The Future of Asian Feminisms

The Future of Asian Feminisms: Confronting Fundamentalisms, Conflicts and Neo-Liberalism

Edited by

Nursyahbani Katjasungkana
and Saskia E. Wieringa

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PREFACE

This anthology originates in the Second Conference of the Kartini Asia Network, held in Bali, November 2008. Already in the preparation of that conference we aimed to put together a coherent set of ideas and research findings, linked with the five themes of Kartini, namely women's studies, fundamentalisms, globalization and livelihood, conflict resolution and sexuality. In the course of organizing the conference and editing the book, many thanks are due. In the first place to the funders who made it possible for us to invite over 200 researchers and activists from 21 countries, mainly in Asia. These are The Ford Foundation, Hivos, the Dutch humanist aid organization, NOVIB, The Asia Foundation and the Dutch Embassy in Dhaka which funded the contribution of the Women's Studies Programme of Dhaka University. Special thanks are due to Barbara Klugman who has supported the Kartini Asia Network from the start, especially its sexuality theme. The Dhaka University team, particularly Najma Chowdhury, Nazmunessa Mahtab, Ayesha Banu and Amrita Chhachhi shared our vision and supported the organization in many ways. The Conference Organizing Team, consisting of Sepali Kottogoda, Gabrielle Jaschke, Maznah binti Mohammad, Kamla Bhasin, Chika Noya, Sita van Bemmelen and Saskia Wieringa painstakingly selected the papers and remained helpful throughout the long process of conceptualizing the conference. All other theme convenors stimulated their networks to attend the conference and helped finalizing the programme; these were Babette Resurrection, Kristi Poerwandari, Sunila Abeysekera, Abha Bhaiya and Mahmuda Islam.

The Indonesian secretariat, with unending dedication and patience, carried out the manifold tasks that organizing a major conference such as this entails. Particular thanks go to Chika Noya who not only skilfully and cheerfully led the secretarial team, which was strengthened by Nurdiana Diah Bintarini, Soka Handinah, Irfie Melani Putri and Imelda Taurina; she also managed to set up the Youth Forum, with colleagues Niluka Gunawardena and Benu Verma. In Bali itself we were assisted by the women's organization Bali Sruti. Sita van Bemmelen and Leny Setyawati proved to be of invaluable assistance. Gunawan and Reza Katjasungkana filmed the whole conference.

We were honoured that the then Minister of Women's Empowerment, Meutia Hatta, graced the opening ceremony with her presence and presented the opening address on the gendered effects of globalization in Asia. Oka Ariani Agung from Udayana University in Denpasar delivered the impressive closing address.

During the conference the many energetic discussions created a special flow of energy, which fed into the editorial process of the chapters in this anthology. To strengthen the cohesion of the volume, papers were extensively rewritten in an intensive editorial process. We, the editors, thank all contributors for their patience and commitment in dealing with the exacting task of converting a conference paper into a chapter of a coherent book that deals with a topic not less grand than the future of Asian feminisms. Pritika Kalra painstakingly copy-edited the whole text and produced a genuine English text, which was no mean feat, considering all contributors are non-native English speakers. The book is dedicated to the millions of young and old women and men in Asia who are struggling to build a future characterized by social, gender and sexual justice.

As editors we thank each other for the dedication and the sheer pleasure of working on this book together.

Nursyahbani Katjasungkana
Saskia Wieringa

CHAPTER ONE

FEMINIST REFLECTIONS ON NEO-LIBERALISM, FUNDAMENTALISM AND SURVIVAL

KAMLA BHASIN

The future of Asian feminism is as bright and strong as our determination. We feminists, both women and men, recognize close links between fundamentalism, conflict, neo-liberalism and the control over women's sexuality, which are the themes of the *Kartini Asia Network,* and we need to confront all of them. The world has enough resources and scientific knowledge to provide a decent life to all. The poverty and vulnerability imposed on more than half the world is manmade. Globalisation is today's buzzword, symbolized by the footloose executives and icons of the industrialized world. Yet the economically poor men and women are truly the global citizens. They give more to this earth than they take. They produce more than they consume. They do not waste or pollute like the most educated, scientific, developed 20 percent people belonging to the global north do. They are already practising the "gift economy," which has been suggested as an alternative. If there is still hope alive, it is because of these millions who refuse to accept the TINA (there is no alternative) syndrome. They believe that a better world is possible and struggle to create it. This is the spirit in which our foremothers acted. Feminists like Kartini, Rokeya Shakawat Hussain, Rosa Luxemburg, and many on whose brave shoulders we stand today.[1] There were other rebellious and cultured women who much predate these feminists of what is usually called 'the first wave' of feminism, such as Akka Mahadevi.[2]

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[1] These are pioneering, early 20th century feminists. Kartini (1879-1904) was a Javanese princess. She became a national feminist icon mainly through her passionate letters. Rokeya Hussain (1880-1923) was a Bengali writer. She fought for women education. Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) was a German philosopher and politician.

