Brazilian Kayapo (Turner, 1999) or the Meratus Dayaks of Indonesia (Tsing, 1993; 2005) – are at the receiving end of environmental havoc and social upheaval caused by explorations by western corporations (often in partnership with states) for oil, timber and minerals on their lands. And in Iraq, in the aftermath of the US and British invasion, 'women's secular freedoms – once the envy of women across the Middle East – have been snatched away…', with the situation far worse in the British-controlled south (Judd, 2006). In the so-called 'nation-building development efforts' that are currently taking place, there is no place for women (ibid).

Given this context, can we in fact reclaim 'development' and imbue it with fresh purpose? In *Feminist Futures* (Bhavnani, Foran & Kurian, 2003), we called for radically transforming the theory of development by 'placing women at the centre, putting culture on par with political economy, and paying attention to critical practices, pedagogies and movements for social justice' (p. 2). As a new paradigm in development studies, 'women, culture and development' (WCD)[2] also offers a way to make visible the agency of subaltern women and men in order to suggest radical alternatives for so-

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cial change and social transformation in the Third World. It is a WCD lens, for example, that captures the transformational work by the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, the Women's Group of rubber tappers in Xapuri, Brazil, the Women in Black in Israel opposing the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and Tostan: Against Female Genital Mutilation in Senegal in Kum-Kum Bhavnani's documentary *The Shape of Water* (Bhavnani, 2006). At the same time, 'good development' as a goal for all nations becomes possible only if First World and Third World states take responsibility to abjure their complicity in perpetuating the on-going violence of development. In part this includes broadening and deepening the understanding of development to mean more than the merely economistic; it also needs to be reflexive about what genuine social and environmental sustainability entails.

In studying development, then, it is important not just to understand the First World's problematic historical and contemporary contributions to the current crisis of development, as I argued at the beginning of this essay. Equally important is the task of examining and understanding the agency of subaltern women and men outside the mainstream frame of development whose everyday struggles, resistances and celebrations must inform our collective desires for 'good development'. These subaltern women and men are not victims in a system of cruel and unjust inequalities, but rather, leading agents of change. In Bolivia, Nigeria, Brazil and Indonesia, as elsewhere in the world, we find people fighting back, often with women in leadership positions in social movements for change. In a forthcoming work (Bhavnani, Foran, Kurian & Munshi, forthcoming), we draw on a WCD approach to offer the prospect of shifting the paradigms of development towards an active engagement with subaltern agency, thus decentring the top-down approach to development that pervades prevailing practices and theories of development. In this way, Raymond Williams's (1960) understanding of culture as lived experience may be deployed to illuminate the agency and creativity of those located 'on the edges of development'.

Notes

[1] Some scholars view the term as problematic seeing it as a statement of an already acknowledged inferiority. They have opted for other terms—the developing world, the underdeveloped world, and, more promisingly, 'out-of-the-way places' (Tsing, 1993). All terms no doubt carry their own particular baggage and acquire more if used often enough. For me, the term 'Third World' invokes the on-going political struggle against the neo-imperialism of contemporary times and solidarity across borders.

[2] Our approach, it should be noted, is markedly distinct from the 1995 book Women, Culture and Development edited by Martha Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover, where the editors take a 'critical universalist' position on women's functioning and, further, equate culture with oppressive traditions.

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'Achieving Development' For Women: Evolving Concepts In Measurement

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For a woman to be born in Kerala, a state in south-west India, was an extraordinary stroke of luck – at least according to development scholars in the 1970s. The chances are that she would survive infancy, have reasonable health, be literate, even attend school for a few years, was likely to marry after 18, have no more than two children in her lifetime, be appropriately protected from repeated pregnancy and live till the age of 72, outliving men in the state. Kerala women's prospects were not only better than what their counterparts in India and other developing countries would experience, but was comparable to women in the developed world. Kerala women represented the 'model' of what women in the Third World could aspire from good development practices.

Kerala women's 'development achievements' perplexed experts; they flouted the orthodoxy of the time. The popular thinking was that raising standards of a society (measured as GDP or national incomes) would improve conditions of its people, including women. Kerala, however, was not a rich economy; its incomes at the time were lower than the national average. In fact, Kerala had surprisingly low levels of women in the formal labour force. The impressive statistics were better explained by political and socio-cultural contexts – successive leftist governments that had invested in health and education of its citizens regardless of gender; matrilineal inheritance patterns followed by a significant section of society that favoured girl children; and a history of liberal-minded rulers who strove to create an egalitarian society. Although internationally it was called a 'model of development', it seemed that Kerala was a case of what development did *not* deliver.

