

IT for Change

Bengaluru

Abstracts for 'Feminist Visions of the Network Society'

IT for Change and Zubaan Books

March, 2013

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1. Two paths to civic engagement: A study of women NGOs and ICTs in China

Ip lam Chong and Lam Oi Wan

The path of feminist politics in Communist China is characterised by paradox and contradiction. As early as the 1930s, the Chinese Communist Party had included women's liberation into its revolutionary agenda. The All-China Democratic Women's Federation, predecessor of the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), was established in 1949 when the Communists founded the People's Republic of China. However, under the totalitarian system of Mao's China, there was almost no room for feminist groups to engage in women's rights activism outside ACWF, the largest and most powerful women's organisation in the country.

Even in the post-Mao period, civic organisations and activities are still subject to harsh restriction. Interestingly enough, the authorities have been increasingly paying lip service to the idea of independent women's NGOs and their significance, since the mid-1990s. The ACWF, supported and controlled by the party state, is still the strongest player among women organisations. Paradoxically, the incipient nature of independent feminist groups in China provides a favourable condition for dynamic and political use of the Internet and other ICTs by small groups, informal networks and individual feminists. The impact of technology and new media space is thus mediated by the local political and institutional environment.

This paper is derived from our fieldwork in Guangzhou, a city of South China. It argues that ACWF, caught in its organisational inertia and political affiliation, finds it increasingly difficult to face the challenges of new technologies and media. Despite its efforts and rich resources, its work is largely constrained by the official line of the ruling party. On the other hand, the Internet facilitates a loose network for non-affiliated feminists and women activists to get around media censorship and political supervision. It substitutes formal organisations with a series of flexible platforms for making connections with the civil right movement. They cannot be easily identified by the authority as the target for crackdown. Technological advances also provide a powerful weapon for non-affiliated feminists to be at the forefront of struggles for gender equality and women's rights.

2. Big brother is earning: Gendered dimensions of digital spaces and their exploitation

Heike Jensen

Over the past twenty years, digital information and communication technologies (ICTs) have structurally altered the forms of public exchange and political organising that people may engage in. However, these shifts in the potential exercising of citizenship rights can only be considered side-effects of a global ICT development and diffusion that squarely follows the dominant logic of market capitalism, seeking to address people as consumers and users, and not as citizens. The neo-liberal business logics and models of revenue generation that have become prevalent, particularly in the social networking spaces defining Web 2.0 but also in the recently spreading world of 'apps', erode privacy, since the commercial exploitation of people's data trails or electronic footprints lies at their core.

So what does it mean if people's political actions are transformed under such conditions? As always, it is useful to address this question with a gender-sensitive approach, because women's and men's relationships with commercial and governmental forces as well as their relationships to surveillance and media have always differed structurally. In particular, ideologies of gender as related to sexuality and morality have played a decisive role with respect to the opportunities and boundaries that have characterised women's and men's experiences in these contexts. Sexuality and morality are at the root of any system of social stratification, which explains the high stakes that every person and every institution up to, and including, the nation-state has, in its normative elaboration, contestation or policing. Gender hierarchies, misogyny and sexual violence, hetero-normativity and ideologies of race, class and the nation all coalesce in these struggles over sexuality and morality.

When comparing experiences in the global North with those in the global South, several issues need to be pursued in these respects, most notably the nature of each public sphere, the concepts or ideologies of privacy, the relationships of citizens to the state and of consumers to the market, and the relationship between North and South regarding public and private forces. How do women's public interventions, particularly in the areas of sexuality and morality, play out under these differing conditions? What political and economic opportunities and challenges can be traced and need to be tackled? These are the kinds of issues and questions that I propose to address.

3. Re-framing empowerment

Andrea Cornwall and Tessa Lewin

This chapter will reflect on the use of digital media in activist research on women's empowerment to challenge stereotypes, open up societal debates on 'difficult' and controversial topics, provoke indignation and stimulate new imaginaries of empowerment. It will explore the use of digital media as a means of engaging researchers and activists in processes that can in themselves be empowering. Drawing on examples from Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Egypt, Ghana and Sierra Leone, it will examine the potential of digital media for expanding the possibilities for the exercise of citizenship and expression of agency in the process of co-production of outputs destined for engagement with broader publics. In doing so, the chapter will explore the implications of these forms of engagement for thinking about digital citizenships and for the interplay between different expressions and modes of activism.

