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WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY PAKISTAN:
RESULTS AND PROSPECTS

by

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Abstract: Women's rights have come under attack in many Muslim countries, particularly those where the state relies for support on fundamentalist religious elements among the clergy. The response of women to such attacks and their capacity to defend themselves is determined by the nature and level of women's organizations that exist within a particular social formation. In this article, the author examines the particularity of one specific case: that of Pakistan. The antecedents of women's mobilization and the transformation of their organizations over time are traced through their interface with political trends in the country. Particular attention is given to a new women's organization, the Women's Action Forum.

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WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY PAKISTAN: RESULTS AND PROSPECTS¹

Social movements in most parts of the world are closely linked to relations of domination, exploitation, oppression, and repression. They may be the reflection of actual conditions, in the sense of an objective worsening of living conditions, or they may be a consequence of a perceived sense of deprivation. In the second sense, social movements may be the outcome not of worsened sets of circumstances but of a change in people's consciousness regarding their condition. The struggle that women are currently waging in Pakistan reflects both these elements. Not only has the situation of women worsened since the current military regime came into power in 1977, but Pakistani women, by virtue of increasing access to education, involvement in professional employment, and a multiplicity of other factors, are more conscious of their condition today than ever before.

Much of the literature on women states that women are the victims of the double oppression of class and gender. This is as true in Pakistan as elsewhere. What this means in the Pakistani context is that not only have women had to struggle to win concessions from a male-dominated society, but they have also had a hard time maintaining themselves and their families given a socio-economic milieu in which the vast majority of the populace is victimized by social, political and economic deprivation. Women in Pakistan are the victims of various types of repression and oppression. Women as well as men suffer from being part of a socio-economic framework dominated by international capital in which their contributions and status are often determined by forces external to themselves. Within this framework, however, women are further oppressed because they belong to the gender that is seen as necessary for maintenance of the system but is relatively unrecognized and poorly rewarded for its contribution to that maintenance. Women are victimized not only by the economic system but also by the dominant social relations within it.

This is not to suggest that class and gender are the only factors responsible for women's situation in Pakistan today. The world is much more complex than that, and Pakistani society is no exception. Additional significant factors that affect the conditions of Pakistani women are those of religion, kinship, nationality (ethnicity), and access to education. Religion in Pakistan means the Islamic tradition as it is expressed in Pakistani society.² And that expression is male oriented, tending towards segregating women and confining them to the house. As such, religion (not in the abstract but as it is concretely manifested in the state ideology in Pakistan) relates directly to the gender question.

Kinship groupings in Pakistan are much more rigid in the rural than in the urban areas. In rural areas they affect the division of labor and access to property. Basic divisions in kinship groupings in the settled areas are among agriculturalists, non-agriculturalists (petty commodity producers), and the landless (wage laborers). In the tribal areas, too, tribal divisions are on a territorial basis and, within the tribe itself, status is determined by whether one is a surplus producer or appropriator. When seen in the context of their relation with property, territory, surplus

generation or appropriation, kinship affiliations closely intersect with class interests. With increasing class differentiation being brought about by the transformation of the Pakistani economy, changes in kinship location are occurring; for example, agriculturalists are being pushed down into the same class as non-agriculturalists and wage workers. But the dissonance this creates in terms of kinship relations is temporary. In a few generations, for all practical purposes, people lose their membership in the previous kinship network and are assigned to the appropriate economic class. Kinship and caste in Pakistani society do not have the same implications they might have in Indian society for example. Kinship and caste are factors, but I would argue that they are usually not articulated apart from the class question.

The nationality or ethnicity question is a complex one but within each nationality or ethnic group women do suffer repression because they are women; their gender oppression still holds. In addition to being discriminated against as women, they also suffer from a form of "internal colonialism" which precludes their access to education, health and other facilities. What they experience is more complex than double oppression.

As we look at access to education, we must understand and acknowledge that it incorporates all of the above elements, but not in a mechanical fashion. Upper-class women obviously have a better chance of getting an education, but this is further affected by their incorporation into the urban or rural bourgeoisie. Rural landed families tend not to educate their women. Because of the lack of adequate education facilities in the minority provinces, all classes suffer, but again the deprivation is much greater for women from the working classes than for those from the bourgeoisie.

The argument here is that the factors of kinship, nationality (ethnicity) and access to education can better be understood in a class framework. Kinship, as we have noted, is dependent on land relations and is, therefore, closely related to the class question. Oppression of nationality or ethnic groups, too, is a function of the nature of the classes that dominate the state structure and direct development in ways that deprive certain minorities of their rights. What I am suggesting, therefore, is that at the existential level all these factors do come into play, but at the level of explanation, one must again come back to the question of class, its articulation with the state, and the subsequent nature of societal development.

Let us for a moment, then, return to class and gender. And within this let us locate the nature of women's oppression in the Pakistani context.³ In Third World Countries, which suffer from a distorted form of development termed by some "The Colonial Mode of Production" the informal sector of the economy is particularly strong. The formal sector consists of the industrial sector; the informal sector includes agriculture, small scale production, handicrafts, the domestic sector, and household production. Women are mainly employed in this informal sector and, since this is the sector that is hardest hit by capitalist development, women in turn are the worst affected group.