Amartya Sen, the Nobel laureate, was fond of using the Kerala example to challenge development beliefs of the 1960s/70s and question the conventional ways of measuring development. The focus on incomes, he argued, did not reflect the diverse ways in which achievements (and conversely, inequalities) of development are manifest. By the 1980s, he was advocating a revolutionary approach to thinking about development, namely, the capabilities approach (Sen 1999). Quite simply, the capabilities approach argues that development is better measured as the opportunities that are available to people to improve their personal choices so that they are able to realise their potential. Sen's capability approach generated a discourse of rights-based *human development*, that is, that the goal of development is about individual 'freedoms', and 'agency', not merely improving the standards of a society. The capabilities approach was influential in the construction of measures that included non-monetary, non-market statistics of wellbeing. In 1995, the United Nations brought out two indicators to measure human development for women: the Gender-related development index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) (UNDP 1995). These composite indicators are developed using a cluster of statistics that includes knowledge, longevity, standard of living, political participation, and decision-making.

Third World feminist writings in the 1970/80s questioned the view that development achievements were merely about accruing the 'fruits' of economic growth – even if they did encompass a range of non-income indicators. Instead, they pointed to the bearing that the development has on changing gender power relations and enhancing women's personal agency. For instance, is it a development gain for a woman if literacy is used by her family merely to improve her marriage prospects? Or, is a job liberating if her income is appropriated by her husband? Through the 1980s, the concept of 'empowerment' came alive measuring development in terms of women's 'access to' and 'control over' resources, 'participation in' social processes, as much as 'achievements' of development outcomes. For the development school, these debates also affirmed the use of qualitative information (as much as statistical variables) as a means to validate women's development experiences.

In the 1990s, the reproductive health paradigm was influential in developing a nuanced framework for measuring women's experiences in health issues. The reproductive health movement was the result of years of activism by women from the developing world drawing attention to injustices and discrimination they faced in the areas around sexuality and reproduction. Pressures from population policies, absence of health infrastructure to support childbirth, adolescent health, fertility, HIV/AIDs and other sexually transmitted diseases, legal and resource barriers to abortion and contraceptives, were among the issues that gained international notice. A measurement response was to include women's sexual and reproductive health among the attributes of development outcomes. The Reproductive Health Indicator (RHI) was constructed to capture this dimension – like the GDI and GEM, it is a composite measure and includes maternal mortality, maternal literacy, number of births and child mortality. However, beyond quantitative measures, the reproductive health paradigm also raised awareness of areas that had previously not been considered as central to development – domestic violence, reproductive security (especially in areas of conflict) and reproductive autonomy.

"women in Kerala are still having extraordinary achievements (and opportunities) in literacy, sex ratios, maternal mortality, number of children"

Whilst the measurement of women's development achievements have improved over time, they are far from perfect in reflecting women's experiences in society. In the new millenium, for instance, Kerala is the highest-ranking state in India in terms of GDI, GEM and RHI. Translated, it means that women in Kerala are still having extraordinary achievements (and opportunities) in literacy, sex ratios, maternal mortality, number of children, etc. However, placed against the non-conventional criteria of 'agency', these ratings obscure some significant social realities over the past decades – that women in Kerala are less likely to be working, more likely to be unemployed, are weighed down by the widely spreading practice of dowry, have less control over resources such as land, less access to family inheritances, less likely to have autonomy in household decision making, and less likely to participate in formal political processes. Despite the laudable literacy levels, there has been no woman Chief Minister in the state, and most positions of power are held by men. There is also growing visibility of domestic violence, sexual crimes and mental ill-health among women. In the past five

years, there have been several high profile cases of forced prostitution and sexual harassment – all trends that point to the sexualisation of women in society. And sadly, the political mobilisation of women is compromised by the apathy of consumerism.

So then, can Kerala be upheld as a model of women's development achievements? That depends on what you measure.

