

WOMEN, PEACE AND POLITICS:
THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR WOMEN, 1975 TO 1985

by

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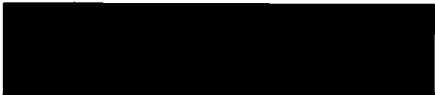
A THESIS

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Title: WOMEN, PEACE AND POLITICS: THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE
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The United Nations Decade for Women shows a remarkable growth in the international feminist movement and the increasing role women play in the public sphere. A reassessment and reevaluation of the structure of society takes place over the Decade to consider a society which is less hierarchical yet maintains diversity, places more value on human development and advocates the pursuit of genuine peace which can only be realized in the holistic pursuit of improving society. The U.N. Decade for Women can be seen as part of the process of positive peace which influenced women from the grass roots level to the actors in the international arena. The growth and maturity which occurred over these ten years has affected the role of women and the perception of women's issues in the public sphere henceforth.

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DEDICATION

To all the women of power and determination who have encouraged, supported, nurtured, questioned, and otherwise helped me in my endeavors of understanding:
Thank you.

Thanks to all the men who have accepted and encouraged these elements of humanity which are so frequently pushed to the side for the sake of expediency, not only in academia, but everywhere.

It is ours to create the vision and the way of a better society.

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Chapter One

Introduction to the Decade for Women and the politics of peace

... I do not see a conflict between the prevailing conditions in developing and industrialized countries as regards the real aspirations of women for social justice and a better life. In fact, women throughout the world share so many problems that they can and must support and reinforce each other in a joint effort to create a better world.¹

Helvi Sipilä, Secretary-General of International Women's Year and Assistant Secretary-General to the U.N., announced the connection between women and a better society at what was to be the first of three global conferences held during the United Nations Decade for Women. Her words spoken at the opening of the Mexico City Conference in 1975 give a good impression of both the reasoning, the tone, and the process behind the Decade. The United Nations, thirty years old at the time, had named many "theme years" and decades over its history to call attention to specific problems which were believed to be an obstacle to the successful implementation of the U.N. Charter. The Decade for Women started off as a theme year, and after the first conference in Mexico City, it was officially recognized that the problems women faced were not going to be solved in a single year (or even a decade). On recommendation from the conference delegates, the General Assembly accepted the idea

¹ Arvonne Fraser, The U.N. Decade for Women: Documents and Dialogue (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987) p. 23

for a Decade dedicated to women. What actually occurred during these ten years is exciting on many different levels.

On a political level, women made themselves a distinct group to be considered in an internationally recognized official (as well as "popular") capacity. The U.N., as a congress of nations, represents a Western ideal of law and order. While the Charter recognized the equality of women in theory, the participating nations of this forum were still immersed in overwhelmingly patriarchal concepts of organization. Thus, while the U.N. in theory provided for the equality of women, de facto sexism left the "Gentlemen's Club" of diplomacy intact in the post-World War II Congress of Nations. Thirty years later (and not without dissent), the women of the world were finally acknowledged in the international forum as not having equal status before the law. This admission drew attention to the fact that the preamble of the Charter was yet to be fully recognized.² The Decade was an attempt to address the political and social issues of equality.

On an educational level, women learned a great deal during this Decade. Basic education on these issues took

² The U.N. Charter states: "We the Peoples of the United Nations Determined ... to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small" ... and Article 1.3: "to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion..." are among the most relevant references to women's equality.

place among women participating in the international political realm for the first time. Learning also occurred among those individuals both inside and outside the U.N. system who did not understand the need for women to have a year (let alone a decade) to discuss obstacles to women's full participation in society. "Consciousness-raising" was an important part of the Decade. Networking too, proved an effective means by which women's organization, both formal and informal, could better utilize resources. Access to information, education, credit, technical assistance and medical facilities, for example were previously extended only to elite women if at all available. As Sipila's earlier quote made evident, women of the world had much in common even in all their diversity.

As the Decade progresses, one can see the evolution of feminist thought from a stress on integration during the early part of the Decade to an emphasis on the need for structural change towards the end of the Decade. Structural change here suggests a complete reevaluation of policy in the institutional framework of society. In the World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the International Women's Year (WPA), the term integration was used extensively. This is probably due to the importance of development and the stress on economic equality at Mexico City. Both emerged as high priority concerns of developing nations, while the issue of economic equality was an easily identifiable priority among women in industrialized nations.

Looking at the women's movements of the late sixties and early seventies, this is not a surprising emphasis. In fact, several western feminists discussed this need to recognize the women's movement as requiring structural change ³, but this was not the case in the international realm. As time went on however, and the feminist movement expanded, the emphasis decidedly shifted to one of structural change. This evolution is not surprising either. As more women became involved in the public sphere and became more knowledgeable about its functions and voiced their opinions, it was increasingly evident that changes might need to occur in the system they had next to no impact in forming. Perhaps more importantly (and less controversially), is the idea that as women began to name and study the obstacles to their own "integration" into society, it became apparent that structural change was what was actually needed. A society based on patriarchal values could never accommodate the needs of women to allow them to be fully participating members.

The concept of structural change is complex and somewhat problematic to define. Several trends exist within the feminist movement which constitute a diversity of approaches to structural change. Some women envision structural change in more Marxist terms as a change in the means and distribution of production. Even within this

3 Nancy Hartsock, "Political Change: Two Perspectives on Power", Quest Vol.1 No.1 (Summer 1974)

perspective a wide diversity of opinion still exists as to the extent and content of such changes. Another somewhat divergent perspective on structural change is that which might loosely be termed "eco-feminist" or Green. This vision employs change from both within and without to create an ecologically-centered, life-based (positive peace) society. The Green view differs from the Marxist perspective in its questioning of the very purpose of production and its connection with the environment. Again, the degree of radicalism varies across borders and beliefs. Yet another perspective is the more main-line approach to changing existing structures of the state and society to allow women more access to defining and participating in these institutions. What all of these approaches have in common however, is the idea that within the structures of present societies elements or the entirety must be reassessed and reevaluated in terms of their accessibility and accountability to women. When the term structural change is used in this paper, it will refer to a general tendency toward concrete institutional changes which ideally are accompanied by changes in consciousness. In this way, the idea of structural change will connect with that of structural violence which to be affected necessitates change in both the system of society and the consciousness of culture.

It seems this period of change in the women's movement can be understood in its own terminology. One of the main

themes of the Decade was peace. It is through the process of peace that one can begin to place this change in context. I will use a somewhat different definition of peace than is generally used and perhaps was intended at the beginning of the Decade. A closer examination of the discussions and documents resulting from the chronological progression of the Conferences shows a broader meaning of peace than is commonly understood. The concept of positive peace materializes bit by bit through the Decade. It wasn't an epiphany of peaceful visualization, but a long, involved struggle which made the goal the process; in other words, this evolution from integration to structural change (as it was termed in the feminist understanding) can also be viewed as a manifestation of positive peace.

A definition of positive peace is in order. Although the origin of the concept is difficult to credit to any one individual, the peace researcher Johan Galtung perhaps popularized it and has written most extensively about it.⁴ The essence of positive peace is allowing individuals to achieve their full potential: that state which allows the maximum amount of personal growth and freedom without infringing on another's ability to do the same. This definition implies many ideas which have been (and continue to be) pursued in other names, social justice and social

4 Many of Johan Galtung's articles appear in The Journal of Peace Research and other authors in this scholarly publication have also made substantial contributions to the idea of positive peace.

change, are but a few. Positive peace became a means of expressing these human needs embodied in its principles contrasting with the narrow view of "negative" peace as merely the absence of war. Positive peace applies to the social-political-economic structure and those in a given society. Positive peace must work for all and not just the dominant group.

Obviously this does not reflect the current social structure. Nor would such a structure be easily achieved. Peace researchers and educators generally recognize the connection of structural violence and limited potential. This emphasis will be the basis of peace in this paper. Structural violence can be both passive and active in that it might purposely discriminate, as in the case of race or sex, or it may foster violence. For example, by focusing media attention on the lives of the rich and famous while ignoring any of the numerous problems in the same world, the media is reinforcing the reward system of the status quo, rather than trying to improve upon it. The media's lack of coverage of structural violence is often an all-too-easily dismissed aspect of what is commonly termed violence. It is more common to hear stories of an individual who was assaulted than to hear discussions of how the defense industry affects education. The importance of recognizing, labeling and acting on defined problems is an underlying principle of positive peace. This is what occurred during the U.N. Decade for Women.

The Decade was a period of research, definition, exploration, proposed solutions, implementation, cooperative efforts, reevaluation and repetition of the process. This is positive peace at work.

It is in this manner, using positive peace, that I would like to analyze the Decade. In a way, it is difficult to use the term "analyze" as that concept is only one small part of a much larger process. Also, these issues, that of peace and of the deeper meaning of the Decade, seem to fall out of the bounds of traditional academia. Yet I strongly believe that a place can - and must - be created for studies which acknowledge the importance of extending beyond the traditional limits of accepted disciplines. Both women's studies and peace studies have been pioneers in academia in making connections between previously isolated disciplines. Personally, I look to these areas to offer guidance in the years ahead which demand different responses from those offered in the past. The Decade, while working within the status quo, also asked for new responses to the difficulties which lie ahead.

One final area of exploration in this paper is the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in peace-making. This same time period witnessed a virtual explosion of private organizations willing to work towards solutions of specific problems. Often they were organized because of a dissatisfaction with governmental policy. Other times they were well-established groups expanding into new areas of

human rights and aid services. The Decade served as a catalyst for many women's organizations on all levels, grass roots, national, regional and international. In 1970 only 47 organizations were specifically oriented to women, by 1985 the NGO count was 189, roughly a four fold increase.⁵ Many of these groups shared a vision of positive peace which they actively worked to help create.

Robert Elias has described the role of NGOs in the following way:

Freeing themselves from the prison of state sovereignty, some have put their hopes in supranational governments such as the United Nations. Yet when you talk to U.N. officials in Geneva and New York about issues like disarmament, human rights, and economic development, most would admit their work would amount to little without the NGOs. They provide, for example, most of the information for the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. NGOs have greater access to investigate nations than intergovernmental organizations hampered by protocol and politics. They can go much further in identifying and condemning abuses.⁶

The active role of NGOs in the main conferences of the Decade shows the influence they had on policy making and the consequent "democratization" of peace-making, particularly at Nairobi. Although the differences between NGOs and local grass roots efforts can sometimes be worlds apart in scope, their connection is in their citizen-based support. NGOs are private organizations to meet a specific need as

5 Elise Boulding, Building A Global Civic Culture: Education for an Interdependent World (New York: Teachers College Press, 1985) p.132

6 Robert Elias, "Non-Governmental Peacemaking", Peace Review, (Summer 1989) p.4

perceived by the organizers. (The importance of grass roots activism to the broader feminist movement lies in the fact that much of grass roots organizing is done by women, especially concerning environmental and peace issues.⁷) Thus, women's mobilization into the NGOs and the U.N. is a significant event, one I believe is closely connected to the pursuit of positive peace. I will comment on the contributions of NGOs through the Tribune and Forums of the world conferences. Like the U.N. conferences themselves, the NGO meetings only provide a snapshot of the process of events of the Decade. It is within these constraints however, that the impact of the NGO will be addressed.