Women are first affected at the level of the family structure. Since kinship relations are based on property relations, articulated within a patriarchal, patrilocal family structure, women's choices in marriage and decisions to work are often made for them. Religion provides ideological support for this type of family structure and becomes a further factor limiting women's freedom in decisions that affect their existence. Neither of these factors is static; they are changing but they still play a repressive role vis-a-vis women. The family itself has remained a strongly male-dominated institution in Pakistani society. Even where kinship factors, for example, have changed as they have in the cities, the changes are not necessarily positive for women. Families may no longer feel it is essential for women to marry within their own kinship group; they can be betrothed to somebody from another group, but the decision still is made by the families. At best, the prospective husband may have some say in the matter, but the woman is more often than not a passive recipient of familial wisdom.

RATIONALE FOR EXAMINING THE WOMEN'S QUESTION IN MODERN PAKISTAN

Pakistan today is a country engulfed by a wave of repression--engulfed not by external forces but by its own armed forces. This oppression is not limited to any one class or gender.

Why then, one might ask, write on this issue of a women's movement in Pakistan at a time when the democratic rights of the entire population have been suppressed by a highly unpopular military regime which has no support among Pakistanis aside from conservative religious elements and a handful of industrialists and large landlords?⁴ The reasons are three. First, given the evaluation in the previous section of women's continued exploitation and deprivation, an analysis of their own efforts to combat this constitutes a meaningful exercise under any circumstances. Second, precisely because the present regime in Pakistan relies on religious elements, the issue of women becomes even more critical today. These fundamentalist religious groups, while ambivalent on other issues (e.g., the relationship of labor and capital, agrarian taxation and property to name but a few) are in total agreement when it comes to the question of women. Their position is clear: they believe that women are inferior to men and that their place is in the home serving their male lords and masters. Third, women, for the first time in the history of Pakistan, are organizing an independent, mass movement to fight not just for the preservation of those rights currently under attack but also for a deepening and extension of those rights. They are among the vanguard of the political movement in Pakistan and, in that sense, need to be taken very seriously indeed. All political parties, with the exception of Jammat-connected ones, are banned from holding public meetings. The left, which was fractious to begin with, has lost ground as its leaders and most active cadres have sought exile, been imprisoned, killed, or gone underground. This has meant that, until the launching of the August 1983 movement, the only organized groups publicly taking a stand against the regime had been professional groups, e.g., lawyers, journalists and students.

Women's organizations moved into the vacuum created by the absence of traditional political formations. Basing their work on organization across class lines, they challenged the regime publicly through forums, mass meetings, press campaigns, petitions and demonstrations. Women were the first to realize the importance of direct action during this period and acted upon that realization at a time when the left was saying conditions were not conducive to such action. Being independent and part of no political party, women, in the current phase of their struggle, have been able to speak out on specifically women's issues but have consciously sought to link them to broader issues of economic privilege and deprivation, inflation, exploitation and injustice. Maintaining their relative autonomy from other groups and parties, they insist that they are merely striving towards what is agreed upon in the Human Rights Charter of the United Nations, a body of which Pakistan is a member.

The focus on women's issues and rights has not kept women from supporting other progressive causes, e.g., the Palestinian movement, the release of political prisoners, help for the drought-stricken people of the Thar desert, and restoration of democratic rights. In other words, the struggle of women in Pakistan, as it is currently being articulated, does not designate man as the enemy but rather a social-structural formation within which women are among the most oppressed, but by no means the only, victims of repression.

This article examines, first, the measures taken against women by Zia ul Haq's military regime. It then traces the origin and development of women's mobilization and organization in Pakistan and places the current developments within the context of events occurring in Pakistan since the coup against Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's regime. Women's current mobilization and organizational expression is then critiqued in terms of its strengths and weaknesses and future courses of action are noted. This last section points out the various possibilities stemming from the character of women's mobilization and its organizational expression as it articulates with other groups and interacts with the state.⁵ The future of women is by no means viewed linearly, nor is the organizational form through which their struggle will continue. Lastly, certain theoretical conclusions and practical questions that stem out of this entire analysis are posed.

THE CURRENT MILITARY REGIME'S RECORD ON WOMEN (1977 TO DATE)

Since the Pakistani government proclaimed its intent to institute "Nizam e Mustafa"⁶ women have been one of the key groups targeted by the regime. Most recently, in March 1983, the Majlis e Shoora⁷ passed a "Law of Evidence" whereby the status of a woman is reduced to that of half a man in terms of her ability to bear witness in court. In cases of rape, a woman's testimony is to be considered inadmissible,⁸ and the murder of a woman should not warrant the same penalty as a similar crime against a man.