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NZAid Gender Policy: Rights and Wrongs

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In February 2006, the Minister for NZAid approved a draft of the NZAID Policy 'Achieving Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment'. After Cabinet approval in March 2006, the draft has been released for public consultation. This is a welcome document as it updates the 1998 gender and development policy which predated the creation of NZAid. However, it also provides an important glimpse into how NZAid interprets the dynamics of global and local realities in the gendering of development concerns and especially how this affects the Pacific. The policy is rights based and uses a capability framework attempt to widen the extent of gender equality and women's empowerment by focussing primarily on education, primary health care, leadership, enhancing livelihoods and ensuring security. It recognises gender equality and poverty elimination are linked and notes this especially in the Pacific region. The introductory part of the policy identifies the Pacific as a region of particular interest to for NZAid because it 'shares a lot with its people' yet there is nothing specific in the actual Policy that directs any resources specifically to the Pacific.

The policy is clearly and unsurprisingly driven by the UN Millennium Development Goal (MDG) process, rather than the paradigm-shifting Cairo and Beijing processes. The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994 broke new ground by shifting concerns over rapid population growth away from demographic targets and the discourse of population control, and towards people-centred rights based approaches to family planning. Reproductive and sexual health and rights were clearly placed on the development agenda, but not without titanic struggles with religious fundamentalist lead by the Vatican (Sen and Batliwala 2000). A year later at the Fourth

World Conference on Women held in Beijing there was a consolidation of the notion that human rights are central to development discourse, and moreover that the 'human rights of women and the girl child are an integral part of universal human rights' (The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995). The UN Millennium Development Goal project attempted to 'distil the many and complex issues of the 1990's decade of UN Conferences into 8 marketable goals with 48 indicators to measure success' (Harcourt 2005, 2). Notably sexual and reproductive health and rights were left out.

Many critical feminist development activists, policy-makers and academics contributed to the UN Millennium Project 2005, *Taking Action* report, which sought to address this major oversight, and it is this document that underpins NZAid gender policy. Their strategic engagement with the MDG process and its template-like methodology should not however be misunderstood as a blanket endorsement.

The geopolitical landscape within which gender debates are currently situated has exposed new challenges. Neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism now combine in ways that economic justice and gender justice continue to require negotiation and protection (Sen 2005, Molyneux and Razavi 2005). Although there have been positive outcomes, like continued reaffirmation of commitments made at Cairo and Beijing, human rights are still under pressure. Greater attention needs to be paid to the global reconfiguration of the UN Reform process and the new UN Human Rights Council that will meet for the first time on June 19, 2006 in Geneva. While UN development work may continue to pay technical attention to the MDGs, fundamental women's rights issues will inevitably emerge in debates in Geneva.

The new NZAid gender policy has the potential to recognise this shifting terrain by providing a clear direction towards engaging with the gendered human rights aspect of poverty elimination. For example in the area of labour mobility, women and men are affected differently both as mobile temporary labourers and as the spouses of those who move. In the past New Zealand has played a critical role in progressive gender-aware human rights debates and this should not be underestimated as a critical gender and development activity. At the very least the policy needs to emphasis the interdependence of the MDGs, the fundamental role of Goal 3: to promote gender equality and empower women in achieving all other targets, and the specific role of sexual and reproductive rights, especially following the recent release of UN Millennium Project 2006 report on *Public Choice, Private Decisions: Sexual and Reproductive Health and the Millennium Development Goals*. This 2006 UN report is a direct response to the recognition by the UN that the targeted time frame for the MDGs diverts attention from achieving sexual and reproductive rights and health. Significantly though, the title of this report released in February 2006, lets the 'rights' language of Cairo and Beijing slip away. We must remain every vigilant of these non-innocent slippages. Fortunately the rights discourse is still echoed in the NZAid policy.

"we must be bold enough to name the new and the old issues that continue to disproportionately affect women"

However, there seems to be some confusion as to the driving framework of the NZAid gender policy. An introductory quote from the President of the World Bank suggests the poverty focus[2] while the use of Sen's capabilities approach elsewhere in the report suggests a broader understanding of development. In the post-UN Reform era, human rights will be the better driver for women's empowerment and gender equality. This is because at least through the Optional Protocol process of CEDAW,[3]

there are still possibilities for globally leveraging a clear place for women's rights to be upheld at the local level. A capabilities approach allows for broad-based economic growth that facilitates the expansion of capabilities which is markedly different to growth mediated development. NZAid needs to clarify which is the bigger driver of its policies.

