

# Educational Voyaging in a Globalizing Planet: The Conference of the Rich, the Poor, and the Oppressed<sup>1</sup>

*Shahrazad Mojab*

## ABSTRACT

This paper is an account of the author's experience of aspects of globalization that are generally overlooked in market- and state-centred discourses. She uses her personal experience of attending several academic conferences as a way of analysing the relationship between the market, struggle, politics, and identity. The paper also provides a critique of the concept of "civil society" as a celebrated "space" of plurality and resistance.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article fait un compte-rendu de l'expérience vécue de l'auteure sur les aspects de la mondialisation qui sont souvent ignorés dans les discours centrés sur le marché et l'état. Elle se sert de l'expérience qu'elle a acquise en assistant à plusieurs conférences académiques en tant que moyen d'analyser la relation entre le marché, la lutte, la politique, et l'identité. Cet article fait aussi une critique du concept de la "société civile" comme un "espace" de pluralité et de résistance célèbre..

## CONFERENCES AS SITES OF STRUGGLE

Within a period of three weeks in July 1997, I attended five conferences, presented four papers, and acted as one of the organizers of a conference. These activities took place in London, Berlin, Hamburg and Paris. I also visited three publishers and research centres, and reached tentative agreements for publishing two books. I had a dozen interviews with the media in Paris, and promised a number of community group representatives to give talks to their constituencies in the near future. Apparently concerned about my status as an untenured faculty member, some of my friends noted the intensity of my engagements, and commented that I had gotten "good milage" out of my trip, and that it would look good on my *curriculum vitae*.

I fit the definition of a hard working faculty member, but such categorization does not explain what I am doing. No doubt there is, as Budd Hall reminds us, a "political economy" of academic work (Hall 1993, xix). We have to contribute to the creation and "transfer" of knowledge nationally and worldwide. We live in an

"information society" or "knowledge economy." Moreover, the corporate agenda of higher education in Canada and, increasingly, in America, Europe and elsewhere, has introduced business-type competition into the academic profession. We all teach and conduct research in a "publish or perish" environment.

The commercialization of higher education is taking place in the context of the current global economic crisis. Budget cuts, restructuring, downsizing, merging and globalization are some of the priorities of university administrations. Faculty members are expected to bring money to the university and create jobs for graduate students by getting research grants and signing contracts with business and government. Many universities are reluctant to assist the faculty in their research, finance their conference work, or even pay mailing, photocopying, and telephone expenses.

While consciously resisting the dog-eat-dog mentality that commercialization imposes on us, I have to be concerned about my tenure dossier. In spite of this obvious limitation, I do not attend conferences or publish papers just to improve my profile. Conferences are, for me, sites

of struggle between very unequal sides. The choice of a theme for a conference, its geographic location, its participants and audiences, its language or languages, and its sponsors cannot be anything but political. Viewing an academic conference as neutral or value-free is itself a political commitment.

Much is being said and written about globalization. Although the most powerful driving force of globalization seems to be the capitalist market and its industry, other actors, such as the state, labour, and various social movements, play a part in this process of historical change. While the policies, visions and discourses of globalization are as diverse as the world can be, it is clear that the transnationalization of capital, economy, and culture is at the centre of these debates. Recently, alternative views, such as those which adopt non-market and non-state approaches to globalization, have begun to be voiced. The following is an account of my experience of aspects of globalization that are generally overlooked in market- and state-centred discourses. I record my impressions of conferences, cities, debates, conflicts and discourses. My style is narrative and I mix observations with interpretations. Methodologically, this paper is of the qualitative type; it may be what Connelly and Clandinin describe as "narrative inquiry," as they note that narrative inquiry, like other qualitative methods, "relies on criteria other than validity, reliability and generalizability" (1990, 7).

I realize that there is no pure experience untinted by politics, ideology, epistemology and language. My experiences are shaped by my background - born in Iran, a long time political activist currently living in Canada as a "visible minority" woman, a middle class university professor, and a Marxist feminist. My impressions of the conferences are personal; they are not evaluations of the conferences nor the people who attended them. Conferences are complex events with a usually diverse group of participants. No single person can provide an adequate assessment of a conference with multiple panels and events. However, absolving myself of traditional evaluating tools, I was in a position to sketch together several

unrelated gatherings into a map of interrelated events.