This degradation of woman to the status of half a being, or even a non-being, is the culmination of a series of attacks on half the population

of Pakistan. Prior to this, the government issued other proclamations banning the participation of women athletes in international and mixed sports events, attempted to repeal the 1961 Family Laws Ordinance which gave a modicum of security to women with regard to their marital status and property rights, announced its intention to eliminate coeducation and institute separate universities for women with separate subjects and clearly a much reduced budget and consequent lowered standard of education. This latter proposal is designed to eventually drive women out of the professions and back into the home.⁹ What the regime did not itself proclaim, it tried to sound out through its surrogates, the ultra-conservative religious leaders.¹⁰

The last two years have seen the emergence in the mosques and in the media (television in particular) of mullahs speaking against women and proclaiming the wonders of the Iranian model, particularly with respect to its position on women. This is exemplified by the "chador aur char davari" controversy¹¹ generated by Israr Ahmed and the others. Israr in particular was the spokesperson par excellence for the idea that a woman's place is to serve and titillate the male of the house. She is designed to be an object of pleasure for her spouse as well as a beast of burden entirely dependent upon him. Israr preached this philosophy both from the mosques and through the government sponsored and controlled television.

None of these incursions on their already limited freedoms were taken lightly by Pakistani women; they have responded with anger, vigour and initiative. Before we examine what form this response has taken in the current period, let us examine the historical development of women's struggle in Pakistan.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S MOBILIZATION IN PAKISTAN (1940-77)

The mobilization of women in Pakistan can be traced to the preindependence period when women, albeit bourgeois women, were a vocal element in the anti-colonial struggle, as well as in the Pakistan movement.¹² Their efforts led to a recognition of their contribution by the Quaid e Azam, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, who made a strong plea for the removal of constraints against women. As early as 1944 he stated:¹³

No nation can rise to the height of glory unless your women are side by side with you. We are victims of evil customs. It is a crime against humanity that our women are shut up within the four walls of the houses as prisoners. There is no sanction anywhere for the deplorable condition in which our women live. You should take your women along with you as comrades in every sphere of life.

Viewing the independent state of Pakistan as essentially a secular state, Jinnah said that women had claims to the same rights as did any minorities, nationalities (ethnic groups), or other oppressed groups within the limitations of a liberal, bourgeois-democratic state. It is interesting to note that even at this stage some mullahs, for example, Maudoodi, founder

of the Jammat i Islami, not only opposed the rights of women, but were also opposed to the creation of a Pakistan that took its being on the ground that the Muslims of India had the right to a separate homeland.¹⁴ Voicing their opposition to the creation of Pakistan, they called Jinnah "kafir" (unbeliever) for working for the creation of Pakistan.

Following the creations of Pakistan, of which many mullahs such as Maudoodi were now citizens and residents, the women who had been active previously decided to push their efforts further and concretize some of their demands through the legal code. Women gained the right to vote¹⁵ and, following a long struggle which became articulated with the coming to power of a modernizing, reformist military regime, in 1961 women finally succeeded in getting passed the now much attacked Family Laws Ordinance. In this ordinance women were officially recognized as being able to inherit agricultural property (in consonance with Islamic Law); second marriages were made contingent upon agreement by the first wife; divorce was made more difficult for the male and the woman was given the right to initiate divorce for the first time (on certain specified grounds only); and a system of registration of marriages was introduced for the first time. These are but a few of the ordinance's better-known clauses.

Although it has never been adequately implemented, this ordinance was nonetheless considered a major victory by women's groups. Why is this so? Partly because it contains a recognition by the state of the need for reforms to better the status and condition of women, but an understanding of the nature of the women's organizations extant at that time will help us to better answer this question.

As stated earlier, women's mobilization at Pakistan's inception was limited mostly to bourgeois elements. Having received some education relative to their counterparts in other classes and being part of the political mainstream, often by being related to men who were in politics, these women were cognizant of the law and able to manipulate it to their advantage. The family law safeguarded their rights as women. But the Family Law Ordinance did not penetrate very far. Working-class women in the urban areas were only marginally able to benefit from it to the extent that they either had patrons among the bourgeois elements or some progressive organization was willing to take up the fight on their behalf. The lot of the rural women, isolated as they were from the political scene and the center of organizational activity, continued much as before. Tribal women were in a similar position; neither women's organizations for other progressive forces interested in women's issues were able to penetrate these areas.

The women's organizations existing at that time, the All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) being the best known among these, were primarily social welfare and charity organizations and the nature of their work reflected this. In addition to providing relief during emergencies and taking care of the destitute and orphans, they placed a strong emphasis on education, but took a limited approach to its provision, restricting it to

the creation of APWA college in Lahore and the setting up of a few vocational training and handicraft centers. Their attitude was patronizing; their approach was basically reformist; and their reach was limited. They did not see anything fundamentally wrong with either the socio-economic system or the political structure. Reforms, therefore, were not posed in terms of the self-realization of women but merely in terms of an improvement in their conditions.

