Gendering Global Governance

SHIRIN M. RAI
University of Warwick, UK

Abstract ────────────────────────────────────

In this article I map out the major debates on global governance and the feminist critiques of the mainstream interventions in these debates. I argue that the shift from government to governance is a response to the needs of a gendered global capitalist economy and is shaped by struggles, both discursive and material, against the unfolding consequences of globalization. I suggest feminist interrogations of the concept, processes, practices and mechanisms of governance and the insights that develop from them should be centrally incorporated into critical revisionist and radical discourses of and against the concept of global governance. However, I also examine the challenges that the concept of global governance poses for feminist political practice, which are both of scholarship and of activism as feminists struggle to address the possibilities and politics of alternatives to the current regimes of governance. I conclude by suggesting that feminist political practice needs to focus on the politics of redistribution in the context of global governance.

──────────────────────────────────── Keywords

democratization, feminism, global governance, markets, neoliberalism, participation, recognition, redistribution, regulation, social movements, state, women's movements

INTRODUCTION

In this article, I examine the concept of global governance.[1] Both 'global' and 'governance' are contested and important concepts. The first indicates the scope and scale of today's world of production, consumption and exchange, and the other encapsulates the shift from 'state/government' to 'multi-layered' governance, not only of states and markets but also of interstate relations and security. I argue that the shift from government to governance is a

response to the needs of a gendered global capitalist economy and is shaped by struggles, both discursive and material, against the unfolding consequences of globalization.[2]

In making my case, I begin by reviewing three key areas in the global governance debate. These are: the place of globalized markets and new regulatory regimes; the place of the state within the global political economy and the challenges it faces; and the processes of democratization that can be seen as a bridge between shifts in state/market relations and the emerging governance framework. I argue that mainstream global governance debates would gain much from the insights that feminists have developed on key issues of the economic and social consequences of disciplinary neoliberalism and the politics of engagement with institutions of power and knowledge, and reasoning and epistemic communities. I also suggest that this shift from government to governance poses challenges for feminist political practice. These challenges are both of scholarship and activism as feminists struggle to address the possibilities and politics of alternatives to the current regimes of governance.

GLOBAL GOVERNANCE: NEOLIBERAL IDEOLOGIES AND FEMINIST CRITIQUES

Governance emerges as a concept in the post-Cold War and, as some would call it, a 'post-statist' period of the 1980s. We can easily pick up the threads of liberal triumphalism in the discourse of convergence articulated at that time (see, for example, Fukayama 1991; Huntington 1995; Barber 1996). In post-Cold War sketches of the world system in late twentieth century, liberal values triumph over others, aspects of western civilization triumph over other cultures and modernity's concerns are resolved through these triumphs. Struggles within the parameters of other cultures, religions and ideologies, upon this envisioning, are doomed to failure unless they recognize the impossibility of reform from within. The logical conclusion then is that a liberal world is the only future that we can 'rationally' look forward to if we wish to live civilized, non-violent and democratic lives.

The 'clash of civilisations' (Huntington 1995) scenario takes on tremendous force in the context of the 11 September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre, when the idea of governance faced its first major challenge. The 'war on terror' has become a part of the governance discourse – Afghanistan and Iraq both become examples of an active engagement with the politics of convergence. Non-liberal regimes, especially those that defy rather than work with western 'civilization' become legitimate targets of attack and reconfiguration.[3] This western civilization is also a 'market civilization' (Gill 1995: 399) where the individual competes for resources in the market and where the market civilization 'tends to generate a perspective on the world

that is ahistorical, economistic, materialistic, "me-oriented" short-termist, and ecologically myopic".[4]

Four different strands become visible when we examine the context in which 'governance' emerged as a discourse. First, was the collapse of the Soviet Union and the beginning of the post-Cold War period in the international system. Second, and building on this, was the convergence of economic policies under globalization within the neoliberal framework, which, arguably, are being embedded through mechanisms of global governance. Third, as a consequence of the collapse of 'communism' and the rise and dominance of the neoliberal framework in the global economy, was a re-examination of the role of the state in the context of the post-Cold War globalization. And finally, was the emergence of the discourse of democratization as the most appropriate framework within which both political and economic transitions could be accomplished. Democracy became the bulwark against both forms of totalitarianism as well as the return to state managed economies. The concept, indeed ideology, of global governance has come to take account of all these strands. In the following sections I will reflect upon three of the four strands noted above: neoliberalism and global governance, the 'failing' state and democratization.

In this section I examine how the emphasis on markets within neoliberalism is a gendered discourse, which feminists have challenged. Neoliberal economic theory is the ascendant framework for global governance. The discourse of neoliberalism emphasizes, and indeed normalizes, the 'efficiency, welfare and the freedom of the market, and self-actualisation through the process of consumption' (Gill 1995: 401), even though the outcomes of these policies are contradictory, hierarchical and inefficient to protect human life and the world in which we live. The dominant actors, in the context of globalization, are those that control transnational capital that is the motor behind much of economic activity – through the circulation of money, through speculation on money markets and capital movements as well as through tax evasion and money laundering. This discourse of the market also has another message – if market-based competition is the most efficient way of allocating resources in society, then any attempts to interfere in its functioning would be *per se* inimical to the 'greater good'. The market then, though far from a level playing field, is given the primary political space in the discourse of globalization.