One additional distinction about NGOs should be addressed. Literally thousands of organizations can be properly termed NGO. When I use the term NGO in this context I mean those organizations which operate on either a national or local level but also have interests in the international arena. These organizations primarily use such international forums as a means of furthering their goals and purposes. More often than not, the NGOs referred to here are oriented in one way or another to positive peace and at a minimum have fairness and justice as part of their principles. I use this definition as a guideline for this

7 See Birgit Brock-Utne Educating for Peace, Pam McAllister Reweaving the Web of Life, and Ynestra King and Adrienne Harris Rocking the Ship of State and Nicholas Freudenberg and Ellen Zaltzberg, "From Grassroots Activism to Political Power: Women Organizing Against Environmental Hazards" in Double Exposure for accounts of grass roots women's activities and initiatives in peace and ecology movements.

paper and not a descriptive means of generally distinguishing NGOs from other organizations in the international arena.

At this point it is important to note the different natures of the U.N. and NGO organizations. Although these two groups often work in consultation and coordination, they have different reasons for existence and therefore different functions. The U.N. is a forum created by the Charter for nation-states to resolve problems and to prevent the scourge of war from afflicting humanity. The key factor in the U.N.'s functioning is the maintenance and well-being of the member-states. By contrast, NGOs are created to pursue a particular issue or selection of issues which may or may not overlap with the more political concerns of the U.N. Of course the nature and function of the actors in each of the sections has a significant influence on the policies being pursued.

Since the work of both the U.N. and NGO conferences are being discussed here, I have chosen to address the three themes of the Decade: equality, development and peace. A thematic approach is more indicative of the process of the Decade than a historical or chronological approach. While within each theme a historical progression usually results, it is due to the evolution of ideas over time more than the importance of chronological order. Again, it is the process of the Decade which I am arguing is important.

It should be noted too that this paper is limited in its approach by a few factors. First, the themes addressed during the Decade are complex, and much more detailed than I could ever hope to describe within this framework. The essence of these themes, which I hope to present in the following pages, is a good starting point to understand the importance of the Decade. My own understanding of the Decade however is unfortunately biased by the almost entirely English-language documentation I have used. Although U.N. documentation is in English, it is created for an international audience and therefore may be less biased than the North American and European publications. While this is a limitation which may have been avoided given more resources, I don't feel it has significantly hindered the results.

The next section of this paper will consider some of the significant events and factors which contributed to the Decade. With this historical context, it will be easier to understand the themes of the Decade.

Chapter Two

The Decade In Context

Important contributors to the Decade

The most significant long-term contributor to women's rights in general, but the Decade in particular, is the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women. Created in 1946 with the encouragement of several NGOs committed to equalizing women's status in the newly created U.N., it is a functional body of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). ECOSOC is one of the six organs that make up the United Nations. The Commission then, is a research and consultative section of ECOSOC which in turn makes reports and recommendations to the General Assembly. The Commission meets once every two years to consider any and all issues which affect women, but concentrates on the economic, legal and social status of women throughout the world. When the General Assembly named the reasons for declaring International Women's Year (IWY), the Commission was cited as one of them.

... Recognizing the effectiveness of the work done by the Commission on the Status of Women in the twenty-five years since its establishment, and the important contributions to which women have made to the social, political, economic and cultural life of their countries ... the proclamation of an international women's year would serve to intensify the action required to advance the status of women ...1

1 General Assembly Official Records, Resolution 3010 [XXVII], 2113th plenary meeting, 18 December, 1972

The Commission had as one of its members Mrs. Helvi Sipila of Finland who would become the Secretary-General of the IWY Mexico City conference.

Sipila had worked in the Commission from 1960 to 1968 and became the first woman appointed Assistant Secretary-General for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs in 1972. She was extremely active in securing women's legal, educational and economic equality, as well as assuring fair access to family planning and advocating women's equal voice in decision-making both in her home state and internationally. Sipila was a strong supporter of the "theme year" idea for women and was instrumental in seeing it through ECOSOC to the General Assembly.

ECOSOC made several recommendations to encourage the declaration of IWY; the first recalls development. In 1970 the U.N. was entering its second official Decade on Development and it was increasingly evident to a growing number of strategists that women were not being adequately accounted for in plans. General Assembly resolution 2716 [XXV] of 15 December 1970 officially and irreversibly made the connection between women and development. In its resolution the General Assembly, noting its responsibility to report the shortfalls and inconsistencies it saw in development strategies, called attention to the possible link between development failings and the lack of consideration for women's role in the process. While strategists made provisions for many different groups,

children being one example, a majority did not consider women to have a distinct role (if any role at all) from men in development. They did not identify women to have any particular concerns, special interests or social obstacles which men typically do not have. This disregard for half the population only too blatantly pointed to the need for an international women's year. Women needed to be recognized not as dependents on men, but as full members of society. Women needed to be involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of programs. One way to start this process was the IWY.

A second recommendation by ECOSOC reminded the General Assembly of the need to recognize women's struggle in the effort against racism. In the Programme for the Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination, it was acknowledged that women of color are doubly discriminated against in cases of racism. The Programme emphasized the need to highlight this connection in future U.N. efforts, one of which could be the IWY. This link between racism and sexual discrimination becomes an important, although controversial point at the first two Decade conferences.

NGOs also had an influencing role in the establishment of the IWY and the Decade. The nature of the U.N.-NGO relationship makes it more difficult however to determine exactly how much influence NGOs have in particular decisions. NGOs frequently prepare background papers and advisory positions which can and do impact General Assembly

decisions. Quantifying NGO influence without first-hand knowledge however, is difficult. One example of this is the Finnish Women's International Democratic Foundation which is reported to have suggested the idea of IWY to the Commission on the Status of Women.² All U.N. documentation however, refers to the recommendation as originating in ECOSOC. Thus, it is sometimes difficult to precisely determine the influence of NGOs.

Outside the U.N. international events were also encouraging the need for an IWY. A new women's movement was rising, the likes of which had not been seen since the late nineteenth century. Contemporary women, like their sisters of the last century, recognized the need to have their voices heard throughout society if they were ever to achieve true equality. Traditionally excluded from full participation in the public sphere, women turned to non-traditional means of making themselves heard, through demonstrations, literacy campaigns and lobbying efforts. These efforts did not go unrecognized and caused at least a general, although limited, recognition that women do play an active role in all societies.

Declaring the Decade

The U.N. Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, was created by the General Assembly (resolution 1771 [XXX]) effective 1976 to 1985. During this period

² Hilikka Pietila, What does the United Nations mean to Women? An NGO view (Geneva: United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service, 1985) p.11

governments were invited to mobilize national efforts to identify, explore and offer solutions to the obstacles women encountered in their efforts to be full and equal citizens. The focal points of the Decade were three global conferences; the Mexico City Conference of International Women's Year in 1975, the World Conference for the United Nations Decade for Women at Copenhagen, Denmark in 1980, and the Conference to Review and Appraise the Decade at Nairobi, Kenya in 1985. These global gatherings provided the opportunity for governments and interested NGOs the world over to compare notes, discuss progress and devise new responses to persistent obstacles. All three conferences had a parallel NGO gathering which was unprecedented at other U.N. "theme" events. The NGO conferences provided interested parties the opportunity to share, discuss and revise information they knew on women's issues with other NGOs as well as the official representatives to the U.N. forum.

Thus, with each global conference sponsored by the U.N., there was a concurrent gathering of NGOs. This makes essentially six important world forums which occurred during these ten years. Additionally, numerous preparatory conferences, both national and regional, preceded the 1980 and 1985 conferences. The number of conferences begins to multiply exponentially once one considers the NGO and IGO meetings, preparatory conferences for regional meetings and any combination thereof. Because of the sheer number of

events, it becomes necessary to limit this study only to the three official and NGO conferences that took place during the Decade. I have noted some of the more significant regional and subject meetings in the previous pages. It is important to realize that these conferences are the results of many months, sometimes years, of preparatory work. Although a conference may be accredited with a specific proposal, it is quite possible that it may have been originally proposed by another committee or NGO or individual.

Generally speaking, all three conferences had a similar form; an official U.N. delegate conference lasting roughly two weeks, accompanied by the NGO gatherings which offered topical workshops, seminars and "how-to" talks. Nairobi was a slight variation on this theme as the first half of the NGO Forum preceded the official U.N. program. The intergovernmental conference participants all received background papers, typically participated in at least one regional meeting, and the delegations were composed by the sending nation. The Mexico City and Copenhagen NGO gatherings were by invitation only. By the time Nairobi started plans for the Forum though, any and all interested individuals, regardless of affiliation, were welcome. These meetings were extremely well attended by women, composing up to 90 per cent of the registrants. It is important to keep in mind this distinction between the largely self-chosen NGO participants (i.e. they attended out of interest) and the

appointed members of the intergovernmental conference delegates. Recall that the U.N. is a congress of nations, representing official government views and policies. The NGOs are private organizations with an interest in the subject, whether it be philanthropic or otherwise. While some accuse NGOs of being little more than international lobbyists, the facts are undisputable that they have made remarkable accomplishments in the field of human rights, relief services and aid agencies.

International Women's Year Conference, Mexico City

As evidenced by the mismatch of dates, the first "Decade" conference actually took place before the establishment of the Decade. The Mexico City conference was originally established to provide an international focus in order to globally celebrate IWY. It was the resulting documents of this conference which proposed the idea of a decade. Before delving into the decade proposal however, an examination of the intentions of the IWY conference should provide some key insights as to why a decade (at least) was proposed.

The General Assembly proclaimed 1975 International Women's Year for the following reasons:

- To promote equality between men and women;
- To ensure the full integration of women in the total development effort, especially by emphasizing women's responsibility and important role in economic, social and cultural development at the national, regional and international levels, particularly during the Second United Nations Development Decade;

- To recognize the importance of women's contribution to the development of friendly relations and cooperation among States and to the strengthening of world peace;³

They requested that the appropriate actions be taken to organize a world conference to commemorate the year and focus global attention on the subject. Thus, the great forces of the U.N. started work on the first of its conferences to be dedicated to women.

Mexico extended the invitation to host the conference and it was accepted happily by the General Assembly keeping in mind the desire to focus on women in development. Mrs. Helvi Sipila was appointed Secretary-General of the Conference and became de facto Secretary-General of the unofficial NGO forum which would occur simultaneously with the actual U.N. conference. Only one other conference had such a precedence, the 1972 conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm where NGOs set up "counter-meetings" to comment on the official program. Sipila had her work cut out for her.

The U.N. delegate conference began 23 June, 1975 and was opened by the President of Mexico, Luis Echeverria, U.N. Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, and Conference Secretary-General Sipila, to more than 5000 attendees representing 133 countries. In contrast to later Decade conferences, comparatively little preparatory work was done, although according to Hilikka Pietila (Secretary-General Finnish United Nations Association), "IWY was the first of the U.N.

