

# Exploring the Contradictions of Family Relationships

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This paper is a reflection on family relations, and of the political implications of the ways in which they are conceptualized.

The reflections are prompted partly by my collaboration with Women and Law in Southern Africa, where now family studies are on the agenda, partly by my own involvement over the years in the Danish women's movement of the 1970'es, as well as in women's struggles in Mozambique (where I lived from 1980 to 1984), and partly by present developments in the global women's movement, as expressed at the recent Fourth World Women's Conference in Beijing.

The paper is divided into three parts:

In the first part I'll explain what I mean, talking of contradictions of family relationships. Basically they are the contradictions between family relations as on one hand oppressive and confining, and at the other hand offering protection and support.

In the second part I'll discuss how, at various points in time, at various locations, one side or the other of this contradiction has been in focus of attention in thinking and writing about the family. From my own experience first the new women's movement in the 1970'es, where all thinking about the family was focused on its oppressive and confining aspects, and secondly my African experience, where I came to see family relations very differently: as networks of identity and resistance against colonial power and market forces' ruthless breakup of families and social relations by economic hardship and forced work migrations.

Finally in the third section of the paper I'll comment on what seems to be at present a major front in discussions of

women's issues as they have taken place in the global fora provided by UN conferences, most recently at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. There seems to be at one hand the gender equality argumentation - a continuation of the 1970 women's movement approach, from seeing female biology and family relations basically as obstacles in the struggle for gender equality, to an insistence now on women's human rights - and at the other hand the new feminist right wing, the American 'pro-family', 'pro-life' organizations, Christian fundamentalists in alliance with Muslim fundamentalists, stressing traditional family values.

The point of the paper is to show the unfortunate consequences of the dividing line between Left and Right in the women's movement being drawn like that, between 'equal rights' at one hand, and 'family' at the other. I want equal rights *and* family, ie. I don't want to leave family issues to be conceptualized by right wing fundamentalists. As far as I can see the Left far too uncritically is speaking in the language of the market, in the presently dominating neo-liberalist tone of voice, thus leaving the whole field of close human relations, belonging, parenthood etc. to the Right. I see this as catastrophic for several reasons: Partly because the Right is talking to women's hearts, whereas the Left is talking to their minds. In this aspect the historical mistake of the Communist Party *vis-a-vis* Fascist mobilization in pre-war Germany (reflected upon by Wilhelm Reich in *Massenpsychologie des Faschismus* (1933) as well as by Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1944)) seems to be repeated. And partly because we - the Left - do need hearts and close social relationships in the necessary struggle against the dominance of unfettered market relations.

## **Part I**

### **Contradictions of Family Relationships**

Family relationships are based on difference. Typically they will include relations across gender and age: man/woman, parent/child. Often relations of gender and age will be socially constructed as relations of power. In a classic article from 1973 Claude Meillassoux is discussing how peasant production in pre-colonial Africa supported power relations of *age* - hierarchy resting, according to Meillassoux, on "a notion of 'anteriority'. The first are those to whom one owes food and seeds" (Meillassoux, 1973:83) - and of *gender*, social reproduction of the

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community being "a political endeavour and not a natural process" (Meillassoux, 1973:85).

Hierarchy, however, is linked to solidarity: "The reproduction of the [reproductive] cycle generates solidarity and hierarchy between successive generations; notions of anteriority and posterity preside over social relations. It does not mean only, therefore, a relation between the genitor and his offspring, but also between older and younger brothers (...) patrons and clients, host and foreigners" (Meillassoux, 1973:85). Also in the relations of gender, hierarchy and solidarity, authority and affection are interlinked.