The market is institutionalized not only in the functioning of global capitalism but also through the institutions of global governance. This, to quote Gill (1995: 412), is done through the process of 'new constitutionalism' – in contrast to traditional constitutionalism that is associated with the state – which 'can be defined as the political project of attempting to make transnational liberalism, and if possible liberal democratic capitalism the sole model for future development'. It is in this project that institutions of global governance – the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO – become stronger vis-à-vis the state, and are presented as neutral players seeking maximum economic efficiency for all through attempting to ensure 'fair dealing' in the

markets.[5] These institutions also symbolize the separation of the economic from the political, thus taking the heat out of macro-economic policy making. Indeed, the very term governance emerges because the increasingly important Bretton Woods institutions are not mandated to challenge the primary position of state actors. Governance or indeed 'good governance' then becomes a measure 'to refer to the capacity of governments to formulate and implement policies and processes by which authority is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources' (Faundez 1997: 6). Law is an important part of institutionalizing neoliberalism: through providing the following:

> (a) … a set of rules known in advance; (b) [ensuring that] the rules are actually in force; (c) [that] there are mechanisms ensuring application of the rules; (d) [that] conflicts are decided through binding decisions of an independent body; and (e) there are procedures for amending the rules when they no longer serve their purpose.
>
> (World Bank 1992: 30)

Rules, then, are critical to 'good governance' – rules that stabilize neoliberalism through state law, but which are disciplinary in the global sense.

Finally, market-dominated, state sceptical governance also takes a privatizing turn. Through internal regulatory mechanisms such as voluntary codes of conduct, transnational capital seeks to limit external scrutiny of its production regimes and the impact of these on labour and the environment in particular. The stabilization of these privatized forms of governance takes place through recognition by international organizations of these initiatives.[6] However, NGOs and social movements also play a part in challenging internal regulation by scrutinizing both the parameters of the codes as well as mechanisms for the implementations (www.corpwatch.org).

Gendered Markets and Feminist Critiques

If markets are crucial to understanding the current phase of globalization, then we need to analyse their gendered nature as well as the impact of gendered roles for women. This applies to the mechanisms of global production (labour) and exchange (goods and services), regulation that spans not one country but regions and (with the increased role of international economic institutions, and the WTO) the globe, the use of technologies that so enhance the flows of monies and make instantaneous financial transactions across the globe possible, the breaking down of the political resistance of nation-states to liberalization and the opening up of their internal markets to global competition. Feminists have argued that markets are socially embedded institutions and roles 'within market systems are structured by non-market criteria' and then institutionalized through indicators of 'market rationality'[7]

(Elson and Pearson 1998; Harriss-White 1998: 201). These non-market, though clearly not non-economic, criteria lead to specific gender-based distortions in the markets (see Palmer 1991; van Staveren 2000; Rai 2002). The participants in the market include the state, formal associations such as trade unions, consumer groups, business associations, market networks, firms and individuals. The functioning of the market depends upon the politics of state involvement, the politics of market structures and the politics of social embeddedness – of the state and of the market (White 1993: 6–10). In such a patterned market system, participants come to specific markets with 'unequal' capabilities and bargaining capacities and resources, as a result of and which inhere in unequal market structures, regulated and stabilized by gendered state formations, and characterized by more or less unequal power. Class and gender are two bases for unequal power relations operating in the market. The consequence of this is that gendered market hierarchies distribute rewards and privileges (Palmer 1991), and construct and consolidate identities (Ling 1997), which then further embed markets in gendered socio-economic 'scapes'.

The neoliberal ideology fails to take into account the embedded nature of the markets and its consequences. It does not query that individuals can pursue their economic self-interests in ways that have nothing to do with the 'best price'. Neither does it question the 'degree to which self-interest places economic goals ahead of friendship, family ties, spiritual considerations, or morality' (Block 1990: 54). Nor, indeed how reproductive roles might change in the playing out of market roles (Harriss-White 1998). Finally, there is an assumption that instrumentality in decision making goes hand in hand with obedience to rules, and with maximizing interests, rather than a set of signals that can lead to conflictual economic and social behaviour in different groups of populations. Together this brings into question the assumed neutrality of markets in terms of access, competitiveness and efficiency. In the current phase of globalization, markets are not seen only as central to resource competition and allocation in the sphere of private capital, but also as central to state and governance institutions more generally. This has led critical theorists to speak of marketized institutions. As Hewson and Sinclair (1999: 17) have put it, marketized institutions 'may not be market institutions in the narrow sense. However, even within public institutions the tendency is increasingly towards adopting market principles of organization and social intervention'. Philip McMichael (2000) suggests the same when he speaks of the 'new managerialism' that promotes a problem-solving approach to difficult issues of redistribution of resources.

The political outcome of taking this critique seriously can be outlined through the examination of the discourse on Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). Feminist arguments about the gendered nature of markets would make us re-examine the whole basis of the TRIPS regime, and not just the governance of the trade regimes in the context of the unequal power relations between North and South. TRIPS patents cover both product and processes. As a result, for example, farmers will not be able to keep seeds

from their crops. As women form an increasing number of small and poor farmers, this provision affects them particularly. Second, patents privilege particular forms of knowledge – 'stabilizing' historically developed processes of production, entitling modern industrial companies to patent products and processes and denying nature's and people's creativity.

