

The Women's Movement in Pakistan: Challenges and Achievementsⁱ

Farida Shaheed

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Introduction*

This paper examines the challenges confronting the contemporary Pakistan women's movement as well as some key achievements. Achievements can be seen as those institutionalizing changes within the state as well as institutionalizing societal changes in practices and attitudes. For the first, achievement is dependent on those who make and implement policy and requires state-oriented activism, ironically rendering success dependent on a non-feminist (and greatly critiqued) state. Progress on the second requires a differently focused activism, one that concentrates on and learns from working with women within their specific realities. To institutionalize sustainable long-term changes, women's movements need to work on both simultaneously. It is beyond this paper to address the issues arising in both types of activism in any depth. Nevertheless two important challenges seem to be common: (a) how to be as inclusive as possible of differently situated women and their specific needs and concerns whilst maintaining some level of coherence, and (b) how best to mediate alliances and engagements with other social movements and actors. Over and above this, an immediate and growing issue in the context of Pakistan is the challenges being mounted by retrogressive political Islamists.

Briefly reviewing some of the conceptual issues surrounding notions of feminism, I suggest it may be useful to differentiate women's rights movements from women's movements so as to account for and include activism by those who would not necessarily consider themselves to be feminists or part of a movement for women's rights. Two distinct periods of the Pakistan women's rights movement are then examined to highlight how specific contexts, with attendant opportunities and opposing factors, influence activism and outcomes: the 1980s activism in opposition to an adversarial state that had minimal engagements with and impact of international events, and the post-1990 activism more directly linked to and engaged with international arenas. Differences are viewed through engagements around political rights on the one hand and sexual violence on the other. A third section examines the relationship of the women's movement to other social movements and issues of collaboration. The final section explores the challenges faced by the women's movement in contesting political Islamist groups from within a human rights framework.

The lively debate in feminist circles involving "naming, identifying, locating and evaluating the changing character of women's activism" that this volume sets out to examine is largely muted in Pakistan, not least due to the paucity of academic institutions and journals that would provide venues for such debates. In the absence of such forums the debate, such as it is, runs largely in a subterranean manner confined to drawing rooms and the 'interior' spaces of fairly limited circles of activists and civil society organizations, especially those focusing on women rights and human rights in general. Considered reflection and rigorous debate are rare luxuries for civil society actors with a rights agenda in Pakistan where, since 1977, unfolding events have required constant vigilance and prompt responses. With reflection and debate carried out on the run,

between urgent campaigns, protests and picket lines, my examination of women's movements draws upon my own personal engagements with the women's movement and mostly undocumented debates within the women's movement and its affiliated groups.

Of feminisms and movements

Any attempt to assess women's activism raises a question of what qualifies as feminist activity and how this differs from women's activism in other spaces and movements. Concomitantly, what defines a movement, as distinct from a trend? At what point can moments of activism be said to have transmuted into a movement? In contemporary usage there has been a blurring of terminology such that 'feminist movement' is used interchangeably with 'women's rights movement', or simply and more broadly still, 'women's movement.' Meanings have shifted over time and, depending on the ideological positioning and understanding of the user, the term 'feminist' can refer to all and any actions concerned with improving "women's lives in some way," (Krook 2008) to a concept of pluralistic feminisms that, based on experiential differences, have led to distinctive 'black' or 'third' world feminisms. (Phillips 2002)

The lack of consensus on what constitutes 'feminism' was evident in the heated debate provoked by my coauthored use of the term "indigenous feminism"ⁱⁱ at a seminar. The paper posited 'indigenous feminisms' not as a reference to linkages between indigenous-ness and feminism, but as describing women's endeavors to assert their rights within their own socio-cultural contexts (Wee and Shaheed 2007, 4) The reactions were unexpected given the considerable efforts of feminists to emphasize the diverse realities of differently located women, especially those from the Third World, or South in current terminology. Most, if not all, of those present would have identified themselves as feminists and many were from the global South. In the ensuing discussion, a number of those present took exception to this use of the term, questioning how actions not emerging from and grounded in feminist theory could be termed 'feminist.' While there are indeed important questions concerning what 'feminism' is, should be, and can cover, the dispute indicated an assumption on the part of some that only those with a theoretical grounding in a presumably 'authentic' feminist body of textual knowledge should be deemed 'feminist.'

A first point of disagreement related to the degree of inclusiveness: should all women actively engaged in social and political fields be included within the 'women's movement,' regardless of whether they specifically address gender relations? Should, for instance, any women organizing in public spaces automatically be presumed to be a part of the women's movement by virtue of their gendered presence in the public political arena? Specifically forwarding the case of the Madre De Los Desaparecidos (Mothers of the Disappeared) some feminist seminar participants either said no, because it is 'just a movement of mothers that did not try to change the system,' and thus outside the parameters of 'feminist' actions. Others felt that in a context in which women are supposed to remain confined to the domestic sphere, the defiance of prescribed female roles by such women constituted a 'feminist' move, regardless of intent to change the system.

There is no doubt that through their actions and organizing, women involved in such initiatives enhance their own personal autonomy as individuals. It is also true that, by increasing women's

public visibility, such initiatives may help to reconfigure public arenas and thereby enhance the space for other women as well. Nevertheless, in the absence of any articulation and actions supportive of women's rights as a gender or a class perceived to have a modicum of common interests, the basis for including these women - active as they may be - as part of the women's movement is unclear. Women's agency does not automatically translate into demands for gender justice and equality as is vividly evident in studies on Rwanda and other places of violent conflict.ⁱⁱⁱ The suggestion that all women, regardless of class, ethnic, religious or other identity, automatically constitute a coherent group with similar interests is, of course, invalid and has been written about extensively. Quite separately is the question of who determines whether someone is a feminist or not. Would women engaged in initiatives such as the 'mothers of the disappeared' consider themselves to be part of the women's movement? These conflicting views suggest a need to distinguish between the unintended impact of actions that alter women's prescribed roles and self-perceptions from those undertaken as consciously 'feminist,' that is with the specific intention of changing gender relations. For instance, women's participation in the peasant movement in Punjab briefly discussed later, had no feminist aim when it started. Yet, activism itself changed women's perceptions and some of the gender rules in their communities and families. Today, some five years after the height of activism, women involved in the movement have started to articulate demands for greater rights as women, rather than an undifferentiated 'landless peasantry.' I posit that women's engagement in movements that do not explicitly aim to change gender relations may have the unintended result of increasing autonomy for women (as for instance actions by the mothers of the disappeared), but that a minimum criteria for inclusion in a movement for women's rights is that the women themselves reject the current arrangements of gendered relations. Unless their actions have precipitated such a shift in thinking, I would not consider the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo to be feminists, regardless of any potentially feminist outcome of their actions, such as the opening up public spaces for women. ■

A second point of divergence concerned the conceptual and historical location of feminism. Some of those present rejected the notion of 'indigenous feminisms' because this did not fit the 'modernist liberal project.' Contrasting views were that indigenous feminists include women who fought against the gendered oppressions of the colonialists and that there are long historical traditions of women's struggles in their country pre-dating the advent of Western 'feminists', who, in any case, tend to talk down to the women at the grassroots level. The proposition that there is a singular origin of women's rights activism is one I have contested as both ethnocentric and unhelpful. My concern is less with arriving at conceptual clarity in theoretical debates than with addressing and overcoming the immobilization of women that can result from an acceptance of such a premise. The deliberately promoted myth that women who engage in struggles for women's rights are, ipso facto, Westernized and alien to their own societies ought to be robustly contested. The fear of being cast 'beyond the pale,' of losing what little social networks or social capital women can harness within their own communities has a seriously detrimental impact on women's activism for their own rights, as I have argued elsewhere. (Shaheed 1994 and 1997) Moreover, having uncovered a rich legacy of women's assertions for rights as women and for social justice across space and time in Muslim contexts, I have no doubt that women's struggles for more gender equitable and more just societies precedes the 'modernist liberal project.' (Shaheed 2005) That the language of 'gender equality' is recent and tied to specific developments is another matter, but 'justice' and 'injustice' are powerful

concepts that resonate deeply in most cultural and historical contexts. Indeed it was discussions around retrieving women's struggles for rights from the margins and footnotes of history and how to bring these to the center that led Vivienne Wee and I to coin the term 'indigenous feminisms.' That the history of women's activism has so thoroughly disappeared from everyday social consciousness is itself a problem deserving further examination.