The other global context that the policy could pay more attention to is the broad area of women in formal politics. Despite the recent ascendancy to power of a number of new women leaders in the developing countries of Liberia, Chile, and Jamaica, who did not arrive on the coat tails of their husbands or fathers, women's positions in formal governing structures is still far from equitable with men. This is especially the case in the Pacific with recent elections in the Solomon Islands and Fiji revealing how difficult it still is for women to be fully and democratically represented. Women's presence in regional and national roles is still lagging way behind yet they are the face of the development in the Pacific.

Sexual violence against women is still a daily tragedy for many women in all countries of the Pacific. And among young people 15–24 years of age, it is estimated that in 2005, 1.2 percent of women and 0.4 percent of men were living with HIV.[1] Taking centre stage more often these days, the debate over the HIV/Aids crisis rarely acknowledges that unless HIV prevention programmes are drastically and rapidly improved, the combination of wide-scale migration, extreme poverty and severe inequality between men and women (including high levels of sexual violence against women) will fuel the epidemic (ibid).

The opportunity to comment on this policy is a welcome opportunity for policy-makers, academics and activist to share feminist commitments to women's equality. But, it is the particular combinations of insights from these varied perspectives that provide the real impetus for transformative change. The gendered nature of development in 2006 cannot be underplayed and we must be bold enough to name the new and the old issues that continue to disproportionately affect women sexual violence, poverty, trafficking, prostitution, polygamy, abortion, education, health, social security, inheritance, incest ....

Notes

[1] http://www.unaids.org/en/Regions_Countries/Regions/Oceania.asp

[2] "Ignoring gender disparities comes at a great cost – to peoples well being, and to countries abilities to grow sustainably, to grow effectively, and thus to reduce poverty" Wolfensohn 2001.

[3] 'By ratifying the Optional Protocol, a State recognizes the competence of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) -- the body that monitors States parties' compliance with the Convention -- to receive and consider complaints from individuals or groups within its jurisdiction'. See http://www.un.org/womenwatch/ daw/cedaw/protocol/2000

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The Jamaican 'Higgler': Feminised Resistance in the Marketplace

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The historical presence of the 'higgler' (female trader) in the Jamaican economic sphere is imposing and constant. Defying any notion that the macro models of globalization are bereft of gender as a constitutive force (Freeman, 2001), the Jamaican higgler is instead the feminized figure of this phenomenon. For nearly two centuries she has come to embody a figure of black Afro-Caribbean womanhood in which size, strength, autonomy, physical movement, travel and business acumen are defining characteristics.

No longer merely a colourful rural peasant who trades in small-scale agricultural produce, the contemporary higgler is a 'big-time' (successful, socially mobile) urbanized entrepreneur. She is a dark-skinned Afro-Jamaican woman usually dressed in tight, revealing, garish costumes with large amounts of gold jewelry and elaborate hairstyles – a powerful counterpoint to the traditional conventions of Eurocentric beauty which obtains and is accepted in Jamaica. Her style of banter and mode of economic and political negotiation, embodied in demanding postures and loud statements, are crass and volcanic. This image of femininity is considered to be obscene, vulgar and unladylike. That she is defined less by 'Victorian' demure and 'respectability' and more by vivacity and local-ness means that the 'higgler' is ranked at the base of the colour-class-race and gender-coded organizing frame of post-colonial Jamaican society.

But what she has lost in 'respectability', she has gained in 'reputation'. Since the 1980s, Afro-Jamaican 'higglers' have been the promulgators of a new brand of female entrepreneurship. They have managed to expand significantly their traditional roles as local 'market intermediaries' of ground provisions to becoming medium and large-scale regional and international retailers. Higglers metamorphosed their self-made domestic operations by becoming active participants in a set of informal export/import activities. Networks of them travel together to neighbouring Caribbean islands (including Curacao, Panama, Bermuda and St. Martin) to purchase foreign goods for resale in the markets and shopping arcades across urban Jamaica. Others, having obtained non-immigrant visas to the United States, successfully extend their trading activities beyond both the rural-urban and regional locality to a more global context – by travelling to US metropolitan cities such as Miami and New York to purchase food, the latest clothing, fashion accessories and other consumer goods for resale to wholesalers, retailers and individuals (cf. Freeman, 2005 for a focus on Barbados).

The overwhelming material and symbolic 'success' of the 'neo-higgler' was officially recognized by the Jamaican government during this period by the (paradoxical) levying of customs duties and prescribed taxes on their activities and the reclassification of the titleship 'higglers' to 'Informal Commercial Importers' (ICIs). Clearly, resurrecting the economic and creative genius of historical slave women and paralleling their traditional agricultural counterparts (the so-called 'market higglers'), these 'neo-higglers' sought alternate sources of income

and symbolic empowerment within the economic structures of transnational marketisation and global free market capitalism.