Gender relations, however, are not just relations man/woman, but also relations woman/woman and man/man. According to my own research in Mozambique, these more horizontal relations are also cut across by age (older and younger brothers/sisters, hierarchies between co-wives, here based on precedence of marriage more than on age of wife) but mutuality and solidarity is very much felt as well. In rural parts of Mozambique physical surroundings as well as social life, seemed to be divided along gender lines, into male and female domains, the very fact of gender being socially more than biologically defined: "Songs, dances and rituals were gendered. A woman may join in in a man's dance, but everybody will know that this is a guest performance. (...) Two worlds, one male and one female, seem to be coexisting. They are interdependent and intertwined, but still they are separate, and the borderline between them has to be observed. Into this divided world bodies are fitted in. Sex seems to follow from gender, more than the other way round" (Arnfred, 1995: 6).

The most important day-to-day gender relation would be, for women, the relation to other women. In many households there would be a number of women, sharing daily tasks, helping each other. Gender groups would provide mutuality and support. But at the same time gender groups would also be hierarchical, senior wives and mothers-in-law making life difficult for young female newcomers to the family.

One interesting point regarding relations of gender and relations of age is that they tend to change differently over time. With increasing market relations and corresponding processes of individualization, hierarchies of age seem to lose importance, while hierarchies of gender seem to persist, even being reinforced (Arnfred, 1990).

Another interesting point is the coexistence of authority and affection. In present day Western families this combination of authority and affection can be observed -and experienced- in

relations between parents and children, the relation between grown-ups and children being one area where hierarchies of age are still important. Looking at relationships between parent and child, or between teacher and pupil, it becomes evident that even if these relationships are hierarchical, they are not necessarily oppressive. On the contrary, a certain hierarchy is a precondition for a learning process to take place.

The point, I want to elaborate here, however, is the basic contradiction in family relations from (especially young) women's points of view: Family relations of age and gender being oppressive and confining, and at the same time offering protection and support.

Obviously the terms in which I am talking here are extremely crude, dealing in very general terms with 'women' and 'family relations'. In any concrete analysis, of course, the tools must be refined. My point has been to show the contradictions, doublenesses and ambivalences in family relationships, from young and older women's (and from young men's) points of view. And in this context to emphasize the importance of keeping in mind both sides of the contradictions when analysis of family relationships is carried out. That is: to think in terms of both - and rather than either/or.

## **Part II**

### **The 1970'es Women's Movement Stressing Family Confinements**

Significantly it has been the either/or approach that has characterized family studies in the context of the women's movement. Or put differently: When family studies were *in* in the women's movement in the early 1970'es, the approach, with very few exceptions, was critical, focusing on the ways in which women's position in the family contributed to the perpetuation of female subordination.<sup>1</sup>

Simone de Beauvoir's great study from 1949 *Le deuxième sexe*, an important source of inspiration for the new women's movement, invariably portrays the ways, in which women

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<sup>1</sup> One important exception was Ulrike Prokop (1976): *Weiblicher Lebenszusammenhang*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, with her Marxist inspired methodology stressing the "Widersprüche und Ambivalenzen im Weiblichen Lebenszusammenhang."

Browsing recently through various feminist reviews from the late 1980'es onwards, looking for newer feminist analyses of, or discussions related to, 'the family' in one way or another, I was surprised to find the almost complete disappearance of this topic from the feminist research agenda.

through their family positions and obligations are tied to *immanence* - as opposed to the men's possibilities of *transcendence* - as fatal limitations, preventing women from taking part in the great deeds of culture and history. The goal for Simone de Beauvoir - and for much of the new women's movement of the 1970'es - was gender equality, failing to recognize the terms for that equality as male. In the socialist inspired part of the movement we rephrased 'equality' as 'emancipation', seeing gender struggle as an aspect of class struggle for a new society - but the implicit male model persisted. At that time we did not have the conceptual tools for thoroughly criticizing the male bias inherent in virtually all scientific and political thought (Marx included) with roots in Enlightenment thinking.<sup>2</sup>

Our reaction in the 1970'es of course was understandable. We had seen our mothers' generation, and their mothers before them, as limited by the family expectations to their performance as mothers, housewives and wives. We saw all these traditional female family roles as obstacles and impediments in relation to what we wanted to achieve in terms of education and professional fulfilment. A more radical wing of the new women's movement wanted to do away with the family altogether - women can do without it. A less radical wing insisted on gender equality not just in terms of women entering male domains, ie. the public sphere and the labour market, but also in terms of men entering female domains, ie. the private sphere, childcare and kitchen duties. The basic valorization, however, of public sphere = exciting achievements, and private sphere = household chores, was unchanged.

