

Liberating Women, Liberating Knowledge: Reflections On Two Decades Of Feminist Action Research

Maria Mies

ABSTRACT

The pioneer of feminist participatory action research recalls the origins of this model from the time of its first publication in 1977, and offers a history of some of its results throughout the world. She reflects, too, on challenges to the model, including the "academic matricide" posed by feminists' embrace of postmodernism.

RÉSUMÉ

La pionnière des études sur la participation à l'action féministe retrace les origines de ce modèle depuis le jour de la première publication en 1977, et présente une histoire de quelques-uns de ses succès partout dans le monde. Elle fait réflexion aussi sur les défis au modèle, y compris le «matricide académique» causé par l'adhésion des féministes au postmodernisme.

INTRODUCTION

Wisdom of the Origins

Some texts are like children. Once they have left the house they go their own way, have their own impact and their own history. Sometimes you get some feedback--like a postcard--from odd places and you are surprised where your "brainchild" has moved around, how it has been received and assessed. This is what happened to my paper, "Methodological Postulates for Women's Studies", which I wrote in February, 1977 for the first meeting of the Association of Feminist Theory and Praxis which took place in Frankfurt, a text that appeared in English translation in 1983 (Bowles and Klein).

Another metaphor for such texts could be that of seeds thrown into the winds. The seeds metaphor is tempting because it suggests

that everything which will later develop and manifest itself is already present in the very beginning, in the seed-corn. You cannot add much which is qualitatively altogether new. This is what worried me, when I got the invitation to give this keynote lecture at this remarkable Praxis♀Nexus conference. I felt that I had said all or almost all I had to say in those old "Postulates" as they are referred to in Germany. What could I say in Victoria which was not known yet? I had even replied to the criticism and controversies which had accompanied the "Postulates" since they were first published in Dutch and German (Mies, 1984, 1991). But in 1994 I was asked to write a contribution for a new German book on feminist methodology where, 15 years after the Postulates were published, I would reflect on the experiences with this approach.

While doing this exercise of self-reflection I was again amazed at the "Wisdom Of The Origins"--at the fact that my/our main concern at that stage in our new feminist movement was precisely the necessary link between practice and theory and in that order: first there had been our struggles and campaigns (e.g., for liberalization of abortion laws, against violence against women, for a host of feminist projects, for space in the university) and now it was time to reflect on the question of what all this meant with regard to the dominant knowledge system, the dominant epistemology, methodology and the dominant academic institutions, where many of us were placed, either as students or teachers and researchers.

This search for the practice-theory-nexus was not just an arbitrary exercise, it was an existential necessity, because all women with a beginning feminist consciousness in academia experienced their existence as women and scholars/students as contradictory, as being torn into two opposite directions. June Nash called it the "double consciousness" of women. Being ourselves the site of this tremendous patriarchal contradiction led to what in German is called *Betroffenheit* (concern, affectedness), which pushed us to overcome this sterile divide between practice and theory.

In my second paper on feminist methodology in 1991, I described '*Betroffenheit*' as a subjective process in the person which may start with emotions of anger, outrage, rebellion, which then should lead to reflection and analysis of the causes of this anger, and the insights thus gained will have to be translated into actions. In the "Postulates" of 1977, I made this *Betroffenheit*

or rebellion and concern the starting point for participatory feminist action research and women's studies. Research, starting with this kind of rebellion, concern and commitment is what Charlotte Bunch calls "passionate scholarship" (Bunch 1987). Sometimes I have called the process sparked off by this *Betroffenheit*, the process of transforming hot anger into cold anger by transformative and constructive action.

We discovered the divide between practice and theory as the main structural principle of the dominant epistemology. We also discovered immediately that this division was not gender neutral, that it was indeed part and parcel of the patriarchal division of labour for women. Moreover, this structural divide had its parallel in the division between mental and manual labour, between head and hand.

In this body metaphor it was obvious that those men who had invented these dualisms did not have a female body in mind, a body that first creates life practically, which then can become conscious and reflective. In the metaphor of "head and hand", the middle part, the body, that connects hands and head was, as my late friend Christel Neusüss wrote, not only forgotten, but the head was then declared to be the origin of all life. Consciousness was considered more important than being, theory superior and more valued than practice, mental labour had/has a higher position than bodily manual labour, and women's bodily labour creating new human beings was not called labour even by Marxists, who, on the other hand, had put practice over theory, according to the famous text of origin, the German Ideology by Marx and Engels. Therefore, Christel Neusüss analysed the movement of the German left as the

"Head-Births" of the German Working Class Movement (Neusüss 1985).