Additionally, as someone engaged in human rights as well as feminist activism, it seems to me that viewing feminism exclusively in terms of a 'modernist liberal project' falls into the trap of narrowly confining the women's movement for rights within the parameters of the human rights discourse. While much of women's activism since the middle of the twentieth century has taken place within the human rights discourse which is, indeed, located within the modern liberal project of nation-states, we do women a great injustice if we simply disregard or actually discard women's activism for rights as and for women that preceded nation-states as either irrelevant or 'something else.' If feminism is defined as "a discourse centrally concerned with gender inequality and women's empowerment," (Basu 2005) then feminism is far older than the liberal modernist project.

In Pakistan's context, regardless of contested meanings, the absence of an equivalent term for 'feminism' in any of the local languages, apart from limiting its usage, raises its own challenges. The absence of vernacular terms facilitates the suggestion – aggressively promoted by opponents of women's rights and gender – that 'feminism' is a North American/European agenda, if not an outright conspiracy, and its local 'westernized' proponents, at best, out of touch with the grounded reality of 'local women' and unrepresentative of their needs, at worst agents of western imperialist agendas. Aided by such propaganda, feminists are popularly projected as aggressive anti-men women. The net result is a discomfort with and lack of ownership of the feminist label even amongst women actively demanding greater rights and opportunities for women.^{iv}

Although the numbers are increasing, relatively few women in Pakistan self-identify as feminists. Most are urban educated women with access to English; a substantial number had pre-existing links with either transnational women's movements or/and with leftist ideology if not groups. Those who have identified as feminists since the 1980s have been inclined to differentiate between a women's movement—even a women's rights movement—from a feminist one. The women's movement would include all those seeking to bring about more gender equal rights and greater autonomy for women within the operative structures of state and society. Avoiding the term patriarchy, such women commonly articulate the problem as one of 'male-domination,' without addressing underlying questions of power. (Unlike feminism, patriarchy does exist in local language, so the use of male dominated does not reflect a lack of choice in local idiom.) Feminists, in contrast, see the essential problem as that of patriarchy as a system privileging males over females manifest in the structures of both state and society within and beyond national boundaries. Their concern is how to challenge patriarchy as a system that actively disempowers women, regardless of other socio-political differences. For feminists therefore, providing women with greater opportunities and representation in decision-making fora, improved health and better laws are not ends in and of themselves. At best these can serve as stepping stones to a restructuring of power relations, structures and systems.

Activism in the 1980s developed a more nuanced understanding of feminism. The experience of working with differently situated women (rather than a study of and conceptual engagement with feminist theory) brought to light how untenable it was to demand rights for women exclusively

in terms of the narrow yardstick of whether discrimination is based on ‘sex alone,’^v ignoring the differences in women’s lived realities. The women’s movement expanded to embrace the voices and causes of differently situated women, especially with respect to class but other identities as well, developing understanding of the somewhat cumbersome term ‘intersectionality.’ The process of learning and accepting women’s diversities and the need to address them comprehensively was neither instant nor smooth and entailed learning from past mistakes, sometimes at the cost of losing ground with differently situated women. Initial hesitation points to the relatively privileged background of those leading the women’s movement who enjoyed the advantages of class, urban location, education, etc. The Pakistan women’s movement was not engaged the international arena at the time and this ‘indigenous feminist’ learning emanated from the grounded reality and particular circumstances in which activism was located. It is therefore interesting that this development should have coincided with parallel thinking elsewhere.

In the Pakistani context it seems more appropriate to speak of a women’s movement which has some feminist underpinnings—to use phraseology suggested by Amrita Basu—a women’s movement with feminist demands.(Basu 2005) Terms for the women’s movement and the women’s rights movement exist and are commonly used in local languages. Further, although the dividing line may not always be easily distinguishable in practical terms, there is some value in trying to distinguish between a wider, more generalized ‘women’s movement’ and a ‘women’s rights movement,’ according to the primacy placed on gender equality and institutional base in activism. In this, a women’s rights movement would be characterized by the gendered perspective on issues adopted by adherents/activists, by the primacy placed on achieving greater gender equal rights, and by the consistency of conscious actions from institutional bases identified with the movement. The broader and more fluid ‘women’s movement’ would encompass institutions and individuals who, in the course of their engagements in other arenas and fields, take up women’s rights issues, but whose principle concern is not gender in/equality. This distinction facilitates a consideration of the interstices of the women’s movement with other social movements for change. It also makes it possible to account for and to include the activism of individuals within non-feminist/women’s organizations and institutions for women’s rights as part of the movement. These imprecise intersections with their smudged boundaries are where opportunities for interactions and engagements across movements occur, providing considerable scope for mutual learning through a cross-fertilization of ideas, analyses and modes of activism. Equally, these spaces provide important openings for interchange with and the participation of those who are not, or not squarely, inside the ‘women’s rights movement’ on a daily basis. In addition to the overlap of different social movements, these ill-defined spaces, I would suggest, are where engagements with ‘femocrats’ and other state representatives - male and female - occur in the pursuit of more gender equitable development plans and policies. This interaction is essential for helping to institutionalize changes and for broadening the support base for the women’s movement. The term ‘women’s movement’ could be expanded to include the women’s activism in conservative movements, providing such activism supports greater rights and equality for women. Otherwise, there is a danger of confusing the mere fact of being active with a movement that takes forward a gender-equality agenda. I suggest ‘women’s activism’ as alternative wording to consider agency for a cause outside this agenda.^{vi}

A related question is what elements distinguish a movement from trends, campaigns, or even a 'non-movement' – a term used with reference to women's activism in Iran. (Bayat 2007) To what extent do social actions require a focused leadership, a clear-cut strategy for change and organizational underpinnings to qualify as a movement? As in the case of 'feminism,' no clear consensus emerges. Hence in Pakistan, people question whether the robust activism of women through the 1980s acknowledged locally and internationally as a women's movement, can be called a movement given the limited number of activists and groups in a struggle that, for many years, remained state-oriented. The answer of course depends on one's understanding of social movements. In my view, movements by definition must be dynamic and therefore changing – otherwise they stop being a movement. While retaining the same broad objectives (gender equality in the case of the women's rights movement) a movement can have dissimilar priorities, tactics and visibility at different historical moments and in different socio-cultural and economic contexts. Further those mobilized by a movement are not always activists located within a particular institution. Although a core of institutional bases is necessary, when movements are effective they include participants, sympathizers, supporters and empathizers outside formal institutions. Such individuals may occasionally become activated or participate by, for example, joining demonstrations or signing petitions. Many people mobilized in the recent lawyers-led civil society movement for the restoration of the judiciary in Pakistan (2007-2008) were individual citizens outside the legal profession, civil society organizations and political parties. They were, nonetheless, important participants in the movement. Hence, I believe that not only was the 1980s activism a women's rights movement but that today's activism constitutes a different phase of the same movement. If the contemporary phase is less street-oriented and more diffused than the 1980s, many groups and individuals are the same; while the movement has lost its intensity and become more institution-based, there is a greater range of actors than before.