The coming to power of Bhutto in 1972 saw the emergence in Pakistan, for the first time, of a popularly elected, populist regime that drew support from workers, the rural peasantry, and women. The 1973 Constitution granted women rights more in accord with United Nations-stated principles (modified to fit Pakistani reality) along with a promise to extend education on a mass scale to all groups, including rural and urban women.¹⁶

Women's groups, though they increased during this period, remained in the background in that they did not perceive themselves as being under attack from Bhutto's regime. They chose, therefore, to exploit the favorable environment to push for an extension of women's rights within the framework of the state, not in antagonism to it. An exception was the role played by women in the 1977 campaign against Bhutto, a role quite similar to that of Chilean women in their "pots and pans campaign" against Allende prior to the latter's downfall. In Pakistan, too, bourgeois women led this movement, not protesting the abrogation of democratic rights by the Bhutto regime (a criticism that the left groups and national minorities levied against him), but mounting a right-wing opposition to his regime, decrying his economic policies and their inflationary impact of their dwindling purse sizes.¹⁷

Not until three and a half years after the 1977 military take-over were women once again to emerge as a political force. This time, however, the organizations that came into being, although having a historical continuity with the past and the nature of the struggle women were waging, are qualitatively different. The nature and scope of their activities is far different from what it was previously as is their interpretation of what needs to be done, the internal composition of different groups involved in the struggle, and the process through which they see positive change as emerging.

TRANSFORMATION OF THE WOMEN'S STRUGGLE AND CREATION OF THE WOMEN'S ACTION FORUM

The late sixties and early seventies saw a small but significant blossoming of intellectual thought and grass roots political organization. Women in larger numbers joined the professions and, though their numbers remained relatively small, they made a significant contribution. Television in particular broke the taboos generally connected with music and the arts in Pakistani society. College women with creative talents took advantage of this opportunity and became instrumental in portraying a different woman. Indeed a recognition of the media's transformational capacity may lie behind the current regime's attempts to drastically alter both its programming and personnel. The mushrooming of left wing political parties in the late

sixties and early seventies, tied as they were to the working class and the peasantry, drew into the political arena women who had been previously dissociated from this process. Not only did this serve to politicize more women than ever before but it also gave women much needed organizational experience.¹⁸

These experiences served women in several ways. They brought women out of the home in increasing numbers. They created institutions and organizations which, though limited, were lasting. And they gave women experience in running their own programs. Experience with the left led many women to recognize that they themselves must wage their struggle and that there was no objective need for an independent, autonomous women's organization. Undoubtedly, increasing education and exposure to feminist movements in other parts of the world, as well as awareness of women's involvement in national liberation movements elsewhere, served to reinforce this awareness. It was, however, the attacks upon women by the current military regime that caused this awareness to mature and take an organizational form.

The Women's Action Forum (WAF), a mass-based, popular front of many women's groups and of concerned individuals was formed in September 1981.¹⁹ The specific issue that brought about the formation of WAF was a zina (adultery) case, whereby a fifteen-year-old woman was sentenced to flogging by the military's courts because she married a man of a working-class background against her parents' wishes. The fact that this new women's organization, WAF, emerged in response to such a case, is itself illustrative of how different it was from previous women's organizations and from political parties with women's committees.

Previous women's organizations had not challenged the basic family norms about marriage and choice in marriage. They had merely sought to secure some rights for women within marriage and to secure access for women to some of the benefits of development. Left groups, similarly, had not fought for women's rights as women but merely as members of the work force. For the labor groups, the issue of women was relegated to a secondary status, the labor relation being the dominant theme. Even within this, women's contribution in the work force as unpaid workers often went unquestioned. This zina case upon which WAF came into existence combined issues of class and gender. Social morality (with respect to marital decision making) and class discrimination (the economic background of the person one chooses to marry) were both involved. Drawing upon this multiple repression that lies deeply rooted in the traditional social customs of Pakistani society, WAF was immediately in direct confrontation with what for centuries has been held to be sacred on the Indian sub-continent. By taking up such a case, it was also able to generate support for women's rights from women of more than just one class. This case came shortly after reports about women professors being molested and removed from their positions and about women being tortured for their political beliefs and affiliations, the imposition of restrictions against the professional activities of women, and the imposition of dress code requirements for women public employees so the WAF

felt that action was imperative. It also recognized that help could not be expected from either the Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD) or the left since these groups were themselves fighting to survive and neither had in the past taken an active stand in the nationally-organized drive to push for women's rights. Women recognized that this was a fight that they must themselves lead--that the need was to educate each other and fight for their rights not only in response to the current measures taken against them by the military regime but also to overcome inequalities that were rooted in the cultural milieu. This represented a major breakthrough in the struggle for women in Pakistan.

Created initially by professional, middle-class women in Karachi in September of 1981, WAF immediately received the endorsement of seven women's groups. These groups, while maintaining their independent existence,²⁰ decided to rally under WAF's banner in a popular women's front dedicated to one common goal: women's development through the achievement of basic human rights for all Pakistani women. These rights include: employment; physical security; marital choice; planned parenthood; and non-discrimination.

Recognizing the enormity of the task confronting them, the organizers of WAF proceeded cautiously. Initially, they devoted their attention to fighting to preserve rights under attack from the military. Given their limited numbers at this point, a lobbying-cum-pressure group approach was used. The first task undertaken was a national signature campaign based on five issues affecting women. Over seven thousand signatures were collected between October and December, 1981, and the document was presented to the Chief Martial Law Administrator, Zia ul Haq.