Another consequence of this anti-family trend, the implications of which we did not see clearly at the time, was the push for general commodification: the expansion of the market into previously non-market spheres. In the short run this was exactly what we wanted: Minimizing the household chores. Preserving, pickling, baking, sowing, darning, mending - all of this and more of the same kind disappeared from the homes and the housewives' agendas, being replaced by visits to the supermarket. For laundry, cleaning, dishwashing etc. expensive machinery was bought. And as for childcare Denmark experienced in the late 1960'es and early 1970'es a veritable boom in public crèches and kindergartens.

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<sup>2</sup> One early work identifying the male bias of scientific thinking, was Carolyn Merchant (1980): *The Death of Nature*, Harper & Row, San Francisco.

In the long run, however, the implication was that from now on a much greater part of family life and family energies became channelled through the market, or through the state. All of this has to be paid for, so nowadays a double salary (man and wife) is a precondition for a normal family life.

### **In Southern Africa: Families as networks of identity and resistance**

When in 1980 I moved to Mozambique it was with a mental ballast of ten years in the new women's movement and feminist research. Among other things I had done quite a lot of work on "women and the family", analysis of family politics etc.<sup>3</sup>

But I came to see families in the African setting in a different light. The Portuguese colonial power in Mozambique had partly exploited, partly disregarded family lives and linkages. The exploitation was through tax payment, where the 'household head' was made responsible for tax payment in an amount according to the size of the household, and through forced cultivation, eg. of cotton, where likewise the household counted as the unit, meaning that often women and children had to do the actual cultivation work (Arnfred, 1985/86). At the same time family links were disregarded: In order to meet the tax-obligations male members of households had to migrate for waged work on faraway colonial plantations or mines, while wives and children were left behind on the land of the lineage. Alternatively the men would be taken for 'forced labour' on public construction works on behalf of the colonial state, frequently far from home. Scattered families thus was one of the outcomes of colonial intervention - and maintaining close family links in spite of colonial obstruction thus achieved an aspect of (maybe unconscious and implicit) counter strategies of resistance and identity.

Family ties were strong, and family identities important for women as well as for men. Even those who had lived in the city all their lives maintained close ties to relatives in the countryside, especially to those living in the family's place of

<sup>3</sup> Titles among others: 'Familien' i den politiske økonomi, in: S.Arnfred og K.Syberg (red): *Kvindesituation og kvindebevægelse under kapitalismen*, GMT, Grenå 1974; 'Familien' i kvindebevægelsens praksis og teori, in: *Kontrast* 5/1974, Pax Forlag, Oslo 1974; Om udviklingen i den sovjetiske familiepolitik, in: S.Arnfred et.al.: *Alexandra Kollontaj, Udvalgte skrifter III: Om Alexandra Kollontajs samtid og ideer*, Tiderne Skifter Kbh. 1978; Ændringer i klassestrukturen og disses betydning for kvinders situation (also dealing with contradictions between family and wage labour) in: *Sociologisk Forskning* 3/78, Umeå 1978.

origin, where also the ancestors would be buried. These links had social, economic and spiritual aspects, cf. the WLSA concept of 'expanding and contracting families' elaborated in Elizabeth Gwaunza's paper in this volume. Similarly relatives from the countryside when arriving in the city would be guaranteed food, shelter and support from urbanised family members.

A related observation was regarding the importance of woman/woman support and mutual help in the context of family networks. Even in the cities working women would often be found living in family setups comprising at least one more adult woman of closer or more distant kin: a sister, mother (only if the working woman was living on her own, with no husband), a cousin, niece or other.