4. Caring about strangers: Internet groups and the distance between fictional and actual activism

Hania Sholkamy

In *Still Life* (2011), Moore discusses the production of hopes and desires in globalised tracks that defy hierarchies of centre and periphery and endow individuals with opportunities and possibilities to shape their own worlds and those of others. Her observations transcend the simplistic engagements of analysts with hope and imagination as aspects of human life and sociality as they question the scope and significance of reality, of the possible and of the nature and experiential meaning of social change. This paper engages with the social constructions of imagination, desire and hope in the creation and effect of radical change. The revolution of Egypt was not an Internet invention or instigation but was a manifestation of growing interactions and groups formations online that created a sense of solidarity, common purpose and a way of being in the world. Online groups are akin to social movements in some ways and very different in others. These groups may be significant in size although minimal in their impact or action. But they have offered participants a sense of identity that breaches the realms of the real and the virtual. The paper will consider some feminist and youth online groups and their roles in effecting social change through action. The paper will engage with suggestive meaning, symbols, abstractions and mediated social interactions to discuss the future of activism as a potent force for change, and as a self-limiting phenomenon.

5. Who invented what? The invisibility of women in technology development

Graciela Baroni Selaimen

A couple of weeks ago an article in the New York Times (re)boosted the debate about the role of women in the development of the Internet – and, in a more broader perspective, in the development of technology. The article, written by David Streitfeld, instigated passionate reactions mainly due to its first line:

MEN invented the Internet. And not just any men. Men with pocket protectors. Men who idolized Mr. Spock and cried when Steve Jobs died. Nerds. Geeks. Give them their due. Without men, we would never know what our friends were doing five minutes ago.

This kind of argument, although injurious, is not completely deleterious. It's obtuseness helps to revamp a discussion that should remain alive - and perhaps it serves to foster deeper, critical investigation and reevaluation of the stories that feed the mainstream views on the participation of men and women in the development of technology, as well as the role of women in science and technology.

It is a fact that in this field, women have been experimenting two forms of negation: in one of them, the male character is highlighted in detriment of the woman character – in this case, the history of science and technology in the past centuries has constructed a pantheon of male 'heroes' where women such as Ada Lovelace, Grace Hopper, Mae Jemison, Sophie Germain – among many others – are totally absent. Another strategy of negation is the transmission of stories where the collective is the main character – stories told in the plural form, where language is used in such a way that the representation of the collective is condensed in the figure of the virtuous male individual. In this case, women are invisible as subjects, their identities stolen in favour of a male-centered representation of “the group”.

In this chapter, we aim to explore the concept of technology – as a thinking process that presents solutions to contextual problems, built on historic, geographic, cultural, economic and ideological representations. Moreover, we intend to analyse how world views are made real by the tools and routines produced by technology, creating habits that conform, in the end, the organisational behaviour of a community, an enterprise, a society. By evidencing how technology imposes an architecture, an order to action and thought, disciplining or controlling the flows of bodies and minds, we expect to build our argument that the predominant rhetoric on technology development as a male universe aims to dis-empower women and distance them from this place of construction of world views. The chapter also aims to offer an argument stressing the centrality of women's take-over of the development of technological tools and structures that impact their lives, questioning the current prevailing discourses of technological neutrality.

6. 'Invited spaces' and 'invented spaces': Transforming descriptive representation to substantive representation among women presidents at the local-level in Kerala, India

Binitha V. Thampi, Aarti Kawlra and J. Devika

Political decentralisation in India has offered women opportunities to engage with and appropriate positions in formal politics, an arena from which they have been hitherto marginalised. In the South-western state of Kerala, reservation for women in local governance has gone up to 50% and has been accompanied by state-led efforts in mainstreaming gender at the local *panchayat* level through a variety of politico-administrative and developmental programmes such as the Women's Component Plan (mandatory allocation of 10% of total plan funds exclusively for women), gender training etc. These initiatives testify to the Kerala state's commitment to enhancing women's *de jure* participation in local self-governance; however, this has not resulted in the transformation of their political subjectivities and exercise of power on the ground (Williams et.al., 2011). Can the gender main-streaming project of the government of Kerala, therefore, be used as an opportunity to further a decidedly (unequivocally) feminist politics in the state?

The feminist imperative of politicisation at the grass roots level is also meant to address the often raised criticism against women's groups in Kerala, both from within and outside, with regard to their inability to connect with women from the grassroots, although there have been a few experiments to organise marginalised women such as fish workers in the informal sector. Moreover, given the current euphoria and promise of gender mainstreaming through varied women focused self-help group programmes like *Kudumbashree*, where the demarcation between developmentalism and political activism is rather blurred, there is a real danger of depoliticising local politics by surrendering to a developmentalist state's deployment of women as agents of micro-level developmental activism. It is important therefore to re-examine both developmentalism and local political activism through a feminist lens in order to re-politicise them.