Two Phases of the Pakistan Women's Movement

Political developments have not favored a sustained women's movement in Pakistan. Soon after independence the political process, a crucial vehicle for activism in the anti-colonial period, became derailed starting with a ten-year martial law in 1957. Activists dispersed, women's issues dropped off the socio-political radar screen and in the decade 1957-1968 the struggle for women's rights ceased to be visible as a movement. Lobbying for women's rights, such as existed, was carried out via informal social networks by women connected to and therefore able to access the corridors of power. Gender inequality was altogether absent from the agenda of socialist groups active in the 1960s and 1970s despite the presence of some women. Nor did women within these groups take up women's issues. Indeed, the exceptional feminist groups formed around this period were viewed by those engaged in socialist movement(s) for change as deviations, counter-productively diverting focus and energy from the main class struggle.^{vii}

The current women's movement in Pakistan is divided into two phases: a period of intense publicly visible activism inwardly focused on national issues in the 1980s and a more diffused movement since the 1990s. The differing nature of activism points to the dialectic relationship between movements and the historical period in which they are embedded, with movements

influenced and shaped by the specific configurations of power they confront. The earlier phase originated in the context of a military dictatorship that, having “arrogated to itself the task of Islamizing the country’s institutions in their entirety,” (Khan 1985, 127) sought to reshape society in ways that systematically rescinded women’s rights and narrowed their spaces. (For a detailed account see Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987) Forced by circumstances to focus entirely on resisting immensely problematic legal changes and policy initiatives, this earlier activism largely ignored international arenas. While some personal connections with feminists and women’s rights groups abroad continued, activists did not use the United Nations system and processes around the women’s conferences (viewed as irrelevant to the issues being faced within the country), nor did they feel able to spare the time to engage more fully with transnational women’s movements. These arenas assumed far greater importance as sites for negotiating demands and inserting feminist demands after the restoration of democratic processes in the 1990s. In the current phase, a combination of factors, not all of them directly linked to women’s activism have helped to sustain the demands for gender equality.

Under the military and quasi-military rule of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988), the women’s movement emerged in direct opposition to state repression. Counter-intuitively, the movement born in opposition managed to put women permanently on the national agenda of diverse political actors, the state apparatus and even amongst its opponents in the politico-religious parties, such as the Jamaat-i-Islami. The intense activism emerged in a period characterized by an almost casual snuffing out of rights, the installation of barbaric punishments, and religiously wrapped rhetoric intended to stifle democratic voices and any form of dissent. All citizens felt the impact but, as the least powerful segments of society, women and minorities became special victims. Concerted efforts sought to push women back within the strict confines of ‘home and hearth’ or *chador aur chardiwari* (veil and four walls of a homestead), rescind their rights, and curtail their liberties. The unprecedented convergence of military and religion in state power had devastating and lasting impact. Social movements retreated and the labor movement had still not recovered from the early and brutal suppression of workers’ strikes. The elected prime minister, deposed by Zia, had been hanged and the sometimes despairing protests (there were dozens of self-immolations) to save Z. A. Bhutto’s life had given way to depression and despondency. All political activities had been banned and there was no parliament with which to engage. Becoming attached to an existing movement, even if it had been desired, was simply not an option.

The actual spark igniting activism was provided in September 1981 by the legal case of a couple who became victims of the soon to be infamous Hudood laws newly promulgated by the military regime as part of its so-called “Islamization.” Amongst other issues, the new provisions covered rape, abduction and other sexual crimes and criminalized all consensual sex outside marriage. The hastily promulgated laws led to incredible injustice as evidenced in this first case. (For details see Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987, Jahangir and Jilani 1990) In a nut shell, Fehmida, a college student, had eloped with the driver of her college bus. Attempting to annul the marriage, her parents registered a case of abduction without realizing that, under the new laws, the absence of any evidence of abduction and insufficient documentary proof of marriage empowered the police to register a case of ‘illicit relations’ (*zina*). A lower court awarded the two maximum sentences: death by stoning for the already married Allah Bux and a hundred lashes of the whip for Fehmida.^{viii} Ironically enough, on reading the news the original intention of the small feminist

collective was not to start a women's movement, but to mobilize as much opposition to the horrifying possibility that someone could be legally stoned to death and whipped a hundred times. That it became a women's movement was due to the response of men who were either dismissive ("this is Pakistan, it'll never happen") or defeatist ("this is martial law and there is nothing you can do about it").^{ix} Angered by the increased harassment in the streets and, for many, a questioning of their status both in workplaces and at home, many women felt they were at a crossroads and had no option but to stand up for their rights regardless of the magnitude of opposition. This was most acutely felt by middle class urban women, especially those from the professional and upper-middle classes who, having gained the most also stood to lose the most from changed circumstances and policies.

The collective, Shirkat Gah – Women's Resource Centre, was a voluntary group formed in 1975 by young professional women for the purpose of raising consciousness and integrating women's rights and development. One of its activities was collecting information on women including through regular press cuttings, hence the attention to the small news item of the Fehmida-Allah Bux case, and consequent outrage. Conscious of the limited impact a ten-member collective was likely to have, Shirkat Gah called a meeting of like-minded women who might be prepared to act collectively against the growing negative repercussions on women of the regime's so-called 'Islamization.' The meeting led to the creation of the Khawateen-Mahaz-e-Amal better known by its English name, Women's Action Forum, as a platform for women and women's organizations to defend women's rights. As a lobby-cum-pressure group, WAF brought together individual women and women's groups across political spectrums on a minimal agenda.^x

During the 1980s, the women's movement was intensely focused on the state apparatus, seeking to counter state proposals to rescind women's legal rights and reduce their presence in public arenas. Every day brought new measures that needed to be responded to: proposals to ban the coverage of women by the media; directives making chadors compulsory for all government students, teachers and employees; new laws that reduced the status of Muslim women and non-Muslim men to legal minors etc. (For details see Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987)

In their internal discussions, activists recognized that bringing about social change required working with women and, reaching out to women at the grassroots. They concluded, however, that the constant barrage of negative laws and policies being promulgated or proposed made it imperative to focus all attention on preventing further retrogressive steps, which meant addressing those in state power. (*WAF Convention Report 1982*) Hence, and paradoxically, despite their rejection of the regime, activists still depended on those in power to achieve success – that is to amend or drop the measures being proposed. Their ability to do so depended on how much nuisance value they could muster on the streets, international embarrassment, and allies within or with access to the corridors of power.

In contrast to movements seeking to expand existing rights and liberties, the 1980s activism was reactive in nature, concerned with resisting the encroachment and erosion of personal freedoms and rights. Significantly, the expanded spaces and freedom enjoyed by at least some women had not emerged as a consequence of social movement activism. Instead, evolutionary processes had slowly enlarged the circles of self-determination for women, particularly for those from the middle and upper middle classes. Activism resulted from the accumulative felt-impact of state

moves to rescind women's rights and to formalize official policies of segregation across the board; it emerged from experiencing increasing harassment in public spaces and, for many, also within their own households. A few of those leading the movement came from the elite as well as the lower middle and working classes, but most were gainfully employed professional middle class women.

