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ΠΑΡΟΥΣΙΑΣΗ ΤΗΣ ΕΚΘΕΣΗΣ

'Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World'

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I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to the organizers of this event—especially Maria Stratigaki, the scientific director of the Gender Studies in the Political and Social Sciences Programme at Panteion University—for the invitation to UNRISD (and myself) to present our research findings and join you in a discussion on the theme of gender equality.

Introductory remarks

Anniversaries are often occasions for reflecting on the distance travelled, and ten years after the Beijing Conference seemed like a good moment to be thinking about what has been achieved *and on how the policy environment has changed* in the period since the high point of the global women's movement.

It is difficult to find confident assertions of *progress* in these difficult and sceptical times. It is widely accepted, in both academic and policy circles, that what counts as *progress* is often contested. What counts as progress *for women* has become an especially disputed and politicised question these days. Nonetheless there is broad consensus that the standard indicators of income and well-being provide some guidance for policy purposes even if a more thorough assessment will require more than what they alone can provide.

The UNRISD Report shakes the convenient belief – widely shared in development circles – that with time, economic development and modernity will bring about gender equality. The report shows a different and much more complex picture: gender equality has advanced in some dimensions (e.g. primary education, fertility reduction) though not in all countries, while at the same time, some gender hierarchies and inequalities have been maintained and even intensified in other contexts—for example the problem with excess mortality of females in India and China; the persistence of gender gaps in wages across the world; the severe problems of violence against women in both developed and developing countries, and in both "peace time" as well as in contexts of armed conflict; the commodification of women's bodies through modern mass media and so on and so forth.

There is no automatic link between "development" and gender equality. On the contrary, the evidence presented by the report reveals gender inequality to be a persistent feature of the modern world, even though some of the modalities through which it is expressed have undergone change in recent times.

Regarding economic growth in the context of what is called "globalization", we argue that while economic growth provides the necessary conditions for escaping poverty, improving standards of living and generating resources for redistributive policies, it is not sufficient for gender equality. Moreover, the present model for economic growth, the "neo-liberal" model, has not performed very well on a range of criteria: it has reduced inflation (one positive outcome), but this has been at the cost of slow growth in many parts of the world (especially in many low-income countries) and stagnant employment, as well as increasing inequalities and marginalization. The report further argues that in a world in which the economic policy model tends to deepen social and economic inequalities and reinforce marginalization; in which redistribution has no place; and in which governments compromise the interest of their citizens to accommodate global forces – is not going to be a world that secures gender equality.

Rather than going through all twelve "areas of concern" identified by the Beijing Platform for Action, the UNRISD report brings many of these "areas of concern" together under four broad thematic areas that capture some of the most pressing policy questions of the day:

STRUCTURE OF REPORT

(1) **macroeconomics, well-being and gender equality**;
(2) **women, work and social policy**;
(3) **women in politics and public life**;
(4) **gender, armed conflict and the search for peace**.

I would like to begin with the more positive findings of the Report, before tackling the less up-beat ones and what they imply for policy … so the presentation will have a different structure from the report.

OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION

(1) Women in Public Office: The rising tide

One resolution in the Beijing Platform for Action to have enjoyed marked, though uneven, progress over the past decade is that calling for women's greater access to public office.

Women's presence in national parliaments (1987 to 2004)

There has been substantial experimentation with a range of affirmative action measures to enhance women's chances of winning in elections. This has been in response to the recognition that male bias in electoral systems and public institutions serves to undermine women's electoral prospects.

In addition, around the world, women's groups have lobbied for parity in public office and have pressed women politicians and their male colleagues to respond to a 'women's manifesto' once in office. As a result, political parties have adopted voluntary quotas of women candidates for election, and in some countries the state has reserved seats for women parliaments.

However, even though the average proportion of women in national assemblies almost doubled between 1995 and 2005 at an aggregate level, there is still a very long way to go before anything resembling parity can be reached: <u>only 16% of national political representatives are now women.</u>

BUT in 16 countries women have managed to reach or even exceed a threshold of 30% of national assemblies – a public presence that is considered to constitute a 'critical mass' capable of having a significant influence on public policy. These include, as one would expect, several Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Iceland), as well as some European countries one would not expect (Austria, Germany), and interestingly also a number of countries from Africa (Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa) and Latin America (Argentina, Costa Rica).