An expanded notion of feminist politics must therefore, following Miraftab (2004), revitalise 'invited spaces'¹ for the practice of citizenship at the grass-roots. She suggests the creation of an 'invented space' as its counterpart whose mutual constitution and interplay may enable women's articulation of their collective politics and the reclamation of their citizenship rights by direct confrontation and questioning of the patriarchal status quo (Miraftab, 2004:1). From the perspective of a feminist politics then, it is in the interaction and movement between these spaces of invitation *and* invention, that the practice of citizenship becomes politically effective. We present the case of *Gramamukya*, a web-based platform and digital network, here as a potential 'invented space' for political mobilisation and solidarity building among women *panchayat* presidents in Kerala.

¹We employ Cornwall's (2002) and Mirabeau's (2004) formulation of 'invited spaces' to refer to the state provided legitimate spaces for the participation and practice of democratic citizenship.

Through a discussion of the rationale for building *Gramamukhya* in this paper we raise the question of *how* technology can be appropriated for feminist goals. The global feminist rights based approach to information and communication technologies (ICT's) has viewed the potential of digital technologies as being able to give voice to women often in 'transgressive spaces' that they can call as their own, for citizenship, in countries in the Third World. But unless women are truly empowered to define the conditions under which they interact online and to form meaningful trans-local alliances towards transforming their personal and political contexts, the mere access to and use of ICT's does not amount to a feminist appropriation of technology. Furthermore, the recognition of heterogeneity amidst commonalities of interest in feminist praxis has meant the creation of a communication network of women engaging in politics at various levels, building solidarity by "working together continuously across our differences" (Narayan, 1988).

In this paper we show how www.gramamukhya.in was envisioned as an 'invented space' of collective deliberation and solidarity building at two levels. At the horizontal level, the platform brings together both serving and former women presidents from local self-governing bodies of three districts in Kerala - Thiruvananthapuram, Malappuram and Kannur. At the vertical level, the engagement is with feminist activists, scholars and collectives, women centric quasi-government meso-level institutions, women writers and diasporic migrant women workers. Developed in the local language (Malayalam), the website features three main sections or modules for its users. 'Knowledge Creation and Information Sharing' (*Arividam*) deals with matters specifically related to governance while the 'Discussion Forum' (*Charchavedi*) and 'Writer's Blog' (*Ezhuthidam*) are associated with wider public life and mutually reinforce its members' individual and collective articulations and subjectivities for personal transformation and exercise of agency in multiple arenas.

Our paper is a methodological exercise in exploring the possibility of *Gramamukhya*, as a feminist space for networking and solidarity building among women from different backgrounds, united in their opposition to structures of patriarchy. It is a feminist vision in the network society that not only aims to reinstate the gender lens currently shadowed within the mainstreaming discourse but also to engender new meanings to strategies of empowerment and politicisation devised for specific contexts. It addresses the feminist critique of top-down narratives of ICTs for development while aiming to create a dialogic communication community together with the possibility of the online meeting the offline within a newly emergent, technologically mediated, form and practice for exercising citizenship rights.

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7. Mainstream Media and the Feminist agenda in Network society

Maesy Angelina

As posited by Manuel Castells (2007, 2009), one of the main characteristics of the network society is the extended understanding of public space from being limited to the physical 'space of places' to include the 'space of flows', the communication models mediated by Internet technologies. The influence of this understanding can be seen in scholarly discussions on Internet technologies and feminist action, which have shifted from early tendencies to treat 'the virtual' and the 'the real' as separate spaces into acknowledging the interaction between the physical and cyber as an inseparable realm (Gurumurthy, 2012).

Studies of the latter kind mostly explore how Internet technologies are used for organising action or how web 2.0 constitutes the new public sphere, but there are very few studies that include the role of mainstream media in the network society. Mainstream media is generally acknowledged as an important site of action because it "constitutes the space where power is decided in the network society" (Castells, 2009:242) and can serve to reach a wider group of citizens excluded from Internet technologies due to the digital divide, especially in the Global South context. However, the discussion is usually framed with the coverage of an issue or action in the mainstream media as a goal and revolves around the tactics employed to achieve it. This frame suggests linearity between web 2.0 as a space for alternative discourse making and the transfer of this counter discourse to the mainstream media.

In this essay, I would like to argue that a more critical analysis of the mainstream media and its relationship with web 2.0 as a potential alternative public sphere is crucial to reflect on the strategies of feminist action in the network society. Problematising the mainstream media as a site for feminist discursive action is especially crucial in the context of Indonesia, where the hype about democratised media after the end of 32 years of authoritarian regime is dwindling, as the corporate oligopoly of media ownership emerges (Lim, 2011; Nugroho, Siregar, and Laksmi, 2012). In this context, web 2.0 is often discussed as a genuine space for democratic expression given its prolific user base² and in the light of some cases of social media based citizen action being successful in capturing mainstream media attention and affecting change. Yet, a recent study (Lim, 2011) highlighted that, by and large, the content of discussion in social media mimics the discourses in the mainstream media. This raises questions on the strategy of alternative discourse formation through social media.