Post 1988, the arena for social movement activism shifted from the streets to the courts and other state institutions. Having honed their skills in oppositional tactics through years of street-oriented protest, activists discovered that the new parameters of governance required different skills to lobby effectively for legislative change and improved policies. It no longer sufficed to air outrage, condemn events and highlight the negative impact of proposed or passed legislation and policies. The new circumstances required more nuanced, detailed responses. Beyond analyzing proposed measures as before, the formulation of concrete proposals necessitated an exploration of potential alternatives, including by researching how best to adapt and adopt measures from other contexts. Proposals for action had to be, discussed, amended and re-discussed within the activists and with potential allies as well as being tabled and negotiated with decision-makers; opportunities sought for the latter. By 1995, the new lobbying skills developed became evident in the first government-non-government partnership in preparing the Pakistan report for the 1995 UN Fourth Conference on Women held in Beijing. In the meantime, more systematic outreach to women outside main urban centers locations by women's organizations (a number growing out of WAF) helped to widen the base of the movement and multiply the voices articulating demands. Enhanced interaction and linkages with other social movements led to the adoption of at least part of the women's movement agenda by actors outside the movement, amplifying the voices for women's rights. This is especially visible amongst some groups engaged in labor, the human rights organizations, and the rights-oriented civil society groups in general. These linkages have, in turn helped activists in the women's rights movement develop a more nuanced and deeper understanding of how intersectionality plays out in women's lives and issues. The different nature of activism from the 1980s onwards is illustrated here by two issues: political representation and violence against women.

During the Zia era, political rights were a matter of general concern. For both the women's movement and other anti-martial law activists, a principle demand was the restoration of democracy. Operating under a strict martial law regime, WAF tried to minimize the risks of activism. One method was to consciously lever open the rather narrow wedge separating 'women's issues' from 'politics,' in the perception of both society and the authorities and use the gap to carry out public activism. Women's issues were forwarded as 'social' (therefore not posing any serious threat to power) and thus outside the purview of politics, seen narrowly as tussles over state power.^{xi} Hence, WAF deliberately called itself non-political until 1991, when it amended this to 'politically non-aligned.' Apart from avoiding state repression the label was intended to allay concerns amongst potential women activists about getting involved in 'politics.' Separately, women's rights activists sought to insert women's rights into the agenda of political parties. Direct interaction with political actors was limited. The strategy adopted was to prepare a general agenda on women's rights and to circulate this to all parties. Although relatively little follow up was done to ensure adoption, several parties picked up some of the WAF agenda points. By the early 1990s all political parties had started to address women in their manifestos, including the Jamaat-i-Islami.^{xii}

Post-Martial Law, campaigns around political rights maintained a focus on the inclusion of women's concerns in political party manifestos but a new focus became women's political representation. The initial impetus for the demand to restore women's reserved seats in the national and provincial assemblies was the lapse of the 1973 Constitution's provision for women's seats following the 1988 general elections. Without this measure, the number of women in parliament dropped from 24 in the 1988 assembly (the highest number until then) to two in the following assembly. The need for political representation may have been felt more keenly than elsewhere because frequent military rule has meant the wholesale elimination of women from the ranks of policy decision-makers. The nature and modality for such affirmative action has been hotly debated, leading women activists to engage with political parties more systematically.

The practice of reserving seats for women in legislatures pre-dates independence so it has never been a particularly controversial subject. The means for filling these seats in Pakistan since the 1962 Constitution has been problematic, however. It is assembly members (themselves returned on the basis of popular franchise) who elect the candidates on reserved seats. This modality has been criticized on a number of counts: for de-linking women from the political power base; making women so elected accountable not to a female electorate but to the predominantly male politicians who bring them into office; depriving women of a political training ground. Furthermore, political parties have used the existence of such seats as an excuse not to field women from general seats.

By 1996, the women's movement had run enough campaigns and lobbied sufficiently to have a number of proposed measures included in the National Plan of Action for Women, Pakistan's domestic policy for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action that was launched in 1998. WAF continued to be the main vehicle for articulating a collective demand, but the ground work and organizing was carried out by specific women's groups, such as Shirkat Gah-Women's Resource Centre and Aurat Foundation-Publication and Information Services. Women's organizations undertook research, formulated possible measures and to build a consensus organized discussion forums bringing together diverse actors that included political party representatives and bureaucrats but also other civil society groups and media. WAF and these groups are not mutually exclusive, however. Many women bridge the two and many selected to lobby as WAF. Campaign points were picked up and supported by other human rights oriented civil society groups and actors. Additional suggestions were to amend the Political Party and Public Representation Acts to make it obligatory for parties to field a percentage of female candidates and to have a minimum number of female members. Efforts to increase the number of women in local government were inspired by the example of the Panchayati Raj in neighboring India. The government's decision to introduce a 33 percent quota for women in the new local government system on the basis of direct elections in 2000 was primarily the result of intensive lobbying by women activists within the country. The UN endorsement for a one third female representation in political decision-making forums around the time of the Beijing conference is likely to have encouraged the government to take concrete action, but was not the driving factor. The first round of elections inducted close to 40,000 women in the political process. In 2002 new quotas were introduced in the national and provincial assemblies as well as, for the first time in the senate, responding to the movement's longstanding demands.^{xiii}

Crimes of Violence

When exactly activists took up the issue of domestic violence depends on the definition of domestic violence used. Does the rubric include the violence visited upon family women in the name of honor? What about issues like forced marriages and child marriages? These and many other subjects have been campaign topics; activists in Pakistan have never understood domestic violence as being limited to spousal violence. Early on activists took up individual cases of domestic violence brought to them by the concerned women or their supporters. They visited hospitals and jails to consult with and provide relief and help to survivors of violence on learning of cases through the media. (This part of activism remained largely unpublicized) The activism of the 1980s having been galvanized by the infamous *zina* section of the Hudood Ordinances 1979 related to sexual relations, rape and other criminal acts of a sexual nature, ensured that gender-based violence was on the agenda from the start. From state violence, as corporal punishments, incarceration and the torture of women political workers, activists quickly picked up other facets. Within its first year, WAF organized two seminars on “crimes against women” (first in Karachi then Lahore). WAF newsletters indicate that activists used ‘crimes against women’ in much the same way as ‘violence against women’ or ‘gender-based violence’ is currently used, including systemic and structural violence in addition to interpersonal forms of violence. Seminars, pamphlets, public protests, press conferences and press releases regularly highlighted ‘crimes against women.’ Some campaigns took up specific forms of violence.

For example, in 1989, growing media reports of women burnt in their kitchens as a result of ‘accidents’ resulting from ‘stove bursts’ led to an intensive, albeit short-lived, campaign. Meetings with survivors and/or their relatives confirmed that, as suspected, most were not accidents resulting from faulty technology but intended homicides by husbands and/or in-laws. The demand for an independent inquiry into the production of gas stoves was fulfilled and such reports ceased to appear after a year although it is unclear whether there was a real drop in cases or merely in reporting.

Activists did not use the term ‘violence against women’ until the early 1990s. The change reflects the greater engagement of local activists with the international arena and the adoption of language made popular not just by feminists but, to a large extent, by the UN. The demand for legislation on domestic violence was only articulated in the second phase (demanding progressive legislation from a government bent upon rescinding rights pointless). Post-1990 to widen the support base, women’s organizations and individual ‘gender experts’ from within the movement used their respective institutional bases to raise public concern around domestic violence. Simultaneously they started addressing related aspects of domestic violence such as legal aid, shelters and spreading legal awareness. The acute need for legal awareness was a lesson from the Zia era when women learnt just how quickly rights can be overturned when so few women know about their legal entitlements, far less enjoy these. A diversified institutional base has helped activists to address the myriad facets of domestic violence beyond just naming and protesting its existence, to interventions directly addressing women’s problems.

VAW is an issue that has been widely taken up by women’s groups as well as rights-oriented groups in smaller towns and fairly remote areas. For instance, research into so-called honor crimes has been conducted by a group in remote South Punjab, Sangtani. Others have taken up other aspects: from forcible marriages to police failure to register rape cases. In many instances,

action has followed capacity built through linkages, trainings and support extended by urban-based women's groups. This has bolstered the ability of groups to directly intervene with the police and administration. A few, such as the urban based Behbud-e-Niswan Network (Women's Welfare Network) (BNN) in Faisalabad, have set up alternative dispute resolution forums to directly address issues of gender-based violence in their communities. Additionally, the issue of violence has mobilized the support of others outside the women's rights movement, such as retired members of the judiciary and importantly, doctors.