All of this does not mean that breaking out of family confinement would not be important strategies for changing women's lives - as it happened for instance during the armed struggle for liberation in the 1970'es, or in the Maputo Green Zone Cooperatives in the 1980'es (Arnfred, 1987 and 1988). The point I want to highlight here is how in Mozambique I came to realize the importance of the other side, the cohesive, supportive side, of the doubleness of family relations.

Later, in the Women and Law in Southern Africa research project, I found this supportive aspect of family relations emphasised, along with a critical analysis of the oppressive and confining aspects of family relations. In the WLSA context, the double aspect of family relations reappears as a double aspect of customary law, which means that in the analysis of so-called customary law, rooted in family structures (hierarchies and values) a similar double approach proved useful. WLSA findings in this respect are summarized by Alice Armstrong, previous regional coordinator of the WLSA project: "Most Western feminist legal solutions are directed towards making women more independent, more autonomous. Yet most women WLSA spoke to sought connection and *belonging* rather than independence and autonomy. They did not want to be *controlled* by the extended family, but they *did* want to be part of it. They did not want to be *dependent* but neither did they want to be alone (Alice Armstrong, 1995:6, emphasis in original).

Regarding suggestions for political and legal solutions in this situation of both - and, obviously an either/or solution will not be satisfactory. Most Western legal solutions, as noted by Armstrong, focus only on independence and individual rights

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against family obligations and claims, thereby disregarding the aspect of belonging. The challenge is to find a legal solution which takes both aspects into account: the need for independence *and* the need for belonging, at the same time. This is Alice Armstrong's suggestion:

"We must find solutions which allow a woman to be connected but not dependent, to belong but not be controlled. For example, we could talk about the *involvement* of the family in the marriage process, while emphasising that the *control* must be eliminated (Alice Armstrong, 1995:6, emphasis in original). At the same time it is important to think in terms of *alternatives* to the family. Connection and belonging might be provided by a women's organization, a support group of women, or work- or neighbourhood relations. The challenge is to transcend the pattern of dichotomous thinking, in legal theory as well as in social and political practice.

### **Part III**

## **Equality going Astray? Problems with the Language of 'Equality' and 'Rights'**

Equality always was and still is a major issue in the women's movement. For good reasons, as male dominance is still prevalent. What I want to argue in this section is a) that 'equality' on its own is not enough. 'Equality' must be qualified: Equality with whom? On whose terms? In which respect? What is the context? And b) that the nice-sounding language of 'equality' and 'rights' should be scrutinized for what it excludes, and why.

### **'Equality' in development discourse**

In the context of development work, Women in Development - WID - is still, after decades of feminist research and politics, the widespread strategy of First World development agencies. WID is a basically liberal approach seeing women as rational agents, on equal footing with men: economic man extended to economic woman. The socialist argument is parallel: Women should be wage workers just like men, reproductive tasks taken over by state institutions, that is: turned into wage labour (cf. the description above of DK in the 1970'es).

In liberal thinking of the early modernization theorists, Naila Kabeer points out, the market was considered a liberating force: "Both economists and modernizing theorists

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ascribed a liberating potential to the market. (...) Modernization would lead to the spread of liberal, egalitarian values which would help to undermine old, authoritarian structures within the family" (Kabeer, 1994:8). To some extent of course this is true: the market *is* an equalizer, putting the most diverse objects at the same level, making them exchangeable (as explained at length by Karl Marx in *Das Kapital*, volume one). Unfettered market forces, however, also *polarize*, accumulating riches and deepening poverty, as is repeatedly demonstrated in global statistics. According to the UNDP Human Development Report 1994 the richest 20% of world population receive 84,7 of total world income, which means that the remaining 80% must share 15,3%. Not exactly equality.