This essay will scrutinise a discursive action modality that I am calling 'reactionary resistance' that is quite often employed as a strategy for action in the Indonesian context. Reactionary resistance is the immediate collective expression of dissent of a case of injustice in the composite spaces of social media, physical public

²Indonesia is the third largest Twitter content producer after Brazil and the U.S. (Lim, 2011)

space, and the mainstream media. I would like to contrast two cases of reactionary resistance, a successful public campaign to defend wrongfully detained members of the Corruption Eradication Commission³ versus a far less successful series of protests on violence in the name of religion against minority groups⁴. The essay will analyse the strategies employed, the kind of discourses created, outcomes; identify why the cases differ in terms of success, and end with a reflection from the cases for the implications for a feminist agenda for action in the network society.

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³Also known as the *Cicak Buaya* case.

⁴The focus of the case study is the protests known as #SeninHitam (Black Monday) and #SomasiPolisi (Class Action against the Police Force).

8. The Power to Organise and Engage: The Use of ICTs to promote domestic workers' labour rights

Kate Lappin

(Asia Pacific Forum on Women Law and Development)

Domestic workers are recruited from overseas to do such work that other citizens are disinclined to perform; to care, clean and cook. Such work is carried out in the employers' house and many migrant domestic workers are required to live-in, in countries such as Hong Kong and the Middle East. Live in domestic workers have a greater difficulty in forming social or support networks or being involved in collective action. The fact that almost every worker also has separate employers and workplaces also means that it is much more difficult to organise domestic workers than those who work together in factories under the same employer. This leaves migrant domestic workers invisible and isolated.

New technologies have, however, transformed collective organising and the way assembly, association, solidarity and action happen, particularly for migrant workers. A survey of Filipino and Indonesian women migrant domestic workers was carried out in Taiwan and Hong Kong in 2011. The results of the survey showed that 100% of domestic workers in Hong Kong and 82% in Taiwan have a mobile phone, and most of them already use it to get information and to contact groups and organisations. Furthermore, in Hong Kong 69% , and 42% of groups and organisations in Taiwan, thought that calls and text messages were the most effective method for organising domestic workers.

In countries where migrant workers and women migrant domestic workers in particular continue to be routinely excluded from both the public sphere and from engagement with the state, without protection of their rights, organising is difficult at best. This is where ICT can bridge the gap between the isolated workers and the groups and organisations which can represent their interests to the state. What this means is that even if a domestic worker does not have days off and rarely leaves the employers' household, she can potentially stay informed on the movement, be aware of policy changes, get regular news, add her name to petitions, and keep others updated on her situation. She can do this through text messages, call, emails and social media on her mobile phone. It also enables her to easily connect with others in the offline world when she is able to take time off and escape the employers' household.

Restrictions on these online and offline connections are often put in place by the employers themselves, but states could also potentially intervene as migrant workers become more organised and strengthened in their movements. To counter attack this potential threat, international law and rights frameworks can be invoked to secure access to technology as a lifeline for women migrant domestic workers.

9. New Media Technologies, Young Women's Agencies and Transformative Politics in South Africa

Desiree Lewis

In the global South, neo-liberalism and many governments' decreasing support for progressive NGOs and women's movements have posed new challenges for postcolonial feminist consciousness, mobilizing and action. In South Africa, after two decades of democracy, the community and national organisations that flourished shortly before and after the downfall of apartheid have become less and less active, weakened by struggles for state and donor funding, but also undermined by patriarchal nationalism and global capitalism. This chapter explores the potential of the energies of young women in post-apartheid South Africa, showing how their uses of ICTs often open up new possibilities for feminist intellectual activism and agency. The chapter seeks to show that their innovative approaches to communication, association and self-definition through the use of social media and digital tools gesture towards new forms and content for feminist transformative politics.

The chapter deals with two related arguments: at one level, it draws on the views of several influential intellectual activists who affirm the imaginative and productive meanings of radical politics in the present day. Rather than endorsing ways in which radical politics simply responds to an oppressive status quo, these thinkers advocate how progressive politics can actively envisage alternative futures.

At another level, a connected argument is that the uses of mobile and digital media among many young women in contemporary South Africa reflects their efforts to open up new spaces for feminist association, networking and knowledge production by extending possibilities for both identity politics and the politics of social transformation.

In a book published in 2006, Patricia Hill Collins describes the emergence of a new generation of young black feminists in the US, who use the resources of popular and commodity culture to define agendas for change. Collins' work precedes the massive transformations to communicative systems in recent years, transformations which have profoundly affected socially marginalised young people

in South Africa, despite the digital divide. While much of this communication focuses on entertainment and self-expression, much of it is linked to broader explorations of how personal experiences are politicised. In many ways, then, the widespread use of social media among many young women creates opportunities for the “personal” and daily communication that more traditional forms of mobilising and action tend to neglect. It will be shown that new opportunities for consciousness raising and identity politics can offer crucial routes into transformative politics among young South African women.