[2] Akka Mahadevi was a 12th century poet and philosopher from Karnataka, India.

Feminists of today are trying to keep alive their radical and creative spark in the midst of storms of neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism, and neo-imperialism. Feminists are also fighting for social justice and equality as the following story illustrates:

The leader of an indigenous group was questioned about the three most important things in the world. She replied:

> "I think the first most important thing in the world is the people. The second most important thing in the world is the people, and the third most important thing is also the people."

I agree with this wise woman. By "people" we refer to the 60%-70% of the world which is excluded and marginalized by the present paradigm of development. It is excluded economically, politically, and culturally. People and their lives are indivisible. Their sexuality is connected to their livelihoods; their livelihoods are connected to their agriculture, crafts, industry; and their agriculture and crafts are further connected to their culture. So let us try not to fragment people and their lives when we view them.

We could start by recognizing and saluting the millions of ordinary people, both women and men, whose extraordinary wisdom, hard work, and fearless actions are keeping this earth alive, offering a ray of hope. I mean the *dalits* (considered as a class of untouchables) in India, the indigenous people everywhere, and the working castes, classes, and races. We must remember the Zapatistas, the women of the Chipko movement, the Minamata and Bhopal activists, women and men working in Gonoshastho Kendro in Bangladesh, women from the US who raised the slogan "Not in my backyard"; "Not in my name". Let us remember the people's struggles in Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Pacific.[3]

[3] Zapatistas are followers of Emiliano Zapata, an agrarian reformer during the early 20th century Mexican revolution. In 1994 in Chipas, Mexico, an armed revolutionary group was set up to oppose the free trade agreement with the US. They wanted democratisation and land reform. The Chipko movement started in the 1970s when women resisted deforestation of the Himalayan mountainous region in Uttarakhand, India. If they saw anyone cutting a tree, they would hug the tree so as to cover it with their body and hence protect it from felling. The Minamata scandal is a case of mercury poisoning in Japan, while the Bhopal disaster refers to a chemical explosion in 1984 in that Indian city. In both cases, many people died and were affected with serious illnesses. Gonoshasthaya Kendra (GK) started its activities in 1972 after war with Pakistan. With the assistance of 22 volunteers and doctors, health care services were provided to people, particularly women and children.

Feminism

Let me define feminism. From a personal view, feminism is a perspective, a discourse, a way of looking at the world. Feminism looks not just at the world of women and girls. It looks with a woman's eyes at all issues, because all issues are related to women and all women's issues are societal issues.

We do recognize that all women are not the same; hence we focus on the marginalized and excluded ones. We feminists are concerned not just about patriarchy. We also address hierarchies, such as those of class, caste, race, the north–south divide, majority versus minority, and so on. We must try to understand their interconnection. In addition, feminism is an activism, a constant process of devising strategies to transform the world we live in, to make it more sustainable, equitable, and just. Women's studies and feminist studies, for me, are essentially towards understanding the world and how to transform it. Theory and practice have to go hand in hand.

Feminists, in my view, also need to look at the world from the perspective of Mother Nature or ecology. We admit that human beings are children of nature and not her master. We also recognize that there is not, and cannot be, a monolithic feminism. This is why we speak in the plural—feminisms. Feminisms, I feel, should be like water. Water is the same everywhere but it takes the shape of the container it is in. Feminist principles are the same but the form and shape and priorities of feminist perspectives and struggles are contextual.

I believe that the clash of civilizations is not between Muslims and Christians. It is between profit and the people. The present greed- and profit -based economic system is the biggest hurdle to the well being of the majority of the people. It is the biggest hurdle to peace, to sustainability, to justice, to genuine democracy, and to anything of value. For millions it is the biggest killer. This economic system is the father of all problems. It is the father of all wars. It is the father of many fundamentalisms and terrorisms. In many ways it is also the father of patriarchy.

Already in 1884, Friedrich Engels linked private property to the emergence of class and patriarchy (Engels 1972).[4] In my opinion, the

[4] *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State: In the light of the researches of Lewis H. Morgan* is a historical materialist treatise written by Friedrich Engels and published in 1884. It is partially based on notes by Karl Marx to Lewis H. Morgan on his book *Ancient Society*.

ugliest form of terrorism today is market terrorism while the worst forms of fundamentalism are neo-liberalism and neo-imperialism.