3 General Assembly Resolution 3010 [XXVII]

theme years for which extensive preparations were undertaken at all levels: national, regional and international".⁴ But due to the short period between proclamation and the conference itself, only one official organizational meeting took place in New York in April and eighteen background papers were prepared to discuss all of women's involvement in society. These efforts led to one of the resolutions of the conference: the dire need to collect more data on women. In their preparation of background materials, researchers found that few studies had been done on women alone. By far the most statistical information gathered by sex were population and reproductive studies.⁵

The U.N. conference adopted by consensus the World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objectives of IWY (WPA) which outlined the goals for the Decade on a national, regional and international level. Most of the document has an integrational approach to concrete actions, but some evaluative steps were also mentioned such as "to direct formal, non-formal and life-long education towards the re-evaluation of the man and woman, in order to ensure their full realization as individuals in the family and in society."⁶

4 Ibid. p.14

5 Fraser, The U.N. Decade for Women p.21

6 ECOSOC, World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Women's Year (New York: United Nations E/5725) 11 July, 1975

The NGO conference or Tribune, as it was known, was opened June 19 by Sipila. As such NGO forums were a new complement to U.N. conferences, no provisions were made for official documentation of these proceedings. Various organizations involved in the presentations at the Tribune did record a bit here and there. It is known that 192 sessions were scheduled during this period, dealing mostly with questions of equality. This being the first opportunity for many women to participate in an international forum, a good deal of time was centered on the question of what equality meant cross-culturally. The debate was divided along industrialized and industrializing national lines, with the former taking up the banner for legal equality while women from the developing world argued for economic equality.⁷ This debate would come back to haunt delegates at Copenhagen.

Mid-Decade Program of Action Conference, Copenhagen

Five years later, NGOs and IGOs geared up for Copenhagen which was to be a mid-Decade review and assessment of progress made on the WPA. The interim period had seen a proliferation of women's groups and extensive networking between regional and international NGOs.⁸ Lucille Mair, of Jamaica was selected as Secretary-General

7 Fraser, The U.N. Decade for Women chapter 5

8 Fraser, The U.N. Decade for Women chapter 6

of the conference. In her opening remarks she commented on the purpose of Copenhagen:

[The commitment at Mexico was] ... not simply to bring about women's advancement, but to involve women in the planning and implementation of plans in every sector, including those traditionally considered the domain of men ... we shall need to examine [at Copenhagen] how far we have come in making this new perspective about women - that women must be agents and participants, rather than beneficiaries only - a reality in our national [and] international life.⁹

Mair's remarks reflect what did occur, as this conference came to be known as the "politicized" conference. The introduction of Zionism as racism and the justification of the Palestine Liberation Organization became a political stumbling bloc towards consensus on the Copenhagen document (four countries objected). Irene Tinker deplored this "politicization" as detracting from "the real point of the conference: women's status and welfare."¹⁰ Mair, on the other hand, commented that these issues showed "that all activities, all circumstances, are of direct relevance to women" including the political issues which were being endlessly debated in the male realm as well.¹¹

The Copenhagen conference also adopted three sub-themes for the year: health, education and employment.

9 Women 1980 DESI Newsletter No.6 p.4

10 Irene Tinker, "A Feminist View of Copenhagen", Signs, (Vol.6 No.3 Spring, 1981) p.531

11 Women 1980 DESI Newsletter No.6 p.5

The NGO Forum at Copenhagen ran for nine days and attracted about 8,000 participants from 128 countries. This Forum was "more practical" in the sense it addressed many basic "how-to" needs of women beginning to establish organizations and programs to improve their status and themselves. A mid-Decade directory of all participating NGOs was recorded by the International Women's Tribune Centre aiding the "networking" aspect of this conference and the Decade.

Assessment and Evaluation: The Nairobi Conference

After the controversies surrounding the Copenhagen conference, organizers Leticia Shahani (U.N. Conference) and Dame Nita Barrow (NGO Forum) wanted to end the Decade with a positive feeling. Shahani viewed the importance of Nairobi in this manner:

The end of the Decade must be the beginning of a new stage of the women's movement, where emphasis is placed on implementation, concrete action. The first women's conference in Mexico City was about consciousness-raising, advocacy, the second, at Copenhagen was a boost to networking. This one must concentrate on adopting realistic measures and start the process of putting them into action.¹²

Despite the reintroduction of the "political issues" of Zionism and Palestine at the U.N. Conference, consensus was arrived at with a few abstentions attached to specific paragraphs of the document by dissenting nations. The Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of

¹² Maria Elena Hurtado, "Woman in the hot seat", Forum 85 15 July, 1985, p.9

Women to the Year 2000 (FLS) describe numerous practical measures that can be taken on local, national, regional and international levels to promote the advancement of the status of women. The FLS also made many suggestions as to how society may adapt itself better to the needs of women and how further reassessment of social structures is desirable. The structure of society is a concern in both the concrete actions and evaluative process set forth by the FLS.

The NGO Forum played an integral role in setting the agenda for the U.N. participants. The Forum preceded the U.N. convention by five days, allowing NGOs and interested parties to discuss and formulate policy before the intergovernmental conference began. Unlike the two previous NGO meetings, an invitation was not necessary to attend this Forum. An estimated 16,000 people participated in the over 1200 scheduled sessions from July 10 to 19. Over 60 per cent of the participants were from industrializing nations, also adding a new dimension to the Forum. The Forum was so successful that it challenged the U.N. Conference to be as productive in its plans and evaluations.

Nairobi was an effective "conclusion" to the Decade as it recognized the new beginnings that resulted from the work of the Decade. U.N. and NGO participants alike encouraged further investigations, continuing evaluation and implementation of plans of action by both governments and citizens. Nairobi ended by looking forward.

This historical background giving context to the Decade will make the examination of the themes of the Decade more clear.

Chapter Three

Equality: By Whose Definition?

The first theme of the Decade, equality, is perhaps the most complicated of the three main themes and numerous sub-themes adopted. Equality had been an issue for those concerned with women's rights for well over a century, but its importance as a focal point varies over time "like a sea in which the rises and falls are inescapable and irresistible".¹ The concept of equality is commonly understood as a social state in which women and men have similar status and value. However, over the course of the Decade, the definition and implications of equality are carefully weighed and examined.

The centrality of equality can also be understood through the peace process. In the language and actions of the Decade, the broadest concepts of equality are strikingly similar to those of peace (and to the definitions of positive peace). Equality changes from issues of integration into an existing society to a process which reexamines the basic issues of how social roles are defined and to whose advantage. The current system makes equality an abstract goal to be idolized rather than a method of social activity. Perhaps the efforts of the Decade can best be described as an effort to make equality a process: one

1 Myriam Schreiber, "Au lendemain de Nairobi, les femmes s'interrogent", Transnational Associations: The Review of International Associations and Meetings, (No.2, April 1986) p.82

which tried (sometimes successfully, but more frequently not) to hold itself accountable to all members of society and include them in all phases of the social process, from planning to evaluation. Over the years women learned the process that they themselves used, and struggled to use, was the goal. As it was described in the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies, "Equality is both a goal and a means."²

The idea of equality expanded as women of differing race, religion, sexual preference, ethnicity and physical ability became more involved in both the U.N. and NGO forums. From the start, the connection between sexism and racism was acknowledged by the agenda-setters,³ but the issues which arose with the themes of development and peace started a dialogue (some might say arguments) about what constituted equality in a necessarily biased society. Nevertheless, the underlying concepts of equality stayed consistent throughout official Decade documentation. All written documents advocate both legislation equalizing women's legal position in the present society as well as urge a reconsideration of the traditional roles and values women and men fulfill in a society. The degree of emphasis between these more de jure and de facto issues of equality does vary from conference to conference. This variation is magnified in the NGO Forums. The overwhelming emphasis at the Mexico City conference was on development - creating the

2 Fraser, The U.N. Decade for Women p.174

3 See Chapter Two, Contributors to the Decade for a description of the U.N. linkage of these two issues.

opportunity for women to act as equal partners in development strategies. The Copenhagen conference witnessed a great expansion of NGO activity, reflecting the various issues women felt were integral to establishing their equality. By Nairobi, the NGO Forum attracted almost the same number of participants as both the previous Forums combined, offering literally thousands of workshops and seminars in which women could learn to better utilize their knowledge and skills to their benefit. While this expansion of NGO activity reflects the broadening nature of the international feminist movement (i.e. from integration to structural change), it also indicates an acceptance of women's culture and implies a more general revaluing of women's skills. Towards the end of the decade, NGOs begin to pick up the banner for issues previously left to the governments, like child-care and family responsibility, by designing education programs to facilitate social acceptance of shared responsibility in the family.

De facto and de jure equality

Part of the initial complexity of equality as a unified theme in the Decade is its twofold nature. It can be examined in the language of the documents both in terms of de facto and de jure equality. These "sides" of equality are addressed separately, for the most part, in the documents to achieve the single goal of equality. The beginning of the Decade focused most heavily on instituting the de jure legislation, while recognizing that where such

legal rights did exist, it often was circumvented by de facto issues which prevented women from claiming their legal rights. The early documents of the Decade call mostly on national machineries to solve conflicts in existing legislation and to ensure that the rights granted on a national level were carried through to provinces and states. This is especially true in the area of family law. In fact, the entire issue of family law (de jure) and family responsibility (de facto) takes on a whole new aspect over the Decade.

The concept of family responsibility introduces a new dimension into the individualistic rights and responsibilities set forth by the U.N. Charter and Declaration of Human Rights: group and solidarity rights. As feminism became more inclusive of cultural differences, the question of who defined the rights the U.N. was pursuing became a topic of concern. The link between the ideals of individual freedoms and the patriarchal structure of the U.N. was obvious to some women. Importance of the family and a true sharing of family duties and responsibilities emerged as a developing-nation response (for the most part) to the type of Western feminism which enshrined the same individual rights as were established by men. A synthesis between individual rights tempered with family responsibilities seems to have started at Nairobi. Many of the workshops in the Forum addressed the needs of the family as well as discussed men's legal duties to family. This

suggests women's desire for traditional individual rights yet a concern with the well-being of the family structure.

The beginning of the Decade saw an emphasis placed on the achievement of the individual woman, ensuring the individual the same rights that an individual man could claim. Yet, as the obstacles to women's equality were explored, part of the problem was determined to be the unequal responsibility women had for family care cross-culturally. Fraser notes this:

The shared responsibility concept (in the Copenhagen document) builds on and reinforces the equality section of the World Plan which calls for the reassessment of the roles of women and men and for the acceptance of shared responsibilities for children and family. The reassessment apparently accepted all the traditional responsibilities of mother, worker and citizen. In the Program of Action the point about joint responsibility is made very early and frequently. This point is emphasized even more in the Nairobi document.⁴

Although the need for structural change with an accompanying change in attitude was hinted at in the World Plan of Action, it was considered less important than instituting national machineries. As 1985 approached this reevaluation of societal structure became increasingly apparent. Although legislation was passed, each bit more specific than the last, women were still making incremental advances in a society that had changed little to accommodate them. The necessary need for structural reassessment becomes a significant aspect of the Forward Looking Strategies.

4 Fraser, The U.N. Decade for Women, p.83

It should be recognized that the emphasis on structural change also demands changes in consciousness, and is thereby a complex task. While the governments of the world believed they were doing all they could by helping with legislation, they also tacitly agreed that the social and cultural biases against women could not be legislated out (for the most part). Here is the second shift in focus. Since all three conference documents spoke of social and cultural reevaluation, by 1985 it was evident that something outside the governmental process would have to accompany the legislated change. Forum '85 had as one of its key strategies the efforts of NGOs to intensify their efforts in the ratification of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women ⁵ in their respective nations. It reinforced the 1980 call to inform women of their rights and encouraged networking among NGOs to accomplish that education. Programs outside governments became the more frequent response to women's oppression as the Decade pressed on and governmental interest seemed to lag due to economic and military concerns. An interesting paradox results from these efforts.