> By discounting time and the historically evolving nature of innovation, patenting institutionalises privilege – those who are left out of the loop (very often poor women are the majority of those excluded) fall progressively behind in the race for ring-fencing products for monopoly exploitation.
>
> (Barwa and Rai 2002: 43)

Vandana Shiva has been arguing that perhaps these insights should lead us towards exploring the merits of 'social patents', thus broadening the acknowledgement of knowledge creation and gendered markets. However, she also worries that this would allow the principle of 'knowledge as property' to be further entrenched in discourses of governance (Shiva and Holla-Bhar 1996; Shiva 2000). Such gendered analysis challenges the marketized nature of global institutions promoting market-based solutions to social and political problems, and stabilizing these solutions with the support of dominant epistemic elites (Taylor 2000).

THE FAILING STATE? FEMINIST ENGAGEMENTS WITH THE STATE DEBATE

In this section I examine the debates on the decline of the state within the context of globalization and suggest that comparative feminist scholarship provides key insights into the constitutive, gendered nature of the state in the global political economy and thus challenges the 'declining state' thesis.

Arguably, the whole edifice of global governance is built on assumptions about the shifting boundaries of the state in the international political economy on the one hand, and international relations on the other (Rosenau and Czempiel 2000). The shifts in the nature and position of the state then beg the question about what replaces the state/government and the inter-state world system. Writers point to various concepts such as 'transworld', 'supraterritoriality' and more narrowly, 'multilateralism' to describe the system of 'post-state' political economy and international relations (Scholte 2000). The global spread of capitalism demands attention to the relations between the nation-state and global markets on the one hand and the nation-state and the international system on the other (World Bank 1992, 2002a). In the 1980s, when neoliberalism was making its challenge to state-mediated social democracy, it was suggested that the state is no longer capable of addressing the issues arising from the global reach of capitalism, whether these relate to competition in the market, regulation of the market or maintaining rules

within its borders in order to resolve the collective problems of its citizens (Strange 1995). As such, the nature of competition between states in the international system, Strange argued, also changed – from competing over territory to competing over markets. And that as the form of competition between states has changed, so has their nature, with trade and finance policies becoming more important than defence and foreign policies.

This analysis of the 'leaking sovereignty' of the state is reflected in the discourse of the dysfunctional state that held sway in the 1980s and early 1990s in another context. The World Bank in its report on Governance and Development (1992) suggested that third world states were unable or unwilling to develop the capacity to formulate and implement policies for the development of the economy of the country. Economic conditionalities (generally known as structural adjustment policies) set by the Bank and the IMF were not working because of the failure of the state. A plethora of 'good governance' literature then flooded the development scene articulating, reflecting and assessing donors' demands upon the recipient nation-states 'for democratic pluralism, for the rule of law, for a less regulated economy and for a clean and non-corrupt administration ... for greater decentralization ...' (UNDP 1994: 76). The globalization of policy frameworks indicated the relative weakness of the state in the newly emerging international system. The state was, in line with the rhetoric of resurgent liberalism, the problem not the solution; the state hindered the expansion and functioning of markets that was key to the stabilization of the world economy. Too much government was stifling the energies of entrepreneurs waiting to take advantage of expanding markets. 'Weak institutions – tangled laws, corrupt courts, deeply biased credit systems, and elaborate business registration requirements – hurt poor people and hinder development ...', according to the World Development Report on Building Institutions for Markets (World Bank 2002a). The question then was whether the state could respond to the new pressures of global political economy and if so, what should be the parameters of its functioning?

While many proclaimed the weaknesses of the state were leading to a post-statist era, others reflected upon how the state was repositioning itself in order to secure its continued role in mediating between capital and labour. The argument was that capital needs the regulatory power of the state in order to do business, but that the state needs to be committed to economic liberalization in order to fulfil the potential of globalizing markets (Cox 1996). What we are witnessing, argues Cox, is not the demise of the nation-state but its 'internationalization'; not its destruction but its transformation. In brief, Cox argues that from being bulwarks against the global intrusions into national economies, today's states are becoming mediators, adapters and negotiators with the global political economy. To perform this changed role they have to reconfigure the power structures of government, giving far more emphasis to the role of finance and trade in economic regulation rather than industry and labour, for example. The state's role, therefore, becomes one of helping to adjust the domestic economy to the requirements of the world

economy (Cox 1996). In this context the nostalgia for a benign, or at the very least powerless, nation-state is clearly misplaced: '[n]ational states exist as political "nodes" or "moments" in the global flow of capital' and their development is part of the crisis-ridden development of capitalist society (Burnham 1998: 8). And furthermore, that this aspect of the internationalization of the state points to the current contradictions in globalization as to the extraction of surplus globally. Capital depends on national and global public goods provision, while at the same time reducing the capacity of states to generate tax revenue. The discipline of neoliberalism through structural adjustment policies, guides states to provide those 'public goods' necessary to its operation

Feminist approaches to global governance institutions have developed largely through analyses of political engagements at the level of the state[8] (local as well as national). Feminists have addressed the fundamental question whether the state is constitutive of gender relations by stabilizing patriarchy through discursive, legal and economic power. State economic policies in particular have been addressed in the context of production and primitive accumulation – the states' 'race to the bottom' to attract private capital and foreign direct investment (FDI), and under pressure from the international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the IMF and the World Bank. Women's labour, labour rights and the increasing burden of women in the context of privatization and marketization of social reproduction (Bakker and Gill 2003) is analysed in feminist development literature (Kabeer 1994; Elson 1995; Rai 2002; Beneria 2003). Finally the discrepancy between the state's role in regulating flows of capital and of labour (human beings) through a combination of nationalist, and even xenophobic, discourse around 'illegal' immigration as well through laws and policing have been studied by feminist sociologists and geographers (Sassen 1998; Young 2003; Kofman, this issue).