The standard of living of rich countries is responsible for the plunder of mother nature, of the so-called third world, of the working classes, castes and races, and of course, of women. It should be clear to all that excessive consumption and wasteful lifestyles of the global north are destructive and unsustainable. Once a journalist asked Mahatma Gandhi if he would want India to have the same standard of living as that of Great Britain.

He paused for a moment and said: "That tiny country had to exploit half the world to have its standard of living. How many worlds will India need to plunder?"

Vandana Shiva, a feminist ecologist, says an economy based on greed and profits alone is inevitably an economy of death for it creates a politics and culture of death. According to Shiva, the present global economy is a permanent war economy. The instruments of this war are coercive free trade treaties used to organize economies on the basis of trade wars; and technologies of production based on violence and control, such as toxics, genetic engineering and nano-technologies. She maintains that these are the real "weapons of mass destruction," which kill millions in peacetime by robbing them of food and water, thus poisoning the web of life. A few greedy corporations and countries turn the world into a supermarket in which even our water, our genes, our cells, our organs, our knowledge, our cultures, and our future are for sale (Shiva 2005).

In her view, the first principle that corporate globalization sacrifices is that of "real democracy". Governments get divorced from their people. Representative democracy is no longer representative or democratic under pressures of corporate globalization. The combination of corporate rule and electoral democracy inevitably shifts politics towards fascism, fundamentalism, and militarism.

The economics of exclusion produces a politics of exclusion. Economic failures are leading to large-scale insecurity not just amongst the poor but also amongst the middle classes. The increasing fascist tendencies, fundamentalism and repressive laws can be seen as the result of this economic system. Right wing fascist groups are rampant all over Europe. The neo-liberal economic policies of the European Union and the US have led to unacceptable levels of inequalities, economic hardships, insecurity, and social disruption elsewhere in the world. Large number of people have become development refugees as their communities and cultures have been destroyed. This has created immense discontent and anger, which can be contained only through brutal repression. The emergence of repressive

laws and regimes, and attacks on human rights and human rights' defenders can be attributed to these factors—they are all children of the mythical free market. Markets are free (for a few) but information is locked up, transparency is locked up, people and their basic freedoms are in chains.

The governments of G8 countries can instantly provide hundreds of billions of dollars, pounds, and euros to bail out rich banks and corporations. The US can spend 1,000 billion dollars on a single war, but these countries will not provide 18 billion dollars a year to save the lives of millions of children and to provide basic services to millions of people.

Because of the greed-based paradigm of development, there is war against life itself. Our environment is full of violence; daily life is full of violence. For millions of women, men and children, all times are war-times. There is no peace for them; there is no ease for them. Power, profit and patriarchy have vitiated everything and brought our universe to the brink of disaster. This, I believe, is at the core of the crises we face today.

The following story from Gautama Buddha's childhood sums up many things about our world today. Gautama was about 12 years old, playing in the garden, when he saw a beautiful bird fall from the sky. He rushed to the bird, picked it up and saw that the bird had been hit by an arrow. He ran home with the bird and started nursing it. Just then, one of his male cousins came rushing in, saying: "Gautama give me my bird, this is my bird." Gautama asked him why the bird was his. He replied: "It is mine because I hit it with an arrow and brought it down."

Gautama understood what his cousin said but he did not like his logic. He thought for a while and said:

"You wanted to kill this bird, which means you are its enemy. How can I give the bird to the enemy? I love this bird; I want it to live, so it is mine."

The agents of globalization are like Gautama's cousin. For immediate profit, they will "shoot" anything down. For profit, they will turn fertile lands into golf courses; they will over exploit seas, poison the land by over use of fertilizers, sell cigarettes, Pepsi and Coke, pornography, and weapons. While the peasants, farmers, fisherfolk, craftspeople, tribals, and indigenous people are like Gautama because they have a relationship of love with the nature. They have a caring and nurturing relationship with the nature because their lifeline is linked to her. The cousin to me represents masculine thinking which is anti-life. To me Gautama shows the only way forward. This is the path of compassion, love, caring, nurturing, the path based on feminine principles.

The future

What is the way forward under the present circumstances for Asian feminists?

First of all we must ensure that our personal lives and lifestyles are not destructive towards the environment and of interpersonal relationships. Our organizations should not become bureaucratic, undemocratic, or hierarchical. We should avoid genderization of our language and programs. By genderization I mean slowly giving up the use of words like patriarchy, feminism, structural violence, and exploitation. Our analysis, our writing, and language should not be diluted in order to please donors or people in power. It should remain sharp and crisp with a feminist sting; it should look at gender relations in the context of class, caste, race, North-South relations, disability, and other social and economic hierarchies, and unjust structures. We must ensure that we are not mainstreamed into streams which are filthy, polluting, anti-people, and anti-life. We go to the mainstream only to clean it; only to turn it around.