On the one hand, women were trying to institute change through their respective national and state governments with the backing of the foremost international governing body, thus working with the bureaucracy. On the other hand, women

5 The U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women will be discussed in detail later on in this section.

were acknowledging the fact that their goals could never be achieved solely by means of legislation and government involvement, nor by the mobilization of NGOs. While few issues can be solved exclusively by one means, the Decade made the connections and approached both official and unofficial methods with vigor. As the end of the Decade shows, the interest and involvement by both parties in each others conferences gave a new dimension to U.N.- NGO cooperation. What post-Decade plans may inspire, however, is an interesting speculation. As Kathleen Staudt and Jane Jaquette concluded:

The slow creep of bureaucratic progress over the Decade was not simply the result of a lack of data, inept or uninspired management, temporary irrationality, or momentary departures from the norms of egalitarianism. Rather, the slowness is grounded in male privilege itself. We wonder whether practical, forward-looking strategies are any match for the deep institutionalization of male interests found in states of all ideological beliefs. Indeed, bureaucratic strategies are often state-strengthening strategies. Yet without gender redistribution, an expanded state perpetuates gender gaps.⁶

Taking all these factors into consideration, the shift in focus from specific actions to accompanying structural and philosophical change, relying on NGOs more extensively than government bureaucracy and the new implications of group and solidarity rights, makes the issue of women's equality a more revolutionary proposal than nation-states

⁶ Ellen Boneparth and Emily Stoper, Women, Power and Policy: Toward the Year 2000 (New York: Pergamon Press, 1988) p.278

might wish to acknowledge. What the U.N. Documents encouraged (and sometimes demanded) was equality from a feminist perspective. Such a perspective requires an almost completely different understanding of the world and certainly bureaucracy.⁷ The focus of different aspects of equality varied over the Decade, but in the end, the minor voice which asked for a reassessment of men's and women's responsibilities to the family and society developed into a loud and clear chorus of both U.N. and NGO participants insisting reevaluation by 1985. The revolutionary nature of this work cannot be denied, despite the reluctance of many who would rather think of the Decade as just another U.N. theme conference. As Fraser commented:

... defining and creating society from either a feminist or developmental perspective is not simple or easy; it is comprehensive and revolutionary.⁸

Of course the difficulty encountered by Conference participants in addressing the theme of Equality is only indicative of how the issue was actually approached in the first place. Although the Commission on the Status of Women began its work shortly after the inception of the U.N., it is notable that it is concerned with the status of women (as opposed to equality), and this distinction was remarked upon

7 Ibid., p.276 "... the feminist opposition to bureaucracy is based on the incompatibility between bureaucratic norms of hierarchy, top-down communication, and objectivity, and feminist values of egalitarianism, participation and connectedness."

8 Fraser, The U.N. Decade for Women, p.27

by Sipila in a pre-Mexico City report regarding the role of women in population and development:

Status usually refers to the position or positions a person or group holds in the structure of society - in its educational institution, its occupational structure, its political system, in the family, and so on. To these various positions - a number of which may be occupied by a single individual simultaneously in his or her capacity as a member of several social groups - are ascribed varying degrees of power, privilege and prestige. Thus the concept of status implies a hierarchical arrangement of positions. Each position involved a set of rights and obligations which the occupant is expected to fulfill.

When we speak of the "status of women", then, we are speaking of the conjunction of positions a woman occupies at any one point in time ... It is generally accepted that women are discriminated against and that men have more prestige, power and privileges in almost all societies. But the direct measurement of status is a difficult and complex problem which hinders investigation of the causes and consequences of this particular form of stratification.⁹

Sipila linked the issue of equality directly to that of status. While a portion of the world's governments provided for the formal, legal equality of women to participate in the public sector, their status was often an obstacle to their involvement and advancement. Thus, even at the beginning of the Decade, the issue of equality was questioned by the few women that were involved at a decision-making level: equality for whom and on whose terms? If legal equality were the only issue, what was holding women back in countries which had already, even if only recently, enacted legislation to ensure their equality?

9 Helvi Sipila, "Report to Secretary-General" (New York: United Nations E/CN.6/575, November 27, 1973) p.8

Equality through policy: 1975

During IWY it was widely recognized that "virtually all" of the 135 nation-states formally consented to the legal equality of women to vote in elections and participate in public life. This was considered an accomplishment for it was up from the two-thirds of members who acknowledged women's rights as citizens in 1945 when there were 51 states in the U.N.¹⁰ Nonetheless the problem arises, if legal guarantees are accorded, why the lag in participation? For the developing nations this was determined to be a lack of economic opportunity while the industrialized countries believed the lack of equal opportunity in social areas was the source of discrimination. In official U.N. documentation this consensus was referred to as "the gap between law and practice."¹¹ The same report states the following reasons:

The findings of the present report indicate that the major obstacle to the achievement of equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities for women and men are basically the same in nature, but their relative importance within a country depends on its stage of development. If any obstacle may be singled out as the most prevalent, they are the rigid attitudes and sex-stereotyping, transmitted through customs, religion, school curricula, textbooks, literature and the arts. The mass communications media frequently mirror and reinforce these traditional attitudes rather than act as agents of social change.¹²

10 ----- "Press Release for International Women's Year" (New York: United Nations OPI/CESI NOTE IWY/1 April, 1974)

11 "Introduction World Plan of Action" (New York: United Nations E/CONF.66/3) p.5

12 Ibid., p.6

Sipila's comments on status are certainly reflected here. In fact, as the Decade goes on, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish sharply between equality and status. But note the linkage between the issue of development and equality. It is proposed that a country's level of industrialization is related to women's level of equality in law. The focus of women's participation in development plans becomes a major point of effort by NGOs.

At Mexico City however, the terms of debate shifted from this broad (and more academic) question of what status and equality meant to the more practical side of implementing equal opportunity and affirmative action programs in individual countries. Participants found common ground between North and South when discussing the practical means necessary for equality. The South generally places importance on women's integration into development projects and the planning of future projects while women in the North emphasized the legal mean necessary for integration into established societies. It is interesting to speculate that at this first conference, which admittedly had the highest percentage of female delegates as any previous U.N. Conference, men still had a more important role in the agenda and policy formulation than they would at future Decade gatherings, and it is in Mexico City that the emphasis on integration is put forth so strongly.

Whatever the reasons, the World Plan of Action connected the theme of equality much more with specific

issues such as development and some of its related subjects, education, employment and health, than with the idea of structural reform and societal reassessment. This is not to say that the document asked only for integration. Aspects of the WPA acknowledge the "radical changes"¹³ that would be necessary to start the process towards true equality. These first steps towards equality however, seem to be part of a continuum which widens over the Decade.

Mid-course adjustments

By 1980 the broadening of the continuum began to take effect, partially due to the increased global awareness of women's rights from 1975 and the accompanying expansion of NGOs related specifically to women and women's issues. This expansion of equality however could also be partially accredited to the "politicization" of both the Mexico City and Copenhagen conferences. The Declaration of Mexico had been the strongest manifestation of the political demands by industrializing nation (Group 77) participants. At Copenhagen two particularly sensitive items were put on the agenda for discussion: apartheid and the Israel-Palestine dispute. Different sources vary in their analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its place on an agenda concerning women, but it is obvious that a large rift was introduced with these issues. The events at Copenhagen were profoundly affected by their introduction and this seemed to

13 ECOSOC, "International Women's Year" (New York: United Nations E/5725/Add.1) p.45

have a ripple effect on the terms of debate at future Decade gatherings.

The acceptance of the terms of debate around women's issues becomes important as certain "political issues" were trying to be dismissed by specific groups from the U.N. conferences as not being relevant to the point of the gathering, yet at the same time these issues were pushed on the agenda by other member-states of opposing views. Those who did not feel these issues should be given significant time and space at the Conferences (both U.N. and NGO) felt they were being "endlessly debated" during regular U.N. forums. It was also pointed out that the media coverage of such conflicts tended to overshadow the positive aspects of the conferences, being detrimental to the overall efforts of the Decade. On the other hand, women who favored including these issues in the agenda of debates warned against tendencies to "ghettoize" women's issues by not including significant debates of a political nature which affected women just as much, if not more so, than men. Copenhagen (and among a smaller group, Mexico City) was called "over-politicized" by many participants, yet it wasn't until Nairobi that women began to accept the problem of political conflict, created a space for its treatment (at least in the NGO Forum), and were able to address some of the accompanying problems.

The changing treatment of political issues over the Decade is a good example of how women's perception and

definition of equality also changed over time. As more and more women became involved in the process of identifying, naming and prescribing treatment of women's oppression throughout the world, they necessarily broadened their definition and goal of equality.

The Convention: policy and more

Another important event which shaped the Copenhagen conference was the 1979 acceptance by the U.N. of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. A convention is legally more significant than any number of declarations, resolutions or plans of action as it becomes a binding multi-lateral treaty upon ratification by the signator-nations. Conventions are also usually accompanied by a means of encouraging progress in the agreed area by virtue of a review committee which reviews information, evaluates, and makes recommendations to the submitting country based on the report. Thus the ratification of the Convention could prove very helpful in the legal battle for women's equality as the first article of the Convention defines discrimination as the following:

For the purpose of the present Convention, the term "discrimination against women" shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in

the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.¹⁴

Countries which sign and ratify the Convention are further obligated to implement legislation that will make discrimination in the aforementioned areas illegal and encourage women's active participation in those same areas.

Called "the most concise and useful document adopted during the Decade"¹⁵ the Convention is also concerned with human rights more generally. Much of the language could equally be applied to any group discriminated against: ethnic, racial, religious, physical ability or sexual preference. The Convention goes further than most legislation too, in that it considers some of the cultural and social obstacles (like family responsibility) to women's equality and encourages means of change. This draws attention once more to the shift of concentration on women's integration into society to an integration with men into a society more equitable for all concerned.

With the Convention as a springboard, a marked difference in the treatment of equality can be found in the Copenhagen Review and Evaluation document as compared to the WPA. One topic of discussion was the social responsibility for determining roles women were permitted to play:

Some countries did imply that such (traditional) attitudes were harbored by both men and women, but

14 Department for Public Information, DESI Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women U.N. (84-44582)

15 Fraser, U.N. Decade for Women p.123

the onus for correcting the imbalance was on women rather than society as a whole.¹⁶

Such reevaluations were typical of the Copenhagen documents. It became increasingly apparent, even to the male delegates, that legislated changes were not all that was needed.

The NGO Forum in Copenhagen also reflected the great deal of change which had occurred since the last gathering. An estimated 10,000 people, a majority women, passed through Amager University and participated in the over 150 workshops per day. The tendency to broaden the issue of equality was reflected in the Forum as a wide variety of issues was addressed, including the more political issues shunned by some members of the U.N. conference.