These analyses have led women's groups and feminist activists to ask whether any engagement with the state, and building on this, with institutions of global governance is potentially fraught with dangers of co-option, or whether it is through critical engagements that feminists can change state policy. Through the 1990s, there was a decisive shift from scepticism and caution towards the state to an engagement with and embrace of state institutions. Feminists did so in three broad arenas. The first is that of *participation in political institutions*. They insisted upon the importance of representation of women in these institutions from different standpoints – that women do politics differently/better, or that it is just that historically excluded groups be allowed a say in the 'governing' that affects their lives. Strategizing for this, feminists have argued for quotas for women in political institutions in order to make women more visible and audible in political processes. They also engaged with political institutions by participating in bureaucracies, policy making bodies and representative organizations under the broad principles of gender mainstreaming (McBride Stetson and Mazur 1995; Miller and Razavi 1998; Rai 2003). The second arena is that of *women*

organizing in the informal and formal sectors and spaces of politics – women's movements, human rights groups, functional lobbying groups such as the Self-employed Women's Association (SEWA) and Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO). These groups have lobbied governance institutions at all levels from the outside. The focus has been both, the protection of their members as well as lobbying for shifts in state policy. So, women's groups have participated in ethical trading initiatives (Hale, this issue), as well as challenged the erosion of welfare provision and pressed for gender-sensitizing economic policies at the global as well as the local level (O'Brien *et al.* 2000). The third area of feminist intervention is that of developing *political and epistemic networks* that feed into policy institutions as well as debates. Feminist scholarship in the fields of Economics as well as Development Studies have unpacked key economic concepts, particularly the crucial concept of work – what constitutes work, how is it reflected in economic documents that form the basis of policy making and how, alternatively, might work be assessed, analysed and reflected in public debates (Rubery 1988; Bakker 1994; Bakker and Gill 2003)? Gender budget groups in many countries have done useful work in dis-covering the male bias in economic accounting for the work of women and the impact of this bias on economic policy making and its impact on the lives of both men and women (Elson, this issue). These groups have engaged in discussions with Treasury Departments with intellectual expertise and political commitment to attempt to make transparent the contribution of women to the economy.

Women's movements have been grappling with the issue of the changing role of the state. As the sites of production and reproduction shift within states, as new regimes of production make for different forms of work – part-time, flexible, concentrated in economic processing zones (EPZs), migratory – women are having to organize differently. As global capital's presence is felt directly, less mediated through the state, and as local spaces are opened up to the forces of market, the challenges to global economic forces and organizations are also posing issues of political discourse and mobilization for women. While the state continues to be a central focus of women's mobilization on various issues, supra-territorial strategies are being increasingly employed in order either to counter the state, to delegitimize its position or to mobilize global discursive regimes in women's interests. This is because the relationship between a modernizing state and a civil society within which it is configured, is a complex one. In this context, to view the state as a unitary entity becomes paralysing, and regarding civil society as 'a space of uncoerced human association' perilous (Rai 1996: 17–18).

Feminist studies of transitional and democratizing states emphasize these points. While some of the studies have focused on the impact of liberalizing economies and the marketization of the state on women's lives (Einhorn 2000) others have considered how women can engage the state in a globalizing context where the state is coming under multiple pressures and is repositioning itself in different ways in different contexts (Jaquette and Wolchik

1998; Blacklock and Macdonald 2000; Eschle 2000; Rai 2000, 2002). If the state is a participant in the reconstitution of its own relations with the global political economy, then it continues to be a focus for the struggles against this changing relation – whether it is from (dis-)organized labour in the urban or the rural context, or whether it is from other social movements. The nation-state as the focus of developmental struggles allows historical knowledges of traditions, cultures and political contexts to be mobilized with greater facility than the amorphous 'international economic institutions' peopled by shadowy figures not visible to the local oppositional struggles. Thus, state account-ability and the space for political participation for both men and women forms an important part of the understanding of governance for many women's groups at both the national and the global levels (Tambiah 2002).

Democratization of the State

An analysis of the state gave impetus to the discourse of democratization in the debates on the shift from government to governance. While popular struggles had formed a critical part of the process of 'the third wave' of democratization, the emphasis within the discourse remained on the link between liberalization of economies and the democratization of the state. This allowed democratization to be seen as a rather ahistorical unfolding of established western 'models' of democracy. Economic conditionalities of the 1980s were in the 1990s supplemented by the political conditionalities of 'good governance'. However, a critical literature on democratization did challenge these assumptions (Luckham and White 1996; Whitehead 2002). This literature paid attention to the multi-level analysis of the international system on the one hand and the state and civil society relations on the other, which was to become a hallmark of the governance debate. Rueschemyer *et al.* (1992) pointed to three factors that affect the actual working of democracies: (1) the international factors – such as inter-state relations; (2) the individual state itself and its political institutions and leadership – the role of the military as opposed to civilian leadership for example; and (3) 'civil society', which reflects the social and interest groups with a stake in society. It was argued that it is the constellation of these three factors that make for the possibilities, or otherwise, of a successful democratization process.