Given this hierarchically and dualistically structured relationship between theory and practice, dominating all of our knowledge systems, what chance could women have who wanted to theorise on their own oppression and exploitation? Would "catching -up" with patriarchal theory, in male dominated institutions, solve the problem? Would quotas for women in academia help? Would things be different if there were more women professors? More intuitively than consciously I understood that the recipe "add women and stir" would not do to solve our problem. What difference would it make if more women would get jobs in the university that still followed the same old patriarchal capitalist and positivist knowledge system? Moreover, was a strategy of "catching up with men" capable of doing away with oppression and exploitation of all women? Or even with all exploitation and oppression? Because it was clear to those of us who had lived and worked in Third World countries that it was unacceptable if certain categories of women (white, middle class, in the North) were liberated at the expense of continued colonization of other people living in the South. What was needed, I thought, was not a feminization of academia. To be a woman was not yet equivalent to a political vision and program. Therefore we had to search for an altogether new paradigm of knowledge and science, a new epistemology and methodology, a new relationship between practice and theory, between politics and knowledge, between living and knowing, a relationship which would no longer separate, fragment and hierarchize these areas of reality.

It is necessary to remember the **historical context** within which this search for a new praxis nexus took place. The inspirations of the students' movement of the 1960s were still alive in Germany. Marxism, its framework and concepts, were still known by students. Many of us were still inspired by the revolutionary thoughts of Mao Tse Tung. My search for a different approach to the theory/practice relationship led me again to Thesis Eleven of Marx' "Theses on Feuerbach" written in 1845:

"The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it" (15).

Wisdom Of The Origins--Marx ' Thesis Eleven sums up what these two men in their youth had analysed as the main contradictions of the rising capitalist system and what they saw as the most far-reaching, radical strategy to build up a new, more humane and equal society.

My seven "Postulates" on a new methodology for feminist research were certainly inspired by Marx's and Engles' critique of German idealism, particularly by their emphasis on the priority of praxis over theory, and by Mao Tse Tung's text on Theory and Praxis. Another, equally important source of inspiration was in those years Paulo Freire. For me his "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (1970) fitted well with our feminist methodology of consciousness-raising and action. Freire not only analysed what oppression does to both oppressor and oppressed, but he also offered a method for the oppressed to get out of such a situation of oppression and dominance, a method he called *Conscientização* or awareness-raising. Freire

was one of those scholars who, like Huizer, Mannheim and Stavenhagen, tried to de-colonize social research (Hammersley, 1993).

In those years the academic Left in Germany was also influenced by the Critical-Theory-School of the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research, by theoreticians like Marcuse, Horkheimer, Adorno and Habermas. But while I found most of their writing theoretically convincing, particularly Marcuse's analysis of One-dimensional Man and Horkheimer's and Reich's critique of authoritarian, patriarchal family and society, I did not see how to integrate all our feminist concerns with this theory. But my main problem with the Critical Theory was and is that it does not show a way to get from critical theory to critical praxis. The structural divide between those two areas is upheld, even today, by the adherents of this school.

Therefore, when I drafted the methodological "Postulates", it was clear to me that we had to go further than the Critical Theory, although several elements of their critique could be shared by feminists, for instance the critique of quantitative, positivist research. If we really started including our subjective concern and rebellion--our *Betroffenheit*--into the research process, it soon became evident that we then would have to revolutionize the whole patriarchal-capitalist knowledge system. This was a political necessity. To liberate women, it became clear to me, would not be possible without liberating knowledge, which so far was fettered, not by men but by capitalist patriarchy.

This short reflection on the "Wisdom Of The Origins" may be concluded by again

briefly summarizing the main points of this new action-oriented, participatory, liberating approach. The seven "Postulates" start with the general thesis that we will no longer exclude our own subjective *Betroffenheit* from the research process, but include it as a starting point.

1. The postulate of value-free research, of neutrality and indifference towards the research participants is replaced by conscious partiality.
2. The vertical relationship between researchers and researched is being replaced by the view from below.
3. The contemplative, uninvolved attitude of the researcher vis-à-vis the researched is replaced by active participation in actions, movements and struggles for women's liberation. Feminist research must serve this goal.
4. Participation in social actions and struggles means that the change of the status quo becomes the starting point for a scientific quest. "If you want to know a thing you must change it."
5. The research process must become a process of conscientization, both for the researchers and the researched, or for all participants in the research process.
6. This process of conscientization should be accompanied by recording women's individual and social history, so that women can appropriate their history.
7. Women cannot reclaim and appropriate their history unless they begin to share and collectivize their experience, insights, and theories. Feminist research must help to overcome the competitiveness and sterile individualism of academia.