In criticizing the WID equality approach, Naila Kabeer gives a good formulation to the basic concern of this paper: That the aspects of women's lives and bodies which have to do with pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding/childcare are excluded and rendered invisible in the equality discourse.

"The biological fact that women bear and suckle children (although there are clearly historical and cultural changes in the reproductive experience and process) suggests that they are likely to experience the biological world differently and to participate in the social world differently from men. (...) In ignoring the social significance of these biologically derived activities (...) liberal philosophies *devalue the labour, time and energy of those who carry them out*. (...) The quest for formal equality with men on the basis of an imputed common rationality posited a false identity of interests between women and men and denied the implications of their differing degrees of 'embodiment' in the processes of human survival, well-being and reproduction" (Kabeer, 1994: 28-29, emphasis added, SA).

That is: Labour, time and energy that are not channelled through the market, not commodified, are excluded in this discourse. They do not count. Equality is talked about on the basis of this exclusion. Eyes are closed to the aspects of women's lives and bodies that differ from those of men.

The quest for equality thus implies equality = similarity: "WID advocates sought to emphasize women's similarities with men (mental) at the expense of their differences (biological)" (Kabeer 1994:28), which also implies that similarity means women being like men, and not the other way round. "The WID objective was to demonstrate that in the marketplace women were as good as men; that men could be as good as women did not, in this context, appear to be an important consideration"

(Kabeer 1994:29). This equality is an *equality of the market*, excluding what is not commodified.

This rather truncated conception of equality, is however, and unfortunately, pt. the concept of equality most used in the women's movement.

### Beijing Documents: equality and rights

In the equality discourse of the Beijing Declaration - the official declaration resulting from the Fourth World Conference on Women September 1995 - the focus is on *equal rights*. In the 38 points of the declaration (four pages) the words 'equal' or 'equality' are mentioned 18 times: Equal rights, equal access, equal opportunities, equal treatment, equal participation. The word 'rights' appears 17 times, most frequently as 'equal rights' or 'human rights', but also as 'right to development', 'right to freedom of thought' and 'right of all women to control all aspects of their health'. Compared to all this talk of rights, the talk of *responsibilities* is very modest, the word 'responsibilities' appear only twice, in the context of 'equal sharing of responsibilities for the family by men and women'. 'Rights' thus seem to be what men have got, and what women should get in equal measure; 'responsibilities' are what women have got, and what men should share.

Judging from the amount and content of 'Reservations and interpretative statements' (supplied by 64 different countries) lined up at the end of the Beijing Document, the chapter on 'Women and Health' in the 'Platform for Action' is the most contested section of the entire document. In this section the rights-discourse is continued, centered on 'reproductive rights'. "Reproductive rights" it is stated, "embrace certain human rights that are already recognized in national laws, international human rights documents and other consensus documents. These rights rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health" (UN, 1995: 39).

This sounds all very nice - or does it?

"Concepts like reproductive autonomy, reproductive choice, reproductive alternatives have a positive ring in the ears of feminists," says Maria Mies (Mies, 1993: 205). Somehow they are connected to human rights and to the "women's rights are

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human rights" of the Beijing Declaration. But there is good reason to watch out, ie. to look at the context. "The arguments by which some American feminists demanded a 'right to abortion' are now also used to legitimize 'alternative reproductive choices'" Mies points out (Mies, 1993: 199). The argumentation for abortion continues directly into the choice of new reproductive technologies, such as *in vitro* fertilization and surrogate mothers. "Natural pregnancy and childbirth are put on an equal footing with a number of other 'reproductive alternatives'" (Mies, 1993: 200).

Maria Mies' basic point is that the new reproductive technologies, while using the arguments and words of feminist struggle, are in fact yet another expansion of the market - and Mies does *not* share the view of the modernization theorists of the market as a liberating force. On the contrary: "Reproductive technologies have been developed not because women need them, but because capital and science need women for their continuation of their model of growth and progress. (...) The female body's generative capacity has now been discovered as a new 'area of investment' and profit-making" (Mies 1993: 175). Reproduction is now made visible, but in a context of commodification: *In vitro* fertilization combined with paid surrogate mothers make it a "possibility for anyone to 'create' their own children without sexual intercourse" (Mies, 1993:200). "Procreation has become a matter of selling and buying, of mine and thine. And for this, contracts are necessary. In other words reproductive autonomy ends at contract law (...) the law of the market" (Mies, 1993:204-5).