The rise of global institutions led to a liberal institutionalist analysis of the consequences of global governance for democratization. On the one hand, the various interventions focus on the need for conceptualizing alternatives to state institutions of government in the context of the global political economy. On the other hand, the literature focuses on addressing the democratic deficit of the global institutions themselves. How can these institutions be made more accountable in a context where they seem to be usurping the power of the state (Woods 2002)? The effectiveness of global institutions, especially the UN system and the Bretton Woods institutions, are evaluated and found

wanting leading to prescriptions of reform. New governance institutions are recommended to regulate actors and issues emerging as key in a globalized world, such as mechanisms of consultation, surveillance and co-ordination of macro-economic policies, an 'international financial architecture' stabilized through global institutions and the regulation of capital (transnational corporations (TNCs)) and labour (migration) (Nayar and Court 2002: vii–xi). The democratic deficit in old international institutions is identified as a reason for attempting to reform the global governance regime.

This question can be addressed in two different ways. The first approach would be to address the ways in which these institutions are participating in a process of embedding 'structures-in-dominance' (Baxi 1996) such that capitalist regimes of production and exchange are taken to be the only way forward for the global economy. Global convergence, in this sense, can be seen to be the stretching out of the borders of capitalism to encompass the world. In this sense, global institutions become the target of opposition movements and civil society groups. The anti-capitalist movements broadly defined thus are not interested in necessarily holding these institutions accountable. Rather their purpose is to challenge the policy agendas of these institutions and also to 'reveal' these institutions as embedded in the dominant capitalist order and therefore participating in establishing a 'disciplinary neoliberalism' (Gill 1995), which increasingly binds states and non-state actors into the global capitalist system. This analysis of global institutions then leads us to consider political strategies that are focused on increasing the space for people's movements, challenge the erosion of the provision of public goods and envision alternative modes of governance for a different globalization.

A juxtaposition of this liberal institutionalist agenda for global governance and of the social democratic framework, on the other hand, might allow us to develop some key themes of democratic governance such as the link between political democracy and social justice, the relation between representative and participatory politics and the importance of global democratic space for mobilization in challenging the hegemony of neoliberalism. Such a juxtaposition would also allow us to explore the concerns of feminist scholarship: about democratizing the private as well as public spheres; the unbundling of citizenship in the context of neoliberal policy agendas; the struggles to defend the welfare state provisions; and the mainstreaming of gender perspectives in policy making (which are all sidelined in the liberal institutionalist framework).

Gendered Global Governance

Feminist engagements with global governance have built upon the insights derived from the state debate. However, the two strands of feminist scholarship on the state – comparative politics and international relations – have at times

developed independently of each other, even though some of the core concerns of the two remain similar – participation in political institutions, organizing and lobbying, political and epistemic networks. In order to engage productively in debates on global governance, perhaps these two strands of scholarship need to speak more clearly to each other. In the following section I examine feminist analyses of global governance and also raise issues about the challenges of global governance for feminist practice.

In developing a feminist framework on global governance, Meyer and Prugl (1999: 4–5) have identified three areas. First, gender in global governance is seen as 'involving institutional structures in which women have found or carved out niches for themselves and their interests as women' and therefore 'introduce into global governance women-centred ways of framing issues …' (see also Stienstra 2000; Liebowitz 2002). Gender mainstreaming processes have seen feminist bureaucrats and gender policy advocates at home in state and global governance structures (Miller and Razavi 1998; Sawer 2003; Staudt 2003). The outcomes of these engagements from within have varied greatly depending upon the level of bureaucratic hierarchy at which feminists are able to operate, the political culture of the site of governance, the dominant framework of analyses used by organizations to fashion policy, the resources that gender work has been able to attract – both financial and political capital, as well as the support that feminists within organizations have been able to depend upon from social movements engaged in advancing women's strategic interests.

Second, gender in global governance is approached through critical politics 'exploring the purposive, goal-oriented … social-movement strategies to influence the United Nations …' and Bretton Woods institutions (Meyer and Prugl 1999: 5; see also O'Brien *et al.* 2000). UN conferences have been catalysts for women's organizations to mobilize in the interests of their constituents, as well as to develop conceptual tools to engage critically with the discourses of growth-led development emanating from Bretton Woods institutions. NGO involvement with the World Bank's projects has increased from an average of 15 a year in the 1980s to 89 out of 156 by 1991/2 (O'Brien *et al.* 2000: 31). The NGOs have built upon this recognition to mount campaigns, such as Women's Eyes on the Bank, and the 'Women Take on the World Trade Organization' campaign by Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO). In the context of the regional free trade agreements, such as NAFTA, 'Transnational NGO activism can actually be seen as contributing to or expanding the resources a national political movement has at its disposal' (Liebowitz 2002: 175) thus linking the various levels of organizations and sites of resistance. Feminist and women's groups have engaged with institutions at all these levels through conventional and virtual forms of political engagement and developed insights from these engagements.