### **RE-ANCHORING ADULT EDUCATION: ALL POWER TO THE MARKET**

*July 1-3, 1997: SCUTREA, Royal Holloway  
College, London, UK*

Birbeck College of the University of London hosted the 27th annual meeting of the Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults (SCUTREA). This was an international conference, and its theme was "Crossing Borders, Breaking Boundaries: Research in the Education of Adults."

I presented a paper on "Minority Women at the Iron Borders of Academe." After my presentation, a conference participant came to me and told me, almost in tears, that my courage in using the concept of "class" had encouraged her to do the same when making her presentation. Moved by the comment I experienced once again the oppression by the dominant paradigm(s), which have censored the use of "class" in a world torn apart by the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor.

It is well known that in industrial Western societies adult education is anchored in social activism and social movements which struggled for justice, equality and a decent life. There was, however, an absence of a strong feminist voice, as well as an absence of labour and class and race analysis. With the expulsion of labour and class, the market and market-friendly theories and practices are moving in. It seems that in adult education, as in other areas, market forces are given the task of regulating the educational system. The ascendancy of the market involves a new distribution of economic and political power. A host of theoretical practices, ranging from "identity politics" to "cultural relativism," help to justify the re-anchoring of adult education from the social movements to a market base.

It was less than a month before this conference that we in Canada had the annual meeting of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE).<sup>2</sup> In the spirit of the

educator Paulo Freire, who passed away in May of 1997, I talked about resistance to new theories of submission. I said that we need to reclaim concepts such as oppression and exploitation. Conceptual constructs such as "marginality," "identity," and "negotiation" are by no means neutral or more adequate than "domination," "oppression," or "discrimination." They are, in fact, friendly to the power blocs which are in a position to oppress the dispossessed. The "centre/margin" dichotomy, for instance, reduces social and economic cleavages to a geographical division of power. It claims the existence of a fluid space where every one can move more or less freely (Morgan and Leggett 1996). Class, as a complex social and economic relation of power, is replaced by more physically centred concepts such as "space," "locality" and "body." In full conformity with traditional individualism, one's body and one's identity form the centre of the universe. In this intellectual world view, centres of power such as the market and the state tend to evaporate.

At the Royal Holloway College, another conference was going on simultaneously with the SCUTREA. It was about "Gender and Society in the Muslim World Since 1800." The title attracted my attention and I attended the first plenary session. The guest speakers were two prominent Iranian women - Mehrangeez Kar, attorney-at-law and Azam Taleghani, a politician and a candidate in presidential elections in Iran. I found the session depressing and an affront to the dignity of women and men. For the last 20 years, since the coming to power of theocracy in Iran, Iranian women have been held hostage to the dictates of a group of clerics-turned-politicians. I left the session feeling totally alienated from their language, modes of thinking, and their celebration of gender apartheid that has been forcibly imposed on Iranians.

Theoretically, many cultural relativists celebrate Islamic sexual apartheid under the guise of respect for other cultures. Quite often theory and practice go together. One European academic, who is fascinated with the Islamic Republic's policy on women, treated the two Muslim speakers as advocates of women's liberation.

The day after the conference, I visited a

Kurdish community centre frequented by Kurdish refugees from Turkey. The community centre, located in a poorly maintained building in Western London, provided a sharp contrast to the SCUTREA conference and its location. I saw in it the web of complex contradictions of our time. The walls were decorated with the portraits of the martyrs of the Kurdish nationalist movement, some of whom were probably killed by weapons manufactured in Britain's military-industrial complex. Turkey is a NATO member and faithfully protects the interests of Western powers in the Middle East, Western and Central Asia. In spite of minor differences between Britain and Turkey, Whitehall supports Ankara in suppressing the Kurdish nationalist movement led by the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK in Kurdish); at the same time, Britain protects Iraqi Kurds from Saddam Hussein's army with the Royal Air Force units stationed in Southern Turkey. A group of Kurds in Britain were able to get a license to broadcast television programs, and launched Med-TV, the first Kurdish satellite channel in 1995 (Hassanpour 1998). The British media called the Kurds "pioneers" among the stateless peoples who do not have access to satellite television. Many refugees cannot afford satellite dishes and come to the community centre to watch eight hours of Kurdish television every day. Broadcasting in Kurdish is illegal in Turkey and Ankara has been pushing Whitehall to revoke the channel's license. In Kurdish provinces, the gendarmerie and security forces have smashed satellite dishes and intimidated viewers. Responding to Turkish charges that Med-TV is the voice of the Kurdistan Workers Party, a "terrorist" organization according to Western powers, British police ransacked the offices of Med-TV in London last year. It seems that the emerging "global village" is not hospitable to "separatist" and radical movements or dissident views.