In this list of postulates, the postulate

No. 4 has been and still is the most controversial because it expresses most clearly the Wisdom of the Origins, that praxis precedes theory and that it then leads to a dialectal process of action-reflection-action, etc.

Killing of the Origins: A Critique of Post Modernism

We have come a long way since "The Theses on Feurbach" of 1848, even since 1989, when the Berlin Wall came down and when the utopia, spelt out by Marx, was thrown into the dustbin of history by many, together with the "really existing socialist" systems in Eastern Europe. Also Mao Tse Tung's Chinese Revolution is being transformed into capitalist modernization and catching-up with industrial consumer society. Chinese women are now the cheapest labour force, producing for an anonymous world market in joint ventures. There seems to be no alternative to capitalism, or, as it is called these days, the market economy.

On the backdrop of these changes--and also preceding them--a new trend has emerged--called post modernism, which questions the philosophical, epistemological and political foundations upon which the European project of "modernity and progress" was built, including the great socialist or communist utopias. Post modernism not only criticizes the Enlightenment of the 18th and 19th centuries, but also any attempt at formulating a social utopia based on universal principles like freedom and equality. For some this even means the end of history. History as a process, linking past and future, can no longer be conceived by post modernists. For them it is only an arbitrary mass of individual

moments, atomized, and disconnected. Knowledge, too, is possible only as ad hoc knowledge, pragmatic knowledge, individualized knowledge, knowledge as reduced to information. The prefix "post", which is nowadays added on to a number of historical movements and processes (post-industrialism, post-materialism, post-history, post-Marxism, post-feminism), not only suggests that all these movements are over and obsolete, but also that they were useless, and that they are irrelevant and without value for the present. Therefore, the sooner people forget about them the better. K. Füsser, (following C. Schmidt) has summarized the post modernist ideology as an endeavour of killing all subversive memory as "strategies towards oblivion!"

This Killing of the Origins through post modernism has thus produced a new kind of idealism in the Marxist sense, which not only reduces the total reality to a "text" but also eliminates any memory of the continuity which we have with the rest of the organic and inorganic world as a given, our rootedness in nature. I have never understood why feminists, particularly in the centres of ongoing modern patriarchal capitalism, in North America and Europe, could fall for such an ideology, even propagate it in the name of women's emancipation. Emancipation from our origins, our real mothers and "from mother earth." Their accusation of "essentialism", which is directed against ecofeminism, has its roots, I think, in this hatred of the origins, of their symbolic and real mothers and of the fact that they can be mothers too. This hatred of motherhood cannot be but self-destructive for women (Brodrribb 1992).

I do not want to elaborate on this

critique of post modern feminist ideology here, but I want to discuss the political consequences of this stream of thought. And I want to do this by going back to the origins of our movement--the movement for women's liberation beginning in the late 1960s--and our early reflections on the relationship between research, theory, studies and the liberation of women from patriarchal violence, oppression and exploitation. In the beginning it was still clear that feminist research would make sense only if it served this political goal. But already in 1984, when I tried to reply to the critiques of the "Postulates", which had been published between 1978 and 1984, I noticed that feminist research had become "women's research" and that the gradual integration of "women's studies" into mainstream academia since the early 1980s under the title of "gender studies" had again de-linked feminist research and theoretical reflection from the political movement. Action and theoretical reflection were again neatly separated according to the traditional academic and positivist division of labour between politics and theorizing. This is what I then called the "academization of feminist research" (Mies 1984). This academization of feminist research and theorizing made "women's" or "gender studies" respectable and acceptable for the powers that rule the academic establishment. Particularly the "gender discourse" had the effect of descandalizing the feminist rebellion, because it removed "**Women**"--and all that is associated with this concept--from public perception and public discourse. To talk of gender was decent--because it again separated sexuality, and our organic female body and its experiences, from the more abstract discussions on culture, society, economy.