On our path we should be walking on the two legs of economics and culture. Many of us have given up talking about economics, of the material basis of patriarchy, political economy of violence against women and fundamentalisms. A balanced approach is necessary. We must also ensure that we walk on the two legs of theory and practice—understanding and transforming.

We should give our full attention to Mother Nature, our nurturer. We must remember the principles of being and of living; the principles of ecology, of interconnectedness, the principles of diversity, and harmony. She tells us in Pablo Neruda's words: "They can cut all the flowers but cannot stop spring from coming."[5]

We should also incorporate men in our thinking and practice. We have to challenge them to reflect. Since men and masculinity are also social constructs, men have to be encouraged and cajoled to change. I have been trying to do some of this. I conduct three- to four-day workshops with men, where I help them see how patriarchy and notions of hegemonic masculinity are de-humanizing them, brutalizing them, killing their gentleness, their beauty, and their femininity. Men and boys, especially gentle boys and men are also sexually abused and emotionally castrated in and by patriarchy. Like us they are exploited by hetero-patriarchal capitalism. I think the best way to humanize men is to involve them in bringing up children and in reproductive work. Involvement with creating

[5] Pablo Neruda (1904-1973) was a Chilean poet, diplomat, and politician. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971. This is one of his most quoted sayings.

and nurturing life will help them give up the many deadly games they play.

Looking into our inner selves we must rediscover our inner strengths and energy, celebrated as the principle of Shakti, and reconnecting with what goddesses as Gaea, Isis, and Tara stand for.[6] We must also move towards a strategy of building rainbow alliances to develop common visions because our numbers will be our strength. We have to realize that bigger goals require bigger networks. If I want to be big, I have to give up my small identity. A drop becomes an ocean only when it merges with the ocean, when she gives up her identity as a drop. We must build bridges between local and global actors, between individuals and the communities we live in, between rational and emotional motivations, between nature and culture and between economics and ethics.

Unjust globalization can be challenged only through our global connections and actions. So we too need to go global to build global trust and global love, and to dream of better worlds. We spread our principles of justice; human, women's and sexual rights; democracy and diversity; the integrity of our bodies, spirituality, and the wholeness of our minds.

We denounce the destruction of Mother Nature, of local communities, of human values such as compassion and sharing, and of harmony and diversity. We need to redefine legitimacy−the legitimacy of our claims, our views, our feminist perspectives and goals, our choices, and voices. Our values are honesty, integrity, autonomy, and the balance between Yin and Yang, Prakriti and Purush, Anima and Animus.[7] We need to spread the word that feminism is not a commodity or industry. It involves love, caring, nurturing, belonging, both life and culture, both passion and compassion. We need younger feminists (women and men) into our movements, because they are our hope and future. We must nurture them, help them to become strong and gentle, rational and passionate.

In short, we want freedom from violence, silence, exploitation, monocultures, patriarchy, and all other hierarchies.

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[6] Shakti is in the Indian worldview the female principle and female power. Gaea is the ancient Greek goddess of the earth. The Egyptian goddess Isis was seen to give birth to heaven and earth. Tara, the goddess of peace and protection is the most popular Tibetan goddess.

[7] Yin and Yang are the Chinese principles of complementary female and maleness. Prakrti is mother nature in Indian philosophy while Purush refers to the universal cosmological male principle. Anima and animus are similar terms mainly used in the analytical psychological writings of Carl Gustav Jung.

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CHAPTER TWO

MOVEMENT BUILDING AND FEMINISM IN ASIA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES[*]

TAN BENG HUI

The challenges of movement building present some commonalities across Asia. Therefore, although I focus my views on feminism locally, within the context of Malaysia, I trust these reflections may be relevant to other Asian feminists as well. The processes of movement building are key to achieving success while transforming unequal relations in society. I borrow my definition of the women's movement from the book which Cecilia Ng, Maznah Mohamad and myself have forwarded on feminism and women's movement in Malaysia (Ng, Mohamad, and Tan 2006). This definition builds on the work of Wieringa (1995); Molyneux (1998); Batliwala (2003); and Griffen (2002). It recognizes that women's movements can take a diversity of forms and interests, so they are not homogenous. They can refer to a "spectrum of conscious and unconscious individual or collective acts…concerned with diminishing gender subordination" (Wieringa 1995). This is understood to intersect with other forms of oppression. We agree with Batliwala (2003) that movements are political processes; that they have political agendas; and that these agendas are about changing power relations.