These 16 countries, and others in which numbers of women in office have increased – show that deliberate measures are required to overcome the hostility of political parties to front women candidates. These include changes in electoral systems -- closed-list PR systems work the best for women provided that political parties adopt quotas for women.

But there are also now increasing concerns about how to build women's impact on decision-making: <u>how to turn a feminine presence into a feminist one</u>. In a conference that UNRISD co-organized with the African Gender Institute in South Africa in February 2006, many participants (both academics and activists) voiced disappointment with women's presence in power structures given their failure to bring a gender justice agenda into state policies and programmes. The South African political scientist, Shireen Hassim, makes a useful distinction between "thin" and "thick" notions of participation when assessing women's participation in democratic processes – and argues that at least in South Africa women's impressive numerical presence has yet to bring about substantive economic empowerment (thin participation).

There are a range of known constraints on the chances that gender-equality agendas will be advanced in public office by women. These include:

CONSTRAINTS ON WOMEN IN PUBLIC OFFICE

- the institutional leadership positions to which women are elected or appointed once in office;

- the standing committees for debating legislation or reviewing government policy to which women legislators are assigned;
- the responsiveness of political parties to gender-equity concerns;
- the relationship between women and men politicians and the women's movement;
- the capacity of public institutions to implement policies or to regulate private providers so that they respect national gender-equity goals;
- the existence of an effective institutional base for promoting gender equity in government planning within the bureaucracy – i.e. gendered 'national machinery', a Women's Ministry, equal opportunities bureau, or office of the status of women;
- the incapacity of representative bodies (e.g. Parliaments) in many developing countries to shape policies, especially economic policies, when these policies are being designed by forces and institutions outside the national arena (e.g. IMF, WB, WTO)

Many of these problems are dealt with in detail in the UNRISD report.

Without the extended political apprenticeship that male leaders often receive, it is difficult for women to develop the political skills in constituency-building, alliance-forming, debate, tolerance of opposition, and policy-development that are needed to advance what can be difficult and counter-cultural agendas of women's rights. And if their political apprenticeship is a matter of exploiting family connections, as opposed to working with the women's movement, it is unrealistic to expect them to front a gender-equality-based policy platform once in office.

Similarly if access to office is via direct presidential or ruling party patronage, as is the system in countries where reserved seats in Parliament are filled by the dominant party, women's political impact may be blunted by the fact that the institutions for selection to office weed out those with a transformative perspective on women's rights.

Turning a female presence into policy change

It is early days in seeing major impacts on policies—as newcomers to public office women representatives need time and much support from women's movements and NGOs. In spite of the many obstacles to women's political effectiveness as gender-equity advocates in public office, and in spite of serious divergences of interests between women, there is evidence that greater numbers of women in politics and public decision-making does support gender-sensitivity in public policy.

In South Africa, despite all the subsequent disappointments noted earlier, women in Parliament did manage (in the mid-1990s) to push through important legislation on gender violence and reproductive rights. In Rwanda, where over 48% of parliamentarians are women, women in office are advancing post-conflict recovery efforts that aim to support women who suffered gender-based violence during the 1994 genocide.

In local government, in spite of the problems of women acting as proxies for husbands, or the problems of the intensity of patriarchal resistance at local levels, there is growing evidence from countries with substantial numbers of women in local office, India being a good example, that there is a shift in local perceptions of what are significant priorities for local spending.

But there are also concerns that the means that women are using for reaching political office are likely to influence their willingness to promote proposals for gender equality once in office. In other words: numbers matter, but it is how they got there that really counts. For example, the PR system which works best for getting women elected, tends to breed loyalty to party rather than a constituency, and at its worse can leave women representatives beholden to party bosses.

The UNRISD report also notes that one area that has not seen improvement is women's ability to influence macroeconomic policies. Ironically the advances in women's political visibility seem to have coincided with a diminished opportunity for parliaments in particular to influence macroeconomic policy, especially in countries that confront serious balance of payment difficulties (concerns about technocratic policymaking and how this is weakening democracy).

(2) **Women and Conflict: Two steps forward, one step back? An Ambivalent Record on Gender Justice**

The increased presence of women in formal political institutions and elected assemblies is thus one area where some advances have occurred.

Another area of progress has been the increasing attention paid to gender-based violence, especially in the international legal framework governing armed conflict. This is the area covered in Section Four of the UNRISD report. I will keep my comments rather brief and want to draw attention to the contradictory picture that is emerging

with on the one hand "progress" at the level of policy rhetoric and international legal precedents about which we hear a lot, versus the dismal realities on the ground.