> Most western feminist organizations are on-line today. The Global Fund for Women fights for women's human rights … FemiNet Korea promises an

electronic space for women which challenges the male privilege of the information society ... cyberdialogues exist between the cracks of mainstream news reporting and people's everyday lives.

And that 'communication allows for diasporic publics to connect with one another and initiates new alliances with people "outside" any one geographical region' (Eisenstein 1998: 42; Youngs 2001).[9]

Finally, feminists have approached gender politics in the context of global governance as 'contestations of rules and discursive practices in different issue areas' (Meyer and Prugl 1999: 5). They have done so by not only focusing on the consequences of the dominant global neoliberal economic policy frameworks espoused by the Bretton Woods institutions, but also the constitutive gendered nature of the concepts used to formulate these policies (Bakker 1994; Elson 1995; Rai 2003). Yusuf Bangura has pointed out that '[p]erhaps the greatest barrier to the institutionalisation of gendered development is the inflexible nature of the dominant neo-liberal discourse ... wide gaps exist between the fundamental premises, values and goals of neo-liberalism and the broad gender discourse' (cited in O'Brien *et al.* 2000: 47; see also Kabeer 1995). Feminists have argued, for instance, that the intensification of globalization through the extension of marketized economies and state institutions, has been accompanied by changes in the governance of production and social reproduction. This is resulting in the transformation of 'gender orders and regimes associated with intensified globalization' and the institutionalization of these transformations in gendered governance frameworks (Young 2003: 109).

An examination of these three areas allows us to reflect upon the imbricated nature of political analysis and activism. So, for example, local NGOs are often dependent upon state funding and/or external finance raising issues of accountability and transparency in agenda setting. Similarly, discourses of governance generated at the global levels, in part through women's movements at local and national levels – through UN conferences for example – create a framework for institutional initiatives at the state level. State interests – generated through nationalist and/or democratic elites and articulated at international fora to convey particular political positions within the world system – also create gender equity discursive and political frameworks which women's groups and movements can take advantage of.[10] And finally, social movements continue to function at all levels. They contribute to levels of universalized discourses, some state-level initiatives or mobilizations against state policies, they challenge TNCs and particular states on particular issues but also create norms of socio-economic and political behaviour, which become difficult to ignore at any level. Women's movements and environment and human rights movements would be some of the examples here.

Pulling these various strands together we find an alternative understanding of global governance, which focuses on macro-level changes taking place in the international system and political economy, but grounds these in the local

and global struggles on issues of political rights, language and regimes of accumulation and exchange. Feminist interventions through political practice as well as theoretical insights associated with issues of access allow us to ask different questions about the parameters and paradigms of governance (Peterson 2003). Who is being governed, in whose interests and how – traditional issues of political science are disturbed through the introduction of the categories of gender. Gendered readings of global governance can provide insights into the definitional exclusions with which we start our explorations of political phenomena under globalization.

THE POLITICS OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE AND CHALLENGES FOR FEMINIST PRAXIS

I have suggested earlier that as a concept, global governance becomes prominent in the context of disciplinary neoliberalism and can be seen to be institutionalizing the neoliberal framework at the level of macro-economic policy. In his critique of the work of the Commission on Global Governance, Baxi (1996: 530) comments on the discrepancy between the assumptions of globality by the Commission and the 'central facts of contemporary world disorder'. Violence and poverty in particular are growing apace, and both affect women in particular ways. The feminization of poverty, and violence against women in creating and policing new and old inter-state borders has made this co-operative development a fraught discourse for women. In this context Baxi (1996: 532) rightly comments that: 'If governance is to be conceived as a process, it is well to recall that process is permeated by structures-in-dominance, both in states and civil societies.' The contradictions that arise out of capitalism's march across the globe are embedded in social relations of inequalities based on class, gender, ethnicities and religions among others. The assessment of the processes and institutions of governance need to be aware of these contradictions and the power relations that frame them.

This cautionary stance provokes me to suggest that if feminist engagements with global governance institutions do not take into account the disciplinary power of the dominant social relations within which these institutions are embedded, these engagements could succumb to the danger of supporting 'systems that create themselves' (Riles 2000: 173). As I have argued elsewhere (Rai 2002), NGOs and women's movements working with institutions of power at any level are constrained by the dominant paradigms of power. Most of the initiatives taken by these institutions under pressure from women's groups are 'integrating' rather than 'agenda-setting' (Jahan 1995). The limitations of 'cultural' and 'socio-economic' structures that embed the political institutions are significant constraints upon women activists. These constraints not only impose limits to change, they also raise the issue of co-option of women's groups into the hierarchies of power and influence. Second, the issue of differences among women is crucial. The differences that have emerged