The centre is a blend of coffee-house, restaurant, educational institution offering computer literacy skills and lectures, political and cultural entity, and a social gathering place. Many Kurds from Turkey have lost their native language due to the government's policy of linguistic genocide. I was wondering how the children and the adults

choose between or combine the relearning of their language and learning of English. Shattered by the ongoing repression of the Turkish state and the demands of Kurdish nationalism, how will the first generation of the refugee community integrate into British society?

Most of the people in the centre, both adults and children, were males; the portraits of the martyrs (also mostly men) showed the same gender disparity, even though in recent years many women have lost their lives in fighting for the nationalist cause. Western visitors to Kurdistan as well as Kurdish nationalists claim that Kurdish women enjoy more freedom than their neighbouring Arab, Turkish and Persian sisters (Mojab 1987). This is a myth based, in part, on the observation that rural Kurdish women do not veil and some women have achieved considerable power in traditional society. Having lived in Kurdistan as a non-Kurdish woman, I find Kurdish sisters subjected to oppressive practices that are not different from those found in other Middle Eastern societies. I argue that the nationalist movement itself is, to a large extent, responsible for the persistence of this repression. For the majority of Kurdish political parties, national liberation is more important than women's liberation. Nationalist parties not only have romanticized the unveiled Kurdish women, but oppose feminist consciousness. They do not want the unity of nation to be threatened by gender differences and women's independent organizations.

The centre is a Kurdish island in the "world city" of London. As a megacity, London attracts both capital and labour from around the world. It creates and reproduces both wealth and poverty and is the location of the oldest industrial working class. Yet we hear stories about the slave labour of women brought to Britain to serve the rich immigrants from the Middle East and elsewhere, when, like all world cities, London is the site of an underclass of refugees, sex workers, and unemployed and under-skilled labour.

While at the centre, I was thinking about the educational implications of population displacement. How can an underclass of refugees and immigrants become citizens, not just in a legal

sense, but also as participants or decision makers in the political, social and economic life of their new country? What role can adult education play in checking the process of poverty generation? What is migrant education? How can it help a highly heterogeneous population of adults and children?

### RELATIONS OF DOMINATION: THEORY AND PRAXIS

*Kurdish Women's Studies and Activism: A Global Research Network, Free University of Berlin, Germany, July 11-12, 1997*

The event in Berlin was the first conference about women of the stateless Kurdish nation. Many observers of the world order, especially those with poststructuralist or postmodernist tendencies, tell us that nations and states are withering away. While many of us experience on a daily basis the shrinking of the world through the use of the Internet, e-mail, satellite television and other communication technologies, the institution of the state seems to be durable and powerful. It is true that the European Union has emerged as a supranational order, but the nation-states forming the Union retain much of their sovereign power and cannot reconcile all their conflicting interests. Outside the European Union and even within it, we see powerful nationalist and ethnic movements seeking sovereignty. The Kurds are one of the numerous stateless peoples of the world who are forcibly divided among four neighbouring countries, and aim at establishing their own state.

As a non-state nation, Kurds rarely find any space in the international order. They appear in the world media only at times of disaster or wars involving Western powers. In dealing with non-sovereign peoples, the academic world persistently follows the lead of nation-states that have laid the foundations of the present international order. Much like the nation-state, the academy's policy is one of exclusion. Until the early 1990s, there was not a single Kurdish studies journal anywhere in the world. Today, it is a useless effort to look for a Kurdish encyclopaedia, an adequate Kurdish dictionary or a comprehensive

bibliography of Kurdistan. The Kurds are known as the fourth largest ethnic people in the Middle East, outnumbered only by Arabs, Persians and Turks. However, the Middle Eastern studies programs in Western countries exclude the Kurds and other stateless peoples such as the Assyrians, Baluches and Berbers.