The change in perception of equality by means of integration to means of structural changes becomes increasingly evident during the Copenhagen conference. As cited in Women 1980 newsletter preceding the conference:

In order for women to achieve full equality changes may be required in the existing political or socioeconomic structures of societies, according to the Report on National Planning. What is required is a process of social transformation where the subordinate role of women is permanently changed to one of equality with men and full participation in all aspects of national life. Such a process is explicitly political as it questions the established direction of change or development in a society.¹⁷

The continuum of equality is now stretched to included a revolutionary interpretation of changing the existing

¹⁶ Review and Evaluation of Progress Achieved in the Implementation of the World Plan of Action (New York: United Nations A/CONF.94/13) par.78

¹⁷ Women 1980 DESI Newsletter No.4 p.3

structure. This concept solidifies at the Nairobi conference.

Adapt the policies to fit the women

Also at Nairobi the problem of "politicization" was more or less agreed upon as a needless distinction since all issues could be considered women's issues. As delegate Margaret Papandreou of Greece commented to reporters:

Why is it that this conference becomes politicized when we discuss the rights of refugee women to a homeland or racist violence experienced by women in South Africa? Is that any more political than the issues that are called women's issues? Do you believe that the issues that are called women's issues are non-political and issues that involve women but also men in social injustice are then political? ... All issues at this conference are political, to fight for equal pay for equal work: is that not political? To argue for the right of a woman to have control of her reproductive functions - is that not political?¹⁸

The quest for equality was now broadened to include those more political aspects which women shied away from earlier, but were now acknowledged to be an integral, undeniable part of the whole. Indeed, throughout both conferences women were asserting the interconnectedness of issues and implying a recognition of the structural changes that would be necessary to truly enact equality of the sexes. One delegate from New Zealand affirmed:

All issues are women's issues and often women have different priorities and perspectives and values that are different from men's.¹⁹

18 "All issues political" Forum 85 July 18, 1985 p.8

19 New Zealand delegate in "Plenary in Brief" Forum 85 July 18, 1985 p.12

And this point was reiterated in an NGO workshop entitled "What is Feminism?" when moderator Charlotte Bunch said:

Feminism can not be separated from politics. Every issue is a woman's issue. Feminism is a perspective on any or all issues. It is a perspective on life. It is a political perspective that comes from women but should become the politics of men.²⁰

The issue of equality is no longer a narrowly defined integration approach to the problem, but it has become a process with which a more equitable society may be created. The inclusiveness of all issues as related to women necessarily expands the concept of equality to include this wide variety of issues.

The second theme of the Decade, development, parallels this transition from integration to structural change. As equality - the abstract - is applied to the more substantive issue of development, the two necessarily evolve together. The next section will examine this occurrence.

²⁰ Seona Martin and Ruth Seligman, "What is feminism?" Forum 85 July 16, 1985 p.6

Chapter Four

Development: A Women's Issue

The second theme of the Decade, development, is a huge subject unto itself. The issue of women and development is a relatively new area with numerous studies now dedicated to this relationship. In this section I would like to explain only the immediate relevance of the development issue to the Decade. The best way to understand the concerns of the Decade however, is by a brief introduction to development.

Fundamental aspects of development (pre-Decade):

As mentioned in the background information, before the proposal for the IWY, women were not considered to have a distinct role in the development strategies process. Several factors account for their absence. Historically, the issue of development did not arise until after the establishment of the U.N. itself. The impact of the Marshall plan on Europe encouraged those in the post World War II international realm to start planned development projects for those countries which were not industrialized. Obviously, an important part here is that Europe was a war-torn, industrialized area that needed its economies to be rebuilt. Planned development for non-European countries implied the westernization of social concepts to achieve a western standard of living.

An important part of early development strategies was, of course, improving the Gross National Product (GNP) of a country. In the early 1950s (and some would argue continues

to be today), GNP was the leading indicator of a nation's well-being. As John Galbraith, noted development economics specialist said:

No other social goal is more strongly avowed than economic growth; no other test of social success has such nearly unanimous acceptance as the annual increase in the Gross National Product. And this is true of all countries, developed or undeveloped; communist, socialist or capitalist ... similarly, it is now agreed that ancient cultures, India, China and Persia, should measure their progress towards civilization by their percentage increase in GNP. Their own scholars are the most insistent of all.¹

The western-male bias of GNP has been sufficiently documented to show how it usually hindered rather than furthered a country's social, cultural and often political "development", especially as regards women.² To explain briefly, GNP is only an economic indicator which accounts solely for work performed in the formal sector, e.g. paid labor. Thus "women's work", those traditionally performed tasks oriented to the family and subsistence food production, are generally excluded from economic impact. When one considers the amount of labor performed by women which goes unpaid, it becomes clear that GNP, which shows only the amount of currency being exchanged in the formal sector, is not a good indication of a state's well-being.

1 John Galbraith as quoted by Denis Goulet in The Cruel Choice: A New Concept in the Theory of Development 1971 p.253

2 Maria Mies, Irene Tinker, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), and Elise Boulding (various works)

It is estimated that if the work women performed in the domestic sector of the United States (which is a highly market-oriented society) were economically accounted for, GNP would increase by 40 per cent.³ It should be further recognized that when women do get paid for their work, this work is frequently in the informal sector and thus not only pays substantially less, but is not included in GNP calculations. Additionally, such "handicraft labor" as is sometimes encouraged by development specialists, can lead to the double-bind of not earning enough to adequately support them and limits their access to more productive work.

Women are marginalized not only in the official work force, but also in their social and cultural status as well. Such attitudes pre-date early development strategies however and recall the influence of colonialism. As Sue Ellen Charlton explains:

Regardless of the pre-colonial status of women in a particular society, the immediate impact of colonial control was either to remove the primary locus of decision-making from the local level to the regional colonial capital or to superimpose colonial decision-making mechanisms on the traditional ones. In either case, the decision makers were male, as was the colonial administration. Furthermore, men in the colonial administration had been raised to believe in the traditional Western values regarding the "proper" roles of men and women.⁴

3 ----- "Women and the Existing Development Order", Women 1980 DESI Newsletter No.7, 1981

4 Sue Ellen M. Charlton, Women in Third World Development (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984) p.17

The twofold effect of planners and former colonial domination all having a Western bias worked against the possibility of genuine development in many countries. Many of the biases of former colonial powers were continued by development specialists.

One such example, again found in the Western patriarchy, stressed the importance of educating the "head of the family". This is problematic, as the head of the family defined in Western terms, is the male. (This is not to touch the issue of defining the family either.) In order to educate the men, whether it be in uses of technology or higher sciences, men become the object of concern regardless of their actual relation to the subjects they were being taught.

Findings during the Decade show this concept is factually valid and can be further extended to show a worsening in women's conditions. For instance, one study found that:

... the impact of the modernization of agriculture has frequently had an adverse effect on female employment: in Gambia, case studies have shown that women's work in agriculture rose from 19 to 20 hours [per day] when "improved" methods were introduced, but men's work fell from 11 to 9 hours [per day].⁵

Not only does "modernization" marginalize women from the new societal structures, it often leads to worsened working conditions. Equitable societies cannot be based on such foundations.

5 ----- Women 1980 DESI Newsletter No.4, p.3

The exportation of the western market-oriented patriarchal model to the "Third World"⁶ pushed women out of areas in which they previously shared control and decision-making power. This is not to say, of course, that every non-western country had equality among the sexes. What is generally argued is that women (and men) were "developed" into Westernized gender roles which more often than not contributed to the detriment of women's social status. The development strategies typically drew men into formally acknowledged economic centers of activity, provided them with some sort of outside education, and left the women in the traditional realm to tend to the children, provide food for the family (as men worked too far from home to help) and subsist as best they could. This work was previously shared and unpaid. After the development strategists, the work was left for the women, was still unpaid, and now meant less because of the new money economy.

Development had a large impact on the countries targeted for aid. The impact was even more profound on women.

In terms of the Decade, then, this history of marginalization was an issue to be dealt with. The Second Development Decade was already underway and it was only beginning to be recognized by development planners that

⁶ I am using quotes used to draw attention to the hierarchical arrangement imposed by a self-declared "First World", see Galtung, Boulding, and Vandana Shiva for an in-depth exploration of this issue.

perhaps something had been missing after all. It should be noted that even among those who acknowledged the overemphasis on economic development, women's role in development continued to be largely ignored.⁷ This dawning recognition of women's role in the development process was, in part, spurred by the General Assembly upon recommendation from ECOSOC.⁸ Again, the beginnings of women in development speak of integration, of the necessity to "integrate" women into the strategies. Towards the end of the Decade the shift from integration to a re-definition of development (structural change) shows the peace process in effect.

Development and the Decade

It is notable that the issue of development was the most important during the first Decade conference in Mexico City. This emphasis is due most probably to timing, as the Second Development Decade Strategies and the desire of women to be included in those plans was seen as an important aspect of gaining equality throughout the world. Much of the debate and arguments at the Mexico City conference centered around this North-South division of priorities. Should women first try to gain legal equality, ensure equal opportunities to jobs, education et cetera, or did equality

7 Roland Colin, John Galbraith and Denis Goulet in The Cruel Choice all emphasize the role of men in building more equitable structures between nations, but nothing on the issues of equity between men and women.

8 ECOSOC, International Conference to be held during the International Women's Year (New York: United Nations E/RES/1851 [LVI] 23 May, 1974)

begin with the nation-state, ensuring a stable place in the world economic structure and thereby ensuring its citizens certain guarantees of equality? Arvonne Fraser asked:

Was the question feminism or was it development? Could American women conceive of what it was like to be impoverished? The time to understand that had not yet come. Everyone came with their own view of the world.⁹

The resolution of the official conference was a combination of the World Plan of Action, which focused on mostly legal and "national machinery" establishments to aid women in their quest for equality, and the Declaration of Mexico, a creation of the Group of 77 which explored the needs for a more equitable world economic and political system and how this would in turn benefit women.¹⁰

It is difficult to assess the importance of NGO participation in this category at Mexico City because of the informal nature of this first Tribune. No official records came out of the Tribune, but several new organizations which grew out of IWY have recorded some of what occurred. Most of the 192 sessions were broad explorations of women's issues rather than more specific investigations into particular issues.¹¹ One formal panel was convened about

9 Fraser, U.N. Decade for Women, p.62

10 Group of 77 is a caucus of 130 developing countries (and some non-members like the P.L.O. and SWAPO) to determine a common approach to issues before the U.N. Their strength lies in the fact that if they vote as a cohesive group, they can override any vote in the U.N.

11 Fraser, U.N. Decade for Women, p.60

women and development, but the more in-depth study took place even outside the Tribune.

A pre-conference seminar co-sponsored by UNITAR and UNDP, was led by Irene Tinker of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and Michele Bo Bramsen a Danish specialist, on the topic of women and development. The distinguished group (mostly women) discussed the typically negative relationship between women and development. They resolved that more attention needed to be given to long-range solutions to development problems, meaning that not only did a specific problem need to be solved, but it must be considered in cultural context, with thought towards implications on status, work-load, and potential transference of duties. They were critical of the "social welfare" response of many governments.¹² Clearly, what women were not looking for was a welfare state to give them economic equity with the poorest men, which one might infer from the types of programs implemented by national governments to bring about a more equitable society. Governmental support was the approach, but women did not find this a fully satisfactory means of achieving equality. Structural change would find its place on future agendas of the Decade.

¹² see Irene Tinker and Michele Bo Bramsen, Women and World Development, (Washington D.C.: Overseas Development Council 1976) for a detailed account of what happened at this seminar.