Even at the inception of WAF, the organizers realized that the state was unlikely to concede other than token demands if they limited their activities to submitting petitions; they, therefore, decided to broaden WAF's base. Towards this end, in January, 1982, the Karachi chapter of WAF organized a two-day symposium on "Human Rights and Pakistani Women" with simultaneous workshops on education, law, consciousness raising and health. This was the first of a series of symposiums and workshops held on a wide variety of topics of interest to women; they were conducted in English and Urdu, as well as the regional languages. By virtue of incorporating other organizations in a collaborative front WAF was quickly able to draw such working-class women as were connected to the earlier groups into its fold. WAF also attempted to reach these groups as well as national minorities independently; this was particularly emphasized in Karachi where some of the initiators of the organization themselves belonged to the Sindhi national minority.

Not only did WAF strive to bring the question of women's oppression to women from varied backgrounds, it also immediately began to extend the organization's reach to other parts of the country. The second chapter of WAF was created in Lahore in October, 1981. Chapters soon followed in other cities including Islamabad, Peshawar, Bahawalpur, Lyallpur, and Quetta. It was made clear that anybody could initiate a WAF chapter in her locality,

provided the chapter was willing to adopt the charter drawn up by the Karachi chapter. Each new chapter would, however, be subject to scrutiny by the two oldest chapters, i.e., Karachi and Lahore. If there is any discrepancy between the activities of the local chapter and WAF's charter, that chapter is subject to expulsion.

WAF's chapters are encouraged to incorporate women's groups and organizations in their areas with a view to maximizing outreach and propaganda, avoiding duplication, and facilitating coordination. Because it is open to women from all classes, WAF recognizes the centrality of the gender question as key determinant in a popular front for women.

WAF was originally organized as a democratic organization with no formal membership and with links to no political parties. Since its inception, however, formal membership has been raised as an issue. In a resolution of this question different chapters decided to go different ways in terms of organizational structure. Initially the organizational structure was non-hierarchical and non-bureaucratic but differences now exist; each of the three main chapters in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad has arrived at different resolutions. Despite these differences in organizational expression, the democratic nature of the organization holds. At no point did WAF Karachi try to impose a structure on any of its chapters. Their policy was to let each chapter decide what suited its needs best.

The national structure still remains true to its original form; there is no president or secretary at the national level, and decisions are arrived at through discussion. Each chapter designates one member as a representative to a joint session of all chapters. With these new developments, the struggle for women's rights has come far from its origins. WAF as one expression of that dynamic gives us an important yardstick against which to measure the changes that have occurred. In terms of its organizational structure, membership, program, WAF represents a radical departure from previous attempts at women's mobilization in Pakistan.

WOMEN'S STRUGGLE IN ITS CURRENT PHASE: ACHIEVEMENTS AND LIMITATIONS

What does all this amount to? What has this re-vitalized, re-defined women's movement, spearheaded by WAF but by no means limited to it, accomplished? Where is it headed? There is no simple answer: The accomplishments are both the tangible and intangible, and the goals both short term and long term.

In its battle with the regime, current women's movement in Pakistan seems on the surface to have lost more often than it has won. In February, 1983, two hundred women demonstrated in Lahore against the proposed changes in the Law of Evidence. At least twenty of the participants were injured in their clash with the police and another thirty were arrested. Despite this demonstration and the support of some men, the proposed changes were passed through the Majlis e Shoora less than a month later. It should, however, be

noted that Zia ul Haq has still not signed the proposed legal changes, and his reluctance to do so might partially be because of the opposition women have been able to generate.

Women were also unsuccessful in their attempt to pressure the regime into sending women athletes to international sports events in 1982 (specifically the Asian Games). The move to institute separate universities for women and the dismantling of the Family Laws Ordinance of 1961 have both been shelved temporarily, but it is expected that the regime will re-open both these matters at a later date and that the proposed changes will be ones opposed both by WAF and by most other organized and mobilized women. The one victory WAF and women have had is in their confrontation with the regime in the removal of Israr Ahmed from television. But to draw up a scoreboard saying "regime's wins, women's losses" is a limited way of viewing the whole matter. The gains of women, although in many instances intangible are fairly substantial.

Women have for the first time adopted an organizational stance as an autonomous, non-sectarian, independent women's group (i.e., WAF) making them an important force that any political group in Pakistan will have to contend with. They have broken out of the old pattern of reformism and paternalism that has characterised the Pakistani political scene and have initiated educational, organizational, and informational work that will leave a mark on the future regardless of whether WAF survives as an organization.

