

WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

Challenging or maintaining
the status quo?

Edited by
Christina Schwabenland
Chris Lange
Jenny Onyx
Sachiko Nakagawa

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"An essential guide to research on civil society organisations and women's empowerment in a wide range of international contexts."

Marjorie Mayo, Goldsmiths, University of London

"Rife with important insights for researchers and practitioners with emancipatory ambitions, and a wonderful example of the value of cross-fertilising gender studies and research into civil society organisations."

Charlotte Holgersson, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden

Women are at the heart of civil society organisations. Through them they have achieved many successes, challenged oppressive practices at a local and global level and have developed outstanding entrepreneurial activities. Yet Civil Service Organisation (CSO) research tends to ignore considerations of gender, and the rich history of activist feminist organisations is rarely examined.

This collection examines the nexus between the emancipation of women, and their role(s) in these organisations. Featuring contrasting studies from a wide range of contributors from different parts of the world, it covers emerging issues such as the role of social media in organising, the significance of religion in many cultural contexts, activism in Eastern Europe and the impact of environmental degradation on women's lives. Asking whether involvement in CSOs offers a potential source of emancipation for women or maintains the status quo, this anthology will also have an impact on policy and practice in relation to equal opportunities.

Christina Schwabenland is a Reader in Public and Voluntary Sector Management at the University of Bedfordshire.


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Dedication

The editors would like to dedicate this anthology to the memory of Martha Farrell, who worked tirelessly throughout her life for the emancipation of women. Her career spanned 35 years in informal education, gender mainstreaming, gender equality and policy advocacy. She worked for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) in India for 19 years alongside her husband, Rajesh Tandon, PRIA's founder.

Martha Farrell's contributions included training grass roots women leaders alongside work on gender awareness and mainstreaming, ensuring that policies on the prevention of sexual harassment were implemented within organisations (starting with her own organisation, PRIA). Her PhD research on sexual harassment in the workplace has been published by Uppall (2014) as *Engendering the workplace: Gender discrimination and prevention of sexual harassment in organisations*.

Her work can therefore be seen as covering the span of topics our anthology is addressing: the need to counter discrimination wherever it is experienced, within organisations as well as in the wider society. Martha Farrell was murdered by terrorists in Kabul, along with 13 other aid workers, on 13 May 2015. She had been in Kabul to provide training on gender issues for the staff of the Aga Kahn Foundation. Her life, and so sadly, also the manner of her death, are emblematic of the challenges facing all of us who want to create a more equal society, free of gender discrimination and oppression.

*Christina Schwabenland, Chris Lange,
Jenny Onyx, Sachiko Nakagawa
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Christina Schwabenland

Chris Lange

Jenny Onyx

Sachiko Nakagawa

Foreword

Annette Zimmer

Congratulations to the editors and authors of this volume. The articles provide an interesting and highly informative overview of the state of the art as regards the nexus between civil society research and gender studies. In contrast to many books and articles on women's issues, this volume highlights the topic of emancipation. What does emancipation mean? And what distinguishes emancipation from empowerment? How does emancipation work on a structural as well as on an organisational level? With a very special eye on gender equality the encompassing framework of women's emancipation allows the investigation of both the broader political and social context as well as the working environment and the societal context for women. Christina Schwabenland, Chris Lange, Sachiko Nakagawa and Jennifer Onyx have carefully edited the 16 articles collected in this volume. They tell a fascinating story about the difficulties, struggles as well as the options and opportunities of women's organisations and groups to either get a step ahead or, on the contrary, to struggle with significant problems and difficulties on their way to emancipation. Many of those who followed this book project from its very beginning at the ISTR conference in Siena in 2012 know about the difficulties and barriers to getting an innovative and encompassing approach accepted by publishers and up off the ground. It is an approach which builds on two, unfortunately for publication purposes, very distinct streams of research – civil society and nonprofit research on the one hand and gender studies on the other hand. Furthermore, up until now very little has been published that builds on these two distinctive research traditions. Finally, a focus on empirical work and on the study of organisations is not very common in the area of gender studies, which is one that tends to be very theoretical and by and large arguing from a more or less 'western perspective' of the developed world. Against this background, the editors of this volume, indeed, took the risk of discovering new frontiers of civil society and gender research. The outcome of their adventurous endeavour proves that they were right to take the risk of addressing a fascinating topic from a new and innovative perspective.