These weeks in Mexico started the peace process in a significant way. Women and men were discussing issues of equity and coming face to face with some of the most complex and critical questions of the political, social and economic realms. It was acknowledged that the issue of equality extended beyond legal recognition and involved deeper questions of socialization and social structure. The breadth of the World Plan of Action document is testimony to that. This rethinking of the structure is critical to the process of peace. Women were beginning to question what type of equality they wanted. The arguments between North and South are good examples of this questioning. Women in the North were after equal access to jobs in a system which was oppressive to others. Women in the South were seeking economic stability for their nations, although to what end it cannot be said for certain as economic success, it became clear to many women, does not necessarily mean equitable treatment of citizens.

The global aspect of the oppression of women connected the participants in a way which encouraged them to continue their efforts of exploring this issue despite the initial difficulties encountered in Mexico City. It is true that "everyone saw the world their own way" but the participants left the door open (more accurately, propped the door open) to future dialogue. Future examination of women's oppression held the possibility of relieving some of that

oppression and making the world a more equitable place for all humanity.

The end of the Mexico City conference and Tribune asked for another evaluation of progress on the World Plan of Action to take place in five years. In the interim, governments and NGOs were to implement the strategies and goals set forth in the World Plan. That time span, 1975-80, saw many socio-political changes, not the least of which were the deepening rift between East-West relations and an escalation in the nuclear arms race, accompanied by increasingly conservative governments in the West and revolutionary governments in the Middle East and South. Governments blamed economic hard times on their lack of financial support for women's bureaus and other governmental aid. But at the same time, numerous private (mostly non-profit) women's organizations were created or expanded upon, taking their cue from the World Plan.

Copenhagen: progress or politics?

A great deal more preparation took place previous to the Copenhagen conference than the Mexico City conference. Regional conferences were encouraged to meet and formulate plans and evaluate progress before attending the global forum. One of the more significant pre-Copenhagen events was the Women and New International Economic Order Seminar co-sponsored by UNITAR and the World Association of Former U.N. Interns and Fellows which from 29 to 31 October, 1979

discussed the significance of women in the New International Economic Order.¹³

The discussion on women's role in the NIEO and social orders revealed a number of interesting facts. The workshop maintained that women had historically been and were presently integrated in the economic order worldwide. However, because there was a continued perception of a dichotomy between the modern and traditional sectors, between the economic activities done for money and those done as citizenry duty, between productive work and welfare activities, statistics still tended only to reflect activities in the modern monetary economy. As a result, women in most countries of the world were the "invisible" economic base of society. But, women were excluded from the mainstream of decision-making and planning, which meant they could be controlled more effectively.¹⁴

Here again was a document in which women had virtually no representation in the formulation stage, but were promised benefits from its implementation. Would equal economic opportunity contribute to true equality of the sexes? The findings of the seminar and later at the Copenhagen conference seem to indicate that indeed, true equality went beyond what was included in the NIEO strategies, but it also wasn't a bad start.

Taking up where the initiatives left off at Mexico City, the progression in the ideas of what constitutes true

13 The NIEO is "basically an attempt by the developing states to restructure the international economic system and provide for the redistribution of the world's wealth." as cited in The United Nations: International Organizations and World Politics by Robert Riggs and Jack Plano, (Chicago: Dorsey Press, 1988) p.316

14 "Greater Involvement of Women in Peace, Decolonization and Economics urged at UNITAR Seminar" Women 1980 No.1 p.5

development and true equality, the Women and the NIEO seminar takes a few steps towards a more comprehensive understanding of these issues. A re-definition of history can be seen here. Women were no longer going to be written out of history, marginalized by the record of what was considered "significant" and what was not. Women affirmed that they had indeed been participating all along in the economic, social, political and cultural processes of a given nation, but had never been allowed a significant voice to influence the decision-making process. This seminar can be seen as an intermediary step between Mexico City and Copenhagen.

The Copenhagen Conference, 14-30 July, 1980, was a mid-point conference in the Decade both chronologically and ideologically. Much controversy surrounded the Conference as to whether it was an effective means for discussing women's situation in the world or merely another conference to be subverted by the male political realm. Some women saw the politicization of this conference as detrimental to the capacity of women to solve their own problems,¹⁵ while others saw this "politicization" as confirmation of women's activities and interests in all areas, including politics.¹⁶ Of those critical of this more political aspect, the NGO

15 Irene Tinker "A Feminist View of Copenhagen" Signs (Vol.6 No.1, Spring, 1981) pp.531-535

16 "What Really Happened at Copenhagen?" Women 1980 No.6, 1981 p.5

Forum seemed to provide some solace, as it was attended almost exclusively by women (about 7,000) and had an extremely action-oriented approach to its seminars and workshops.¹⁷ Again, among these more action-oriented events development received a good deal of attention: how to lobby governments for attention to women's issues, how to use new technologies, which networks were now available in what parts of the world, et cetera. As one delegate said about the Forum, "they knew about the issues and objectives of the Decade. At the Forum they discussed how to move the world in the way they wanted it moved, and this showed the success of the Decade as it showed how far women have come since 1975."¹⁸

Perhaps the most important factor which resulted from both the formal and informal gatherings was the agreement that development meant more than economic growth. Here the change from Mexico City becomes more evident. In 1975, one of the main objectives of integrating women into development was to assist them in obtaining a higher economic status. This theme was encouraged by those who stressed the progress of economic growth generally. But in 1980, at Copenhagen, women were still one step away from disavowing the pursuit of purely legal and economic means of achieving equality. While participants acknowledged other areas (more socially-

¹⁷ Ibid. p.8

¹⁸ Ibid.

oriented) critical to true development, a good portion of the strategies continued to assert equal opportunity to employment, stressing the importance of competing in the system some were trying to restructure.

Thus, noting the movement into the Third U.N. Development Decade, the Copenhagen conference encouraged increased women's participation as decision-makers and planners, as little progress had been made in this area since 1975. If anything, the Copenhagen conference was now able to confirm all the inequalities it suspected previous to formal investigation. A big effort was made between 1975 and 1980 to account formally for women's involvement in society. Questionnaires were sent out, and one of the largest responses was received-- 86 countries willingly shared information about their female citizens. The results were sobering and gave the conference organizers hard facts with which to tackle the subjects they had brought up in Mexico City. For instance, one of the reports to the Secretary-General noted that outside the Decade conferences, women composed only 8.6 per cent of world delegations. This represented an increase of .02 per cent a year since 1945. It was noted that at that rate, it would take approximately 200 years for women to make up the 50 per cent of delegations they theoretically had a right to represent.¹⁹

¹⁹ "Report to the Secretary-General" Women 1980 No.3 p.2

Development as a process

At Nairobi, development took on an explicitly peace-oriented approach. Its definition was expanded to include many elements known to peace educators as eliminating structural violence. Galtung had commented on the connections between imperialism and structural violence in 1981, in particular domination as a form of structural violence. Development, as defined by the "Forward Looking Strategies," incorporated these ideas concerning domination in a holistic manner. Looking at an excerpt from the development section will clarify this connection between development and peace:

The role of women is a fundamental question for the development of all societies. Development means total development, in the political, economic, social and cultural and other dimensions of human life, as well as the development of economic and other material resources. It should be conducive to providing women, particularly those who are poor or destitute, with the necessary means for increasingly claiming, achieving, enjoying, and utilizing, equal opportunity. The successful participation of women in societal activities as legally independent agents contributed to further recognition in practice for their right to equality. Development also requires a moral dimension to ensure that it is responsive to the needs and the rights of the individual and that science and technology are applied within a social and economic framework that ensures environmental safety for all life forms on our planet.²⁰

²⁰ Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality Development and Peace, Nairobi (New York: United Nations A/CONF.116/28/Rev.1) paragraph 12

What else could this refer to but a structurally equitable and peaceful society? No longer is development dependent solely on economic success, although economic stability is still a point of concern. No longer is successful development dependent on a "welfare" approach, although social responsibility is shared by governments and citizens alike. No longer is development necessarily from the top down, as the approach embodied here requires cooperative efforts from those individuals affected. Thus, the forward looking strategies imply development in a peaceful manner; a process which involves those concerned, combines rather than fragments, and has as its goals an integrated, holistic solution.

Development took on a unique dimension at the Forum as well: over 60 per cent of the roughly 14,500 paying participants were from the developing world. Development was one of eleven key subjects to be addressed in the more than 1,200 workshops, seminars and addresses to be given between July 10 to 19th. A great deal of feminist theory had been embraced and expanded upon by participants since 1975. One of the workshop participants at the Forum had this to say about women and development:

The reason why so much lip service is paid to "integrating women in development" while so few people are able to translate formulas into practical activities is to be found at least partly in emotional constraints among executive agents. It is self-evident that these constraints

are heavier among males who feel threatened in their power positions...²¹

Women were no longer hesitant to use feminist language and were willing to use provocative words to encourage the formal system to begin to recognize its own short-comings and not to place all the blame on women and their lack of "integration." The questions of structure were being demanded loud and clear by many women who had changed their understanding of their own situation since the Decade began. They asked what development meant and what it should, or could, mean.

By asking these questions, women (and men) were participating in the process of peace. They began the Decade asking the governments of the world to include women in their plans, to integrate them and consider them as an active part of the whole of society. Yet by doing this, the conference participants realized deeper questions needed to be answered than just integration. Difficulties were encountered on all levels of society, not just in the realm of employment or education. Discussions of development led women to challenge the foundations on which that development is based.

One significant area which did not receive much reported attention however was the connection between the environment and development. Several paragraphs were dedicated to the environment in the FLS, but the discussion and action is rather limited when compared to other areas of

²¹ Fraser, U.N. Decade for Women p.208

concern which were examined. The degradation of the environment is seen as a threat to "women's traditional means of livelihood"²² but not as the all-encompassing issue it is to all life. Several grass roots women's environmental movements had mobilized by 1985 and could have been included in the discussion. For eco-feminists, the link between exploitation of the earth and exploitation of women is a basic connection. It is therefore surprising that this did not receive more attention in the Forum (only half a dozen workshops mention "environment" in the title). This marginalization of the environmental issues may be due to my own informational sources, but is more likely indicative of the difficulty of recording all the various events at the Forum. It shows nonetheless that certain issues of terrific importance continue to be insufficiently accounted for in the documentation.

After exploring the issues of equality and development women realized over the Decade that more fundamental aspects of society were in question. Beneficial development for women necessarily involved concepts of equality, but also of peace. As with the other two themes, peace also reflects the progression from the integration of traditional concepts of peace to the structural changes and consciousness changes necessary for a genuinely peaceful society. The development of these concepts of peace will be the next focus of study.

22 Report of the World Conference...Nairobi paragraph 224

Chapter Five

Positive Peace: The Fundamental Issue

The third theme of the Decade, peace, illustrates a narrowing of the largest gap between the intention and purposes of the U.N. and those of the NGOs. The U.N., as mentioned before, is a forum of nation-states and therefore deals with issues of concern to the functioning and well-being of its members (governments). NGOs, by contrast, are usually formed to act on a specific issue with little emphasis on the political consequences of pursuing that issue. These differences manifest themselves most clearly when discussing the issue of peace.