Initially restricted to limited issues and conscious of the need not to outstrip its base, WAF, as the key expression of the women's struggle under the military regime, has steadily been broadening and deepening that base. In doing so, it has been conscious that it is not sufficient to merely critique the regime on the grounds it sets. WAF must also confront issues that immediately touch the lives of the average Pakistani woman who is not concerned with universities, whether separate or coeducational, or with women's involvement in sports events, to cite but two examples. Toward this end, WAF has initiated discussions on topics of more immediate concerns, for example, child labor, growing narcotics use, rape, and the suppression of women, all of which are issues affecting the working-class woman directly. WAF has initiated serious research on the status and condition of women in Pakistan to concretize its work and position. Through its membership and associates, WAF has kept in the public forefront the opposition to the current regime. It has blitzed the media with articles, comments, and inquiries, and, in so doing, has recruited more and more women in its ranks, and has gained increasing support among men. This gain of support among men reflects WAF's ability not only to make the women's issue central, but also its capacity to relate women's issues to other progressive causes. WAF has paved the way towards non-sectarianism and shown that, despite the current environment of repression, mass organizing is not only possible but necessary. Unlike the bourgeois political parties, WAF, as the leading expression of the women's struggle for democratic and human rights, has not maintained a highly skewed organizational structure. Learning from its experiences with left groups WAF leaders have recognized the need to proceed

step-by-step, with a clear overall picture in mind. The task of organizing women is much more difficult than that of organizing either workers or peasants. A struggle must be waged not only against economic forces but also against the social taboos that directly affect women's lives. In seeing the need for a mass organization, WAF considered not only the question that had to be addressed but also the lessons of the past. Previous groups had too often isolated themselves from the bulk of the population by taking very rigid positions. This rigidity often resulted not from a realistic appraisal of the situation but from a lack of clarity about it. Such rigidity often led to personal squabbles, factionalism, and stagnation of the organization. The growth of the Women's Action Forum and the women's movement as a whole must be viewed dialectically. The elements that constitute its strengths may also be possible contributors to its limitations.

We have earlier noted the mass character of the women's movement which draws women from all classes although it is still dominated by professional, educated, urban women. This has been an integral part of the women's movement in its current phase although there is not always agreement between the women who belong to the older women's groups (which have a stronger upper-class bias) and WAF members who have just entered the political current or have had previous experience with left groups. The latter tend to view issues along class and national lines and, although aware that the gender question is a critical one, their approach towards resolution of gender discrimination extends far beyond that of previous groups. Although these various elements have worked well together, it is possible that there may be disagreement when and if the more radical elements begin to push for changes that are both class and gender based and as means are sought outside the formal structures. It is important to note that this type of division is not seen as immediate but is merely noted as a possibility.

Given the diversity of classes and groups represented in the movement, the different WAF chapters are very uneven in their membership composition, and this unevenness is reflected in their work. The Lahore chapter is the most advanced politically and has, in some instances, shown itself willing to undertake actions that other chapters might retreat from. The demonstration in February was organized by this group. There are indications, however, that other chapters are quick to learn; since February demonstrations have been organized in Karachi as well as in other cities.

The decision-making structure is also subject to modification. Given the unevenness of the chapters, there has been some concern among the more advanced segments in WAF that some political parties and their representatives might attempt to push the movement into a more conventional political direction where women's issues are again made secondary to other issues. There is, similarly, a concern that certain individuals in certain chapters might derail the movement by pushing for a more conformist, collaborative approach. Attempts to prevent either of these two possibilities from becoming a reality have been tried by various chapters; the balance between democracy and centralism is a tricky one. Recent

discussions on this matter resulted in the resolution of the matter in the case of the Islamabad chapter, whereas it resulted in a split in the organization in the case of the Lahore chapter.

Although this organizational restructuring has created some divisiveness and hard feeling in WAF itself, it has not had a negative impact on the women's movement as a whole. The various factions have continued to work together on issues of common concern.

What this unevenness and class heterogeneity suggests is that once the regime begins to take a more antagonistic stand towards WAF in particular and the movement in general, there is a possibility that the more uncertain elements might fall away and choose to leave the struggle rather than engage in confrontational activities. The extent of this falling away is impossible to predict since a large faction of the women currently agitating for women's rights has had no previous political experience. There is no doubt, however, that some of the women with close ties to the bureaucratic elements and who have more at stake in the system will leave.

Its urban character also means that WAF and the women's movement as a whole still have not been able to reach rural women who constitute one of the most oppressed elements of the Pakistani population. This is a short coming that will only be rectified as the struggle expands and deliberate attempts are made to spread out into the countryside. Some work has already been done by left parties in this context, particularly in Sindh. Given the nature of popular struggles in Pakistan, which have always had their inception in the cities, this bias, at least in the initial phase, is to be expected. Also, given the linkages between the workers in the urban centers and their rural counterparts, it is expected that working-class women become more and more integrated into the struggle, this link will be made organically.

Inherent in the women's movement, as in other progressive formations previously existing in Pakistan, is a tendency towards tailism (used here not to signify lagging behind the popular will to struggle but in the sense of following the direction set by the state). The women's movement, too, could become entrapped by this tendency. The more advanced elements in the women's movement seem to be cognizant of this possibility, but the newer recruits are so tied into day-to-day reactions to the military's policies that the wider issues and needs might be lost sight of. By letting the regime set the agenda, they could permit the forward motion to be determined by the state and not by their own definition of what needs to be done. It is necessary to respond to the day-to-day attacks on women's rights by the state, but it is critical not to let this sap all the energy. It should also be kept in mind that many of these legally won rights mean very little in the reality of the majority of Pakistani women's lives. Transforming the reality of these women's lives demands educational and informational work rooted in an autonomous women's organization or organizations. WAF is, to some extent, trying to respond to these needs by setting up legal, publicity

and research cells whose work will provide not only information but also the infrastructural back-up needed if this information is to mean anything in concrete terms.