A foreword is not the right place to provide an overview of all the topics addressed in this volume or even to provide a deeper insight into

specific issues. However, a very personal point of view from my side might be allowed. Indeed, I highly appreciate the in-depth discussion on mainstream neoliberalism. The reluctance to join the crowd and follow mainstream approaches constitutes a common point of departure of many articles of this volume. A case in point constitutes the highly critical discussion of 'empowerment' serving as a synonym of women getting ahead in many official documents and in political discussion. The article by Ruth Phillips clearly indicates that women should be careful. For sure, empowerment constitutes a very individualistic approach and hence leaves current economic, social and political structures untouched. However, if the grand design of the current social and political structures is not going to be changed, there is very little hope that 'empowerment' will indeed serve as an avenue towards women's emancipation. At the same time, many of the articles collected in this volume draw our attention to the fact that in the media and in the social sciences women's activism is very often reduced to a single issue, a one-off event. Quite a number of the articles of this volume take a very critical stance on this by highlighting the embeddedness of specific events of women's activism and their broader societal context. In some cases, the authors show that 'the event' is closely connected to a specific culture and tradition. That's why a specific form of women's activism – such as the performances of the Russian punk rock group Pussy Riot – is understood quite differently in its original context. As Eva Maria Hinterhuber and Gesine Fuchs highlight, Pussy Riot has to be located within Russia's new political protest movement to which the women's group added 'a new protest culture with a religious dimension'. Indeed, it is a common feature of the articles collected here that they provide background information that generally is not put up front by classical articles in the social sciences. However, thanks to this background knowledge we are able to see the so-called larger picture and to perceive risks as well opportunities for women and for societies at large.

A further case in point are the articles discussing current developments on the shop floor. For sure, employment has been a significant tool for women's emancipation since the nineteenth century. However, as clearly indicated by a number of authors, today's managerialism has a strong impact on the female labour force. As we all know, women's work by and large translates into cheap labour or even into work without any pay. Current fiscal constraints and the difficulties of financing put many of those nonprofit organisations and initiatives that constitute the main shop floor for women under increasing stress. The organisations react to these challenges by

constantly reducing salaries or by changing working conditions. 'Flexibilisation' has turned into the economic term, which is used for shadowing the deterioration of working conditions in many parts of the world and particularly in those areas where the majority of the workforce are women, such as the social service industry.

A further merit of this volume is that it provides insights and examples of women's activism all over the world. In contrast to many other books focusing on gender issues, this collection of articles and reports does take globalism seriously. You find articles focusing on current developments in Africa, Asia, Latin America and of course Europe and Russia. Last, but not least, it is great fun to dig deep into the volume. Some articles clearly show that women's activism is not what we call in German a 'sour beer affair'. Instead, there are many ways to make your point with the goal to bringing women's emancipation ahead. Again, a textbook example provides the article on the French female activist group *La Barbe* that builds on the strong tool of humour. Wearing false beards at CSO's assemblies and thanking the company for its success in not letting women into the inner circles of management, *La Barbe* unmasks the absurdity of many companies' politics. Indeed, this is a sad story, but it is nevertheless fun to read how women are becoming more and more innovative and in touch with culture in order to make their argument. I am sure those who will read the articles of this volume will definitely profit as much from the reading as I did. In sum, this book deserves careful perusal.

Introducing the anthology

*Christina Schwabenland, Chris Lange, Jenny Onyx
and Sachiko Nakagawa*¹

Introduction

We know that through the organisations of civil society ordinary women have done extraordinary things to challenge oppression locally, nationally and across the globe. We know that they have achieved many successes, and have developed outstanding entrepreneurial activities. Yet this story remains largely untold until now. Women are at the heart of civil society organisations (CSOs). Women come together to run activities, provide services, establish local networks and raise funds; studies suggest that women are more philanthropic than men and make up the majority of volunteers (Themudo, 2009). Yet research into civil society organising has tended to ignore considerations of gender. The rich history of activist feminist organisations is rarely examined. It is time that changed.

We also know, however, that sometimes organisations find themselves drawn into colluding and reproducing the structures that maintain women in positions of marginality and systemic disadvantage. That is why we must also question our collective achievements. If we are to advance theory and to develop strategies into the future, we must also be concerned with critiques of organisational processes, dynamics and activities as well as success stories.

In this anthology, we identify some of the issues and lessons that arise from the various case studies presented, primarily from a grounded theoretical analysis, exploring the multiple sites of domination and struggle and the respective challenges of working inside as well as working from outside oppressive institutions. We specifically focus on the role of CSOs and return to the challenging question posed by the introduction: to what extent are CSOs able to challenge the oppression and marginalisation of women at a local, national and international level? To what extent do CSOs actually find themselves working in ways that

Organising for emancipation/ emancipating organisations?