The massive scale of gender-based crimes and their systematic use as weapons of war in former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda, and feminist advocacy around these issues, as you very well know, did prompt the international community into action. Both International Criminal Tribunals for Yugoslavia (ICTY) and Rwanda (ICTR) were successful in establishing historic legal precedents and breaking new legal ground by prosecuting for the first time perpetrators of violence against women in wartime. Gender-based crimes are now also codified in humanitarian law in the International Criminal Court Statute.

Yet despite such progress, the majority of crimes against women during wartime, as in "peacetime", still go unpunished, and women survivors of such abuse are still stigmatized to a far greater degree than male survivors of human rights abuses.

I would like to quote at length for you from a paper written by the feminist lawyer Binaifer Nowrojee for UNRISD (published as OP10) about the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Ten years after the genocide, what is the record of the ICTR?

ICTR

As of May 2004, the ICTR had handed down 21 judgements: 18 convictions and 3 acquittals. This represents judgements on one-third of the individuals in custody. <u>Only two cases have resulted in rape convictions.</u> No rape charges were even brought by the Prosecutor's Office in 70 per cent of those adjudicated cases. In the 30 per cent that included rape charges, only 10 per cent were found guilty for their role in the widespread sexual violence. …. <u>In real numbers, that means only two defendants have specifically been held responsible for their role in sexual violence crimes (a third conviction was reversed on appeal), despite the tens of thousands of rapes committed during the genocide.</u>

What do Rwandan rape survivors say?

"Even as they continue to recognize the value and potential of an international court set up to deliver justice to them, the overwhelming sentiments expressed by them are a burning anger, deep frustration, dashed hopes, indignation and even resignation.

Virtually without exception, they articulate what they see as not only the failure of this court to deny them justice, but its tendency to exacerbate the suffering they continue to experience. Their concerns can be divided roughly into two related, but different, aspects: jurisprudence and justice. When asked what they want from the international tribunal, Rwandan women above all mention the law: they say that they are looking for public acknowledegment of the crimes committed against them. They want the record to show that they were subjected to horrific sexual violence at the hands of those who instigated and carried out the genocide. They also talk about the process of justice. They want tribunal staff to ensure a legal process that treats rape survivors with the utmost respect and care at all stages of the process. They want information and agency in order to understand the process and to make fully informed decisions on whether to testify and what to expect. They want to be notified of developments before and after they testify. They want an enabling environment in the courtroom when they come forward as witnesses, where they will not be humiliated unnecessarily when describing their rapes, harangued for days on the stand in cross-examination, or … subjected to laughter from the judges while describing what happened to them. Following testimony, they want safety and protection from reprisal, exposure or stigma. Since many of these rape victims have now contracted HIV/AIDS, they want access to the same AIDS medications that the tribunal currently provides to the defendants in custody.

Likewise, women's roles in working to end conflicts are increasingly celebrated, and women participants in postwar peace-building have been thrust into unprecedented prominence by certain international organizations. Yet for all this visibility, women often remain marginal as a group or as individuals in peace negotiations, and in consultations about post-war strategies.

(3) Women, Work and Social Policy: An Ambivalent Record

One of the themes that we emphasize throughout this report—is the increasing visibility of women in the public sphere. Undoubtedly one manifestation of this is at the level of the "visible" paid economy. More women have entered the labour market – formally and informally – and are earning an income. This means (in most cases) greater mobility and (in some cases) greater economic independence. And also note that this is happening across

a wide range of regions and countries – although there are also some notable exceptions (see Central and Eastern Europe).

Female economic activity rates, regional averages (1980-latest year available)

But women continue to be concentrated in jobs with low pay and authority levels, placing limits on their overall access to income, status and power. Although pay differentials between women and men have narrowed, they are still considerable, and in some countries they reach 50% or more (look at gender wage gaps in Hong Kong and Korea!!).

Female to male manufacturing wage ratios (in percentages) for selected countries (1990-1999)

This kind of gender segmentation in labour markets seems to be a near-universal feature of economic life. Even in highly egalitarian societies such as Sweden, where the main employer of women is the state/municipalities and where the social democratic welfare states offer women a "family friendly" workplace, the result has been a "female ghetto" of jobs with low compensation in a sex-segregated care sector (as paid employees doing care work).