Nationally, civil society groups and individual experts used their collaboration with the government on the National Report for Beijing in 1995 to highlight different forms of violence and to insert recommended measures in the relevant chapter. In 1996, this was followed up by preparing new guidelines for the government-run shelters for women. Simultaneously, wearing their 'expert' hats activists contributed to the National Plan of Action for Women as the domestic policy for implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. Despite being adopted by the government in power, the new guidelines had little visible impact and remained on the shelves of bureaucrats collecting dust. Meanwhile, constantly dealing with legal cases where the women required shelter and dissatisfied with the jail-like conditions of the government-run shelters, Hina Jilani, an internationally known woman lawyer, set up the first autonomous women's shelter. Subsequently others, including a few former judges galvanized and sensitized by activists to the issue of violence against women including domestic violence, helped to establish additional new shelters.

Separately, organizations with a focus on gender-based violence have researched and highlighted the procedural problems women confront in reporting and registering cases of domestic violence. The more activists engaged with the issue, the more they found new facets requiring attention. With respect to shelters, for instance, it was not enough to have guidelines issued; far greater efforts were required to make these meaningful and be implemented. Another lesson was that state institutions with their ponderous bureaucracy and intricate protocol and departmental divisions cannot merely duplicate the initiatives of unencumbered civil society institutions. To move from policy statement to actual implementation, recommendations need to be grounded in bureaucratic reality rather than activist idealism. Hence, with respect to shelters, it was only in 2007 that the Punjab government was persuaded to notify new more detailed guidelines. Prior to this, activists worked with the government officials to change their perspective on the issue. In 2008, grappling with how to ensure effective implementation a woman's rights organization undertook a series of activities: (a) a rapid assessment of issues confronting staff (b) translating the English language guidelines into the vernacular, (c) persuading the top concerned bureaucrat to issue a directive for all departments to cooperate (d) writing a manual of operations for shelter, and (e) preparing training modules and running orientation sessions for staff, local government officials and local activists. This is a far cry from the press releases and broad policy demands formulated earlier.^{xiv}

Consistent efforts to mobilize women across class and location contributed to a groundswell of public opinion and lobbying policy-makers led women members of the Punjab provincial assembly to table a domestic violence bill in 2002. Vehemently opposed by members of politico-religious parties, the bill got stuck in committees, making little progress. Nevertheless, the

momentum built eventually led to the bill on domestic violence currently under discussion in the national assembly.

One final change in the activism of the 1980s and the present relates to the presence of far more funded institutions than ever before and what this implies for the women's rights movement. While in Pakistan as elsewhere, there is considerable debate about the negative impact of what is termed the NGO-isation of the women's movement, there can be little doubt that the emergence of such groups has helped to sustain the movement in ways that were not possible on the strength of purely voluntary activism, after working hours and on weekends. Growth has been aided by the resources made available through international donor agencies (mainly through the UN agencies, multinational and bi-lateral assistance programs). Financial assistance has had both positive and negative impact. Support has allowed organizations to expand their work beyond the larger cities to smaller towns and to villages across the country, something that had not been possible before. This has created and/or strengthened linkages with existing community based organizations as well as catalyzing new groups, producing a multiplier effect. At the same time, a number of groups have become not only donor-dependent but donor-driven, adapting programs to the latest 'flavor of the month' activity in vogue, be it health initiatives or income generation, legal aid or gender-responsive budgeting, or environmental preservation. Quite apart from the question of whether the groups have the requisite technical expertise for some of these activities, there is a danger of organizations losing their self-determined purpose. The creation of jacks - or janes - of all trades and masters of none is likely to produce a multitude of groups attempting to deliver on too many fronts, therefore doing everything rather superficially instead of intervening in a focused manner. Uniform imposed agendas and the need to deliver 'SMART outputs' (specific, measurable, achievable, reliable and time-bound) undermine the scope for innovation. Movements would rarely, if ever, have achieved change had they restricted themselves to what was 'achievable' and 'measureable' for instance, or been constrained by the fear of failure. The mushroom growth of NGOs is by no means confined to women's groups, and all NGOs confront similar problems. Yet, the sheer intensity of almost a decade of non-stop public interventions by the women's movement in the 1980s combined with the increased focus on 'gender' within the international community as well as the boost to women's concerns provided by the 1995 'Beijing' conference, means that few civil society organizations concerned with promoting rights ignore gender. The real challenge for civil society organizations, even if they are donor supported, is to avoid being donor-driven and to maintain their own agenda and perspective.

Exceptionally, conscious of the potential dangers of the pull of purse strings, WAF as a matter of principle does not accept funding from any sources other than personal donations. Until 2006 when WAF changed its policy, membership included not only individuals but women's organizations, most of which mobilize external financial support for their own activities. From the state these organizations have extended WAF full support. A large part of this support is in kind (e.g. venues for meetings, taking on organizational activities, etc.) and WAF policy is that any organizational financial contributions be made from independently earned monies untied to donors (e.g. through consultancies or savings). The existence of WAF as an independent forum during the Zia years was critical to launching a movement and there is considerable merit in having at least one forum for women's rights independent of donor and government funding. But there are two concerns: first the WAF experience indicates that relentless activism leads to burn-out and second, unsupported activism may not be sustainable over a longer period of time. The

two are not necessarily interconnected. WAF became far less active between 1991 and 2005 for a number of reasons. Burn-out was one. Another was that different political orientations, submerged in the face of an obvious and devastating opponent in the martial law regime, surfaced following the return of democracy. A third was that the sense of urgency had dissipated. Recently, WAF has become more active, encouraged by the opening of new chapters in smaller towns and the expressed desire for more chapters to be opened. Yet funds are bound to remain an issue if for no other reason than because the absence of funds may marginalize those with fewer resources unable to afford the costs of travelling to interact with other women. If activism is to include women outside the small group of well-resourced women, the movement needs a more effective fund-raising strategy. Eventually, the solution may be a mass-based membership group with access to its own funding.

Finally, historic specificity influences which issues a movement addresses, the demands it articulates and the arenas it utilizes for contestation and negotiation as well as who is considered to be an ally and the choice and nature of the relationships forged – or not - with other movements. Movements are shaped not only by the alliances they build, but by the pre-existing networks of communication activists can mobilize rely on. (Freeman 1999) The choices made by any movement are driven by an assessment of the strategic value of possible options, however unconsciously or informally such an assessment may be. In Pakistan, the experiential knowledge of activists in the 1980s, their class and ideological background influenced such decisions, as did the circumstances in which they became active.

Linking with social movements

As a women's rights platform, WAF did seek to engage with and to influence diverse actors but it was not always clear about the terms of such engagement and was fiercely conscious of a need to remain impervious to all external influences that could either detract it from its main purpose or co-opt it into another agenda.^{xv} I briefly review here the women's movement's linkages with the human rights movement, and two particularly important social movements: labor and the peasant movement.

In the 1980s, women's activism preceded other sustained social activism and individuals in the women's rights movement helped develop the human rights movement in the 1980s. Today, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), an independent civil society organization unconnected to the government in any way, is seen to lead the movement. But, when the first meeting was called to launch the HRCP in 1986, women activists had already been waging their battle to defend women's rights for five years and been the most vociferous opposition to Islamization. (Toor 1997) Women activists were therefore present in large numbers at the HRCP inaugural meeting; they were amongst its founder members and continue to figure prominently in its council and all its activities.