In a recent issue of *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action*, (2010), Max Heiven and Alex Khasnabitch, focus on a pivotal emerging theme in global radical thought by affirming the role of desire, imagining and creativity in radical politics. From the start of the new millennium, this emphasis has steadily intensified, having been raised by feminists in the global North such as Nancy Fraser, by Jacqui Alexander and other postcolonial feminists, and by African feminists including Patricia Mcfadden and Charmaine Pereira. This affirmation of the imagination counters what Stephen Duncombe describes as the debilitating pragmatism of much post-Enlightenment progressive thought. As he states, within this thought the realm of dreams, imagining and symbolism is almost automatically seen as suspect, reactionary or obfuscatory.

The new interest in radical notions of desire and utopia for Fraser and other feminists, queer theorists such as Jose Munoz, and postcolonial critics of globalisation such as Arundhati Roy therefore retrieve dreams, spectacle, envisaged possibilities and symbolism from their reactionary function in conservative myth-making. It is a central argument of this chapter that new information and communications systems in South Africa, which yield abundant scope for inventive audio, textual and visual creativity, open up many of the possibilities identified by certain progressive thinkers.

The chapter focuses on the use of digital media among a group which seems especially marginalised by connected systems of class, race and gender. The paper deals both with individuals and with groups, using participant observation and field work to identify the various strategies and tools used among young women in the Western Cape.

The chapter’s case studies will focus especially on the following:

The use of Facebook in young women's crafting of subjectivities and crafting of political discourse. Young women's use of images, text messages and abbreviated messaging through Facebook often suggests unmediated and naïve responses. At the same time, these images and instant messages often generate astute responses both to communal and national processes that affect young women's lives. Facebook also provides young women with opportunities to visualise themselves in relation to others, prompting them to critique and understand their challenging worlds.

The use of mobile phones: A recent study of mobile phones as the "new talking drums of Africa" indicates that connectivity is in some ways replacing mobility – especially for young women whose mobility is constrained by class, age and gender. Young women's vulnerabilities in public spaces has become increasingly pronounced with the threat of violence reducing their scope for mobilisation and action. The chapter considers how young women have used mobile phones for alternative forms of mobilising, information sharing and support, focusing especially on how these strategies are not simply reactive responses to injustice and oppression, but radically different ways of defining "being" in the world.

10. Gender and Labour Citizenship in the Information Society: Insights from Women's Enterprise and IT Programmes in India

Lisa McLaughlin, USA and Anita Gurumurthy, India

This chapter focuses on gender and labour citizenship within the context of Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICTD) programmes targeted to women in India. As Nakano-Glenn (2002) has described, labour and citizenship have been closely linked for centuries, as illustrated by the fact that the authors of the constitutions of the United States and some countries of Western Europe set up governments based on principles of control by white males whose citizenship status was tied to their labour status as free, independent producers. Gendered and racialised exclusions also were built into government systems where the white, masculinised “worker citizen” prevailed due to notions that only white males had the intellectual and emotional capacities to do conceptual work. In turn, the latter were rewarded with rights and freedoms that other groups lacked. Ultimately, “labour and citizenship are intertwined institutional arenas in which race and gender relations, meanings, and identities have been both constituted and contested” (Nakano Glenn 2002: p. 2).

The larger context for this chapter is an information society in which, in capitalist societies, the production, distribution, and exchange of information now occupy relatively more economic activity than either agriculture or manufacturing. “Information society” also describes a new form of society characterised by a tremendously accelerated capacity to create communication and information networks which both reinforce and challenge capitalism. Within this scenario, attention to “knowledge workers” who are educated, experienced, innovative, and creative sits uneasily with ICTD initiatives that focus on skill-training in basic IT knowledge and applications. For the latter, women are both generic and preferred labour who, in the most limited sense, learn to use email and surf the web, and often in the most advanced sense, are prepared for occupations in data entry and service delivery. The vast majority of the world’s women populate the lower rungs of the decentralised, spatially-dispersed, informal sectors of the information economy. Only if we use the most expansive definition of knowledge worker—anyone in the chain of producing and distributing knowledge products (Mosco and McKercher 2008)—would many women, including those in electronics assembly work, count as knowledge workers.

Rarely does research address “knowledge workers” in the context of ICTD, and there is no question but that the usual definitions of “knowledge work” exclude ICTD initiatives, often in the form of market-based public-private partnerships (PPPs), from consideration, despite the important insights which would follow

from such studies. For example, in the ICTD form of “knowledge work,” PPPs tend to target marginalised groups which threaten neoliberal imperatives as well as approach women as efficient economic actors to be inserted into the global neoliberal economy instead of confronting structural inequalities that establish them as labourers who do not enjoy full, active, substantive citizenship—including economic citizenship.