Mies is putting her points rather harshly. When I quote her so extensively it is because I think that she is voicing necessary reservations *vis-a-vis* the prevalent feminist language of equality and rights (see also Anne Hellum, 1993). To which extend does this language feed into commodification? To which extend does it serve as a bulwark *against* commodification? I share Mies' scepticism regarding the market forces. Yes, they may be progressive to a certain extend. But in our post-Soviet-breakdown world, market forces are let loose on a global scale. Formulation of human rights and women's rights should work as *checks and limitations* on market forces, not play into their hands. I cannot see the checks and limitations on market forces in the Beijing rights-and-equality language.

### Unisex or neuter?

A last point which feeds into the same concern as the above points is based on my interpretation of an advertisement for a

certain perfume, showing a young man and a young woman. The man and the woman in the picture look very much alike. You almost have to look a second time in order to find out who is male and who is female. This picture of course is not the only one of its kind; nowadays androgynity is a prevalent trend on the media scene.

One reading of the picture would be to see it as an expression of equality: The man is not a conquering subject, the woman not a devoted object; they are on equal terms. But if this is equality, it is also equality = similarity, in so far as the two young people look so much alike.

In the early days of women's movements, a century ago, 'equality' was very visibly on *male* terms. Women's movement-women - *kvindesagskvinder* as we would say in Danish - smoked big cigars and wore ties, like men. The gender equality/similarity of the 1990'es is not like that, (apart from the fact that male style suits *are* fashion for women, whereas drag clothing is only fashion for fringe men.) The equality/similarity of the advertisement in question is not on male terms as much as it is on *market* terms. In the picture of these young people "the aspects of women's lives and bodies that differ from those of men" (cf. above) are excluded, they don't exist. While preparing for this paper, a notice in my daily newspaper caught my eye. It was a cutting from the 'respected' British paper Sunday Times, and it read (translated from Danish): "Busy couples, who have lost interest in sex, turn to test tube clinics in order to get help for starting a family. Even if they are fully capable of having children the normal way, some spend up to £ 10.000 on *in vitro* fertilization, in order to escape the physical bother of lovemaking" (Information Oct.11, 1995). This seems to be the reality of commodification, that Maria Mies is talking about: babies are requested from the fertility clinic, you buy the seed and you hire a surrogate mother. Now, at last, when also procreation has become a matter of the (super-)market, the preconditions for true equality are in place. The unisex advertisement in question strikes me as an illustration of this situation.

The word 'gender' when it was first introduced was derived from linguistics (so I am told). Male and female genders are found in many languages. In Danish, however, centuries ago the male and female have amalgamated into 'common gender'. And then, apart from 'common gender' we have the 'neuter'. Rather than unisex (common gender) the young people in the advertisement picture appear to me to be *neuters*, everything related to sex and gender having disappeared.

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To me it looks as if the simultaneousness of on one hand androgynous/unisex/neuter trends in advertisements and media and on the other hand the present boom in new reproductive technologies is *not* just a chance coincidence. I see the two as interlinked, the unisex/neuter model of a person matching a situation where procreation is a matter of money, market and laboratory techniques.

### **The new feminist right wing: 'Pro-family' and 'pro-life'**

Reading the 'Reservations and interpretative statements on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action' (UN, 1995: 157) it is obvious that the reactions are primarily directed against formulations that could be interpreted as right to abortion, legalization of homosexuality and endorsement of extra-marital sexual relations.