There is a hierarchy of exclusion in the academy. Women were excluded from academic studies until the 1970s, when the feminist movements in North America and Europe forced women's studies programs into the curriculum of the universities. This was an exclusively White, middle class, academic enterprise. Women of colour, aboriginal, and Third World women were excluded. Today, however, both the academy and the publishing industry have opened some space for women of the non-Western world. Looking at the Middle Eastern scene again, it is striking that the institution of the state, its absence or presence, plays a prominent role in determining the direction of academic work. If the language and history of the dominant nations, that is, Arabs, Persians and Turks, dominates Middle Eastern studies, it is clear that women belonging to these nations also dominate the curriculum and publishing agenda.

The Middle Eastern states that rule over the Kurds do not allow researchers to conduct "field work" in Kurdistan. Researchers are thus limited in their ability to study gender relations or other aspects of the life of this people. Under conditions of political repression in all countries with a Kurdish population, it is not possible to freely use research techniques such as face-to-face or telephone interviews, questionnaires and correspondence. Everywhere, libraries specializing in the Kurds or holding adequate collections are either non-existent or poorly equipped. This situation is reproduced constantly - with the absence of research, Kurdish women do not enter the pages of feminist and academic journals and books; due to the dearth of literature, they do not appear in the curricula or course outlines of women's studies or Middle Eastern studies programs. With so few academics and researchers interested in such a limited field, it is not possible to organize a conference on Kurdish women even if

financial resources were available.

The academic world is not, however, a totally closed system. While it is true that there is a hierarchy of domination involving theories, paradigms, disciplines and administrative power, we also find an unceasing struggle for democratization of the system. A handful of dedicated individuals are able to make breakthroughs in an area of study, a discipline or an academic establishment. The Berlin conference was the result of one such effort.

At the conference on "The Kurds and the City" held in Paris in 1996, the need for a systematic and scholarly approach to Kurdish women's studies was asserted, and the value of collaboration through a network was reaffirmed. The participants of the panel on women agreed to synthesize the findings of their various papers and use them as the basis of new academic partnership in the area of Kurdish women's studies. Subsequently, the International Kurdish Women's Studies Network was established (Mojab 1997). This network, in cooperation with a number of academics and activists from Europe and Turkey, organized the first academic conference on Kurdish women. I was one of the participants and presented a paper in this conference. Funding came from the Körber-Stiftung in Hamburg and the International Relations Bureau of the Free University of Berlin. The absence of political freedoms in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey, as well as the difficulty in getting visas to Western countries, are serious obstacles to the participation of women from Kurdistan.

The conference witnessed several conflicts, including those between academics and activists. The Network was launched by academics, but some of them reject the strict separation of theory and practice. I advocate close ties between the two and, like many feminists, am critical about the way women studies programs in the West have lost their ties to women's movements. In organizing the conference, we tried to address the problem by inviting a number of activists to participate in the event.

The mix of activists and academics created a number of conflicts. One was over the question of language. While many academics from diverse

linguistic backgrounds could communicate in English, activists from Turkey or Germany were not familiar with it. Thus, we had to use interpreters and translators and the time taken up by translation disrupted some of the planned sessions and limited time for discussion and debate. A more serious problem was the existence of hierarchical relations between the two groups. Some of the activists addressed this issue, noting for instance, that academic elitism was evident in the personal attitudes and behaviours of the academic participants, and that the conference organizers had not prepared for potential language difficulties.

In relation to the issue of hierarchy, the following questions were raised: "Who is representing whom?" "Whose voice is being represented?" "Who is speaking for Kurdish women?" "Who should be in a Kurdish women's studies network?" It was pointed out that the majority of researchers were non-Kurds, either Europeans or from one of the dominant nations of the region. Even though some of these issues had been predicted, they need to be addressed in more systematic ways in future. It is interesting that the question of representation, raised by Kurdish activists, was not framed as a critique of male-female relations of dominance but rather as a nationalist concern about power relations based on Kurdish and non-Kurdish identities. The critique is relevant, however, in terms of the politics of knowledge creation. Some of the activists felt that they were not considered as equal contributors throughout the conference, rather, they were seen as the object of women's studies. The whole conference was a great learning experience for me. I noticed how I can be in a position of domination even when I oppose a hierarchical distribution of authority, status and power.