*Jenny Onyx, Christina Schwabenland, Chris Lange
and Sachiko Nakagawa*

Introduction

In this final chapter we reflect on what the various contributions in this anthology have to tell us about the current state of women's activism around the globe, and to what extent social movements and more formally organised civil society organisations (CSOs) have been effective in responding to the challenges of achieving women's emancipation. With a century of feminism behind us, we would expect to find major improvements in women's rights and wellbeing, and strong support from the many CSOs that exist to enable them to achieve their aspirations. That is not always what we have found. Hence, we return to the key problematic that runs through the anthology: do CSOs contribute to women's emancipation or do they merely reinforce the status quo? We begin by considering the questions we identified, drawing on Fraser's (2013) understanding of emancipation as both an aspiration and a position from which to locate and resist domination, in whatever form it takes. We ask what differing understandings of emancipation inspire the activists recorded here. We then ask where domination is located in these accounts and how it is resisted. Following this analysis we move on to a more measured review of the roles of organising and organisations. We see three alternative ways of framing these; organisations as a means to an end, organisations as the manifestation of alternative/feminist values and organisations as themselves, locations of systemic domination. The chapters in this anthology have provided examples of all of these. We conclude with some comments on the insight we have gained through our engagement with these authors and their research.

Differing understandings of emancipation

The first clear message that emerges from these studies is that women's activism is alive and well in many parts of the globe. We see major and concerted campaigns against women's oppression in Italy, Russia, France, Uruguay and Nigeria in particular. Some of these campaigns are continuations of longstanding feminist demands and concerns that have been documented over the past century in countries of 'the North'. In Portugal we see women from a very marginalised group, the Roma, beginning to organise together (Chapter Eleven). We see women working together everywhere, both internally and across organisations to offer support to each other, both formally and informally. We also see creative use of social media in many countries to bring people together and reach out to each other across the globe.

We also, however, see contradictions and tensions emerging with regard to the different ways in which emancipation is understood and acted upon. Phillips' chapter (Chapter Two), highlights one of the most significant differences: whether emancipation can be achieved through an accumulation of individual endeavours and struggles or whether it requires the kinds of systemic changes that can only be achieved by people working together in solidarity. Her contribution could be interpreted as an attempt to discover how deeply neoliberalism, with its celebration of the individual, has really taken root in the women's organisations which she surveyed. Understood in this way, her results give us some encouragement; for example, in the existence of a substantial, if not a majority voice that is critical of the more instrumental and individualist approach of the third United Nations Millennium Development Goal (MDG 3) and that, as she concludes, 'A clear message from women's NGOs is that the transformations required for gender equality must occur at a structural level; all women must have equal rights that are inclusive of human, civil, political, legal, social, welfare and economic rights' (Phillips, Chapter Two). However, speaking from the Kenyan experience, Lutomia et al (Chapter Fifteen) reframe this argument, noting that where feminist organisations have been coopted into the political system this has led to the professionalising of feminism as it becomes more incorporated in NGO work. Such developments serve to alienate feminist organisations' actions from the grassroots and from those most vulnerable to domination.

The clearest example of differing understandings of emancipation is that explored by Lounasmaa (Chapter Twelve) in which the rights-based and Islamic faith-based organisations in Morocco share many aspirational goals and yet are motivated by very different 'referentials'

(her expression); with the rights-based organisations drawing on an, arguably, more westernised understanding of rights while the faith-based organisations take their inspiration for women's emancipation from interpretations of Islam. Her chapter is very timely, as the re-emergence of the importance of religion within the public sphere (Schwablenland, 2015) is placing such differing understandings of emancipation onto the central stage. These differences are profound at the level of ideology, with the 'separate but equal' approach relying on a more essentialist understanding of gender (women's role being domestic and nurturing), thus challenging so much of (largely western) feminist theory that proceeds from the view of gender as socially and not biologically constructed. However, at a more practical level, Lounasmaa's chapter also offers some possibilities for hope because she identifies many shared aims and aspirations around which such groups could coalesce, even if only in the short term.

Locations of domination: emancipation as a standpoint

Nancy Fraser writes that the struggle for emancipation 'intersect[s] with another struggle, [that] between protection and de-regulation' (Fraser, 2013, 240). Her helpful insight is that domination is to be resisted wherever it is found, and that significant dynamics within *both* of the 'great' institutions of the state and market are inimical to women's wellbeing. She argues that many feminists, already very aware of the domination inherent in statist models of social protection, have been seduced by the freedoms offered (at least rhetorically) by the market, and that this has, at least until recently, blinded us to their more repressive aspects. However, we should also be alert to the marginalising dynamics inherent in *all* forms of organising, including deep-seated cultural mores underpinning both the market and the state. Nor can we exclude the repressive aspects of organisations, including CSOs themselves. Organising works through creating dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, and it is in this terrain that we also need to direct our critique. We therefore understand domination (and resistance) as occurring in multiple sites and in overlapping and contradictory ways.

Both *La Barbe* (Chapter Six) and *Se Non Ora Quando?* (Chapter Three) were founded, in part, out of outrage at political representations of women, from those of the socialist presidential candidate Ségolène Royal in France and the then capitalist prime minister of Italy, Silvio Berlusconi, who was convicted of child prostitution (although the conviction was later overturned on appeal). While feminists have long resisted the use of images of women, usually highly sexualised, to sell

products or services, these political representations are more complex as their influence is much more pervasive. Furthermore, the increasing importance of social media (particularly where Berlusconi owns much of the popular media) gives this form of domination a particularly sinister salience. We might also locate Keyhan's study of Hollaback! here because street harassment is, at least to some extent, given its 'oxygen' through such sexualised images of women which contribute to what she terms a 'culture of permissiveness' (Chapter Four).