A number of issues taken up by WAF were not women-specific. Activists consciously sought to bring together diverse actors around human rights issues. In 1986, WAF formed the Joint Action Committee on the Shariat Ordinance comprising six organizations and WAF.^{xvi} On July 13th 1990, it was WAF rather than the HRCP that called for joint action to challenge the Shariat Bill, recently passed by the Senate and awaiting hearing in the national assembly. (Shaheed &

Hussain) Half of some forty organizations responding to the call then formed the Joint Action Committee for People's Rights (JAC) as a civil society coalition. While still confined to a few urban centers, JAC still functions as an important platform for human rights campaigns and activities that brings together diverse institutional agendas. Sharing a common goal and human rights perspective, some member organizations concentrate on the rights of specific groups such as minorities, women or labor, or area of work such as education or legal assistance. Some engage in development-oriented work and service delivery, other, such as theatre groups, concentrate on raising awareness.

Linkages with the labor movement had two separate drivers. In 1984, a woman trade unionist approached WAF activists for support in dealing with the harassment of female union members by the management of a local pharmaceutical. Union activities rather than gender identity being the cause of conflict, this did not fall within the ambit of what at the time was considered a gender-specific issue. It took years for the issues arising from power differentials due to intersectionality to become an unquestioned principle in the movement. The fact that sexual harassment was part of the management's intimidation may have propelled the decision to extend support for, at a later date, WAF refused to extend similar support when the same women were axed. (Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987) In the meantime, to further the women's agenda within the trade union movement, WAF engaged with trade unions by participating in May Day events and other union gatherings as well as working with female trade unionists. The aim was two-fold: (a) to encourage labor leaders to pay greater attention to the specific problems of women workers who are grossly underrepresented in union activities (Zia and Bari 1999) and (b) to catalyze a broader definition of the labor movement from the 'worker in the workplace' to encompass the workers' entire family for which WAF organized several events for unionists, workers and their entire families.

Initial vacillation and the absence of focused attention have meant that women workers do not always see the 'women's rights movement' as the ally it should be. Moreover, the far greater - if still insufficient - attention paid to women workers by trade unions today is only partly attributable to the women's rights movement. A far more important influence has been the stress placed on women's rights by the ILO. The greater emphasis on women in the international community and closer linkages and involvement of women trade union leaders in the women's movement have combined to catalyze women workers groups, such as the Women Workers Organization and Women Worker's Helpline. Still, collaboration between the women's movement and the labor movement has facilitated an increased focus on women within labor-focused organizations such the Pakistan Institute of Labor Education and Research (PILER). PILER has established centers for women workers, researched the conditions and issues of women workers in collaboration with feminist-oriented organizations^{xvii} and includes gender in their training programs for (mainly male) labor activists. These civil society groups bridge the labor and women's movements. Identifying as part of a broader social movement seems critical however. In contrast, attempts by WAF to forge closer links with professional associations, such as those of telephone operators and nurses produced neither lasting ties nor new initiatives. Momentary linkages occurred usually when women in these professions confronted a specific problem, commonly that of sexual harassment, or when they were actively demanding rights such as better employment. In retrospect, these associations were perhaps too narrowly focused on improving/safeguarding their rights within their particular institutions; they may not have

seen themselves as part of the wider labor movement, and they certainly never joined the women's movement. The dissimilar outcomes of engaging with different types of labor organizations suggest that effective linkages across movements can only be sustained when each considers itself to be part of a movement for social change and there is some commonality of purpose.

A different example relates to inter-linkages with a peasant movement for land rights. In 2001, the peasant movement in Punjab became famous for the women's "thappa brigade;" the thappa being a long wooden stick used by women for washing clothes and threshing harvests.^{xviii} The catalyst for the movement was a 1998 government announcement that the state was considering granting peasants the right of ownership over their homes. It was in the pursuit of this smaller claim that peasants coincidentally discovered that, under the original agreements formulated by the British colonial rulers, they may be actually be entitled to ownership of the lands they had been tilling for generations. They also discovered that the leases for the farms being run by the military and other state institutions such as the Punjab Seed Corporation, had not been renewed, in many cases since before independence as confirmed by the revenue department.^{xix} With the slogan "malkiaat ya maut" (ownership or death), land rights became the movement's main demand. As the movement gained momentum, peasants stopped paying any share of the produce to farm managements and resisted attempts to convert them from tenant farmers (with rights) to contract laborers who could be evicted without notice. In the absence of firm legal grounds, the management resorted to strong-arm tactics supported by the full weight of the state: the police and the paramilitary Rangers. Employing increasing violence, authorities laid siege to the troubled areas, cordoning off entire villages, cutting off water and other supplies from reaching villagers, blocking the sale of any produce, and preventing access to facilities. Unable to reach medical help in time, at least two pregnant women died in Okara. Peasants were arrested, several were shot dead, many others including women were injured.

Women came to the foreground around 2001. Stories differ on when and how women became involved, but the most plausible seems to be that related by an old man who recalls that in one Okara village, upon hearing that two children had been killed, women did not stop to inquire whose children and ran to their rescue, picking up whatever came to hand, including thappas. They seriously damaged the police van and attacked policemen who, unwilling to fight the women, ran away. This initial success galvanized further and more prominent and systematic activism on the part of the women with the full support of male activists (mostly immediate relatives). In different villages 'thappa brigades' were formed and women successfully intervened on several occasions in direct confrontation with the authorities. They prevented state officials from removing wood from their lands, and on two occasions prevented the confiscation of their harvests. The women's "thappa brigade" caught the public imagination so that the thappa metamorphosed from a symbol of women's domesticated roles to a signifier of their activism and, as the only 'weapon' ever wielded by the peasants, a symbol for the entire movement.

The peasant struggle received support from across the spectrum of human rights groups and small parties such as the Pakistan Labour Party and the miniscule but enthusiastic Communist Party. Women's rights groups extended their full support. They visited the affected villages, were part of the delegations interceding with the authorities, and helped provide legal assistance to fight the cases registered against the peasants. They also arranged accommodation and shelter

for women activists of the movement. At the height of the struggle, addressing a gathering of peasants, Asma Jahangir, a well-known human rights leader jokingly told the women that now that they had taken up their thappas as a weapon of self-defense they should use these to correct matters within their homes as well. At the time, the women's response was that this was a joint struggle and not the time to fight with their men who needed their support. This is the only recorded instance of activists from the women's movement bringing up the issue of gender. Otherwise activists simply supported the peasant movement – both women and men – in whatever manner seemed appropriate at the time. Yet, as matters settled into a stalemate with the cessation of police and army action, women activists lost regular contact with the peasant women. More recently a research project seeking to understand women organizing in different spaces - as women-specific organizations, in general organizations, as part of network and as part of social movements – has renewed contact.^{xx}

Women's activism in the peasant movement has altered their lives. At the very least it has changed women's self-perceptions. (Mumtaz and Mumtaz 2009) The exhilaration of successfully confronting the police and Rangers, evident in interviews, has left women with new-found self-confidence. Attesting to this greater self-assurance, women have broken their previous silence around the sexual harassment they confronted during the struggle. Importantly, especially in those areas where confrontation was the most intense, women report a reduction in domestic violence. And, of course the families as a whole are financially far better off since without sharecropping, they now benefit from the sale of all their produce. In Okara, peasant women have started new options for their daughters, by sending them to nursing schools and other technical institutions that will not bind their livelihood options to an access to land. New found self-confidence has enabled a number of women to re-negotiate the parameters of their family lives and spousal relations, and some boast of telling their husbands wanting to create trouble, to leave the home, or “go get divorced if you want to.” Nevertheless, women still do not want to claim their right of inheritance from the family. They have however, recently formed a Women Peasant Association with the aim of trying to access the government scheme for land to women.