I presented a paper on "Kurdish Women's Studies: Theoretical and Methodological Prospects." In spite of the conference's power politics, participants discussed the representation of Kurdish women in European travel literature and Kurdish folklore, Kurdish women and political participation, Kurdish women, war and reconstruction, and the activists shared their experiences with the conference participants.

Everyone agreed that the women of Kurdistan had suffered immensely in the aftermath of the Gulf War. Those who had studied the situation of women in Iraqi Kurdistan revealed that the Kurdish nationalist parties that rule over the so-called Kurdish "safe haven" share much of the responsibility for atrocities committed against women.

### GLOBAL POLITICKING AND ADULT EDUCATION

*UNESCO, 5th International Conference on Adult Education, Hamburg, Germany, July 13-18, 1997*

The trip from Berlin to Hamburg took only two hours by train, but the Berlin and Hamburg conferences were worlds apart. Berlin was a poor women's conference; Hamburg was the rich men's party. Berlin was the conference of a non-state nation strangled by the global nation-state system. Hamburg's was the conference of nation-states. Here, in one of the best locations of the richest city in Europe, the representatives of the world's nation-states mixed with some of the finest educators and debated the future of adult education.

The presence of security offered a sharp contrast to most academic conferences. Workers at the hotel had been told to behave with courtesy because of the presence of top government officials. The prominence of security indicated the status of the state in world affairs. Why do state officials need to protect themselves?

The discourse was also different. Here, the government and the academy seemed to have agreed on a common discourse. Although the two sides are by no means one and the same, everyone seemed to talk about "civil society," "globalization," "action," and "market economy."<sup>3</sup> Obviously, these commonly used concepts cannot always obscure the conflicting platforms of radicals, liberals and conservatives. Adult education remains a highly contested territory. The great majority of the adult population in the world suffers from poverty, oppression and war. Many adult educators watch the unceasing widening of the gap between the rich and the poor. Some of them continue to work in the tradition of educators like

Paulo Friere, Samad Behrangi and others who see in education not only a means for liberation from poverty but also an end to oppression and dictatorship.<sup>4</sup>

"State, University, and the Construction of Civil Society in the Middle East" was the title of my presentation at this conference. I argued that in the Middle East, contrary to the claims of some Western and non-Western observers, the main cause of retrogression is the state and not the people. Many social scientists argue that the state can be harnessed through the formation of civil society. This is a model based on the experience of democratization of Western societies in the post-Renaissance period. I emphasized that the despotic, autocratic state is still a major obstacle to the unfolding of democracy in that region and that the civility of the state is the pre-requisite for the unfolding of civil society in the Middle East.

I was aware that a state-centred conference environment would not be very hospitable to my arguments or even the tone of my paper. But I did not expect to be harshly attacked by a member of the audience, an academic supporting the typical Middle Eastern state. In the discussion period, he said that what I had presented did not reflect the reality of life in the Middle East, that the picture I depicted was far from the truth. Furthermore, he invited other representatives from the region to resolutely oppose my position. That, however, was not the end of his attack. After the presentation, he came up to me and angrily burst out, "I don't want to argue with you. But there is one thing that I want to say. Your paper is a shame for a prestigious institution such as OISE and the University of Toronto."

I felt a moment of silence in the room following my presentation. Once again, some people congratulated me for my courage to relate the persistence of misery with the structure of power, and to demand a change of the status quo. Other comments, however, were subtly patronizing.