But this re-academization of feminist research could not happen without killing of the origins, too. The method to re-integrate feminist research into the male-dominated academic establishment has always been the same: one first destroys all traces of the fact that feminist research grew out of the women's movement. Then you turn the history upside down and state that the women's movement came **after** women's studies, that women's studies were the origin of the women's movement. Particularly in recent publications on feminist research in Germany this destruction of our own history can be observed. The German feminist movement is not identified as the origin of German feminist research, but the writings of mostly American feminists which were translated into German. Moreover, this obscuring and killing of the origins is thirdly accompanied by the elimination of the 'mothers', of the women's movement, of the early feminist pioneers from academia. In Germany quite a number of such well-known and internationally respected feminist activist-scholars and thinkers have not been able to find a position in our university system. Most of them are now in their mid-fifties. Those who are now leading the few women's studies departments for which we all struggled are often not feminists but just female academics.

This academic matricide, as I call it, cannot only be observed in the real history of what happened to the feminists who fought for women's liberation. It can also be found in the writings of many academic women who these days write about gender and science, gender and research methodology. This discourse on feminist research often follows the same method which patriarchal men are using when

they want to establish themselves as the origin of things: the method which Susanne Blaise called "The rape of the origins" (Blaise 1983).

This "rape of the origins" happens, as Catherine Keller has shown, since time immemorial according to the same pattern--first found in the Sumerian myths of origin--where Marduk, the new patriarchal culture-hero, has first to kill his mother Tiamat the Mother Goddess, then dissect her body and throw her limbs all over the land. Out of these then grow the new culture centres and patriarchal feats. Catherine Keller has identified this matricide as the origin of the European concept of the ego. It is not only the method which men use to create their own myths of origin, but also women, even feminists follow this pattern (Keller 1986). After "deconstructing", i.e. dissecting the theoretical and practical works of the "mothers" of the movement, they appropriate and reassemble--"reconstruct"--some of the bits and pieces into their own "narratives." As in post-modern feminism, every reality has been reduced to a "text"; this process of destroying and re-writing of history is just a matter of word-processing on a computer.

*Going Back to the Origins or:
The Proof of the Pudding is in the Eating*

My going back to the origins of my own involvement with the new feminist movement and my reflection on what happened to the praxis--and movement--orientation which had inspired so many of us who began to challenge patriarchal-capitalist epistemology and research, is not only motivated by the need to criticize the self destructive post-modern strategies of oblivion, but more even by the

need to counter the de-politicisation and impotence which followed post-modern destruction of the origins.

EXPERIENCES WITH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (PAR)

As I know that one cannot overcome this de-politicisation and sense of impotence by mere academic arguments, I will rather tell you a few examples of how the "postulates" have been applied and how through this action- and change-oriented approach women in different parts of the world were not only empowered but also began to understand the world in which they live. This is what theory is supposed to do.

Those who have read my methodological papers will know that I applied this approach in my own involvement in a struggle for a house for battered women in Cologne, but also in a project among poor peasant women and women working in the home-based lace industry in Narsapur, South India. I have written about the results of this research in 1982, 1983 and 1984 and I have shown how the women were able to use this research to improve their situation.

Claudia v. Werlhof reports similar dynamics among a peasants' movement in Venezuela, where she had carried out an action research project in 1978-79. When she revisited this movement again in 1991 she found that after her fieldwork, in the course of which the importance of a subsistence perspective had been emphasized, a very creative discussion process had started in which the peasant women and men had begun to tackle issues which before had been taboo, like the woman-man-relationship, the issues of social relations, of communality, of the

relationship between agriculture and art. Their involvement in the action-research as "sister-and-brother-sociologists" had given them a solid base of arguments and enough confidence to defend their strategy of giving their subsistence production and not the market production priority, particularly vis-à-vis the development authorities from the government (v Werlhof 1985, 1991).

In my second article on "Feminist Research and Methodology" (1984) I have reported about the experience with this PAR approach in the "Fieldwork in Holland" which I had introduced in the "Women and Development" Programme of the Institute of Social Studies (ISS), The Hague. Through this "Fieldwork in Holland", women from the South were encouraged to conduct a kind of action-research on women's groups, feminist projects and initiatives in Holland. Third World women doing research on first world Women--even feminists! This exercise, which I had introduced as a kind of practical critique of the dominant social science approach, proved to be an extraordinary eye-opener to most women of the South about the situation of women in a so called "developed" society. This fieldwork helped them more than any number of books to understand why women in a rich "advanced" industrialized country were not liberated, why they need a women's movement. Here I only want to repeat the exclamation of one Filippina student after her fieldwork with the group of "Consciously Unwed Mothers" in Amsterdam: "I always thought that Western values were good for Western people and that Eastern values are good for Eastern people. But now I have realized that Western values are not even good for Western people." (Luz Tanganqco) Even

after I left the ISS in 1981-82, this "Fieldwork in Holland" has carried on. At present it is coordinated by Loes Keizers, one of my former students.