It is unlikely that these changed circumstances would have come about had so many groups, including women's rights organizations not extended unqualified support. From today's perspective, however, perhaps the most important lesson to be drawn from this experience is that while instant, largely spontaneous, solidarity actions by the women's movement with and for women involved in different struggles is necessary and welcome, it is far from sufficient. If the women's movement is to widen its base in a sustainable manner, activists in the women's rights movement need to build and maintain consistent and long-term linkages. While helping to ensure more appropriate and women-responsive policies and laws is necessary, equal attention and energies need to be devoted to supporting women's access to these. To build an effective alliance with women in other social movements, the women's right movement needs to integrate their concerns squarely within the women's agenda. Economic rights have not been addressed sufficiently or adequately by the women's movement in Pakistan. In the 1980s, the movement addressed women's economic rights only as generic concerns. Individual activists did take up economic issues in their capacity of development or gender 'experts' with the Women's Division of the Cabinet,^{xxi} and UN bodies, especially the ILO, but individual actions did not translate into a concrete agenda for change within the women's movement.

The Framework for Rights and Identity

Literature distinguishes between movements whose principle agenda is redistributive demands (greater rights and benefits) – also called instrumental - from those in which the formation or preservation of a collective identity (or ‘recognition’ as popularized by Nancy Fraser) is paramount. Although specific movements may place greater emphasis on one or the other aspect, I would agree with the contention that most have dual faces “which dialectally combine demands with an expressive dimension.”(Stammers 1998) For example, demands for quotas in jobs and in political processes are often made on the basis of creating, strengthening or redefining a collective identity (e.g. in movement for regional autonomy in Pakistan or the Dalit movement in India.) In Pakistan today, the relative lack of expressive dimensions within the women’s movement I believe poses a challenge in view of the concentrated attention on this aspect of movement building so very visible in movements of political Islamists.

In the 1980s the women’s rights movement did engage with identity but did so in resistance to the new parameters for ‘womanhood’ being aggressively promoted by the military regime and its politico-religious allies in the cabinet. Using a hegemonic “Islamization” and “Islamizing” discourse (Toor 1997) backed by brute military force, the regime sought to eliminate the diversified norms adopted by the upper to middle classes. Instead it proposed a straight-jacketed Pakistani womanhood defined, amongst other things, by new dress codes and stricter segregation. Notions of the good ‘Muslim/Islamic’ and occasionally ‘Eastern woman’ were forwarded and frequently counter-posed to professionally working women. This reconceptualized woman was aggressively promoted by the state through its monopoly over electronic media, but equally through directives and at state functions where, for example, women were regularly presented chadors as gifts. State discourse and tactics found resonance amongst conservative and traditional elements within society who replicated and amplified the discourse and message both. In a sense, the very defiance of such impositions can be taken as defining the expressive dimension of the movement in the 1980s. The Pakistan experience thus suggests that when movements are concerned with defending rights and resisting change, their engagement with identity is likely to be one of defending expressive dimensions rather than seeking to institute new signifiers in the daily interpretation of identity.

The preservation and defense of identity should not be confused with the promotion of identity by contemporary movements defined as ‘Islamists’ most obviously through the imposition of various forms of dress code and the veil. These are not a preservation of tradition; the nature of the veil bears little to no connection with traditional forms of dress. The aggressive promotion of new forms of outward appearances and social behavior must be seen as an integral part of these new movements that signify belonging. No similar obvious signifiers mark the collective identity of women’s rights activists. Moreover, even if this focus on identity stems from the absence of any coherence of a political economy agenda, as insightfully suggested by Samir Amin,^{xxii} these expressive dimensions appeal to, make use of and find resonance with what people view as their own culture. No such resonance exists for human rights as a framework for gender equality.

Between 1981 and 1991, WAF selectively used an Islamic framework for countering measures proposed in the name of Islam. The use of the Islamic framework, always a contentious issue within WAF, (See Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987) was propelled by an understanding generated by the circumstances that the human rights framework was not sufficient to galvanize popular

support against the regime's propositions and ordinances. People, especially potential women activists required reassurance that they were not being asked to speak out against their religion, only against the proposed measures of a fallible and dictatorial regime. While "buying into the terms of the debate set by the Islamicists" may have affirmed the Islamicists' hegemony,(Toor 1997, 113) it is also true that by linking up with other anti-martial law groups and those opposed to the imposition of supposedly religious laws, WAF successfully "built up an effective counter-hegemony." (Toor 1997, 121-122) At its 1991 Convention WAF unequivocally declared it was secular. Subsequently referencing Islam was dropped, and a "compromised citizenship" became the preferred framework. (Jamal 2005) Human rights and constitutional provisions always were a reference point. The early formulation of the 'crimes against women' terminology carries an implicit demand that such acts be criminalized and prosecuted by the state. The difference lay in the exclusivity of this as the reference point.

The use of the human rights framework may be inadequate, however. The human rights framework is located squarely within the parameters of nation-states and presumes that the state as the principle guarantor of rights has, or can be persuaded to have, the best interests of all its citizens at heart. The fallacy of this assumption is patently obvious in Pakistan's history. When the state is either one of or *the* main adversary, such presumptions are counter-productive.

Additionally, adopting the human rights framework tends to focus the attention of activists on achieving citizens' rights as entitlements granted by the state, propelling them to devote maximum energies and resources to "upward rather than downward linkages." (Basu 2005a) Equally, although this is starting to change, the human rights framework tends to concentrate on the entitlements of individual citizens, ignoring underlying equations of power and attendant structures that need to be addressed and, in the case of women, be fundamentally altered. Institutions adopting a human rights framework have a propensity to address the state in ways that takes activism away from changing ground realities through direct actions. Finally, the human rights framework seems inadequate as a response to the immense challenges being posed by non-state actors. This includes militarized groups that seem to be challenging the legitimacy of the nation-state as a framework altogether, such as the fanatical pan-Islamicists, but equally posed by transnational corporations that do not fit and are therefore not accountable within the current governance structures predicated on nation-states, including all international institutions.

This said, I do not mean to suggest that the human rights discourse or framework be discarded. Human rights still provide a counterpoint, however inadequate, to the use of culture and religion to justify the structures of patriarchy. What I am suggesting is that the women's movement needs to consider more strategic ways of developing the expressive dimensions of its activities, by appropriating and refashioning the cultural contexts in which they operate. This, I believe, is necessary to counter the incursions of the religious right. The expressive dimensions need not be religious. While rights activists need to spell out more concretely their political economy, to use Amin's language, they must simultaneously seek to ground themselves in and reorient local culture. That this may be difficult does not make it any less important.

Conclusion

I have argued that there is a case to be made for distinguishing a general women's movement from a women's rights movement in order to take into account the contributions of individuals who may be active but may not, as such, be activists of the women's movement. I have proposed that, far from being peripheral, ill-defined grey areas of activism within a larger more fluid 'women's movement' are important contributors to the growth and sustainability of the women's rights movement that buttress the more focused 'women's rights movement'. Furthermore, overlaps and intersections between movements are vital for any movement's development in expanding the number of actors taking forward a movement's agenda, and for creating the multiplier effect necessary to effectuate desired social change. Contentious and vexatious though they may be linkages with other social movements are critical for women's movements (as any other) for they facilitate and deepen understanding and promote a consciousness amongst activists about the complex interconnections of people's lives. For this to happen, women's rights activists need to make the immediate concerns of differently situated women integral components of the women's agenda. The Pakistan experience suggests, however, that a common understanding and commitment to social change on the part of those seeking alliances is a precondition to effective relationships across movements. Without such a shared orientation, bridging efforts are unlikely to amount to much. A further area for investigation and action is how to build effective bridges and overcome the presence of contentiously engaged partners from within a same movement.