Certain chapters of WAF have stressed the non-political character of their organization. This assertion, combined with the fact that the wives of many prominent bureaucrats and upper-class males are active in its ranks, has contributed to the tendency of the regime to allow WAF's continued existence in public. There are, however, indications that this is a fragile existence. The demonstrations in February and September of 1981 were both brutally attacked by police, indicating that the regime is becoming uncomfortable with the women's movement and beginning to see it as a threat. This is unavoidable if the women's movement is to continue to be dynamic. What this means, therefore, is that the movement must either connect with the wider movement for the restoration of democratic rights of the people as a whole or suffer repeated setbacks. To expect a regime that suppresses the rights of the bulk of the population, e.g., workers, peasants, minority groups, national minorities, to grant them to women would be ridiculous. As soon as WAF sheds its non-political stance, there is every chance that the regime will ban it from meeting publicly and legally.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The previous section has considered to some extent the future of the women's movement in Pakistan. It remains here to emphasize some of the salient points. A critical factor is the manner in which the women's movement is able to: 1) understand the contradictions of the state and manipulate these to its own advantage; and 2) integrate the question of women's rights into the broader political question of domination and suppression of the oppressed classes in Pakistan as a whole. In order to do the latter, the women's movement must make a conscious attempt to keep from slipping into an elitist position as did earlier women's groups. To keep the movement limited to the question of formal legal rights is to fall into the trap of letting the state and the bourgeois elements in the movement determine its tenor. Even if these rights were to be granted they would mean very little in transforming the reality of most Pakistani women's lives. To achieve real change, therefore, formalism must be shed, and this can only be done if the agenda is set by those elements within the movement that understand the nature and dynamics of class, national, and gender oppression as a whole.

CONCLUSION: THEORETICAL QUESTIONS AND CONCRETE IMPLICATIONS

The discussion of women's struggles in Pakistan, as elsewhere, immediately raises the question of the commonality between class and gender and the distance between them. Many Marxists claim that the primary contradiction is between classes and that, once the ownership of the means of production is transformed, we can move on to other issues such as that of women's oppression.

Such a dichotomization of various types of oppression is wholly unsatisfactory. As we noted in the beginning of this paper, many types of oppression that are concretely rooted in the day-to-day existence of peoples in Pakistan (as in many other parts of the Third World) deal with issues of kinship, nationality, etc. At one level of explanation, economic and class relations may be dominant, but this remains just one level. If we understand that women's oppression is no simple reflection of their class oppression (although this plays a critical role in reinforcing their repression), then it becomes imperative to insist that progressive elements be able to integrate a struggle against all these forms of oppression simultaneously. If this is not done, conservative political elements will be able to manipulate these differences to their own advantage to divide these movements from each other. We are all familiar with the tactic and the consequences of the "divide and rule" strategy.

For women, then, an integration of the women's question with a total transformation of social relations becomes an absolute necessity. It is precisely these social relations that, in the long run, deny women their rights as humans. And these social relations in the countryside, for example, also constitute one of the forces whereby certain groups are excluded from certain types of mobility. Within this complex web of social relations, sexual and marital norms are another way of keeping intact a hierarchy and division of labor that maintains the propertied classes. Both the landless and women, therefore, have a common interest in seeing these relations transformed.

Similarly, there exists a commonality of interests in the urban areas. It has been noted that women in the industrial working force are often used to bust strikes and to serve as a buffer against improvements in overall working conditions of their class as a whole. While recognizing this, we must also be aware that these same women are often the poorest paid segment of the industrial proletariat. Here again an imaginative assimilation of women's issues and class issues would be of benefit not just to men and women as two genders but also to the working class as a whole. By engaging in struggles of this nature, women will bring their cause closer to others by organic links with them rather than posing the question of women's rights in terms of a moral choice or obligation.

And this brings us to one final point: that of an autonomous women's organization struggling for women's rights. I would argue that it is essential that women retain an independent organization so that their cause does not become subservient to other issues. While maintaining their relative autonomy, however, women can and should enter into a principled alliance with other political groups and parties whose struggles are not in contradiction to them. By forming such an alliance, women can put the women's question on the agenda of other political formations.

Such an alliance is imperative if women are not to become isolated in their struggle. In today's Pakistan, women have had the support of an overwhelming number of men from all walks of life precisely because the

latter see the women's struggle for restoration of their democratic rights as being organically linked to that of other elements in Pakistani society, including national minorities, struggling for those same rights.

The elements in the Pakistani women's movement that continue to support the necessity of maintaining a non-political posture must, at some point, realize the absurdity of this position. The demand for women's rights is itself political. And if it is to be achieved, it will only be through political means.

Women's struggle for equality will by no means be over with the demise of the current Pakistani regime. By joining with other democratic forces that are also posing an opposition to this regime, however, women will have created a certain measure of support that will carry over into the next phase of their struggle. The next phase will be an even more difficult one.