The action-research-methodology was also applied in the research project "Women's Movements and Organisations in Historical Perspective" which I had conceived together with Rhoda Reddock, before I left the ISS. We had realized that most of the women from the South who attended the ISS Women and Development Course had as little knowledge about the history of the earlier, and sometimes of the contemporary, women's movements in their countries as we had of the history of our own women's movement when we began with the new feminist movement. But how could we develop a meaningful feminist study and research programme with women from the South if they were not able to relate to and link up with the history of their mothers and grandmothers, and their movements? As a first ad-hoc step in this direction of reclaiming women's movements' history, Kumari Jayawardena (who had joined the WD-Programme in 1980), and myself wrote down what we knew of this history, so that the students could start. Kumari's account of the first feminist wave in the Third World around the turn of the century was a real eye-opener for many women from the South, because it demonstrated that feminism was not an US-import but had its genuine roots in the contradictions of their own societies--already around 1900 (Mies 1981; Jayawardena 1982, 1986). After I left the ISS in 1981-82 Jyotsna Gupta, Loes Keizers, and Saskia Wieringa continued the work. The project was coordinated by Saskia Wieringa.

The project consisted of six

sub-projects which were carried out by women in the Caribbean (Jamaica, St. Vincent, Trinidad & Tobago), India, Indonesia, Peru, Somalia and Sudan.

The main goal of the projects was to study and document the history of women's struggles in such a way that this research would further the new women's movements. In this approach women were explicitly seen as subjects of their history, not only as passive victims of patriarchal exploitation and oppression.

Specific objectives of the project included:

- To strengthen existing women's movements and organisations through the research.
- To direct the research efforts towards women's institution-building.
- To document women's struggles and organizational efforts, particularly where this had not yet been done.
- To create a pool of committed and trained feminist researchers with theoretical and methodological skills.
- To stimulate comparative analysis of the history of women's organizations on the basis of empirical research.
- To identify some of the problem areas encountered by women in the development process and to stimulate self-help efforts.
- To disseminate the findings locally, nationally and internationally as widely and as immediately as possible, by writings as well as by audio-visual means.

The methodology of the project was inspired by the action-oriented approach spelt out in my early "Postulates". It emphasized that action elements should be contained in all phases of the research. Several workshops were organized in the course of the project during which researchers from the various

countries could meet and discuss. Although the project was not conceived as comparative research it was but natural that commonalities and differences between the various movements and organization could be assessed.

I personally was only marginally involved in the active research process. I was an advisor for the Indian sub-projects carried out by Chhaya Datar and Nandita Gandhi. Chhaya Datar studied the organisational efforts of the women bidi-workers--a home-industry for local cigarettes--at Nipani (Karnataka). Nandita Gandhi documented and analysed the Anti-Price-Rise movement in Bombay of 1972-75--a movement which had mobilized millions of women. In spite of a number of difficulties, both projects were successful as far as the goal of the whole project was concerned. Both researchers published the results of their research in India in book-form (Datar 1989, Gandhi 1990). Several new local women's institutions were built in the course of the project. The project generated several follow-up-activities in which the media, prepared during the research process, could be creatively used. Chhaya Datar was one of the main organisers of the "Stree Mukti Yatra"--a Women's Liberation "Pilgrimage"--or Tour--which took place in 1985 all over the state of Maharashtra, India. Thousands of people participated in this Yatra, saw the videos, read the pamphlets, listened to the talks, attended the theatre-show "A Girl is Born". This Yatra was a highlight of the new women's movement in Western India. One of the newspapers hailed it as a landmark in the Indian feminist movement, which until then was largely referred to as a Western import, relevant only for middle class women.

"Feminism has come to India and it has come to stay"--was the heading of a long article about the Stree Mukti Yatra (Mies 1986).