For many developing countries, while women's access to paid work has increased over the past two decades, the terms and conditions of much of the work on offer have deteriorated. The growth of informal work across the world, along with the casualization of formal sector employment, has allowed employers to lower labour costs and to sidestep social security obligations and labour laws. For women (and men) workers the outcome has been an increasing precariousness of jobs, and greater insecurity of livelihoods. Recent ILO data suggest that informal work tends to be a larger source of employment for women than men in all developing regions (except North Africa).

The forces that have pushed women into the work force over the past two decades have been diverse. There is the push element: poverty and the commodification of the economy (the fact that you have to pay for health, for education, that you have to buy so much of your food even if you are a farmer etc) imply a greater need for cash income. This is changing the coping strategies of households and communities in a multitude of ways. As households "scramble for cash" it becomes increasingly necessary for all household members—whether female or male, young or old—to take on paid work. In this context people have talk about the "distress sale of labour", i.e. women seeking paid employment – not driven by a wish for empowerment, but rather by desperation (in LA high rates of male unemployment).

At the same time, increasing levels of female education, later marriages, and changing aspirations and life styles, are also combining to erode the pillars of patriarchy. Hence access to a job and an independent source of income, no matter how fragile and short-lived and how low the pay, has been used by many women to postpone marriage, to have a greater say in household decision-making, or to leave relationships that are abusive and violent.

However, such empowering experiences notwithstanding we cannot ignore the constraints within which women workers are working and living, and the ways in which current policies are exacerbating those constraints. Jobs that are dead-end, that hardly pay a living wage, and that cause severe "burnout" are abusive and in conflict with human rights conventions. In particular – we must always think about what is happening when women's time in paid work is increasing. What is happening to their time for unpaid care work, for rest, for self-care and for leisure? Are there any viable options for reducing the burden of such a double load – such as accessible and affordable care services for young children, sick people, and the elderly? Are men taking on a greater share of the unpaid care work? Or do women have to rely on their young daughters for help? There are reasons for caution in equating women's paid work with empowerment.

DIVISION OF PAID AND UNPAID WORK IN OECD COUNTRIES BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN

Work and Social Policy

Now I would like to turn to the second theme: gender and social policy.

So the past two decades have seen an increasing commodification of labour, and especially of female labour, coinciding with severe insecurity of working people.

Historically, social movements from below and/or the state from above have promoted measures to reduce insecurities, to limit or soften exploitation—this was the basis of the social protection that was extended to the working class, typically men, in many parts of the world.

Are we seeing today a similar kind of response to rising insecurities? What kind of response is this?

Judging by what development agencies say, there is a perceptible shift.

By the end of the 1990s a consensus seemed to be emerging on the importance of social protection and social policy. However, as many people have said and as we try to show in the Report, behind the common vocabulary about the importance of "social protection", different models of social policy continue to vie for attention and some models are backed by much more powerful interests and coalitions than others.

The World Bank advocates a model of social policy where the state is only expected to step in and provide "safety nets" when the private sector fails --- the assumption being that markets can deliver security for those who can afford them, and for those who fall through, the afterthought is that there is always the option of "targeted" public provision or "safety nets" as they are often called.

There have been concerted moves towards the strengthening of this market-based individualized system of entitlements to health and social security. There are many criticisms of this model, about which a lot has been said, but its gender biases are not always recognized. However, as the evidence from Health Sector Reforms and pension privatization shows, the market-oriented reforms are particularly harmful for women (not all women of course) because they penalize those with low incomes, those whose contributions are unpaid (this applies to all those women who spend part of their lives doing unpaid care work) and those who work on the periphery of the formal economy (in the so-called informal economy where again, as we have seen, women tend to cluster). There is very little space for redistribution and solidarity in this model: and I would strongly argue that significant numbers of women will have a lot to lose from a system of social provisioning that rules out or weakens redistribution.

But there has also been considerable resistance to this model, and there have also been many innovative attempts in recent years to extend social protection to women and men in the informal economy, and to provide entitlements (to a pension or to health care) as a right (referred to in Chapter 8). We have seen the emergence of trade unions and organizations of informal women workers that are being heard in policy circles, at least in some contexts. It is important therefore to watch the development in this area, as it is one where many actors are involved and many new ideas are being taken up and tried.