Different historical moments give rise to different sets of issues, influencing the movement, its priorities and the nature of activism. In Pakistan this is reflected in the two periods of activism, one more isolated and inwardly looking, the other with more visible international dimensions and influence. Increased support (in terms of finance as well as arenas and international consensus building on issues) has assisted the institutionalization of women's demands but has also brought its own challenges of how to remain politically and financially independent.

Finally I believe there is a need to examine the interweaving of culture, economics and the political domain more closely. In this, the role of the cultural expressive dimensions of movements as both academic research and activism deserve more attention. The expressive dimensions of daily acts as signifiers of belonging and commitment are critical aspects of those movements associated with essentialist - and essentializing - politics espoused by religious right movements (such as political Islamists) and other identity-based exclusionary initiatives. Such movements are largely opposed to equality on the basis of gender and other basis of collective identity. Seeking to build political constituencies on the basis of self-serving selective use of religious, ethnic or other collectivity, these movements deliberately focus on cultural expressions of identity to reshape the social and cultural arenas as 'recognition markers' of belonging. (For example, the daily donning of a particular form of the veil and dress, communal prayer, forms of speech etc.) By comparison, the cultural dimensions of the pluralism favored by the Pakistan women's rights movement and other human rights groups is weak and incidental – often seemingly delinked from the cultural roots of the societies they operate in. The rights-based movements need to develop a more robust cultural expressive signifiers of change and belonging to resist and provide a counterpoint to movements of the religious right. The human rights framework needs to be complemented by a more effective use of the creative arts combined with retrieving historical and cultural traditions that resonant with people.

While the human rights framework is an important and necessary counter weight to hegemonic discourses of tradition and religion, without an indigenous cultural base, it may simply be insufficient to meet the challenges since changing gender relations are deeply embedded in cultural notions of people's perceptions of self and others. Antonio Gramsci's argument with reference to class struggle bears consideration. This is that the class (or alliance of classes) that emerge in dominant or 'hegemonic' position "will always attempt to secure a hegemonic position by weaving its own cultural outlook deep into the social fabric."^{xxiii} This is just as true with respect to gendered relations of power which permeate and are reproduced in all aspects of social interaction, and are justified by and internalized as the given culture. Ultimately, rights can only be enjoyed if and when they have become an integral part of people's culture, however this is defined.

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WAF Archives at Shirkat Gah – Women’s Resource Centre, Lahore.

- ⁱ This paper draws on work, discussions and papers of the research consortium, *Women's Empowerment in Muslim Contexts: Gender poverty and democratization from the inside out* led by the Southeast Asia Research Centre of City University. See www.wemc.hk.com
- ⁱⁱ Vivienne Wee and Farida Shaheed, "Indigenous feminisms: resistance to culturally embedded patriarchies" (Paper presented at the Conference on 'Reclaiming Feminism: Gender and Neo-liberalism', 9-10 July 2007, Brighton, Sussex, organised by the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, with the University of London, Birbeck.) This section draws upon feedback and continued discussions with Vivienne Wee.
- ⁱⁱⁱ See for example Sarah Marie Blizzard, "*Women's Roles in the 1994 Rwanda Genocide and the Empowerment of Women in the Aftermath*"; and Carrie Sperling: *Mother of atrocities: Pauline Nyiramasuhuko's role in the Rwandan genocide*.
- ^{iv} Negative stereotyping is neither new nor unique to Pakistan, South Asia or Third World countries. (See for example Freeman 1999) Today this may be somewhat less of an issue in the West, but calling oneself a feminist tends to assume more overtly political dimensions in contexts such as South Asia. (Forbes 2003)
- ^v "Sex alone" is the term qualifying the constitutional provision prohibiting gender discrimination which is now contested by women's rights and more general human rights activists as inadequate.
- ^{vi} The term would thus include more conservative women's groups demands for better conditions and opportunities for women, including those articulating such demands from within a religious framework, but it would exclude those opposed to women's equality in principle.
- ^{vii} Personal communication by Aban Marker, founder member of Shirkat Gah - Women's Resource Centre, if not the first feminist women's organization, certainly one of the very first, formed in 1974.
- ^{viii} The case was later overturned. The maximum punishments have never been implemented in Pakistan.
- ^{ix} The collective was Shirkat Gah – Women's Resource Centre of which I have been a long-standing member. These were the responses we all seemed to have received when we approached men with the idea that we had to do something to prevent this sentence from being executed. Shirkat Gah then called the first meeting that led to the creation of the Women's Action Forum as a platform for women and women's organizations to oppose the actions of the regime.
- ^x To galvanize the broadest possible consensus WAF allowed groups to participate or dissociate from specific actions.
- ^{xi} In 1983 the first women's demonstration held in Lahore was one of the first under Martial Law. The police action: tear-gassing, baton charging and police lock up gave the regime very bad international press. The women were released without being charged and, subsequently, the administration was careful when women publicly protested for women's rights. When the same women joined a call for the restoration of democracy, they were arrested charged and jailed for two weeks.
- ^{xii} WAF also wrote and circulated "position papers" on various aspects and produced 'women's agendas' before general elections and other major events such as the UN conferences on Human Rights in 1993 and Conference on Women in 1995.
- ^{xiii} Out of a total of 342 seats in the National assembly, 60 seats were reserved for women and ten for minorities. These seats were to be allocated on the basis of proportional representation to parties bagging at least five per cent of the total general seats. In the Provincial Assemblies out of the full 371 seat Punjab Assembly, 66 were reserved for women and eight for minorities, in the 168 seat Sindh Assembly, 29 for women and nine for minorities, in the 124 seat N. W. F. P. Assembly, 22 for women and three for minorities, and the 65 seat Baluchistan Assembly, 11 for women and three for minorities.
- ^{xiv} These current activities are being carried out by Shirkat Gah as part of its work in the five-year action research *Women's Empowerment in Muslim Contexts: gender, poverty and democratization from the inside out* supported by the UK development agency, DFID. This work takes forward earlier Shirkat Gah work and other aspects of shelters-related work are being addressed by Shirkat Gah's main Women's Empowerment and Social Justice Programme. The GTZ development agency has been the catalyst for change with the Department of Social Welfare the department responsible for shelters. *Survey Report: issues requiring Guidance/Instructions Dar - ul - Amans, Punjab*, March-April, 2008, prepared by Khalida Ahson for the Shirkat Gah WEMC project
- ^{xv} For a more complete discussion see Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed, *Two Steps Forward, One Step Back? Women of Pakistan*, Chapter 9 "Questions for the Future."
- ^{xvi} The six organisations were: Democratic Women's Association, Punjab Women Lawyers, Shirkat Gah, Simorgh ASR, and Aurat Foundation
- ^{xvii} Some like the Social Development Policy Institute is not a women's organization but has feminists on its staff.
- ^{xviii} This section draws upon research conducted by Fareha Arshad & Mohammad Ahmed the Punjab team of Shirkat Gah-WEMC project, still under way and Fareha Ahsan's paper "Women in the Movement (AMP) A Question of Sustainable Empowerment, presented at the WEMC Shirkat Gah Seminar, December 2008, Lahore.
- ^{xix} For details see Khawar Mumtaz & Samiya K. Mumtaz *Women's Participation in the Punjab Peasant Movement: From Community rights to women's rights?* forthcoming
- ^{xx} Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Centre is undertaking part of the Pakistan component of the multi-country *Women's Empowerment in Muslim Contexts: gender, poverty and democratization from the inside out* - a five year action research consortium supported by the UK development agency, DFID.
- ^{xxi} A separate government machinery for women was recommended by the 1976 Commission on Women and all the preparation had been done under the government of Z. A. Bhutto, although it came into existence after Zia's coup, in 1978.

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Antonio Gramsci cited in Sadia Toor op. cit. from *An Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935*.