Alongside these 'ICIs' there are other female traders engaged in similarly autonomous but much smaller-scale subsistence activities. They do not wear elaborate jewellery and the latest fashion. They are often unable, due to prohibitive costs, to travel on commercial airlines to large North American cities to buy goods for resale on the local market. Instead, they are itinerant street vendors who can be seen swarming the streets and markets of major Jamaican towns (May Pen, Mandeville, Santa Cruz, Lucea to St. Ann's Bay and Linstead), peddling (at much cheaper rates) a variety of consumer items – toiletries, cosmetics, cigarettes, rags, hats and belts. Many can also be found selling cold beverages, soups and snack items (peanuts, chips and lollipops) at public events.

Given the historical model of Caribbean livelihood, defined more by flux and movement than statis and sendentarism (Freeman, 2005), it is the public space of markets and streets in which the higgler also operates. Indeed, the urban poor often see the sidewalks/street pavements, bus stops, street intersections, shopping piazzas and/or storefronts as well as public parks, as providing the most favourable business opportunities. In the Downtown Kingston business district, these shopping places are to be found on King, Princess, Pechon, Tower, Barry, Beckford and Orange Streets. My own trek as a participant-observer through this bustling commercial district reveals huge tarpaulins hung across the road, creating ceilings for makeshift streetside shops, a plethora of either wooden or 'plastic bag' stalls sprawled on almost every corner, handcarts and 'mobile stalls' being pushed around to maximise sales and overstocked stationary kiosks parked in open spaces or perched on the flanks of and/or inside the St. William Grant Park. Crowds of women, (as well as men and child vendors) line the pavements, some with carton boxes with assorted items tagged to the sides or open suitcases revealing the latest jeans and shoes. Others carry huge bags loaded with goods, buckets (with juice, water) on their heads, or in their hands, which allows for roving to and from different trading spaces.

"This image of femininity is considered to be obscene, vulgar and unladylike"

No doubt, the streets and sidewalks of urban Jamaica have been transformed into 'vibrant and colourful shopping places' (Bayat, 1997). But the street is more. It is the public space where Afro-Jamaican higglers assemble, make friends, earn a living, spend their leisure and express their discontent. The street provides the context for social/civic engagement, it is the locus of collective struggle and expression for these urban poor women and the political platform upon which they mount popular resistance against the encroachment of the Jamaican State. In fact, for nearly fifteen years, armies of small-scale vendors, hustlers and 'higglers' have acted in defiance of efforts by the Jamaican State to remove them from streets, sidewalks, intersections, piazzas and storefronts or urban areas into what many believe to be unsafe, decrepit, un-lucrative selling arcades. Using 'everyday', low-profile, silent and concealed protest narratives and practices, as well as open collective disturbances, a powerful network of informal women traders (supported by a large contingent of the male constituents of this poor and marginalized sector) have united in popular resistance to defend their way of life.

By employing the impressively inventive and effective tools of 'anancyism'[1], and/or 'cat and mouse games', Afro-Jamaican street vendors and higglers have managed to persistently outwit and outmanoeuvre the state authorities – the police and Metropolitan Parks and Markets (MPM) – marshalled to drive them off the streets. For example, determined to cash in on the lucrative market of the street but wanting to feign compliance by appearing to obey removal orders, vendors would obediently clear off the streets and abandon trading on piazzas and store fronts, in accordance with instructions from the local political body, Kingston and St. Andrew Corporation (KSAC) but return the next day to sneakily peddle their goods and continue with business as usual. Rather than compete with each other for profit opportunities, sellers also network with each other to devise even more clever ways of deceiving the authorities. Many itinerant traders, for instance, artfully store their goods in the passageways that run between large retail stores and buildings and peddle them in small portions on the streets.

It is worth noting that consumers, particularly keen shoppers and bargain hunters, also understand the language and politics of illegal vending and are themselves unwittingly absorbed as active participants and facilitators in these counter-hegemonic practices of resistance. A news report published in the *Jamaica Gleaner* in 2001 reveals that 'costumers of shoe and belt vendors who are willing, lounge beside the more expensive stores, while their correct sizes are quickly sought by eager sellers in an alley a few metres away. [In order to avoid being caught], watchmen are employed to shout when the authorities, usually clad in blue, approach. Cries of "MPM, MPM" [Metropolitan Parks and Markets] elicit swift movement and the crowded streets are cleared in minutes.'