Both researchers took up further projects after the completion of their respective research. Chhaya Datar did a study on the history of the Devadasis, many of whom had been bidi-workers; and Nandita Gandhi prepared a documentation on the history of the new Indian Women's Movement (Gandhi and Shah 1992). The whole project has been extremely "fertile" in that it resulted in: 8 books and publications, 30 Conference papers, 3 exhibitions and 12 audiovisuals. It has also resulted in a number of new feminist institutions, including Maitreyi, Women's Research and Documentation Centre, Bombay; Women's Research Unit at the Somali Academy of Sciences and Arts, Mogadishu; and CAFRA: (Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action, Project on Women's History and Caribbean Expression). Several older feminist centres were also supported by the project, namely: Flora Tristan Peruvian Women's Centre, Lima; SISTREN-Research, Jamaica; WAND Women and Development Unit of the University of the West Indies, Barbados; Women and Development, ISS, The Hague, Holland.

Feminist Participatory Action Research (PAR), however, is not primarily a methodology of getting more and better knowledge only; its main impetus is to "change the world", or at least situations which are unbearable for women. Therefore, I applied this methodology also as part of the "project studies" for students of Social Pedagogy at the Fachhochschule Köln to which I had returned in 1981. Here the students have to do practical work with

different problem-groups for one year. Since 1980 women students could do this project-work with women. Their projects covered a wide range of problem areas and resulted in a large number of new feminist institutions among them: two shelters for battered women, several women's cafés, a house for recreation and learning for women, a girls' house, a large number of consciousness-raising groups, several women's centres, a centre for lesbian women, and a feminist health centre.

Project students participated in and supported a number of feminist campaigns, initiatives, seminars, peace and ecology initiatives. The main point was that they got an opportunity not only to learn about feminist theories, but also to develop practical projects and skills, through which they could define their own goals, choose their methods, reflect on the practice-theory-nexus.

All students learned how to translate the long-term goals of the feminist movement into practical, operationalized, short term steps which would yield some results in the course of one year. Thus a goal like "autonomy" had to be spelt out into concrete steps with concrete women, in concrete life situations. This was a very challenging and creative process. It was not always sure whether the groups--because all projects had to be carried out in groups--would succeed in the sense that they would achieve their set goals, but we made clear that there could not be a real failure of these women's projects as long as the group reflected both on its practical and theoretical process.

However, the main success of the women's projects at our Department of Social Pedagogy may not be the large number of

feminist initiatives and institutions--which even created a number of jobs for women--but rather the inspiration and orientation these young women got through this practice-theory-nexus for their own life. Even women who in the beginning did not want to associate with "feminists" began to realize that women really have problems in our patriarchal society. Moreover, they had the experience that they themselves could change things, even if it was only a small change. This was crucial for many.

I know that thousands of feminists all over the world have used a similar participatory action-oriented approach, be it with regard to practical initiatives and campaigns, be it with regard to studies or research. If I have restricted myself here to the women who participated in the experiences I know of myself, that should not mean that I ignore other experiences. In fact, of those I know, I can say that they, by and large, have experienced the same kind of stimulation, empowerment, enlightenment and practical change which we experienced in our activities. Here I want only to mention women like Shulamit Reinharz, from the Boston Women's Health Collective, Kamla Bhasin from Delhi with her inspiring workshops, Moema Viezzer from Rede Mulher in Sao Paulo, Farida Akhter from UBINIG in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Vandana Shiva and Mira Shiva from the Research Foundation for Science and Technology, New Dehli. Many of these women have also shown that the division which is created today between the local and particular, and the global and general, is a false one. In fact, to be involved in real-life local struggles against capitalist patriarchal relations necessarily leads one to an analysis of the global agenda of the

powers that rule the world today. Vandana Shiva has time and again pointed out that feminists must be aware of the processes that are going on under the dictates of global free trade and have to develop strategies that go beyond this paradigm. And in doing this they will have to create alliances with peasants and other marginalized groups who struggle for the survival of both the environment and of people (Shiva 1995).

Some may feel that these individual stories are too small, to irrelevant to be taken as indications of success. Going back to the origins and getting oneself re-inspired by the early ideas and the success stories which followed may appear as a kind of "whistling in the dark"--to keep up one's optimism in the face of overall bleakness. But I think there is more to it than just this self-indulgent "positive thinking." Part of the participatory action approach to research is its desire to change an unbearable status quo towards a more liberating, more human, happier situation. And I think one of the weaknesses of the women's movements is the tendency to belittle, denigrate, play down, obscure--and forget our own successes. We do not take them seriously enough, we are not proud enough of them, we do not tell our success stories to others because of false humility. We do not empower ourselves and others by looking back to what we wanted and what we achieved.