Hinterhuber and Fuchs (Chapter Five) suggest that Pussy Riot locate their critique in the nexus of political, cultural and religious domination. The context of their study is one in which the level of democratic engagement in Russia is seen to have fallen, the state has become increasingly authoritarian and gender segregation has increased again. Within this context the role of the Russian Orthodox Church is critical – from a position of near extinction during the Soviet period the church is now highly popular and its leadership has been very supportive of the Putin government. Their study is particularly interesting in Fraser's terms because here it is the *intersection* between market, state and civil society (in the form of the church) that has created a situation in which women are increasingly marginalised.

Hildwein, from France (Chapter Six) provides the only study represented here in which the focus is primarily on the market, and in particular, large corporations, *La Barbe's* activism being aimed directly at the boardroom. Pousadela's study in Uruguay (Chapter Seven) focuses on the relationship between CSOs and the state, in the struggle for legalised abortion, and the importance of legislation as the most basic guarantor of rights. However, neither study takes an uncritical stance on civil society, with each commenting on significant divisions between actors in the wider movements in which they are located. For example, in Uruguay, much of the struggle devolved around the conflict between feminist organisations and the Catholic church.

Acey's study of women's environmental and social activism in the Niger Delta (Chapter Eight) is an interesting attempt at what Fraser describes as a 'triple movement': an analysis that challenges a positional duality of state versus market. Her focus on the nexus between the political and commercial interests that have led to the degradation of the Niger Delta, and its implications for the lives of women, highlights the complexities of these systemic inter-relationships.

Finally, we have several studies in which dominating dynamics are located *within* civil society itself. Both Rego, speaking of the Roma in Portugal (Chapter Eleven) and Tanaka, speaking of trafficking survivors in Nepal (Chapter Nine) express reservations about the impact of

'top-down' CSOs that are not member controlled, and Lounasmaa, in the Moroccan context, highlights the ways in which unquestioned allegiance to dogma can weaken and fracture solidarity.

How is domination to be resisted and emancipation achieved through organising?

Alongside accounts of traditional models of activism, we also see newly emergent forms of resistance. Hollaback!'s use of social media, for example, goes beyond that of mobilising support: by putting women who have experienced street violence in touch with each other the internet facilitates Hollaback!'s intervention strategies (Keyhan, Chapter Four). Women gain confidence and begin to transform their sense of self, from victim to survivor. Hollaback! and *Se Non Ora Quando?* (Elia, Chapter Three) can be regarded as very postmodernist organisations, adopting virtual forms of organising in order to intervene at the level of identity formation.

La Barbe (Hildwein, Chapter Six) similarly, responds to the absence of presence (of women in the corporate boardroom) by adopting a Butlerian strategy of parody. In her discussion of drag, Butler comments that 'the parodic repetition of "the original" [in this case the adopting of false beards] reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the *idea* of the natural and the original' (Butler, 1999, 41, her emphases).

Pussy Riot's performance (Chapter Five) of their 'Punk Prayer', and in particular their choice of location and their incorporation of Russian sacred music and theology can also be understood as an attempt to disrupt the taken-for-granted by re-presenting these elements in a form that is both shocking and beautiful. These organisations are working at the level of culture formation: challenging oppressive aspects of culture by disruption and subversion. *La Barbe's* focus is quite specific, but that of Pussy Riot is very diffused – they aim to open up a space for resistance rather than mobilising around a specific platform or set of desired outcomes.

In their analyses both Hildwein, and Hinterhuber and Fuchs concentrate on the forms of protest rather than their impact. In fact, discussion of their 'successes' is largely absent. We can read these chapters as themselves acting to disrupt the more neoliberal structuring of accountability in which problem identification leads to proposed solution/intervention, which necessarily leads to a discussion of impact and resulting change. No such easy, or formulaic closure is available in these chapters, in which success can only really be understood as, in *La Barbe's* case, the speeding up of the moment

of recognition that men-only Boards are insupportable, or for Pussy Riot, in the international support that forced Putin's government to release Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Maria Aljochina from prison, thus creating a new form of democratic accountability.

Lounasmaa, in Morocco, and Pousadela, in Uruguay, both demonstrate in their analyses the importance of activists coming together to create a synthesis (however provisional and temporary) of rights-based approaches and more radical perspectives. Pousadela presents this struggle as at the centre of a 'culture war' invoking science, religion and human rights discourses for legitimacy. Lounasmaa, however, argues that the divisions between these groups in Morocco have weakened their potential to campaign for lasting change.