In spite of the many achievements of women's movements in Asia, the work we are taking on as individuals or organizations seems to be increasing everyday. In fact, it is turning into a never-ending task. And yet, if we were truly successful in our task, that is, in making the world a better place, women in particular, we should be doing much less. Some would even argue that a true sign of success for women's movements would be

[*] I acknowledge the support of Susanna George, Melody Lu, Mujde Bilgutay, Ng Tze Yeng, and Cecilia Ng in making this text possible.

when we feel we can all stop our activities and close down our respective organizations because then the day would have come when we no longer would have inequalities and injustices. It would be the day when people can live free from patriarchy, homophobia, racism, classicism, casteism, heterosexism, ageism, and all the other "isms" we have been fighting against.

The fact that we are far from realizing what we have envisioned should not be surprising considering we are living in an era where challenges of neo-liberalism, fundamentalism, and conflict are very real. How to deal with them in a way that does not leave us always busy, with no time for our loved ones; frustrated, impatient, and stressed because we are constantly having to put out fires rather than getting on with the agenda of transformation? How do we ensure that we can move closer to our dreams?

Building movements: some preliminary ideas

One way forward is putting the question of movement building squarely back onto our agenda. Here, I do not mean simply increasing the number of those who are part of the women's movement. For a long time when I first joined this movement, I believed there was a correlation between its success and the number of people it managed to attract.

Perhaps there is some correlation between numbers and our ability to forward our agendas. For example, the scale and depth of a few of our initiatives have often been capped by limited human resources. Nevertheless, I have also learnt that numbers alone do not guarantee effective change. Quantity, I feel, should always be accompanied by quality. Many of us seem to have forgotten how important it is to prioritize and develop capacities of those who are part of our movements. In my experience, our efforts are typically channeled into getting things done. The short-term gains (for example, completion of projects, activities, etc.) are often more important than the long-term ones such as building capacity of newer members. Hence, for instance, if there is something that requires organizing, it is easier for us to turn to a more experienced person than work with several less experienced ones and which could have enabled them to go through the process of building their capacity to take on the same role in the future. In other instances, maybe because there is always so much work to do, we "reward" new joinees in our movements by throwing them into the deep end of the pool. We either assume that these newer members already come with the right skills and perspectives for the roles assigned or have the ability to magically pick up these skills along

the way! This approach is untenable for long-term effectiveness of our movements. We need to learn how to pause, reflect, and (re)strategize rather than simply engage in the "doing".

Towards this, critical thinking is paramount. In Malaysia, perhaps it is the way some of us are brought up, or maybe it is due to our hugely lacking education system, or maybe because for such a long time the majority of us were in denial about the problems in the country, but somehow we have ended up tending not to be critical. Even when we know something is not right, we are happier to just jump straight into the "doing" if it is something we believe needs addressing.

Very few of us ask questions, not because we do not want to, but because we do not know how to. It was not until I went back to graduate study that I discovered one part of my brain had gone to sleep in my ten-year hiatus from the academia. This was the part of my brain which understood that some things were not right and I was not comfortable with them not being right, and yet when I was pushed to locate the problem, I often found that difficult. Asking the right questions, as I have learnt, is as important as finding out the answers.

As people interested in social transformation, we need to encourage greater critical thinking for ourselves, for our organizations, and for our movements. When I first joined the women's movement in Malaysia in 1990, the gap between "the doing" and "the thinking" was not as pronounced as it is today. There may be various explanations; the one that has interested me the most in recent times has been the question of funding and the growth of "Activism Inc.".

Funding and Activism Inc.

With the influx of funds to feminist activists in Malaysia in the late 1980s, we experienced a process of institutionalization of activism. This gave rise to what I call "Activism Inc.". Others have called it the "NGO-ization or bureaucratization" of the women's movement. It is one reason why over the last decade, some have come to regard building the women's movement as synonymous with the building of NGOs. Having NGOs per se is not a bad thing; having an organizational or collective basis for activism is critical for long-term change. However, it is the kind of NGOs that many of ours have evolved that require reflection and critique.

When money first presented itself through donor agencies, it was welcomed as it offered feminist activists the option of organizing for change in a less ad-hoc manner. Some saw this as an opportunity to take activism to newer heights; to have our "message" reach those we thought

it would never have reached otherwise. Yet others must have felt that being more financially secure would make organizing a little easier. The advent of funding has certainly seen some quarters of women's movement capitalizing on this opportunity and over time setting up NGOs with full-fledged programmes supported by part-time employees working full-time. Funding has allowed some groups to carry out more activities than earlier. It has facilitated the movement's visibility, at least in terms of its public image and its impact. Yet, it has not resulted in a sustained growth of our movements. Often we have difficulty simply filling the jobs that we created, where funds have been painstakingly raised.

When funding first allowed us to pay those who chose to work for the movement, we justified this by saying we should not shy away from remunerating ourselves for legitimate work. There are however some concerns around the development of funding and Activism Inc. that are worth further thought.