among women have been many – between NGOs of the North and those of the South, between activists and femocrats, between those who decide to engage with multilateral and state institutions and those who do not, between those who are funded by multilateral agencies and those that are less well funded or not at all. These divisions are also about who gets heard and who does not, and therefore about the implicated nature of engagement which normalizes critiques through mainstreaming them. Third, and linked to this, there has been a recognition that the terms of engagements with multilateral bodies or state institutions do not generally favour women, and that the shifts in the paradigms within which various institutions of power function are minimal. The World Bank has, for example, shown a minimal shift in its approach to economics and policy making, the national machineries of various countries are embedded in and constrained by the political economy of their contexts, and at the local level, state institutions work with women's groups within very narrow boundaries, reluctant to challenge the dominant social mores. Fourth, there are disagreements about the costs attached to the engagement of women's movements with institutions of power – and emphasis on the fact that these are differentially borne by women in the North and South, and by women of different socio-economic strata. We need to reflect upon the fact that while a strategy of disengagement with multilateral and national institutions of power might be untenable, it is important to have cognizance of the costs of such engagements in terms of the fragmentation of women's movements, fracturing of dialogue between different NGOs and groups within countries, and also between North and South. These costs are not inconsiderable and are unevenly distributed. Finally, we can also raise the question of the legitimacy of not only global institutions, but also of women's NGOs speaking for women at international and national fora. Who can speak of the pain and confusion of activists on the ground who feel betrayed by the system that they thought was going to be their ally for change?

While I see the expanded confidence of feminist movements and networks, I also worry that the spaces for negotiations and deliberations leading to radical redistributive outcomes are decreasing. The seduction of engagement with governance institutions and influencing policy outcomes, which provides a sense of agency against all odds – at times through emphasizing the process over outcome, at others through emphasizing 'empowerment' without the transfer of resources that denotes changes in power relations – also provide cautionary tales.

The challenges that feminist politics face are both in the arenas of scholarship and activism. While feminists have posited a powerful critique to mainstream global governance literature, they also need to present an alternative articulation of what governance means (Pearson, this issue). If they do not like marketized institutions, they need to be able to sketch the outline of governance institutions that they would like to see. Catherine Hoskyns and I (1998: 362) have argued that:

[f]or both strategic as well as practical reasons women have had to organize separately as women. ... [However, the] feminist challenge is limited by a current lack of focus on the importance of redistributive policies that are rooted in the structural inequalities of capitalist production and exchange.

We posed the question: can gender recover class? Following Spivak (1988: 276), I would argue that a recognition of the importance of redistribution allows us '[b]oth in the economic area (capitalist) and in the political (world-historical agent) ... to construct models of a divided and dislocated subject whose parts are not continuous or coherent with each other.' And these dislocations, and discontinuities are where women seeking transformation within political economy, as well as the discursive circuits of power, can find agency. This is particularly relevant now when marketization and the retrenchment of welfare provision under globalization is creating tremendous pressures and inequalities across different social and spatial boundaries. We see, however, that feminists are engaging with institutions within the convergent ideological framework of neoliberal governance because the space for alternatives has scaled down even as the recognition of gender-based inequalities has increased. This is not to suggest that these engagements are not important. Indeed the solid ground of embedded liberalism has fractured so much under the neoliberal onslaught that the protection of the welfare state seems a radical project well worth participating in. However, a recognition of the limits of the strategies of engagement with 'constitutional neoliberalism' (Gill 2002) also needs to be taken seriously if we are to be effective in developing political strategies of empowerment for both poor women and men.

CONCLUSION

One could argue that global governance is a concept that hides as much as it reveals. On the one hand the shift from government to governance is presented as an explanatory framework seeking to account for global change, and on the other it is seen as addressing the problem of states' inability to respond to that change. However, global governance has become a concept that is here to stay. The power of hegemonic intellectual and policy elites are behind it and as such it has also become central to the alternative discourses of counter-hegemonic movements. Feminists too are engaged in this debate as they see a 'general broadening of the field of international reorganisation from a preoccupation with describing the output of intergovernmental organisations, their formal attributes and processes of decision-making to a concern with structures of governance' (Meyer and Prugl 1999: 4). These structures include organizations such as the UN, and NGOs as well as social and political movements in a 'global civil society'. A concern with issues of governance also helps explode the myth of consent that is a feature of the earlier

globalization literature – a consent that is often juxtaposed with the inevitability of globalization and therefore conceals the power relations within which the process is developing. One could argue as Palan (1999: 67) does, that:

> the language of global governance, with its attendant rather unflattering insinuations about the functions, legitimacy, and aptitude of the state (and society) … makes sense only once an agreement is reached about some prior, if normally undeclared, common human goals, political functions and so on.

These *a priori* notions are themselves markers of closures – not the same as operated under nationalist regimes, but new closures which make for new winners and losers – in both the public and the private spheres, and take both national and local/global forms.

I have argued in this article that issues of gender have particular salience in the debates on governance and unless we use the insights that have emerged from feminist theory and practice we will not be able to encompass the needs of the future in the conversations about the global present. To reiterate, feminist contributions to these conversations lie in ways in which political activism and theoretical insights have been methodologically imbricated to develop insights on governance. These insights have examined the discursive as well as the material power wielded in embedding certain dominant explanations of governance in the mainstream literature which have then shaped the agendas for 'governing' (Kooiman 2003) and paradigms of governance. Specifically, feminist interventions in the areas of knowledge creation, recognition and institutionalization have particular salience for the processes of embedding neoliberal marketized discourses of globalization and governance. Feminist debates on the state and democracy have relevance for the way in which political activism as well as the relational understanding between the state and global institutions of governance might be viewed. Gendered critiques of markets as not only uneven spaces of exchange, but as inefficient and distorted mechanisms that build upon unequal gendered social relations, subject the normalization of rationality of the market to rigorous scrutiny. The global governance debate needs to make a conceptual shift to embed these insights, developed through everyday struggle at local, state and global levels, as well as through engagements with and critiques of mainstream literature, if theories of critical governance are fundamentally to challenge the structures-in-dominance within this field.