Acey's detailed analysis of the extent to which women have become empowered in Nigeria through their participation in CSOs and networks synthesises radical and liberal approaches, recognising the opportunities that women have taken while also highlighting the need for longer-term, more transformational change in which justice becomes a political, ecological and gendered discourse (Acey, Chapter Eight). In these accounts emancipation is presented as neither simply an individual concern, nor primarily structural, but both – structural change that doesn't work for individuals is merely a new tyranny but individual empowerment without structural change is selfish and limited. This is not an endorsement of neoliberal meritocracy. Hollaback! captures this perfectly: individual emancipation is advanced through shared solidarity which in turn challenges structures of patriarchal ideology.

Do CSOs reinforce or challenge the status quo?

The key problematic that this anthology has attempted to explore is the role that organising and organisations play in the struggle for women's emancipation. We regard organisations as sites of contested values and conflictual dynamics, the focus of coercive pressures from the environments in which they are situated. Consequently, there is no simple answer to this question as organisational actors experience multiple pressures and tensions. Yet organising is essential for the pursuit of aspirations. As noted above, we think it is helpful to reflect on organising from three different perspectives: organisations as a means to an end, organisations as the manifestation of alternative values and finally, organisations as means of domination. We now consider each of these in turn.

Organisations as a means to an end

The majority of the authors in the first section of the anthology treat organisations as relatively unproblematic, although noting that dissent can occur between members and between different parts of the organisation that can have negative consequences for the fulfillment of desired goals. Elia, for example, refers to the tensions between the promoters and locally-based organisers of *Se Non Ora Quando?* (Chapter Three) and Keyhan's chapter also identifies the challenges in managing a global movement from a western base (Chapter Four). Lutomia et al's case study of *Maendeleo ya Wanawake*, Kenya's oldest women's organisation (Chapter Fifteen) interrogates its role in achieving women's emancipation. The authors are highly critical, arguing that the organisation's limited success can be attributed primarily to its close connections with ruling elites and distance from the lived experiences of rural, poor women.

We also see new models of organising under discussion here, however. Tavanti et al propose that what they term 'meso' level organisations (Chapter Ten) may be uniquely able to provide a channel for the exchange of cultural norms between the diaspora communities and organisations working in the homeland in the context of the relationships between the Somali diaspora settled in the United States and grass roots organisations working in Somalia. These intermediary organisations are currently playing an important role in providing resources; arguably, however, their potential role in terms of providing a channel for the exchange of cultural norms may be more problematic and carries the risk of replacing one form of dominance with another. However, Tavanti et al argue that meso-level organisations are well placed to manage these bridging processes, carrying as they do, deep understandings of both cultural contexts. This is an important study because it focuses on the increasingly prevalent international relationships between home and diaspora.

Hollaback! also represents a twenty-first century model of activism against street violence (Keyhan, Chapter Four), organising primarily through the internet, exposing women's experiences through blogs and embracing technological innovations in order to provide support on an individual level, rapid mobilisation around local issues and analysis at an international level. Keyhan notes that the 'unbounded nature of street harassment thus calls for a similarly unbounded response; one that can adapt and respond to the behaviour in a collaborative but expansive way' (Keyhan, Chapter Four). These examples highlight the importance of creating alternative institutional forms that demonstrate

some congruence with the issue being pursued. As new forms of oppression emerge new forms of resistance are needed.

Organisations as embodiments/manifestations of values

Similarly, the idea that methods of organising should reflect the founding values is an important theme in feminist activism (Bordt, 1990; and introduction to this volume; Schwabenland, 2006). Tanaka analyses one such model (Chapter Nine) the 'incubator' role played by the Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC) to CSOs that mobilise around women's issues, and concentrates specifically on a network of survivors of human trafficking. The activities of WOREC in supporting a wide network of smaller NGOs is conceptualised through the metaphor of the incubator which evokes 'feminine' connotations of nurturing (see Hopfl, 2003, for a discussion of the 'maternal' in organisation theory). Tanaka's chapter is redolent with such discourse: WOREC refers to one of the CSOs it supports as a 'younger sister' also invoking the metaphors of family and *maita* or 'home' (Tanaka, Chapter Nine). Her research suggests that this is a highly successful model which offers an interesting alternative to the more traditional, and arguably 'masculine' organisational imaginaries.

Similarly, Rego's chapter (Chapter Eleven) on the organising models of the Portuguese Roma women she studied also invoked the 'family' metaphor, suggesting that the forms of organising adopted had to be congruent with Roma community cultural mores. She observes, however, that the boundary between family and organisation was at times hard to discern.