First, while paid activism remunerates a handful of us who are already committed to the cause, many others have not gone beyond viewing their work in a women's NGO simply as a mode of employment. One reason why the transformative change we envisage has stalled is because within our own NGOs, we have not managed to convince those who regard their work as a job, that what they are doing will better women's lives, theirs included. Given this fact, we should not be too surprised or frustrated if women, who take up employment within our organizations, simply because they are looking for a job, do not display the kind of passion and commitment that we demand of ourselves.

Second, since the time funding arrived at our doorstep, most of us have continued to seek it based on an assumption that it is necessary for the work we want to do. However, the quest to secure funding has embroiled many of us in an arduous obstacle course of fulfilling donor requirements. Typically, we start with the formulation and writing of proposals according to set guidelines. This also involves the art of "selling" because even though the activities we have planned might be legitimate and necessary, since they are competing in a world of limited funds, they require additional "embellishments" – and thus more effort on our part – to make the cut. Then, once funding is secured, even more energies are expended to ensure that the approved activities take place according to plan. Some of us also go to great lengths to make sure that these activities meet our proposed targets, since there are potentially additional rewards from meeting such markers of success. Depending on the donor agency, report writing also presents a set of separate challenges. Once we are done

with a particular project, the cycle starts all over again because there is an automatic assumption that this is the only way to move forward.

Related to this is a more serious problem of how Activism Inc. has trapped us in fixed ways of "doing". We have, in some sense, become project fixated and instead of being able to respond critically and quickly to changes around us – as the spirit of activism calls for – we are sidetracked with meeting funding obligations.

Paid activism has also diverted our attention to goals such as being professional. With money, we set ourselves – and also are expected to have by others – higher levels of professionalism. So we introduce systems to be efficient, for example. While these are not bad in and of themselves, setting such standards often takes much more time and resources than we originally intended, resulting in less attention all round being given to substantive work. The worst part is the more we want to do, the more money we think we need to have, and the more money we have, the more obligated we become to meet donor requirements.

I want to share three other developments related to funding that I have found disturbing: (i) funder-led agendas within the women's movement, (ii) growing inter- and intra-organizational income inequalities, and (iii) donor dependency.

Funder-led agenda

Very few donors exercise flexibility while granting funds. Rather than allowing us to conceive of a plan based on which we approach them, the process is often reversed. They decide what they wish to fund, and we either tailor our plans to fit their criteria or devise new ones that we think will allow us to access this pot of money. Depending upon how desperately we need funds, we adjust our plans even if this means coming up with something totally different from what we had originally intended to do. Funder-led agendas have also privileged certain kinds of work within the women's movement. Depending on what the flavor of the day is, some issues simply do not attract the funding they require.

Inter- and intra-organizational income inequalities

Due to donor grants, the income gap between and within organizations has widened. At one level, some groups within the movement have more access to funding because they meet the criteria of donor agencies or have managed to build a rapport with these agencies. Within the global and local women's movements, some have huge budgets for their activities,

while others have very little. There are fairly large income gaps within some organizations as well, which are explained as unavoidable because salaries are meant to be commensurate with one's expertise and experience. If one of the goals of feminism is redistributing resources and removing income inequalities, how do we deal with these discrepancies within our movements?

Donor dependency

How has donor-agency funding affected our ability to imagine different ways of organizing? For practically everything that we want to do, we factor in a monetary component. In the past, we were forced to scrounge around for resources to publish that odd newsletter or bulletin or because we did not have offices, we relied on each other to open up our homes for meetings to plot the next course of action. Today, in the context of shrinking donor funding, instead of seizing the opportunity to rethink our strategies, viz. funding, we have opted to continue down the money path, the only difference being that we are looking at alternative sources. The options of doing less, changing our approaches, or even reverting to the days when we relied more on the spirit of volunteerism – all these are worthy of consideration but have not been given much thought to. The availability of donor funds has over the years created a dependency on our part. It has made us unadventurous in our ways of "thinking" and "doing". At the very least, we need to question this approach if we want to ensure successful movement building. Now, more than ever, we need to pause, reflect, and re-strategize.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE FUTURE OF ASIAN FEMINISMS

NURSYAHBANI KATJASUNGKANA
AND SASKIA E. WIERINGA

This book is the outcome of the second conference of the Kartini Network for Gender and Women's Studies in Asia, usually called Kartini Asia Network (KAN), or just Kartini,[1] organized in November 2008 in Bali. Co-organized with the Gender and Women's Studies Programme of the University of Dhaka, this conference's theme was the future of Asian feminisms and confronting fundamentalisms, conflicts, and neo-liberalism which is also the title of the present volume.