## **A CLOSER LOOK AT THE RICHEST CITY IN EUROPE**

Various women's groups in Hamburg organized some social-political events during that conference. One was the "Alternative Boat Tour" of the Hamburg port which combined sightseeing with talks about globalization, trade and migration. Another event was "St. Pauli - Walk By Night," organized by a local women's group called Amnesty for Women. During the walk, we learned about the situation of sex workers and violence against women in Hamburg. The information supplied by Amnesty for Women included the following:<sup>5</sup>

According to German Law for Aliens, foreigners with tourist visa are not allowed to practice any occupation in Germany, including work in the prostitution. However, from the total number of about six to eight thousands prostitutes in Hamburg, there are about two thousand foreign women the distribution of which are as follows: 50% from East-European countries, 25% from the South and Latin America, about 20% from Asia and 5% are from other nationalities. Talking of other big cities in Germany, there are about seven thousand prostitutes in Berlin, a thousand and half in Stuttgart, and one thousand in Dortmund, Frankfurt, and München.

Non-German women who get into this practice usually have their own German, Turkey or Polish pimps. These men organize the place where they can stay and work. Sometimes they are being sold to bars or club owners for between DM2,000 to DM8,000. Most of these women do not speak and understand the German language which caused them to be tricked many times by their pimps. They are convinced that they are allowed to work as prostitutes in Germany by paying a certain amount for such a "licence," which in reality does not exist.

They are also forced to pay high fee for the rent of the room and other miscellaneous things. For this reason, some women have to do business of at least ten customers a day.

Prostitution in Germany brings about eleven million annual earnings to the pimps and the state. In Hamburg, there are about two-thousand and nineteen million (DM) earnings. Alone in the newspaper ads, the government can earn much money through 15% turnover taxes. About two thousand model prostitutes working in brothels and apartments are giving daily advertisement in the newspapers.

I was astonished to see the extent of women's body exploitation in the heart of the richest city in Europe. This reminded me of the opening sentences of Sietske Altink's book "'Shocking'; this is the reaction when traffic in women receives publicity. But wherever we live - in Europe, the United States or Asia - the problem exists, and it cannot be attributed to the naïveté of its victims, as the cases in this book show" (1995).

As I do not speak German I could not decipher street signs, ads, art works, or posters. It was, therefore, wonderful to come across a poster in English that said, "Free Mumia Abu Jamal." Despite my unfamiliarity with German I was able to communicate with some of the workers in the service industry since most were young immigrant women and men from Iran and Turkey and my knowledge of Farsi and Kurdish came in handy. In some cases, I even acted as a translator.

**FROM THE STREETS OF HAMBURG TO  
THE PRISONS OF THE ISLAMIC  
REPUBLIC OF IRAN**

*Iranian Women's Studies Foundation, 8th Annual  
Conference, Paris, July 18-21, 1997*

The Paris conference was organized by the Iranian Women's Studies Foundation, which was founded in 1989 by a number of feminists living in exile in Europe and North America. The foundation

receives financial assistance and considerable voluntary help from activists and supporters. More than five hundred women and men participated in their conference.

Although the conference dealt primarily with the Iranian women's movement, it was the site of theoretical struggles. People throughout the world have heard about the misogynist policies of the Islamic regimes of Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and, to a lesser extent, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Persian Gulf states. In Iran, women of diverse backgrounds have resisted the state's sexual apartheid policy. In recent years, however, a number of Iranian and Western feminists have rationalized sexual segregation by claiming that such policies are part of the culture of Muslim societies; they believe that the Islamic body and head cover has multiple meanings and is used by women as a tool of resistance against patriarchy. They also claim that the Islamic state is not a monolithic entity, and some factions within the government endorse women's rights. Theoretically, these arguments are anchored in cultural relativism, identity politics, postmodernism and post-structuralism.

The great majority of political activists strongly reject these claims, which they believe amount to outright support for the Islamic Republic's suppression of women. If activists are more or less unanimous in condemning these theoretical frameworks, we see increasing polarization among the academics. My paper examined the process of polarization and presented a critique of these theoretical frameworks. That it was very well received offered me a useful reminder of the political relevance of academic work in general and social theory in particular.

The highlight of the conference was a panel of former political prisoners who talked about their experience of prison under the Islamic Republic. The crimes committed against these women are so horrible that I do not dare retell them in any detail. It suffices to mention that being a woman made these prisoners vulnerable to atrocities which cannot be committed against men. Female prisoners were subjected to forms of torture that were rooted in Islamic misogyny. While

physical tortures including rape did occur, the women were also subjected to brutal forms of psychological abuse. After listening to these stories, it was difficult if not also impossible to endorse cultural relativism and the claim that there are no universal rights.