One, perhaps the main, reason for this negative attitude towards our "small" success stories is the frame of reference and its criteria according to which we still assess success and failure. This frame of reference is, for many still, the dominant patriarchal-capitalist, expansionist dualistic world-view. Change is seen only as a big bang, the revolution, taking

place at one go, now and here, changing everything in one stroke. Change is further seen only as an either/or question: you work either as a researcher or as an activist, at the local or at the global level, as an individual or as a collective. The perspective is either an immediate and total renewal or a big black hole--nothingness and total despair. Within such a framework there is no space for regenerative life and growth processes, which take time, which blur the rigid boundaries, which are neither sparked off by fantasies of limitless expansion, progress, and omnipotence nor held back by feeling of despair, helplessness, and political impotence. Regenerative life processes simply continue to renew life.

Within such a framework, criteria like small or big, local or global make little sense. Anyone can be politically active and creative anywhere, can start with whatever issue appears most burning to him or her. As long as this activity remains aware of and linked to the "living interconnectedness" (*lebendiger Zusammenhang*)--which today has indeed an international dimension--one can be sure that the most specific, local, particular and small will sooner or later connect with the most general, global and large. The global is in the local.

What is more important than the tangible results of PAR is, in my view, the fact that many women--and some men--who were involved in these research-study-and-change-processes experienced--most of them for the first time--the fact that they could change things, that they could act as political subjects (this is what "subject" means), that they were not helpless and impotent objects or victims whose life was

determined by anonymous, invisible, omnipotent powers and structures somewhere outside. I consider such an experience--small and insignificant as it may be--as the most precious learning effect of this approach. It is the essence of empowerment. Because those involved in such participatory action research and change processes are confronted not only with arguments, verbal behaviour, "texts", but with concrete people and power situations. This confrontation with real life situations can help one to de-mystify those anonymous powers and thus also to lose one's fear of them. One has to see that there are real people behind those almighty structures and institutions, and that these people are not simply automats, but that they are people who have to be held responsible for their actions.

Action research provides a chance, particularly for women, to develop this sense of responsibility with regard to the situation in which they are, which they no longer accept as god- or nature-ordained, or simply man-made, but which they confront together with a different vision and a different ethic. Even if they fail in this process as far as the immediate goals are concerned, they have gained a most valuable asset, namely their political capacity to act. This is, as Hannah Arendt has pointed out, one of the most important faculties of humans, that they can choose and act. This faculty is rapidly being eroded by the dominant paradigm of science and modern information technology today. People "know" everything but cannot act anymore. During my recent lectures I found that German students are overwhelmed with information, coupled with a deep sense of fear, helplessness and political impotence. "You can't do anything here" was one of the sentences most often

uttered. What a change since the students' movement of the early seventies!

Feminist, particularly ecofeminist action-research, is a method to overcome this paralysis of knowledge and to liberate women (and men), as well as knowledge.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ahrendt, Hannah (1970) On Violence. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co. Macht und Gewalt. München: Serie Piper.

Bennholdt-Thomsen, Veronika (1994) (ed) Juchitan, Stadt der Frauen: vom Leben im Matriarchat. Reinbec: Rowohlt Frauen aktuell.

Blaise, Suzanne (1983) Le Rapt des Origines ou: Le Meutre de la Mère. Published by Suzanne Blaise, Paris 1986.

Brodribb, Somer (1992) Nothing Ma(t)ters: A Feminist Critique of Postmodernism. Melbourne: Spinifex.

Bunch, Charlotte (1987) "Not by Degrees: Feminist Theory and Education", Passionate Politics. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Datar, Chhaya (1989) Waging Struggle: Women Tobacco Workers of Nipari. New Delhi: Kali for Women.

Fonow, Mary Margaret and Judith A. Cook (eds) (1991) Beyond Methodology. Bloomington: Indianapolis:Indiana University Press,Indianapolis.

Freire, Paulo (1968) Pedagogy of the

Oppressed. New York: Herder and Herder.

Füsser, Kuno, Dorothee Sölle and Fulbert Steffensky (1993): Die Sowohl-als-auch-Falle: Eine theologische Kritik des Postmodernismus. Luzern: Edition, Exodus.

Gandhi, Nandita (1995) "Masses of Women, but Where is the Movement? A Case Study of The Anti-Price-Rise-Movement in Bombay 1972-1975" in Wieringa, Saskia (ed), Subversive Women: Women's Movements in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. New Delhi: Kali for Women.

Gandhi, Nandita and Shah, Naudita (1991) The Issues at Stake: Theory and Practice in the Contemporary Women's Movement in India. New Delhi: Kali for Women.