During the past five years, the attention of some scholars has shifted from labour *and social citizenship* to labour *citizenship*, applied to knowledge workers. One of the most prominent texts that emphasises labour citizenship is Mosco’s and McKercher’s (2008) *The Laboring of Communication: Will Knowledge Workers of the World Unite?*. Broadly speaking, the idea of labour citizenship extends political struggles to economic arenas where relevant issues include the right to a job and membership in an organization that represents workers’ interests, the right to a standard of living that meets basic needs, the right to social citizenship, and the right to community and public space. Mosco’s and McKercher’s primary focus is on trade unions and worker associations. Importantly, the authors are aware that women tend to be in the lower ranks of the information sector and that, overall, women face far more employment precariousness and workplace injustices than do men. One of their key claims is that women’s involvement in labour unions and worker associations is effective in the struggle for gender justice. However, the book does not interrogate the exclusions and inclusions that women face as targets of gender and development initiatives meant to train them to use ICT in new technology and other non-technology fields.

As in *The Laboring of Communication* (Mosco and McKercher 2008), this chapter addresses worker associations; however, it specifically looks at all-women worker associations. The chapter describes the results of fieldwork conducted in India from 2010 to 2011, notably the Women Enterprise and Information Technology (WE-IT) research conducted collaboratively by Lisa McLaughlin, Anita Gurumurthy, and research assistants from IT for Change. The research compared the ICT training approaches meant to provide women with ICT skills, purportedly to empower them to participate in the information society. The two initiatives on which we focused were the Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Karnataka (AWAKE) in the state of Karnataka, located in the neoliberalised IT hub of Bengaluru with the various programmes of the Kerala State IT Mission (KSITM), located in the historically left-leaning (Communist) state of Kerala.

Although there are notable differences in the circumstances under which ICT training takes place at AWAKE and the various initiatives and associations in Kerala, the discourse of women’s empowerment, animated through neoliberal orientations, were common to both locations. From a feminist perspective, it becomes necessary to understand “empowerment” and “opportunity” in relation to the larger economic context and women’s socio-economic realities that influence the extent to which they are able to exercise and enjoy agency across spheres. The two Indian states where the study was carried out, Karnataka and Kerala, provide

different socio-political contexts to the research problem. While Bengaluru is a globally recognised IT hub, the IT industry in Kerala enjoys a unique position owing to the general lack of industrial growth in the state. In Karnataka, the IT policies have been oriented towards corporations and women entrepreneurs' IT skill enhancement has rarely been a concern. In such a scenario, it is NGOs like AWAKE that have assumed the responsibility of training the women entrepreneurs. Hence, AWAKE became the entry point for our research in Karnataka.

The chapter expands on the details of this research. However, to abbreviate our findings, we came to the conclusion that whether oriented to neoliberal or state imaginaries of development, ICT training programs were filtered through hegemonic world views. In Karnataka, the Hewlett Packard Entrepreneurship Learning Program (HELP) offered women one-time, basic, and cursory trainings, leaving most women with few ICT-related opportunities and, in the case of women who wished to learn more about IT through AWAKE, no programmes for further IT skills development. In Kerala, *Akshaya* and *Kudumbashree* women in particular seem to be a part of the state's plan to bring in e-literacy, government-to-citizen services and ICT infrastructure—ultimately to usher in a new modernity denied to Kerala as a mostly agrarian state. In short, we found that the circumstances of women learning IT skills through workers' associations is a great deal more complex than what Mosco and McKercher (2008) assume in situating worker associations as an avenue to women's empowerment and gender justice. We conclude that economic empowerment in the information society needs to engage critically with the status of women and other disenfranchised persons as economic agents so that ICTD initiatives go beyond skills training and emphasize that women have economic agency (and are agents more broadly) and, further, that this perhaps is the greatest among their knowledge assets as labor citizens.

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11. Digitally breaching gender frontiers in Pakistan: boon or bane?

Farida Shaheed

The information society is often considered to represent significant power shifts. (Gurumurthy 2010) This paper, however, suggests that information and communication technologies are tools rather than drivers of change. Presenting the case of misogynist forces breaching the public-private divide in Swat, Pakistan to recast women's subjectivity in support of the Taliban, it argues that the potential of ICTs to reconfigure gendered citizenship depends on the agenda of those using the tools and on the specific local power arrangements and practices within which women engage.