Governments tend to see peace in a traditional sense, i.e. negative peace (absence of violence). Peace necessarily involves issues of security, national interest and defense. It would take a great leap of bureaucratic faith to classify peace as fundamental to the system itself and for bureaucracy to work towards its achievement. Several NGOs however, have as their founding purpose the pursuit of fundamentally peaceful societies.¹

The beginning of the Decade took a more traditional approach to peace issues. While a few delegates and NGO participants acknowledged the need for general changes in multiple issues to form a more peaceful society, the general

¹ A few examples are the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), Consortium on Peace Research, Education and Development (COPRED), World Peace Organization among others.

emphasis leaned toward economic security and development to provide the stability for peace. Participants in the Tribune and the Conference focused on the need to include women in existing strategies and left the question of who created the existing society for a later date. A good example of this is how the Decade documents chose to deal with the topic of sexism.

Peace, Racism and Sexism

The background documents to the IWY give no mention of the problems of sexism. Racism, colonialism, foreign domination and apartheid are all mentioned as obstacles to women's involvement in the public sphere and their contributions to a more peaceful world. Nowhere does the issue of sexism come up as a block to women's potential as peacemakers. While defining sexism is complex due to the cultural diversity which must be considered in the U.N. forum, it is none-the-less an important consideration. For the purposes of this discussion, consider the following definition: sexism is a systematic exclusion of women and/or women's influence in the public sphere exacerbated by a devaluation of women's expertise in the private sphere. This treatment of women is almost always accompanied by the rise in influence of "advanced" economic systems (both capitalist and socialist). The difficulty of defining sexism in culturally non-judgmental terms is evident in the length of time it took for such a concept to be accepted into the U.N. lexicon. The degree of influence of

exploitative economic systems which further marginalized women from involvement in the public sphere as well as a varying of differentiation between public and private spheres from society to society made sexism an undesirable subject to address in terms of internationalism. Thus, in 1975 a considerable number of nations (note: not NGOs) said sexism was not a problem in their country and posed no significant hindrance to women. In 1980 however, enough participants voiced their concern over sexism that it was, albeit reluctantly, added:

The inclusion of sexism was resisted by many nations (Latin American, Asian, African and East European), who insisted that sexism did not exist in their countries. After extended debate "discrimination base on sex" was added finally to the Programme qualified by a footnote, "which in a group of countries is called sexism" - the first time the concept has been specifically mentioned in a U.N. document. (The word sexism did not appear in the World Plan of Action adopted by consensus in Mexico City).²

The modification of "discrimination based on sex" from "sexism" is indicative of the cultural sensitivity of this issue. It is important to remember too, that the U.N. deals mostly with issues in the public sphere and thus it is women's involvement in the public sphere which is the largest point of concern of "sexism."

These problems which surround the definition and larger issue of sexism reveal what Betty Reardon refers to as the "communication gap" between North and South, East and West.

² Jesse Bernard, The Female World from a Global Perspective (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) p.178

This is a tendency to understand feminist issues only from a single point of view and a reluctance to accept other options. This gap is not only in the political realm of nation-states, but also found among NGOs. While women from mostly industrialized nations tried to make sexism the sole scapegoat, women from industrializing countries believed the polarizing economic structure of the world to be the most guilty party. It would take time for women to see the connections between these issues and allow feminism to be more inclusive, as over the Decade acceptance of diversity increases. The issues converge in the area of positive peace:

... As women of the Third World they know that all people in their society, both men and women, are oppressed. Although women in these societies are certainly more oppressed, their oppression is part of a total system that such Western feminist analysis has not taken sufficiently into account. Indeed, to assert "that our oppression is by men and not by opposing nationalities" not only ignores the structures that enforce sexist oppression and contemporary economic paternalism, but also attributes to nation-states a degree of autonomy they simply do not have. This reinforces the myth of sovereignty, which is another significant supporter of the war system. This assertion also fails to challenge the nation-state itself and all related international structures as essentially patriarchal.³

Feminism needed to come to terms with globalism and work through some of the issues which appeared contrary to "universal sisterhood" (such as individualism in various cultural contexts) if women were to genuinely change the

3 Betty Reardon, Sexism and the War System (New York: Teachers College Press, 1985) p.67

structures which oppressed them and not simply alter the roles of oppressor and oppressed.

As can be inferred from above, the denial of sexism on the part of the governments correlates to their perception of peace and peace issues. Just as a majority of governments refused to address sexism as a serious issue, so too did they ignore the comprehensive issue of peace. It is not in the interests of a nation-state to address issues of positive peace nor sexism; the first because it implies something is inherently wrong with a military-based society, and the second because it is an admission that half a country's citizens are discriminated against. These two issues themselves can be considered one and the same in the context of positive peace. The connection between these issues however was recognized eventually, if only by a few in each government, towards the close of the Decade.

In 1975 however, the issue of peace was generally understood in the terms of absence of war and absence of violence. Numerous resolutions in Mexico City were put in the World Plan of Action to encourage the minimization of violence generally and against women particularly. While it was acknowledged that women (and children) frequently suffered more severely than men in times of war, they did not make the extension that women suffer more than men in a military-based society. Peace was generally perceived as related to "hard security" issues like national defense, and neither the delegates of the U.N. conference nor a majority

of those at the NGO Tribune questioned this classification of peace.

Women's contribution to peace was thus seen in more-or-less traditional means. In fact, according to the WPA it is hard to understand how women could influence the promotion of peace given their status in most societies. For example a few of the goals put forth in the WPA describe women's efforts in peace-making as the following:

... Participation of women in safeguarding peace which would promote economic, social, cultural and political conditions that contribute to the advancement of the status of women and men;
 ... Developing and implementing international standards, and other actions to encourage peaceful relations among states on the basis of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations resolutions as well as international law;⁴

It is difficult to imagine how women could have the impact as described above if sexism was not considered an issue. The issue of peace was termed exclusively in the patriarchal concepts of what constituted peace in that system. At Mexico City there was little space to discuss the limitations of peace within the confines of a society based on patriarchal hierarchy.

Peace and politics

The political conflicts which occurred at Copenhagen open the door to the reconsideration of peace as a women's issue. In a significant way, the debates which focused

⁴ ECOSOC "International Women's Year" (New York: ECOSOC E/RES/1849 [LVI] 3 June 1974) pp.6-7

around feminism and what it was started a process which never concluded. As mentioned earlier in the sections on development and equality, the Copenhagen controversies encouraged a reevaluation by all women as to what they were really trying to achieve in terms of the conference themes. When the delegates started debating whether the Decade conferences should include issues of a "solely political nature", such as the state of affairs in the Middle East, women were also necessarily examining how they defined feminism. Irene Tinker represented one point of view:

The confrontation over the Palestine issue spilled over into the forum sponsored by nongovernmental organizations (the NGO Forum), sending out waves of anti-Semitism that raised tempers, divided delegations, and again diverted energy from the real point of the conference: women's status and welfare.⁵

While the Women 1980 newsletter saw events reflecting a different nature of feminism:

The so-called political discussions at Copenhagen reflected the issues facing the world; the international search for economic justice, the question of self-determination, and the elimination of racism and oppression.⁶

Note once again there is no mention of sexism. Yet the basis of the controversy lies in exactly how pervasive "discrimination based on sex" is in various societies. For how can women's welfare and status be generally improved if

5 Irene Tinker "A Feminist View of Copenhagen" Signs Vol.6 No.3 Spring, 1981 p.531

6 "What Really Happened at Copenhagen?" Women 1980 DESI Newsletter No.6 p.3

the discussion is exclusive of certain issues, whether political or developmental, of society? Politics does not exist in a vacuum of society nor does any other issue. While the importance of politics or women's legal status continues to vary from group to group, Copenhagen opened the forum for discussion.

After the conference was over and participants had time to reflect on the events, a movement towards synthesis between the "political" and the "women's issues" sides begins. Leila Ahmed responded to Tinker's frustrations with this eloquent conclusion:

... The tenor of her (Tinker's) references throughout left one with the distinct impression that because the plights of Palestinian and black South African women were a matter of "world politics" this somehow meant that they were consequently irrelevant to feminists and quite beyond the pale of our proper concern. A Palestinian or South African or anyone else for that matter who then took this to be the feminist line would justifiably judge a feminist perspective and feminist analysis irrelevant as well ... As women, we know well what it is to have our experiences falsified and our histories maligned and stolen from us, and as feminists, we know too how constant must be our vigilance against the dishonesties constantly perpetrated by language used about and against us. Surely our refusal to acquiesce any longer to such falsifications or collaborate in oppressions has created and empowers our transforming vision.

Ahmed voiced in 1981 what was to become the general acceptance of so-called "political issues" at Nairobi. The importance of the acceptance of political issues as related

7 Leila Ahmed, "Comments on Tinker's 'A Feminist View of Copenhagen'" Signs Vol.6 No.4 Summer, 1981 pp782-3

to peace lies in the conceptions behind peace. Women began to use a feminist analysis of the society around them and saw that some of their initial ways of thinking were sometimes a distorted reflection of what they were trying to change. Peace became an important, if not pivotal, subject around which all other issues could be addressed. A new feminist approach used peace as a process to improve society.

This new emphasis is probably due in a large part to the efforts of mostly European and some North American women to feminize the disarmament issue. In the early eighties, disarmament (a "hard security" issue) was a key concern. Women had been endorsed by the WPA to participate in and facilitate the process of disarmament. Several women's groups in Europe took this issue seriously and began work on the issues in the most effective means available to them: collecting signatures, forming new organizations, organizing protests and educating the public. One group in particular, Women for Peace, helped organize a signature collection campaign which presented almost half a million signatures pleading a halt to the arms race to Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim at the beginning of the Copenhagen conference. While accepted graciously during the ceremonies, this effort by women did little to affect the outcome of negotiations in Geneva. Women apparently could not establish their role as peacemakers in the field of disarmament (either) without the pre-approval of men.

So it may partially have been due to this frustration of women's attempts at working within their traditional "place" which encouraged a reevaluation of the definition of peace. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, who became extremely active in the overall disarmament effort came to the realization that they were leaving out the social and economic aspects of peace by concentrating almost exclusively on disarmament. WILPF's conclusions are typical of what many other women and women's groups realized between the time of Copenhagen and Nairobi:

Like many other activists in Europe and North America, WILPF women were caught up in the fervor of the new peace movement, whose clear emphasis was disarmament. But at this conference [World Women's Peace Conference, Barnard College 1982], over and over, the stories told by Third World women living under conditions of apartheid, occupation, and famine prompted more comfortable WILPF members into remembering their organization's historic commitment to social and economic justice as integral to any true peace. For many Western middle-class women newer to the peace movement, however, this was a jarring realization-- and one that would be more and more emphasized throughout the remainder of the international women's decade.⁸

Years after beginning the quest for equality, development and peace, women were seeing issues from a different perspective: one that was more inclusive and all-encompassing.