Hammersley, Martyn (1993) (ed) Social Research, Philosophy, Politics and Practice. London: Newbury Park; New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Holzer, Brigitte (1995) Subsistenzorientierung als 'widerständige Anpassung' (Resistant Adaption) an die Moderne in Juchitan, Oaxaca, Mexiko. Essen: Peter Lang Verlag.

Jayawerdana, Kumari (1982) Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World. The Hague, Holland: Institute of Social Studies. Republished in 1989, London: Zed Books and New Delhi: Kali for Women.

Huizer, Gerrit and Bruce Mannheim (1979) The Politics of Anthropology: From Colonialism and Sexism Towards a View From Below. Den Haag: Mouton.

Keller, Catherine (1986) From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self. Boston: Beacon Press.

Maguire, Patricia (1987) Doing Participatory Research: A Feminist Approach. University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Mass: The Centre for International Education.

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels (1977) Selected Works, Vol I; Moscow: Progress Publishers.

Mies, Maria (1981) Feminism in Europe: Liberal and Socialist Strategies 1789-1919. The Hague: Institute of Social Studies.

Mies, Maria (1982) The Lace Makers of Narsapur: Indian Housewives Produce for the World Market. London: Zed Book.

Mies, Maria (1982) Fighting on Two Fronts: Women's Struggles and Research. Den Haag: Institute of Social Studies.

Mies, Maria (1983) "Towards a Methodology for Feminist Research" in Gloria Bowles and Renate Klein (eds) Theories of Women's Studies. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Mies, Maria (1990) Theoretical and Methodological Problems of Doing Global Feminist Research in Nytt OM Kvinne, Forskning, Nr. 2/90, Oslo.

Mies, Maria (1990) "Women's Studies: Science, Violence and Responsibility" in Women's Studies International Forum, 13:5, pp. 433-441.

Mies, Maria (1991) "Women's Research or Feminist Research? The Debate Surrounding Feminist Science and Methodology" in Fonow, Mary Margaret and Judith A. Cook (eds): Beyond Methodology. Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Mies, Maria and Vandana Shiva (1993) Ecofeminism. London: Zed Books; New Delhi: Kali for Women.

Mies, Maria (1993) "Feminist Research: Science Violence and Responsibility" in Mies, Maria and Vandana Shiva Ecofeminism. London: Zed Books and New Delhi: Kali for Women; Melbourne: Spinifex; Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.

Mies, Maria (1994) "Frauenbewegung und 15 Jahre Methodische Postulate zur Frauenforschung" in Dietzinger, A. u.a. (Hrsg.). Erfahrung mit Methode. Freiling: Kore Verlag.

Muraro, Luisa (1993) Die symbolische Ordnung der Mutter. Frankfurt: Campus.

Nash, June (1974) "Report on the conference on the feminine perspective in social science research, Buenos Aires, March 19-20, 1974" in Huizer, Gerrit and Bruco Mannheim (1979).

Neusüss, Christel (1985) Die Kopfgeburten der Arbeiterbewegung, oder: Die Genossin Luxemburg bringt alles durcheinander. Hamburg: Rasch und Röhrig.

Reinharz, Shulamit (1992) Feminist Research Methods in Social Research. New York: Oxford University Press.

Rich, Adrienne (1977) Of Woman Born. Motherhood as Experience and Institution. London: Virago.

Shiva, Vandana (1995) Trading Our Lives Away: An Ecological and Gender Analysis of Free Trade and the WTO. Penang, Malaysia: Pesticide Action Network (PAN) Asia and the Pacific; New Delhi: Research Foundation for Science Technology and Natural Resource Policy; A-60 Hauz Khas, New Delhi.

Stavenhagen, Rodolfo (1993) "Decolonizing Applied Social Sciences," in Hammersley, Martin (ed) Social Research: Philosophy, Politics and Practice. London: Sage Publications.

v. Werlhof, Claudia (1985) Wenn die Bauern wiederkommen: Frauen, Arbeit und Agrobusiness in Venezuela Bremer: Edition con/peripharia.

v. Werlhof, Claudia (1991) Was haben die Hühner mit dem Dollar zu tun. München: Frauenoffensive.

Wieringa, Saskia (no date) (ed) Women's Movements and Organisations in Historical Perspective. Project Summaries and Evaluation. Den Haag: Institute of Social Studies (ISS).

Wieringa, Saskia (1995) (ed) Subversive Women. Women's Movements in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. New Delhi: Kali for Women.