The pressures on collectivist and non-hierarchical forms of decision-making are also discussed in Hinterhuber and Fuchs' chapter on Pussy Riot (Chapter Five), noting the tensions that emerged between the two members of the group who had served prison sentences and the others, who had not. Elia's analysis of *Se Non Ora Quando?* (Chapter Three) similarly identifies the struggles the movement has faced in operationalising its core values of solidarity and inclusivity. Lutomia et al (Chapter Fifteen) highlight important, and unresolved, questions. They ask whether those who create a feminist organisation should have the same identity as the members and whether it is important for the leadership of feminist organisations to be representative of its members and their lived experiences. In the example of Kenya's *Maendeleo*, can an organisation whose agenda relies on colonial mores, such as 'civilising', be transformational without radical structural change?

Organisations as instruments of domination

Finally, a number of critical examples emerge from these chapters. First, the tensions between different types of organisations, mentioned by Lutomia et al above, resonate in other chapters as well. For example, Rego (Chapter Eleven) suggests that the small, informal associations, initiated and headed by Roma women, have emerged more in spite of, than because of the initiatives of the bigger, capacity building organisations, of which she is highly critical. Lounasmaa's chapter on the divisions between faith- and rights-based women's organisations in Morocco, argues that the conflicts between them are resulting in the marginalisation of both groups from influence in national political processes. Although acknowledging that both faith- and rights-based organisations are often campaigning around very similar issues and shared concerns Lounasmaa concludes that women's civil society 'is divided even when all agree' (Lounasmaa, Chapter Twelve).

Two final studies take up a different theme, that of the internal dynamics of CSOs. Dussuet and Flahault (Chapter Thirteen) ask whether CSOs in France, despite their avowed commitment to women's emancipation, actually provide more empowering models of employment. They note that more women are employed in CSOs than in other sectors but they examine the nature of the jobs available to women, their recognition and status and the terms and conditions of employment available and highlight some disturbing questions about whether the overall impact is to maintain women's inequality rather than to challenge it. While acknowledging that for many women the CSO sector is experienced as a good place to work, primarily because of its more humanist values, they note that "feminist values" do not protect [organisations] from the "gender effects" inherent in their roles as employers (Dussuet and Flahault, this volume). Even more concerning, they suggest that women implicitly collude in their own marginalisation in these organisations by their very allegiance to the 'values' which render their disadvantaged situation more palatable to them.

Similarly, East and Morgan continue the debate about the extent to which the CSO sector is an empowering place to work through their survey of flexible working practices in medium-sized, service-providing charities in the UK. The authors conclude that in this sector as in others, formal policies tended to maintain, rather than challenge the 'woman as carer' stereotype. They uncovered examples of female junior staff developing innovative ways of working that were more successful and these were based on cohesive, intimate and robust team-work

among women staff. This, however, was informal and was dependent on women showing solidarity towards each other *despite*, rather than because of, the more formal processes, and their chapter reveals a very worrying lack of such formal supportive policies (Chapter Fourteen).

Feminism as a global social movement?

We now return to our initial problematic: to what extent have social movements and more formally organised CSOs been effective in responding to the challenges of achieving women's emancipation? First, we ask to what extent these organisations form part of a global social movement. Some of the cases are more clearly linked to global movements than others. Perhaps the clearest example is that of the Uruguayan women's movement to legalise abortion (Chapter Seven) which received ongoing international support for the campaigns. Hollaback! (Chapter Four) also clearly refers to a global campaign against street violence, although in both cases, many of the actual strategies and actions were local.

Does this matter? We recognise the importance of women organising locally to take action on the issues that concern them, and in the ways that are most culturally appropriate to their specific context. We also acknowledge the damage that has been done by probably well-intentioned, but condescending initiatives imposed by the west. However, we are also concerned that such actions will necessarily have limited effect unless they are able to contribute to a wider movement.

We noticed that no reference was made, in any of the chapters, to the work of DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era). DAWN is a network of feminist scholars, researchers and activists from the economic south working for economic and gender justice and sustainable and democratic development. DAWN provides a forum for feminist research, analyses and advocacy on global issues (economic, social and political) affecting the livelihoods, living standards, rights and development prospects of women, especially poor and marginalised women, in regions of the south. Through research, analyses, advocacy and, more recently, training, DAWN seeks to support women's mobilisation within civil society to challenge inequitable social, economic and political relations at global, regional and national levels, and to advance feminist alternatives (www.dawnnet.org).

Since its founding in 1984, the network has become a significant voice in the development of south feminist analyses in gender and development and a key player in global feminist forums (Mayo, 2005). DAWN has had some remarkable achievements. However, it has

had little immediate or obvious effect on the cases explored in this anthology. And almost all of our cases are focused on the urgency of solving immediate and local, or national issues.

The second question we need to consider is what has prevented the achievement of major improvements in women's rights and wellbeing. One suggestion can be found in social movement theories, and particularly the 'political process' approaches to understanding social movements (Mayo, 2005). This strand of theorising emphasises the structures of political opportunity as these affect social movements. These refer both to existing and emergent socio-economic and political cleavages but also to the opportunities that these provide for action. Such opportunities tend to be cyclical according to the cycles of oppression and liberalisation that occur in the wider socio-political environment. We note, of course, that such opportunities have decreased in many contexts in recent years – as the case of Pussy Riot (Chapter Five) illustrates.