⁸ Catherine Foster, Women for All Seasons: The Story of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989) 89

Peace is the issue

The Nairobi gatherings reflect a genuine shift in the perception not only of the issue of peace, but of the idea of feminism more generally. With a new internationally-based feminist movement, the themes of the Decade were seen as inextricably linked to one another. This interconnectedness was acknowledged officially now in U.N. documents and encouraged by the NGOs. A report to the Secretary-General before Nairobi concisely states this transition:

Fundamental in many ways to the achievement both of equality and development is progress towards the Decade's third goal, peace. Peace may be thought of as simply the absence of war and armed conflict, but a broader definition is required when it is linked to the issues of equality and development. Peace in its broadest sense is rather a state in which resources, material and human, are used for the positive purpose of improving living conditions, health, welfare and happiness. An environment free from conflict and violence in the home, the community, the State and indeed the globe is what peace means in its fullest sense. In this larger context women, who play important roles in the family and community and increasingly in national and international life, have a critical contribution to make.⁹

This U.N. definition of peace comes very close to what peace research calls positive peace. The linkage of issues and the focus on peace as a process rather than a limited goal

⁹ Overview: Report of the Secretary General, Review and Appraisal of Programs Achieved and Obstacles Encountered at the National Level in the Realization of the Goals and Objectives of the U.N. Decade for Women (5 December 1984 A/CONF.116/5) 15

expands greatly upon the definition of peace determined at Mexico City.

This broadening of the concept of peace did not make the goals and actions of the Forward Looking Strategies any less concrete. On the contrary, because the issue was more inclusive women had a multiplicity of means by which they could become involved. The FLS requested both the increased opportunities for women to hold decision-making positions inside and outside the government while maintaining the need to create a less violence-oriented society. Some of these definite actions include:

- * Support women's grass roots organizations, women artists, journalists, writers, educators and civic leaders in efforts to promote peace.

- * Provide opportunities for women to organize and choose studies, training programmes and seminars related to peace, disarmament and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

- * Governments, non-governmental organizations, women's groups and the mass media should encourage women to engage in efforts to promote peace education in the family, neighborhood and community.

- * Provide financial support for women to take university courses in government, international relations and diplomacy so that they acquire professional credentials to work on peace and international security issues.¹⁰

A type of synthesis is reached at this point between the earlier effort of the Decade at integration into the public sphere, while acknowledging women's role in the family and

¹⁰ International Women's Tribune Center It's Our Turn Now: A Guide to the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (New York: International Women's Tribune Center, 1986) 85

encouraging the efforts to shift the basis of society to a more peaceful one. These structural changes hint at an implied change in attitude which must accompany the policy alteration in order to be truly effective. While the emphasis continued to be on policy formulation, undercurrents of improving the climate for these new policies was also hinted at throughout the Nairobi conferences.

Exemplifying the newly-accepted approach towards equality is the Peace Tent at the Forum in Nairobi. Its explicit purpose was to allow a safe place for dialogue between disputing parties and as a "feminist alternative to men's conflict and war."¹¹ The blue and white tent first had to resolve its conflict with the red and white Coca Cola tent which tried to set up in the same spot in the Forum. Peace prevailed and Coca Cola moved their tent elsewhere. Organizers and participants alike described the Peace Tent as one of the best used and most helpful aspects of the Forum. About half the day official programmes and dialogues were scheduled for the space and the other half was intentionally left available for women to discuss disputes which resulted from other programmes, either NGO or U.N. Organized by Feminists International for Peace and Food, this space allowed an alternative to the regular offerings and the traditional structure of problem-solving. Some

¹¹ Nadia Hijab, "A source of peace" Forum 85 11 July 1985 p.8

governments saw this women's initiative as a threat to their own proceedings as all different nationalities were conversing in private about what they were not supposed to address in public, officially. The Chilean government went so far as to publicly voice these concerns, as reported by Forum 85:

During the meeting of Latin American NGOs at the Peace Tent on Friday, an official representative of the Chilean government demanded to know who was going to speak in the name of Chile. The Chilean women refused to give the name of the speakers. They were instructed that no one had the right to speak for Chile unless they've been officially invited (this at an NGO event).¹²

The expansion of women's concerns into the realm of peace as an all-encompassing, substantive issue seems to have caused a great deal more concern among governments than was indicated at the beginning of the Decade. In fact, Chile was not alone in its dislike for the Peace Tent. At one point in the Conference when the disagreements between disputing parties reached a high point, U.N. Security threatened to shut down the Peace Tent for the remainder of the Conference as it was not fulfilling its claimed purpose. Yet how could shutting off dialogue be a help to the peace process? While it is true that the discussions were heated, and sometimes emotional, it cannot be denied that exchanging views clarifies the positions of both parties and leaves the lines of communication open, if nothing else. Dame Nita Barrow, organizer of the Forum, resolved the Peace Tent

12 ----- "Grapevine" Forum 85 15 July 1985 p.12

would stay open as it was symbolic of women's approach to problem-solving and if U.N. security wanted to shut it down, she would close the entire Forum in response. After a plea to the disputing parties in the Peace Tent not to jeopardize further possibilities for dialogue, the parties consented, lowered their voices and tempers and the Peace Tent stayed open through the Forum.¹³

The spirit of the Peace Tent extended beyond the bounds of the physical space, as many participants voiced the need to start making connections between the issues they had identified throughout the Decade. Carlot Lopes de Silva, a representative of WILPF, Netherlands, perhaps summed up the feeling of the Decade most accurately:

Equality, development and peace can not be separated of each other. Either we'll achieve all three of these goals or none of them. In a word, where there is a priority on arms expenditure instead of feeding the poor (mainly women), equality can not exist. The system is based on stressing the individual "right" to exploit people.¹⁴

And women definitely have a role to play in changing that system.

As the three themes of the Decade exemplify, issues are interrelated, dependent on each other, not subjects to be addressed in a simple cause and effect relationship. The societal structure and attitudes are a complex web of interwoven realities and beliefs which sometimes backtrack

¹³ Dame Nita Barrow, as recounted in an interview with Betty Reardon, 3 May 1990

¹⁴ ----- "Obstacles to equality" Forum 85 15 July 1985 p.10

on each other and sometimes end abruptly only to develop into another line of thought. The Decade certainly had its abrupt endings which resolved themselves into other issues and lines of reasoning which may have seemed futile at times, but the strength of the Decade lies in the connections made from one strand of the web to another. The web is strongest when all the connections are whole.

Chapter Six

Global Feminism, Peace and the Future

It is very promising for the future to see feminist strategies and theories supported by so many women from all over the world, despite cultural differences. The movement has gained strength, depth and power. -- Forum participant ¹

The U.N. Women's Decade set in motion the energies for literally tens of thousands of women across the globe to work for the betterment of "their half" of humanity, thereby benefitting the whole of society. While the early days of the Decade stressed women's integration into existing structures, the process of the Decade brought new questions to the fore. As women became more involved in decision-making and creating organizations to address specific subjects, it became clear that fundamental obstacles stood in the way of progress towards a new, equal society. More than just integration was required, a new concept of society needed to be imagined and offered up for consideration. The new vision manifested itself in the form of structural change that altered some of the fundamental conceptions upon which most societies are based. Child-care and family responsibility became more important as the Decade went on and group and solidarity rights began to be discussed as the Decade came to a close.

¹ Caroline Pezzullo, For The Record...Forum '85: The Non-governmental World Meeting for Women, Nairobi, Kenya (New York: International Women's Tribune Centre, 1986) p.19

This evolution is perhaps part of the emergence of a truly global feminist movement which came of age during the Decade. I term this a "global feminist movement" as the values endorsed by the newer movement are more inclusive than the first ideals promoted by mostly industrialized nations' women's movements. With the global movement there is greater recognition of the value of "traditional" women's work; that it is not something to be marginalized in pursuit of equality in a patriarchal structure nor that it should become a burden and hindrance to women's active participation in society. The movement draws on these areas as well as non-traditional approaches for strength which allows and encourages diversity. Perhaps the most significant strength of the global feminist movement is diversity.

A new way of thinking was also encouraged during the Decade. The importance of recognizing the connections between issues and not seeing them as isolated circumstances takes on more significance over the years. Linking sexism to poverty and militarism reveals a system which is based on exploitation and inequality, whether it was created to be like that or not. By making connections an integral part of the examination of problems, women were promoting a new perspective. This manner of understanding and explaining the systems in which we live in various societies can also be considered part of the peace process.

To give an example, one feminist peace researcher has explained why it is important to understand structural violence in these terms:

Violence, in structural terms, links underdevelopment, peacelessness and discrimination based on biological characteristics. A structurally violent situation is one in which the means for the attainment of certain rights is controlled by the group in power, removing not only power but the right to define oneself from those who are controlled. Thus:

(i) *Development and peace are reciprocally linked if peace is defined not as the absence of war but the achievement of positive social and cultural goals. The oppressive structures which limit or deform development in the interests of the rich and powerful, trade on insecurity to justify armaments and draw ordinary people into their folly, partly through denial of alternative ideas and contracts. The violence is also seen in the amount of money spent on arms, especially when this is compared with development aid: the tying of resources to destruction and threat rather than improvement of the human lot. One particular aspect of this is the development of high technology increasingly associated with the military, and the implications of this as a "development model", as well as the tying up of one-third of the world's scientists in military and paramilitary research.*²

Burns clearly shows the connections between the issues as being important to the overall understanding of how an increasingly interdependent society functions. For positive peace to be truly effective, it must consider the underlying elements of all of society. There can be no trade-offs, as in a system of integration. The minimization and eventual elimination of structural violence is at the core of this approach. We can see the themes of the Decade arriving at a

² Robin Burns as cited in B. Reardon's Sexism and the War System (New York: Teachers College Press, 1985) p.61

common obstacle: structural violence. It is here that the future efforts of the U.N. Decade strategies must be directed.

The topic of structural violence shows some of the limitations of the Decade. While the emphasis did shift from integration to structural change over the Decade, most of the approaches taken to alter the institutions of society are policy oriented. The significance of changing some of the attitudes, indeed the consciousness, of policy-makers (let alone society) seems to take a secondary importance to policy formulations. The limitation of using policy as a means of solving problems is the traditional single-issue approach. Eliminating structural violence however requires a more comprehensive method. Just as violence to the environment also perpetrates violence against women, whether it be drought due to deforestation or high cancer rates due to pesticides, so too are policy changes which take no account of the beliefs of the people only affecting part of the problem. The links between these two problems are often suppressed or ignored. It will take a holistic approach, requiring a definite change among most Westernized thinkers, to solve such problems for the long-term instead of provide a short-term fix.

The Decade made important strides among an amazing number of individuals from many different cultures to reach a common understanding of the task which lay ahead. The

Decade documents are proof of what can be accomplished if people are willing to try to work differences out.

The influence of NGOs can not be forgotten in this area, either. In many instances they initiated imaginative proposals which were taken up and acted upon. NGOs were among the first groups to make the connections between issues and encourage those linkages. They provided both a means of accomplishing tasks as well as a model. At Nairobi, because the NGO Forum preceded the official conference, they were able to make numerous decisions which encouraged the U.N. officials to work twice as hard so as not to be out-done by an informal operation. NGOs can fill many different roles, and perhaps one of the more successful positions is that of "gadfly" whereby the organization can prompt meaningful direction without destroying the integrity of the body.

The U.N. Decade for Women was indeed "a landmark in the history of humankind" as Helvi Sipilä referred to it. The years witnessed not a revolution, but a revolutionary process. The internationalization of feminism, some might say trans-nationalization, encouraged women to think of society in new ways. As oppressed individuals, they could understand the futility in perpetuating the circle of oppression. Thus, a new vision of a peace-based society would solve women's oppression rather than displace it on to others by promoting integration.

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