Regarding these points there is a clear Right/Left controversy. Free abortion and legalization of extra-marital sex, including gay and lesbian relationships, are long-time issues on a feminist agenda, deriving from the struggle against male power over female lives. The problem is, from my point of view, that the right wingers raise other points of complaint that I find justified. The Holy See (the Vatican delegation, in conference context the wing leader of the rightists) in their 'interpretative statement' also point critically to a tone of "exaggerated individualism" in the document texts, and the regrettable "colonization of the broad and rich discourse of universal rights by an impoverished libertarian rights dialect" (UN, 1995: 162). I can only agree. The Holy See also points critically to the fact that more attention is devoted to reproductive rights than to eg. the education of women: "A document that respects women's intelligence should devote at least as much attention to literacy as to fertility" (UN, 1995: 162). That this should be said by the Catholic church is somehow remarkable. But it is a fact that the chapter on 'Women and Health' is the longest among the 12 sector chapters in the Platform for Action.

What troubles me of course is where I see myself agreeing with the right wing. In a strange article, which was distributed at the Beijing NGO Forum (I got it from a friend), originating apparently from a group belonging to the 'pro-life', 'pro-family' network in USA and written by Dale O'Leary, a long argumentation is developed against the 'gender feminists', a major point of contention being that "gender feminists believe that manhood and womanhood are socially constructed, that we

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are actually born sex neutral beings and socialized to be men and women and that this socialization negatively and unjustly affects women" (O'Leary, 1995:22). But then the author goes on to state that "trying to pretend that all the obvious differences are socially constructed and can therefore be changed or that men and women can and should be the same, makes maleness the standard for women, because while women can enter the world of work, men cannot give birth. If the real differences between the sexes are ignored in a vain attempt to achieve a sex/gender classless society, those things which are unique to women are devalued and women are forced into competition with men in those areas in which men are better equipped to succeed" (O'Leary, 1995:14). The whole article is rather confused, but the disturbing thing is that the confusion also produces statements that tackle important issues, which the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action do not address.

As I see it the left wing is too badly argued, leaving far too much space for the right wing. And what is worse: In the space left, 'parenthood' and 'family relations' are floating around, a fact of which the right wing takes advantage. Another quote from the O'Leary paper: For Gender Feminists "women's participation in equal numbers in work outside the home is the motivating reason for changes in the home, not the desires or decisions of the women themselves. The private sphere is viewed as secondary and less important. The family and the work of the family becomes a 'burden' which adversely affects women's 'career prospects'. The responsibilities of women within the family is the enemy of the Gender Feminist agenda" (O'Leary, 1995:22). In the discussions of the NGO forum, the right wing's talk of 'the family' was counteracted by the left wing talking about 'families', in plural. This of course is an important point, but it doesn't solve the problem of family relations of any kind being almost totally neglected in the documents, and replaced by "exaggerated individualism" (the Holy See) in the spirit of the market.

What is further to be kept in mind is that all of this is not just a theoretical discussion. Political mobilization is taking place; a world wide right wing feminist network is under construction. Preceding the Beijing Conference signatures against the Beijing Platform for Action were collected from organizations representing 50 million women: Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Muslims (Sjørup, 1995: 21). A great number of women, apparently, do not feel their concerns addressed in the 'equality and rights' - discourse of the Beijing Declaration. The problem is that all those women are mobilized on a right

wing, fundamentalist agenda. "Gender Feminists believe that they have the right to liberate women from their families and their womanhood, even if women don't want to be liberated" (O'Leary, 1995:11).

As I see it, 'gender feminists' could learn quite a lot by listening more to women, also to women of the Third World. A suggestion would be to take a point of departure in women's daily lives and struggles to make ends meet, trying to understand and conceptualize the difficult issues around "the aspects of women's lives and bodies that differ from those of men", as well as the issues related to the contradictions of family relationships. In this last respect WLSA research could serve as an inspiration.

It is of paramount importance, I find, to see these issues more with women's eyes - different women, young and old, and women and men - and less with the eyes of the market.

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