Over 200 participants from 21 countries (mostly Asian), including participants from many provinces in Indonesia, came together to debate the most critical issues they have been confronted with in their daily struggles to create a society in which gender and social justice is a norm. This is in line with the mission of Kartini—to help build women and gender programmes grounded in women's realities, and to stimulate gender and women rights' advocacy programmes fuelled by the latest insights into women's and gender studies.

As was the case during the first conference of the network, held in Dalian in December 2004, this event too led to a rich exchange of experiences. These were related to the five themes of the network: women/gender studies, fundamentalisms, conflicts, livelihood and sexuality.

[1] Princess Raden Ayu Kartini (1879–1904) was a pioneer of women rights. In her letters to her Dutch pen friends, she criticized the colonial government, the patriarchal Javanese culture, and existing Islamic practices. She fought for women's education, autonomy, and workers' rights. She died during child birth. Her brilliant letters were published in 1911 and later translated into English (*Letters of a Javanese princess*, published in 1920). Recently, more radical letters for instance on polygyny, were published (Coté 1995; Jaquet 1987).

In this introductory chapter some key findings are synthesized. We see two triangles at work. Politically and organizationally, the triangle of women's empowerment comprises the three poles of women's movement, women's studies, and gender-based policies. Theoretically, the "triple-R" triangle. The three poles of which are rights, redistribution, and recognition. In neither of these triangles is the order fixed. The critical issue is that they are most effective when each of the three poles is actively engaged with the others.

Asian feminisms

The term "Asian feminisms" from the title contains two keenly debated words, "feminism" and "Asia". How far can we speak of "feminism" in view of the wide diversity of motivations, actions, and mobilizations? And is there something specific about Asia, something all nations in that region hold in common?

The latter question far outweighs regional interests, considering that the economic and political weight of the region is growing fast, and that the 21st century has been named the "Asian century" by many commentators. With three countries in the global list of top five-largest countries, two of which (China and India) have consistently high growth rates, Asia is increasingly recognized as the continent to which economic, if not political power, will shift in the coming decades, surpassing the struggling European and US economies, which have been hard hit by the 2008-onwards financial crisis. However, the enormous economic power of the region is not divided equally. At first sight the differences between East, South, Southeast, Central, and West Asia seem to be more prominent than any possible shared issues. In view of the widely diverging histories, political and economic structures, as well as cultural perceptions, one might argue that the region is more characterized by diversity than by commonalities. Yet, as Minjeong and Bose (2009:67) argue: "...transversal cultural flows are maintained through cultural links". In this volume, we explore one of those transversal cultural flows, that is women's studies and the women's movements in the region. And, importantly, we examine the scope of these transversal cultural flows of the women's movement to translate concerns into transformatory transversal politics.

We found in our work within the KAN framework, and especially in the two conferences that the network held so far that it was refreshing and stimulating to discuss the issues Kartini focuses on with such a large number of participants from all five different Asian regions. Even if only to recognize the enormous diversity by which Asia is characterized. So

often in global conferences there is an Asian panel, or an Asian to represent the Asian voice. In our network, we hear voices from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos, China, Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Uzbekistan, Malaysia, to name a few, articulate a variety of views and experiences. The chapters brought together in this volume demonstrate the great diversity of the "transversal cultural flow" that women's movements within Asia provide. Also, in the process some common issues may be distilled.

Without going into an analysis of what all these countries may have in common, it was important for our participants in the past events (the research we did or the conference presentations we shared), to talk to women from neighboring countries, and not only to their North American, European, and Australian colleagues. The North-South exchanges between feminists have a long history but the south-south exchanges, which have a genealogy from anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles onwards, need articulation and further development. Though feminist scholars, both from the global South and the global North, can gain valuable insights from these South-South exchanges, so far this has rarely happened. Most dominant gender theories are based on women's experiences from Europe, the US, and Australia. As theory is the sediment of experiences, exclusion of authors from the global South should lead to reflections on the supposedly general validity of dominant gender theories. This is the more striking as pointed out by Chowdhury and Chang in this volume (chapters 4 and 5) that it is easier to draft curricula of Asian women's studies programmes based on materials produced in the global North than based on Asian women's experiences. Postcolonial gender theories, such as the work of Spivak (1999) are the most striking exception to this general rule of Northern theoretical dominance but these are often ignored.

As Chhachhi (2011) notes in an interview with Nancy Fraser, Northern feminists have not really engaged with post-colonial theorists such as Bhabha, Spivak, or Mohanty. Tracing the genealogy of feminism, the references are primarily to second-wave feminism in the US, the UK, or other European countries; differences in the trajectory of Southern feminisms which could contribute to a richer production of knowledge are generally ignored.