### IN CLOSING: A GLOBAL SYSTEM OF REPRESSION

The day before I left Toronto for London, a Canadian newspaper published a brief summary of the 1997 United Nations Population Fund annual report.<sup>6</sup> Here are a few highlights:

More than 585,000 women around the world die needlessly each year from pregnancy-related causes. About 70,000 women die each year, and countless more suffer infections and other health consequences, from unsafe abortions. An estimated 120 million women have been subjected to some form of female genital mutilation with another 2 million at risk annually. Two million girls aged between 5 and 15 are recruited into the "commercial sex market" every year. Improving the quality of women's health services would cost \$17 billion a year by the year 2000, "less than the world currently spends each week on armaments." Many countries have been forced to cut health spending because of "Structural adjustment" programs, a euphemism for the inflation-busting austerity measures favoured by international lending institutions. Inadequate health services and lack of respect for women's rights have also led to a rise in rape, exploitation and sexually related diseases such as AIDS.

While writing this paper, I read in another report from India that "[M]ore than 5,000 women are killed every year because their in-laws consider their dowries inadequate. Only a tiny percentage of the killers are ever punished. Hundreds of

thousands of cases in which women have been beaten and tortured over dowries await trial in courts across India." <sup>7</sup>

While I was returning to Toronto, airline personnel handed out envelopes to collect from the passengers whatever foreign coins they wanted to donate to UNICEF. The back of the envelope read: One British pound, "protects 21 children from blindness caused by poor nutrition; nine pounds immunises a child against six preventable killer diseases; and twenty-one US dollars buys teaching materials for two primary school classes" (August 20, 1997).

### TWO VIEWS ON CIVIL SOCIETY

Since the fall of the state-centred political regimes of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the concept "civil society" has been widely used to explain not only the history and politics of these countries but also to function as a central explanatory tool in the social sciences.<sup>8</sup> Its use has, in fact, spread beyond the realm of theory. Civil society is now a prescription for removing poverty and dictatorship from the face of the earth. While academics enhance the explanatory power of the concept, politicians and big business see in civil society a golden opportunity to create new markets and reap more profits. They argue that if civil society is expanded from China to Russia, West Africa and Latin America democracy will prevail. In this discourse, democracy is equated with free market economy.

It is true that the democratisation of society, politics and economy in Western Europe has been historically tied to the rise of capitalist relations. The advanced Western industrial societies have developed a market economy and a space for civil society. In spite of all the gains made in this process, the West has not been able to eliminate unemployment, poverty, inequality and violence. To give just a few examples, the two world wars began in the birthplace of civil society - Europe. Today, the military-industrial complex is an integral part of the capitalist economy. Weapons are profitable commodities in the international market. Nazism came to power in one of the most

developed civil societies of the world. Even three decades after the fall of Nazism, eugenics was legally practised in Canada (the province of Alberta), Sweden, Norway and Denmark.<sup>9</sup> Looking at another contemporary problem, I refer to the serious damage inflicted on the environment in advanced market economies; if the trend of ecocide is not reversed, there is little hope for the future of our planet. Science fiction writers portray a fearful future when the population of major cities is divided into an affluent minority and a majority suffering from hunger, disease, crime, and overcrowding. The minority and majority live in spaces segregated by borders and guarded by military force.<sup>10</sup> This may be a pessimistic prophesy, but it is not difficult to discern early symptoms of such a future.

We may ask this question: if more than two centuries of civil society in the West has failed to bring prosperity and peace to these societies, how can it transform the developing world into a promised land? We already know that the prescription of a "free market economy," the Structural Adjustment Program, drafted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and imposed on the developing world by the largest financial powers, has failed to eliminate hunger and its associated ills. In fact, some observers argue that in developing societies democracy works as an obstacle to economic development. They advocate economic liberalization and political authoritarian rule as practised in countries such as Singapore and Malaysia (McGinn 1996). This version of "civil society" is a re-writing of the earlier prescriptions of "green revolution," or "white revolution" of the 1960s, which promised that land reforms leading to the commercialization of traditional agriculture would bring prosperity to the Third World.