These resistance strategies of 'false compliance' and/or 'passive non-compliance' (Scott, 1985) means that Jamaican male and female vendors' have developed the empowering capacity to 'call the bluff' of the authorities and escape penalty. Through this collective resistance -response tactic, they thereby reinforce their dominance of the street and underline their customary rights and usage of this public space while weakening the ability of the state to enforce its removal policy and invoke its 'rule of law'. Afro-Jamaican women traders, like their historical counterparts in the struggles against British slavery, also tend to become involved in more militant resistance campaigns, explicitly combative and violent. These include mounting hostile street demonstrations and administering a succession of 'shut downs' of the Downtown Kingston commercial district. For example, in 1999, vendors (both male and female) collectively defied the police and officers from Metropolitan Parks and Markets (MPM) who were enforcing the government's 'Vendor Removal Action Plan' by physically hauling down the shutters of some competitor stores in the business district. 'If we cyaan [cannot] sell, then no body will sell' was their rallying cry (*Jamaica Gleaner*, 1999, December 22).

"Afro-Jamaican female higglers are learning the importance and potency of unity"

Again in 2001, following the refusal of authorities to allow vendors to off-load their goods for sale in prohibited areas, hundreds of angry street vendors, led by mostly female traders, prompted the closure of several businesses through aggressive demonstrations, which effectively ground to a halt all commercial activity in the city. Spurred on by a powerful network of higglers, these empowered 'informals' bore placards and chanted 'no seller, no

store'. In symbolic assertion of their right to 'justice' and, in recognition of their 'moral economy' viz. a. viz. these very streets on which they earn their food, they marched in procession on Beckford Street, strutting past members of the security forces in a ritualized challenge to their authority (see *Jamaica Gleaner*, 2001, November 20).

There is widespread agreement that 'participation in social protests raises the political consciousness of women, sometimes, but not always contributing to a revised view of their subordinate status in society' (West & Blumberg, 1990:31). Jamaican women have always challenged traditional views of poverty. For centuries, Afro-Jamaican women have been mobilizing hundreds of their colleagues in the streets in popular collective struggles aimed at resisting encroachments on their livelihood by super-ordinate groups, including the Jamaican state. These informal processes undoubtedly hold potentially transformative effects for those engaged in them. Primarily, the informal economy, in a context of capitalism and the free-market, is facilitating small-scale entrepreneurship and hence a thriving source of income and a better way of life for a vast number of disadvantaged and marginalized women, who are unable to claim real access to resources through the formalised, recognised channels of society. In other words, through free enterprise, higgler women are offered a range of social and political resources which allows them to realise some 'success' and 'social betterment' even within the otherwise confining socio-economic structures of the Jamaican society.

The informal economy, as an informal space of social engagement and political negotiation, also creates the enabling environment for their protest participation/ involvement. In this regard, the power of the street demonstration offers higglers real weapons by which to launch a counter-war against the encroachments of the Jamaican State and other super-ordinate groups and structures. Therefore, while ICIs and higglers retain an interdependency with global capitalism in their quest to survive poverty and improve their social standing, they simultaneously utilise the political/ cultural arena of the street to physically, materially, and symbolically struggle against the efforts to deny them this way of life. Within this process of struggle, Afro-Jamaican female higglers are learning the importance and potency of unity – networking, supporting each other and acting together in opposition to a common enemy, the Jamaican State as embodied in the police and removal officers of Metropolitan Parks and Markets. Rather than passive victims, they are increasingly recognised as empowered actors. Their confidence has also increased enormously as they realize both the power of protest and their political significance.

Notes

[1] 'Anancy' is a colourful and imposing character in Jamaican mythology and folklore. Caricatured as an insect identical to the spider, Anancy symbolises trickery and is celebrated for his gimmicks, cunning and ingenuity in finding loopholes in or 'beating' (dodge, skirt, elude) the system.