Specifically, I would suggest three areas where feminist deconstruction of the concept provides radical insights. First, such an analysis becomes an exercise in the recognition of the multiple bases of inequalities that are being stabilized through systems of global governance: class, North/South relations and gender as the unequal social relations constitutive of global capitalism which find reflection in marketized institutions. Second, it allows us to reflect upon gendered arguments and political strategies that challenge these inequalities. From gender mainstreaming to gender budgets, from gendered

Codes of Conduct to gendering workers' unions, from enhancing the scope of micro-credit to the extension of Tobin Tax to Maria Tax (Pearson, this issue). Finally, while these multiple strategies are critical to addressing gendered inequalities, the focus on the study of how global capitalism is embedded in socially unequal regimes of production and social reproduction also allows us to view the limits of these strategies. However important to the lives of individual men and women, shifts in specific policies cannot offset the disciplinary dominance of global capitalist relations. To challenge that a broader alliance of which feminists would form part, would be needed. As Hoskyns and I (1998: 363) have argued, 'the next phase of women's struggles needs to take on board more centrally the issue of redistribution of resources if power relations in society are to be refashioned'.[11] Perhaps the next phase of women's struggles might be stronger for building bridges with other movements arising from the continuing marginalization of people living under intensification of globalization.

Shirin M. Rai
Department of Politics and International Studies
University of Warwick
Coventry, CV4 7AL, UK
E-mail: Shirin.Rai@warwick.ac.uk

Notes

1 I see governance as a gendered system of rules and mechanisms that translate as 'public life' bounded by and constitutive of discursive, political and economic power. Governance includes multiple actors as well as multiple sites, thus taking away the state-centric approach to rule-making and implementation.

2 I define globalization as the process by which capitalism has become global. Capitalism is not simply, upon this reading, an economic framework, but fundamentally a set of gendered social relations, which is reflected in and structures the way we produce and exchange goods and services as well ideas and ideologies.

3 Asked about the place of the USA in the international system Secretary of State for Defence Donald Rumsfeld replied 'I honestly believe that every country ought to do what it wants to do … It is either proud of it afterwards or it is less proud of itself' (the *Guardian*, 11 February 2004: 25). The question that can be posed here is can global governance institutions constrain and contain the might of the USA?

4 A liberal reformulation of this position would be that a global governance regime is needed for the provision of global public goods, such as a sustainable environment, as well as regulation of global public bads, such as international crime (Nayar and Court 2002: vii). Neither a sustainable environment nor international crime, however, can be understood without reflecting upon the

social contradictions that give rise to unsustainable environments and to the growth of international crime.

5   One could argue that this disciplinary neoliberalism is clearly evident in the increasing convergence between the economic policy frameworks of the World Bank and the UNDP, especially in addressing the anti-poverty agenda as well as in initiatives for the management of capital–labour relations through the Global Social Compact, which builds on the idea of 'corporate social responsibility' – one way of privatizing social governance. See www.globalsocialcompact.org.

6   See, for example, the Global Social Compact negotiated by the UN under the leadership of Kofi Anan (www.globalsocialcompact.org).

7   For a discussion of gendered market sectors and production processes see Mies (1982), Elson and Pearson (1998), Elson (1999).

8   The state is broadly defined within the feminist literature to encompass formal politico-juridical institutions, regulatory frameworks such as constitutions and regulators as well as elements of discursive power such as educational and cultural bodies that privilege and consolidate, among others, gendered identities. Feminists from a poststructuralist position have emphasized the fractured nature of the state and hence the need to engage in the political interstices of the political system, while Marxist feminists have seen the gendered state as an important node in the maintenance of the global circuits of capital. State interests, thus, are cast in a different light by different feminist scholars within a broad framework that gives credence to the specific gendered nature of the state.

9   It is perhaps pertinent to point out here that as other resources, communication networks too are unevenly distributed among and accessed by the rich and the poor, men and women. While there are 135 Internet hosts per 10,000 persons in industrial countries, the figure for the poor countries is 0.9 (http://firwall. unesco.org/culture/worldreport/htm). Even among the poorer nations, the unevenness is marked. In China (excluding Hong Kong) there are 8.9 personal computers per 1,000 people, and in India, 2.7 (http://www.isc.org).

10 I am grateful to one anonymous referee for bringing this point to my notice. The way in which 'western' commitment to gender equality was raised as an issue by the US state in the context of the invasion of Afghanistan, but disregarded in the case of Iraq poses interesting questions for feminist scholarship and activism.

11 As Upen Baxi pointed out in his reading of this article, the society we speak of is already globalized and therefore the epistemic and social struggles that feminists have to engage in are also necessarily globalized not only in the targets of the struggle – a transnationalist capitalist class that dominates through both state and suprastate institutions – but also the networks of struggle that they create.

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