12. It's just about our little lives: Poor women on the worldwide web

Sylvia Estrada Claudio and Emma Saloranta

This essay will recount the lessons learned from an action research wherein an online magazine was created in order to bring to the fore the stories of poor women especially with regards to their reproductive health and rights. In order to do this, several women from poor communities were given the training that enabled them to write and take photographs. In some cases the training included basic computer training to enable the women to put their articles in electronic form. Technical and financial support was also provided so that the women could send in their articles over the Internet.

The effort was undertaken to help the struggle for the passage of reproductive health legislation in the Philippine Congress which has been an uphill battle for the past 16 years because of strong opposition from the Roman Catholic Church.

Public discussions on the proposed legislation have tended to be mired in discussions of morality and contestations about the scientific basis for the safety of contraceptives or whether sexuality education promotes promiscuity. It was hoped that being the stories of poor women - the conditions in the homes and communities; their struggles for health including safe motherhood - might help help sway public opinion and some legislators towards support for the bill.

The research reiterated the immense difficulties faced by alternative community based actions when they attempt to scale up, especially to the national level. In this case, the problems of the interface between large structures and individual actions are seen through the lens of the Internet, which has its own interstices for individual action even as it has a given architecture/structure which still privileges the powerful and the wealthy.

13. The Tech is Not Enough: Women, new media and citizenship in Sri Lanka

Sarala Emmanuel, Sachini Perera and Sepali Kottegoda

Women's engagement with new media has not been adequately documented in Sri Lanka. This is clearly an 'emerging' area of knowledge both in terms of access to and use of technology by women. From a feminist social sciences perspective, there is a need for an exploration of the understanding and practice of citizenship as experienced by women using new media. This chapter presents some of the first research on women's engagement with ICTs in Sri Lanka, focussing on a local SMS-based news service for women, a national campaign to increase women's political participation, a state initiative to provide ICT access to rural communities and the role played by vernacular women bloggers.

As Gurumurthy and Singh (2010)⁵ argue, information technologies create and expand public domains and create a means for asserting identities and group rights, particularly placing women's interests in the centre. However enabling structural change and political will become crucial to bringing about transformation in experiences of women's citizenship (Gurumurthy and Singh 2010).

One of the key findings of this study has been that, it is women's access to and control of technologies in creating content of media messages and, women's activism and collective engagement in new media avenues which has supported a transformative process in their exercise of citizenship. Even though ICTs are available through mainstream state and private sector programmes, this has not meant that access is ensured to women and girls. The chapter also suggests that the extent to which this transformation can take place within mainstream spaces is also dependent on success in changing or by-passing historically controlling patriarchal power structures.

⁵ Gurumurthy, A & Singh, P (2010), "Reclaiming Development in the Information Society" in Christa Wichterich (ed), *In Search of Economic Alternatives for Gender and Social Justice: Voices from India*, WIDE Belgium

14. Campaigning for the passage of the ‘Antibaixara’ Law in Bahia, Brazil: Virtual and face-to-face battles

Cecilia M. B. Sardenberg

On March, 2012, after a heated battle that lasted over nine months, the State Congress of Bahia finally approved Law Project N. 19.237. Sent to the Governor of the State shortly after, it received his immediate sanction. The new law, which has become known as Law *Antibaixaria*– that is, law against vulgarity - has provoked much polemic and debates. It prohibits the use of public funds for the payment of performers who express *Serifm* (sex is liberation) in their songs, either by devaluing women or exposing them to a constraining situation, or otherwise inciting violence and disrespect against human beings. To win public opinion in its favour and the required votes in Congress so as to guarantee the passage of the Law, a number of different strategies were put to work by campaigning feminists. In this paper I propose to discuss the core issues at play in the debates, the actors involved, as well as the strategies in use, with the hindsight of someone who was directly involved in the campaign. In specific, I intend to look more closely at the uses of digital media as an activist tool in this process, and how it was successfully combined with other media strategies, as well as more traditional 'face-to-face' encounters, to confront symbolic violence and defend women’s rights to respect and dignity.

15. New architectures of participation and the opportunities and pitfalls of openness

Evangelia Berdou

The opportunities for participation afforded by the Internet, Web 2.0 platforms, and mobile phones are said to support new possibilities for collective action and co-creation. In developing countries, open source information crowdsourcing platforms, like *Ushahidi*, and open mapping and data initiatives, like OpenStreetMap, are enabling citizens to use, create and disseminate information critical for their lives and livelihoods. Many of these new tools appear to create new architectures of participation and collaboration that challenge the relationship between producers and users of information, experts and the public. How realistic, however, is this promise? Do these new architectures of participation live up to their potential or do they perpetuate existing inequalities and create new risks, especially for women? This chapter draws from an investigation of a well-know citizen mapping and media projects in Africa, *Map Kibera*, to examine some of the assumptions that underlie ‘open’ architectures of participation. It is argued that the idea of ‘openness’, especially in a developing country context, is a multi-layered and ambiguous concept with mixed effects for pro-poor development.