The CIVICUS¹ *State of civil society report* for 2015 comments that:

In 2014, there were significant attacks on the fundamental civil society rights of free association, free assembly and free expression in 96 countries. Threats to civil society emanate from both state and non-state actors that benefit from perpetuating governance failures and denying human rights; including corrupt politicians, unaccountable officials, unscrupulous businesses and religious fundamentalists. New attempts are underway, even by democratic states, to roll back long-established human rights norms, which are described as obstacles to national development and security, while critical voices are conflated with terrorism. Hostility to civil society is becoming normalised, and CSO energy is being forced into fighting existential threats. (<http://civicus.org/index.php/en/media-centre-129/reports-and-publications/socs2015>)

It is within this context that we should assess the success or otherwise of those CSOs reported in this anthology. From these accounts of current and concerted activism we see that many are responding to newly emerging forms of gender oppression. *Se Non Ora Quando?* is partly a new response to old concerns in Italy. But it is also a response to rapidly escalating cultural shifts in modern politics and the media which overwhelmingly objectify and denigrate women's bodies as sexual objects to be exploited at will. This level of public exploitation

goes beyond anything seen in recent history in Europe. Pussy Riot is a dramatic response to a rapidly increasing silencing of women's voices in Russian politics and the church, a sad loss of the relatively high visibility of professional women during the Soviet era. The tales of oppression and increased burden on women in the Delta region of Nigeria speak of loss of livelihood and environmental destruction affecting women in fundamental ways thanks to the unethical and at times illegal action of oil companies, and corrupt government practices. The position of women in the oil rich Delta region, a region of Africa which had about the best hope of full economic and social development, instead of benefiting from the new wealth, has significantly deteriorated. But in rich as well as poor countries, there has been a global escalation of urban street harassment of women, as documented by Keyhan. Much of this street harassment has long existed under the radar. But its effects can be very serious indeed, affecting women's sense of decency and respect, their capacity to move freely in the city, and increasingly their personal safety. The levels of street attacks on women appear to be growing exponentially.

What is responsible for this expanded oppression of women? Always the state is implicated, but usually in support of powerful interest groups. Clearly the dominance of the market and development capitalism has been a factor. But behind all the cases presented are deep-seated cultural practices, traditional norms and values that have always subordinated women but which now find a new use and rationale in the hands of those in power as a form of justification and punitive control over women's choices and actions.

Given that in many parts of the globe, conditions for women have deteriorated, what then are the opportunities for action? What kind of strategies are most likely to have a positive impact?

Current strategies for action

We have identified four quite different approaches that these organisations have taken. All have made significant improvements to women's position, but all have met considerable, though different challenges.

The first approach is best illustrated by Tanaka's explication of women's NGOs as incubators to develop leadership skills for socially excluded women in Nepal. These are directed specifically at the large number of women who have been trafficked and sold, usually for sexual or menial labour in neighbouring India. The practice is not new, but the response is. As these women are gradually returning to their place

of birth, they find themselves isolated, scorned and discriminated against in Nepal. Identity-based feminist organisations, newly formed by and for these women, enable them to develop a more positive self-identity, and a collective voice to demand their rights. We may call this the '*picking up the pieces*' approach, working with those women who are the most obvious victims of oppressive practices, and helping them gain a voice and improved conditions. A similar approach is illustrated in the case of the Roma women of Portugal. These organisations can and do use their work as a basis to launch campaigns against the prevailing hegemony, to change legislation, to improve work and housing opportunities, to try to change attitudes. But they cannot change the underlying causes of that oppression: they can only assist women to deal with it.

The second approach that may be taken is to try to *work within the existing cultural practices* and political structures to modify those practices that are most likely to oppress or disempower women. This appears to be the most prevalent strategy in Africa and the Middle East. In Islamic countries that means, for many, accepting the dominant laws of Islam, Sharia law, but working within that framework to try to reinterpret the core statutes that are used to oppress women. It means accepting the traditional role of women as mothers and housewives, but providing better rights within that role, for example by better education, or by stopping the excesses of genital mutilation. The seven chapters that form the second section of our anthology illustrate three difficulties with this position. First, despite their 'softly softly' approach, they may still be seen as a threat to the status quo. Second, and at the same time, a few high profile feminist advocates may be co-opted into the existing political hierarchy, and in the process lose the will to challenge practices that threaten their own material advantage. Both these reactions are evident in Kenya's Maendeleo organisation. A third difficulty faced by these same organisations is that they also face challenges from other forms of more radical feminism of the 'north'. African or Islamic feminism must be different they argue, and must operate within the existing cultural and religious context in which they are embedded. From a global feminist viewpoint, this strategy may at best lead to some sort of 'empowerment' but never real emancipation, as Ruth Phillips argues in her global overview.