(4) Economic liberalization: A barrier to gender equality?
There may be debate on social policy these days, but the macroeconomic model seems to be beyond discussion. Evidence from the PRSP process seems to show that the macroeconomic policy area is not even on the agenda for "consultations with civil society".

In reflecting on the achievements of the 1990s, the UNRISD Report pays particular attention to the contribution that development policy can make in diminishing women's subordination. It has suggested that among the reasons for the persisting gender inequalities has been the prevailing policy orthodoxy (often referred to as neo-liberalism or the "Washington Consensus") with its single-minded emphasis on fiscal restraint and balanced budgets.

The UNRISD report summarizes the problems that we find in the world, in countries that are dominated by neo-liberal macroeconomics. It acknowledges the gains of that approach which is the decline of inflation, but it stresses that now that inflation is conquered there is a need to move on to other objectives and other problems; the problems of rising unemployment, and the need to tackle the fiscal squeeze—the pressures that globalization puts on governments not to raise adequate amounts of revenue to fund the kind of programmes that are needed to create social justice. It underlines the need to address the fact that in many regions around the world there is increasing poverty, increasing numbers of people below the poverty line, and the need to tackle the problem that in those countries which have implemented neo-liberal macroeconomic policies growth rates have been anemic and there has been slower progress in improvements in health and education. It emphasizes the need to tackle the problem of increasing income inequalities both within countries and between them.

Growth rates

The liberalization of international capital flows has resulted in rising financial and economic **volatility**, and more frequent and severe financial crises with well-known detrimental impacts on people's well-being, women's labour market position (evident in East Asia), and their unpaid care burdens.

Many countries have been subject to fiscal squeeze, resulting from reductions in trade-related taxes and from declining tax rates on capital. These have often contributed to a **reduction in government expenditures** as a share of GDP. In several instances, expenditure cuts have been concentrated in capital expenditures affecting infrastructure (which is critical for the care economy managed by women), and in others, expenditures on health, education, welfare and social safety nets have been eroded.

In sum, the predicted benefits of higher economic growth and poverty reduction have not materialized, and precisely at a time when effective social protection is most needed, the capacity of governments to provide public services and social protection has been widely eroded. With weak public health and welfare programmes, fragile

infrastructure and thin social protection mechanisms, the provision of unpaid care by women and girls has been intensified—to intolerable degrees in sub-Saharan Africa, where the HIV/AIDS epidemic is taking a staggering toll of lives. At the same time taking on paid work has become ever more necessary for all household members—whether male or female, young or old—to make ends meet.

But the report also makes references to the glimmerings of some alternatives.

It emphasizes that the neo-liberal macroeconomic policy agenda is not the only agenda that has been pursued. It refers to an alternative approach which it calls the "managed market approach"—which some countries have pursued, by managing international trade rather than simply liberalizing trade, by managing flows of finance rather than simply liberalizing financial markets, by not simply giving priority to reductions in budget deficits and inflation, but in thinking about industrial policies and industrial transformation, thinking about job creation and thinking about economic growth.

These are countries in East Asia, and to a lesser extent in southeast Asia, which have achieved staggering rates of growth as well as significant reductions in poverty and in inequalities between social classes and households. The report notes of course that this approach has come under increasing strain in the 1990s, and especially after the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

Remarkably while there has been a rapid growth in women's employment in these countries, women were heavily present in the labour-intensive export industries where low wages were an important component of gaining market share. Hence, women's low wages in these export industries generated the foreign exchange with which to purchase technologies and capital goods. But there was little positive impact in closing of gender gaps in particular in wages but in other variables as well. So by 1999-2000 despite 45 years of spectacular growth and industrial transformation, women's wages relative to men's wages in countries like Taiwan and South Korea, were no more than 55%.

Hence this type of growth process, while it may have in fact resulted in increases in women's absolute well-being and societal increases in absolute well-being, it did not provide the conditions for reducing gender inequality.

QUOTATION

"I think a major message coming out of this report is the limitations of striving for gender equality in an unequal world, and how we have to combine the struggle for gender equality with the struggle for a more equal world. I think that means we have to make alliances with other movements that are also struggling for a more equal world… But within those alliances we are always going to have that struggle still—the struggle within the struggle to transform the thinking of those who are proposing alternatives. Struggling to make sure that a gender perspective is alive and that it is incorporated into those alternatives." Diane Elson, Presentation at UNRISD conference, 8 March 2005, New York.

Thank you!