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Invisible Subjects: Exclusion of African Women in Print News Media

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That women of the so-called developing world perform two thirds of the world's labour, yet own less than one percent of the world's property, perform seventy to eighty percent of domestic farm labour, yet remain largely uncompensated, and produce more than half the food generated in these countries, yet make have the poorest nutritional status, are facts well documented (UNESCO, 1995; FAO, 2005; Global Links, nd; Gordon, 1996). African women who have paid jobs earn an average of 15 to 30 percent less than their male counterparts, make up less than six percent of African parliamentarians while 56 percent of African women remain illiterate (Made, 1995).

As a social and economic institution, the media is no less culpable in contributing to existing and growing inequalities between African men and women. According to Made, (1995) 'the media help to perpetuate this situation by gender stereotyping and negative portrayal of women' (p. 21). A content analysis of news stories produced by the Pan African News Agency (PANA) carried out in November 2005, reveals consistencies with these claims. Not only were women marginally represented in news stories, the stories in which they did appear relegated them to background voices and so called 'gender issues' were vaguely defined. Issues such as health, education, violence against women and nutritional status were under-represented. In addition, women were spoken about as against being heard and those voices that we do hear are those of 'great' African women who do not represent the majority. These trends in the coverage of news have implications for development primarily because media present '*ways* of representing, seeing, and thinking about reality' (Grossberg, Wartella and Whitney, 1998, p.183) which have clear ideological implications. The non-representation of women in the news produces and perpetuates the image of women as invisible subjects, which undermines development given that it is their very visibility/inclusion that is necessary to create sustainable development strategies.

The significance of the exclusion of women from the news in the African context lies in the effect of mass media on human consciousness and subsequently, action. It is noted among scholars that the media have its greatest effect on its audience when reinforcing and channelling existing attitudes and opinions that are consistent with the 'psychological makeup of individuals and the social structure of the groups with which they identify' (Wilson, et al, 2003, p.47). Existing attitudes towards women are shaped by patriarchy, which has constructed a 'feminine' identity that construes women as non-competitive, dependent, weak and objectified. This is what the media depicts, thereby reinforcing and channelling the opinions that are consistent with the social structure.

At the heart of the marginalisation of women in the news is the power of discourse as well as discourses of power. Discourse is the domain of power. This means that power is inevitably constructed and

articulated through discursive means (Foucault, 1984). Discourse becomes political, as it is the bases upon which society is organised and power distributed within said society. Consequently, the group that controls the discourse will be the shaper of reality. Within the African context, as within many others, the discourse is patriarchal. The control that patriarchy has over discourse engenders a denial of representation from and silences the oppositional other, which in this case is woman. As Cixous (1980) mentions, 'woman has always functioned "within" the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sounds' (p. 257).

A concomitant of this denial of female speech is the silencing of female experience. Hence, it is no surprise that women are denied voice/speech in the news media, especially given that said media are owned and controlled by men (UNESCO, 1994). Fair (1996) puts it eloquently when she argues that, '[women's] exclusion as news sources is part of the way ruling is carried out in public discourses where accounts of "what happened" or "what is" must fit textual realities routinised by dominant (androcentric) social relations' (p. 19). Discourse and representations (or the lack thereof) are means of power and reflections of power and those in control of the discourse will determine who gets seen or heard.

The data examined comprised news stories gathered by the Pan African News Agency (PANA) from North, Southern, West and East African countries within a six-month period, June 2005 to December 2005. PANA was chosen as the source because of its presence in most African states and its ability to provide stories from multiple locations. A somewhat comprehensive view of how women were treated in the news across the continent could therefore be had. Approximately 152 headlines were examined and fifty-two stories read in depth in the categories of gender, agriculture and politics. These categories were selected because of the researcher's perception that they are highly relevant to development issues as they affect women.

In total, the gender category had 51 stories. Fourteen were sub-categorised as politics, seven under violence and human rights abuse, ten under equality, four under career, two under education and one under health. The remainder were categorised as miscellaneous they did not fall within any of the established sub-categories. As the data suggests, there is a preponderance of stories about women and politics. While this may seem positive, a closer examination reveals that in many of these instances, women are being *spoken about*, not *telling* their own stories. For instance, the story titled 'Wade urges greater political commitment from women' reads, 'Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade said Friday in Dakar that he would like to see more women involvement in the political arena so that they could gain access to their country's highest decisions-making bodies' (PANA, Dakar, Senegal, 14/10/2005). While President Wade's sentiments are commendable, and are even lauded by female political leaders, he is speaking on behalf women whose on-the-ground, experiential input we do not hear. However, more significantly, the dominance of news stories in the political sub-category is reflective of media trend to feature those they consider to be prominent and powerful. According to Made (1995), the people who appear on the front pages or who are the subjects of news stories are people who occupy positions of power. Most African women do not fall within this category; hence we are not necessarily hearing the voices of the majority of the population. Another concern about construct of the 'great' female politician or public figure is that ironically, it serves to silence even these women. As exceptional women, women are recognised within a specific mode of female visibility. So-called exceptional women are treated as the 'great minority', the atypical female, which furthers the assumption that the majority of women cannot rival male accom-

plishments. Such a view also gives the impression that such women are motivated by the desire to parallel the record of male achievement.