The third approach that is well evidenced in the first section of this book is to *directly challenge the dominant cultural regimes* in the most dramatic and sophisticated way possible. In fact this is the single most defining feature of the difference between the cases in section one and those in section two of this book. The strategies make use

of drama and humour and are able to attain high media profile, as witnessed by Pussy Riot, and *Se Non Ora Quando?* The capacity to directly challenge dominant cultural practices appears to be limited to advanced economies which can appeal to democratic traditions. The most effective strategies are those which deliberately break the law or at least entrenched cultural practices... such as women wearing beards invading corporate all-male board meetings... or young women making pop music in an orthodox cathedral. Such tactics challenge formal authority, and are likely to be stopped by the police, or lead to imprisonment as in Russia, or to being killed. Such direct challenges to powerful entrenched interests are dangerous. They resonate the first wave of feminism in England in the 1920s in which brave suffragettes faced humiliation and imprisonment to achieve the vote. Such strategies, though dangerous, are more likely to be successful in the long run, but only if there is sufficient momentum to continue for long periods against entrenched opposition.

The fourth approach occurs in post-industrial economies where sufficient feminist liberation has already occurred such that more women are employed and may now work in organisations of their choice, using preferred feminist practices. There are two such cases identified here, one in England (East and Morgan) and one in France (Dussuet and Flahault). Both cases report modern, flexible, family-friendly work practices, that attract women who wish to do meaningful work, in collaborative workplaces with flexible conditions that allow them to juggle family and work commitments. Many women are happy with this arrangement. However, as both cases illustrate, they also generate continued disadvantage for women, with low wages, insecure tenure and few career advancement opportunities. It is as if these organisations perpetuate women's disadvantage by their very success. Women remain entrenched in low paid, insecure, poorly recognised employment. Much is gained, but much remains the same.

Given that these CSOs are operating under difficult socio-political conditions, it is not surprising that there often develops ideological conflict between feminist groups over strategy. The strongest identification of this is in Lounasmaa's case of women's activism in Morocco. Those who wish to work within Islamic principles to achieve women's empowerment are in direct and open conflict with those who wish to challenge existing power structures. Both often campaign for the same ends, such as education for women, but refuse to acknowledge or work with those of a different orientation, and so the total effort becomes fractured and less effective. Such conflict becomes more entrenched and also leads to less effective outcomes when a

feminist organisation becomes allied to a particular political party, as is illustrated in both Morocco and Kenya. In both cases, the alliance with a political party appears to be a rational strategy in terms of larger political support for feminist reforms. However, the danger occurs when inevitably the feminist issues are dominated by party ideology and masculinist power interests, as illustrated by the pro-abortion campaign in Uruguay. Keeping the feminist cause away from political interests is however easier said than done. Not only is it tempting to accept political patronage, but political parties are likely to attempt to infiltrate or co-opt the feminist movement for their own political gain, as illustrated by the *Se Non Ora Quando?* movement in Italy.

This raises the question of what is the best organising strategy: top down or bottom up? Is there any role for the state in the struggle for women's emancipation? Clearly the state is implicated in virtually all cases of oppression. Equally clearly, full emancipation cannot occur without significant changes in legislation and the implementation of that legislation, both responsibilities of the state. So the state needs to be persuaded to be responsive to women's demands. Can the state also take a more direct initiating role? One case in point is that of the Roma in Portugal. Raquel Rego illustrates the state's attempt to stimulate the development of Roma women's organisations. So far there has been mixed success, given that they are working directly against prevailing Roma cultural rules which require women to marry and bear children while very young, and in which virtually all decisions are made by men. In the case of Nepal, the NGO acts as incubator for the development of fledgling identity-based feminist organisations, in which the relationship moves from sponsor to partner as the new organisation gains in strength and capacity. In this case the NGO is acutely aware of the importance of remaining separate from the state, but also from powerful international NGOs that may impose their own conditions. The case of the Somalia diaspora argues that both a top down and a bottom up approach need to occur in tandem if any real change is to occur. What appears to be clear from all cases is that women's own voices must be represented in some form. Philanthropy may bring temporary relief, some "empowerment" but no lasting or real change or emancipation.

It is also clear, however, that support from the state is 'necessary but not sufficient'. The deep-rooted cultural practices and beliefs referred to by so many of the writers here demonstrate the limits of the state – for example, FGM (female genital mutilation) is against the law in several African countries (and many western ones as well), yet the practice continues. If there are lessons to be learned from the most

recent period of feminist activism it is that hard won victories can be overturned, oppression can be reasserted in hitherto unexpected forms and locations, a new generation of activists can be encouraged and enthused. Progress is not linear; eternal vigilance is always required. New models of resistance will continue to be necessary. We all owe it to our embattled sisters to continue the struggle.

Note

¹ CIVICUS is the major international infrastructure organisation for civil society

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