The second question is whether the multiple forms in which women fight for gender justice in Asia can be called "feminist"? It is striking that within Kartini we have hardly had any discussion on whether everybody

felt comfortable calling themselves feminist.[2] Most of our participants are very much aware of the history of feminism in Asia, as indicated by our name, and by the name of the Bangladesh network that is linked to Kartini, the Rokeya network.[3] Korea, India, China, Pakistan, and the Philippines, to name but a few countries, can also boast of long histories of their women's movements and most of their early protagonists called themselves feminists.[4] The Beijing *Women's World Conference* of 1995 is an important recent landmark for the Asian women's movement. So many countries from all over the world. (182, to be specific) signed the consensus document called the Beijing Platform for Action (PFA), that voices calling feminism a western concept can be silenced easily. What is clear is that Asian feminists share certain concerns, even though they differ in how they deal with these issues, and that they put different emphasis from that espoused by many feminist writers in the global North.

Asian feminist researchers also feel sidelined by the citational practices of Northern feminists, which tend to exclude the theoretical contributions of researchers and activists of the global South. The self-referencing Anglosaxon feminist academic networks often treat the work of non-Northern activists and researchers as not relevant for their understanding of global (read Northern) theoretical concerns. That many native English speakers only know one language is not helpful either. At most, Asian researchers find themselves back in footnotes, providing the material upon which Northern academics build their theories. In our conferences, Asian researchers were not the "exotic others," but representatives of the rich national cultures and histories on which their work is founded.

The founding members of the Kartini Network decided that it was imperative to stimulate a particular "Asian voice" in women studies and in the global women's movement. There is general agreement among them that dominance of feminisms from the global North must be broken; they want to widen the concept of "feminism" to include voices from the global South as well. The participants in Kartini's activities feel that the term

[2] Roces (2010) contains a long discussion on the discourse against the use of the term "feminism" from various quarters in Asia. It is often equated with western arrogance, an anti-family attitude, and promoting lesbianism.

[3] Like Kartini, Begum (Lady) Roquia (1880-1932) was a feminist pioneer. A prolific writer, she was famous for her efforts towards gender equality and other social issues. She established the first of school in Bengal primarily for Muslim girls, which exists till today. A comparison Roquia or Rokeya and Kartini has been given in Wieringa (2006).

[4] Jayawardena (1986) provides a discussion of early feminism in the third world. A recent collection focusing on Asia is that of Roces and Edwards (2010).

"feminist" applies to them and that they themselves will determine what issues to include and prioritize in their daily struggles for gender and social justice. The turn of feminist thought from being based on solidarity, which stipulates a body-soul commitment to a particular brand of feminism, to affinity, which allows for the forging of changing strategic alliances has helped ease the process with which Asian women appropriate the concept of feminism to their struggles (Wieringa 2009). The present day emphasis on feminisms as a set of theories and practices based on diversity, incorporating multiplicities and contradictions enables it to work on the basis of shifting alliances and short-term agendas, while keeping committed to the vision of gender justice (see also Casal de Vela e.a., chapter 6). The rise of global feminist debates, such as the Feminist Dialogues related to the World Social Forum have likewise engaged many feminists from the Global South (Vargas 2005).

Kartini Asia Network

KAN or Kartini was conceptualised from 2001 onwards, when Amrita Chhachhi, Thanh-Dam Truong and Saskia Wieringa, who all had extensive links with different parts of Asia, started reflecting on how they could help build a truly Asian voice within the global women/ gender studies discourse. In the following years, many friends joined us: Abha Bhaiya, Nighat Sayet Khan, Nursyahbani Katjasungkana, and Kamla Bhasin, to name but a few. They all wanted to contribute to building an Asian vision of the future of Asian women and men, to bring out the specificities of the manifold rich experiences of so many Asian nations, and to critically challenge the so-called global discourse of women's gender studies. They were also determined to build up the Asian women's own discourses and academic practices. Over the years, other like-minded souls agreed to contribute to this journey, and so Sister Maryjohn Mananzan, Babette Resurrection, Najma Chowdhury (and her team in Dhaka University), Sunila Abeyesekere, Sepali Kottogoda, Qiqi Jin, Kristi Poerwandari, Mary John, and many others joined. In May 2003, we came together for the first time in The Philippines.[5]

[5] The general secretariat of the network is presently located in Jakarta. Two national chapters have been set up: the Rokeya network in Bangladesh coordinated from the Gender and Women's Studies Department of the University of Dhaka; and the Kartini Indonesia Network, coordinated from the general secretariat in Jakarta. Just prior to the conference the Kartini Young Asian Women Leadership Forum was established. This is an initiative, which followed from Kartini's sexuality training in Himachal Pradesh, India, in April 2008, coordinated by the