Within the category of agriculture, there were 51 stories in all. Twenty-one of those stories fell within the sub-category of international aid, eight within disease/pest threat to crops/livestock, ten within innovations, five within economic corporation and sanctions and three within sales. Of all these stories, women never appear as the subjects of any headlines, neither are their contributions to food production mentioned. Stories also tend to focus on the activities of large-scale commercial farming, excluding the activities and concerns of women who tend to engage in small-scale farming.

That the majority of stories fall within the international aid sub-section is also telling as it is the male population of the agricultural sector that tends to benefit most such international intervention. For example, only five percent of the resources provided through extension services are available to women. In addition, women's already limited access to resources is further constrained by the low priority given to the subsistence or small farming sector in which the majority are found (http://www.fao.org). Their invisibility in the media is reflected in an FAO report, which coins African women as 'invisible' producers (FAO, 1997).

The innovative strategies of women farmers, 80 to 98 percent of whom engage in subsistence farming, are notably absent from subcategory of innovations. It is well documented that, in order to sustain food/agricultural production under exiguous conditions, women have resorted to many creative strategies, one of which is the creation of informal savings groups which provide access to cash needed for farm production (Nweze, 2005). To combat such invisibility, Grieco and Apt argue for a gendered approach to agricultural policy in Africa, which includes the systematic inclusion of local voice. This approach should also be extended to news media regarding their coverage of agricultural news items. The future of Africa's food security rests in the hands of the producers of food and their exclusion from the public discourse portends dire consequences for future development.

"Despite only occupying approximately six percent of African parliamentary seats, it cannot be denied that women have been gaining footholds in the political arena."

In the final category of politics there were ten stories under the sub-category of corruption and human rights, 17 under international bilateral agreements and 14 under election and governance. The remainder fell in the miscellaneous category as they did fit the generated sub-groups. The majority of the stories within this category all featured men or international organisations as the subjects of news. The men were either heads of states, foreign ministers or heads of organizations. What this suggests is that women do not hold such high level leadership positions and when they do, it is not deemed news worthy as their absence in news coverage indicates. Despite only occupying approximately six percent of African parliamentary seats, it cannot be denied that women have been gaining footholds in the political arena. For example, in South Africa, one third of all parliamentary seats are reserved for women and in Rwanda, women make up 49 percent of the national assembly.

However, these trends are not reflected in the news stories examined under this heading. Where women appear in politics is in the category of gender, making it a 'special'

issue and so giving the impression that such women are atypical as mentioned above. For instance, a story about the new Liberian Prime Minister, Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, detailing her election win, appears in the heading of 'gender'. There are no stories about female leaders in the political category, despite the majority of stories in the section referring to heads of states. While it may be useful to place matters affecting women under a special category for the sake of policy making, it ceases to be beneficial when this category becomes imprisoning.

While dominant forces in media tend to resist change, particularly regarding ownership and control of media sources, the catalyst for change lies within the media itself. That is to say, if the absence of women in news media is to be redressed, women themselves will have to start being owners and operators of news media. As a UNESCO report (1994), states, 'there have to be more women in the newspaper industry' (p.9). If the dynamic of owner shifts, so does the discourse that constructs social reality. Women will gain greater control over the construction of their own identities and realities and be in a better position to help shape the destiny of their development. Of course this is easier said than done given the high drop out rate of not only female media practitioners, but also those who start their own operations. There are obstacles such as money and training. However, it is certainly not unattainable as there are women entrepreneurs in the news industry who are determined to shift the power relations. Several of them have been coming together in a workshop geared towards enhancing the credibility, viability *and visibility* of women's journalism (UNESCO, 1994). They are determined to claim their place in continent's emerging independent media.

"If the absence of women in news media is to be redressed, women themselves will have to start being owners and operators of news media."

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