16. What does the Internet Governance Forum signify for gender equality?

Anita Gurumurthy and Nandini.C

As social norms, practices and institutions adapt to the new formations of the digital era, the foundational questions of justice and equality, access and opportunity – abiding feminist concerns – are recast. The case for active immersion by feminists in the emergent and often piquant aspects of the governance of digital spaces, especially the global Internet, therefore cannot be overstated. While the national arena is still somewhat closer to feminist activism and advocacy in this regard, global Internet governance seems rather distant. At the global level, the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) is a key global body, carrying out the mandate of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) with regard to multi-stakeholder policy dialogue. Even as global policy making in relation to the Internet is distributed across a multiplicity of sites – OECD, EU, bilateral trade agreements etc. – mirroring trends in international political economy, the IGF still remains an important space for pushing the discourse of equality in the information society. This paper examines how gender equality gets constructed within the discursive space of the IGF by undertaking a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the most recent IGF – IGF 2012 in Baku.

Firstly, based on a review of existing literature on gender equality and gender justice, we evolved an analytical framework that would enable us to understand the debates and discussions at the IGF, through a gender equality lens. As Southern feminists have long argued, the idea of gender justice must straddle both economic and social justice domains⁶. Keeping with this view, and drawing upon UNRISD's framework⁷, this study has defined gender equality as comprising the following domains: capabilities and access to resources and opportunities; empowerment; and enabling macro-environmental factors. The specific interpretations of this framework in the context of this study are detailed in the table below.

A. Capabilities, access to resources and opportunities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access to technological infrastructure (Internet and ICTs), and costs of access 2. Making technologies contextually-appropriate 3. Opportunities for innovation
B. Empowerment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Empowering possibilities opened up by Internet and ICTs 2. Rights and freedoms w.r.t Internet and ICTs
C. Macro-environmental factors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. National policy regimes 2. Global Internet governance regime 3. The political economy of global development/ the North-South divide

6 For instance, see the discussion on the need to move beyond the personal to the political by the black feminist Angela Davis cited in the Introductory chapter of Chaudhuri, M. (ed., 2006), *Feminism in India*, New Delhi: Kali for Women. Also the work of Southern feminist groups like DAWN..

7 See Chapter 4 of the UNRISD Report *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World*

Relying upon this framework, an inductive analysis of the transcripts of the six main sessions of the IGF 2012 was undertaken, through a detailed reading of the transcripts of the main sessions, to understand the main contexts in which the eight themes of the gender equality framework have come up. This first-level reading revealed that invariably, these thematic elements were situated in relation to the word 'access' – a notion that has inspired much writing and scholarly exposition in the field of ICTs and Development, particularly in its connection to women's empowerment. Pegging our inquiry to the systematic tracing of utterances of 'access', we felt, was a useful rhetorical device to grasp the meanings and assumptions embedded in the discursive spaces of the IGF.

Thus, trailing the word 'access', we selected utterances across the transcripts of the six main sessions, and analysed how the eight thematic elements of our gender equality framework had been constructed within these utterances. We used a selective coding methodology, excerpting parts of text with the word “access” as situated in particular narratives⁸. In addition, we have also used an additional category titled 'gender dimension' – i.e. utterances with explicit references to issues of women's rights, structural exclusions emerging out of the operations of patriarchy and LGBT rights – in order to assess the prevalence of explicit references to gender, among references to any of the above-mentioned eight thematic categories.

The study clearly indicates that the IGF is a discursive site that is symptomatic of the problems of the new 'normal' in global governance. For the marginalised, it is at best, yet another site for a politics of presence, and at worst, yet another red herring where real business is not transacted. Unpacking the discourse of gender equality in IGF 2012 has also helped us identify how the particular confluences of feminism at this historic juncture with neo-liberal capitalism's version of emancipation creates both an intellectual and political crisis. The discourse of gender equality in the space of technology policy has been revealed to be the depoliticised product of the way the many actors in this space transact notions of gender and justice.

The study also alerts us to the particular significance of the agenda of Internet governance for women's rights activism. The Internet governance agenda clearly offers an opportunity for intervening in the discourse of technology, and perhaps more importantly, in the foundational task of institutional reconstruction, as the digital re-plots the coordinates of the social, in the emerging network society context. Shaping frameworks and norms simultaneously at both national and global scales, is therefore imperative for gender justice advocacy. Women's rights activism must be alert to the need to forge alliances with national and global movements working to democratise the information and communication realms – the knowledge commons activists, the open source community, and with movements against runaway, global capitalism – the right to livelihood and fair trade movements, and the global democracy movement. Only then can new policies and normative frameworks that contribute to progressive and long term visions of gender justice be shaped in the current network society context.

⁸ rather than in relation to a certain number of pre-decided words.