In developed capitalist economies, leaders on the right advocate a policy of all power to the market. This platform entails, among other things, the dissolution of labour unions and the elimination of labour as an organized power. In the sphere of politics, this platform demands the privatization of governing and governance and that the market should take over many functions of the state. Thus,

the state and the market become one and the same. It is a policy of full sovereignty for the market forces.

What then are the alternatives to the hegemony of the market? Many observers who reject the simplistic equation of the market with democracy propose to build a "global civil society" through the agency of social movements. This bloc includes a diverse body of grass-roots groups that operate on local, national and global levels. These movements are not motivated by profit making, and will be able, as a result, to address problems from the citizens' point of view. The goal is to solve enduring problems such as unemployment, a deteriorating environment, hunger, violence, war and oppression. But while social movements can be potentially powerful, they are not as organized as the state or market forces. Indeed, community groups and social movements cannot initiate effective change except through the institution of the state. Thus, if the market and pro-market politicians advocate the privatization of politics, social movements have to struggle for democratization of the political system.

The advocates of market sovereignty claim adult education as their own territory. The argument is straightforward. If the market is the main supplier of jobs and employment, it should have final say in the provision of training and skills. In recent years, governments have delegated to the private sector some of the task of training and retraining adults. Here lies the imbalance of power. Having no control over the job market, we educators have little say in mapping our educational undertaking.

If the "end of history" means the replacement of state-centred society by market-centred forms of social organization, then the struggle for a civil society should be on the agenda of anyone who cares for freedom. More than ever, there is need for a space free of the dictates of the market and the state. This means that education involves much more than training people for the job market. We need to educate people as citizens with the right to lead a free and decent life. We should not be treated as individuals who must compete to be rewarded with a job. I realize that

this approach to education is utopian. It is not easy to replace the hegemony of the market by the hegemony of the citizens. However, if educators are not expected to reproduce the status quo, they should be encouraged to resist it.

## ENDNOTES

1. I would like to thank Griff Foley for recognizing my agony over the global suffering of women, my kindled passion for action, and, above all, encouraging me to write about it.
2. At CASAE (June 9-11, 1997), I organized a panel on "Socially Responsible Adult Education: Issues of University Community Partnership" and presented a paper on "'Intellectual' Community Responses to a Feminist-Anti-Racist-Participatory Research."
3. These concepts were used in almost all major speeches delivered by various government and NGOs representatives including in the keynote address by Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and Lalita Ramdas, president of the International Council of Adult Education (ICAE). In her statement to the opening plenary entitled, "Adult Education - Lifelong Learning - Global Knowledge: the Challenge and the Potential," Lalita Ramdas said, "The basic premise of globalization and the Mantra of the Market needs to be re-examined. What is being globalized is concentration of wealth and power on the one hand, and accentuation of misery and poverty on the other. The numbers of those who fall into the category of suffering humanity is increasing day by day..."
4. Samad Behranghi was an Iranian educator and writer who devoted his life to teaching and learning from the children of the peasants. He wrote a number of works about education; see Thomas Ricks, "Samad Behranghi and Contemporary Iran: the Artist in Revolutionary Struggle," in *The Little Black Fish and Other Modern Persian Stories by Samad Behranghi*, translated by Mary and Eric Hooglund, Washington, D.C., Three Continents Press, 1976.
5. Personal correspondence with Amnesty for Women, July 21, 1997.
6. "UN Report Slams High Maternal Death Rate," *The Toronto Star*, May 28, 1997, p. A3.
7. "Brides Killed over Poor Dowries in India," *The Toronto Star*, August 14, 1997, p. C6.
8. For a critical survey of the concept, see Ellen Meiksins Wood, "The Uses and Abuses of 'Civil Society'", *The Socialist Register* (1990): 60-84.
9. According to a Reuter news report, about 60,000 women were subjected to "Nazi-style campaign of forced sterilization" between 1935 and 1976 in Sweden. The goal was to "rid Swedish society of 'inferior' racial types and to encourage Aryan features." According to a study published in a Swedish daily paper, Sweden, Norway and Denmark pioneered racial cleansing "sciences" after World War I ("Sweden Admits Sterilizing Women Deemed 'Inferior'", *The Toronto Star*, August 25, 1997, p. A14).
10. See, for instance, "Past Tense", a two-part episode of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*.

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