Pakistani women must, therefore, be prepared for a long struggle. Their theoretical work and organizational preparation must enable them to sustain this movement into the future since, ultimately, a resolution demands that deeply rooted cultural norms and traditions be altered. This will be done not by shouting slogans or spouting rhetoric, but by careful planning, by concrete examination of the underpinnings of discrimination, and its links and intersection with other forms of deprivation and oppression, and by the tedious, arduous task of building links with those other groups and classes that are likewise negatively affected by the system of privilege, protection, and repression.

NOTES

1. This paper was presented at the Twelfth Annual South Asian Conference, University of Wisconsin, Madison, November 4-6, 1983.
2. This is not the place for a detailed discussion of the basic tenets of Islam and the location of women within it. For those interested in following up on this question, I would recommend Azar Tabari's article entitled "Islam and the Struggle for Emancipation of Iranian Women."
3. Much of the discussion that follows is based on work done by Gail Omvedt.
4. Although this regime has enjoyed considerable support in the past among the large landlords, there are indications that the imposition of Ushr might lead to antagonism toward the regime. Furthermore, there are elements within this class that still support the Pakistan People's Party, being willing to cooperate with a regime that provides a minimal measure of reform while, at the same time, allowing them a critical role in the political realm.
5. This paper, being an overview of the women's question, does not permit a detailed analysis of the state. The state in Pakistan as it exists today is viewed by this author as a military-bureaucratic apparatus using fundamentalist religious elements both for ideological reasons and to provide the shock troops needed to control dissidents. The ideological cover is more for external than internal consumption, i.e., to satisfy the Saudis and other Middle Eastern rulers on whom this regime is dependent for financial support and continued labor export. The possibilities referred to, therefore, take into account the weak hold the regime has over other groups that have traditionally collaborated with the state, e.g., the bourgeoisie which views this regime as being incapable of providing the kind of "law and order" it views as being conducive to a favorable investment climate. It is no coincidence that the regime's strongest support comes from the trading sector, the petty bourgeoisie, which has traditionally also been the class from which the fundamentalist religious groups have done the bulk of their recruiting.
6. Nizam e Mustafa refers to the law of the Prophet (Muhammad) which is today taken by many in Pakistan as the basis for a theocratic state.
7. Majlis e Shoora is the consultative body in Pakistan that today formulates its laws. There is no legislative body in Pakistan. The Majlis e Shoora is non-democratic in its selection and composition and the creation of the military, designed and created to rubber-stamp its policies.

8. It should be noted that, although the Majlis e Shoora passed this law last March, it still has not been signed into effect by General Zia. This is in part a consequence of the strong mobilization of women against its passage. This has not, however, stopped courts from trying and sentencing women on its basis. Three cases have been made public whereby rape victims were actually sentenced and subjected to flogging because no male witnesses could be brought forward to testify on their behalf and their own testimony was not permissible. One of these three women included a blind woman, who after being raped, was charged with extra-marital relations. This example of blaming the victim, particularly when the victim is a woman, is rampant in today's Islamic Pakistan. It is also interesting to note that the woman who was given the severest sentence out of the three came from the tribal areas; this indicates the even more oppressive conditions under which tribal women live.
9. Census data are used to justify this position. Government statistics in Pakistan, as in many other countries, provide a distorted picture of women's involvement in the workforce, and consistently underestimate their economic contributions. Estimates for the rural sector in particular, conducted by women, show that women contribute from 12 per cent to 80 per cent of their households' incomes. This is in addition to their contribution as unpaid workers in their own households.
10. The dynamics of the state itself play an important role. The regime, dependent on the mullahs for ideological support, is sometimes forced to take a contradictory stand. Thus, we see the creation of a women's division on the federal level, headed by an outspoken opponent of the mullahs, conducting research on women's issues never before probed in Pakistan (partly because of funding by international bodies for such work) while, on the other hand, mullahs are given the freedom to openly preach a philosophy of hate against women.
11. This refers to the "veil and four walls," the notion that women's place is in the home, and when she steps out, she should not be visible but veiled.
12. Many of the Muslim women involved in the anti-colonial movement worked not independently among women but alongside family members, usually males.
13. Quaid e Azam, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Aligarh University speech, 1944.
14. The position of these mullahs was that Islam did not recognize the existence of nations. The nation of Islam was, therefore, not a geographically located entity, bound in space, but a community of believers linked internationally through a spiritual unity. Interestingly, such an interpretation not only rules out a bourgeois, liberal state such as emerged in early Pakistan, but also denies the rationale for a theocracy such as is now being supported by mullahs in Pakistan and Iran.

15. The right to vote was generalized to all women, but their ability to run for office was curtailed by a system of quotas for women. This was designed, ostensibly, to ensure at least minimal representation. In reality it became the basis for denying women access to those seats contested in a general election.
16. It remains a moot point as to how far Bhutto's regime would actually have gone. There can be no doubt, however, that the environment was much more beneficial to women than it has been either previously or subsequently.
17. The analogy with the Chilean situation is striking. Bhutto's reforms, though nowhere near the scope of those introduced in Allende's Chile, nevertheless served to jolt the bourgeois classes. Not only did these classes engage in a conscious policy of capital-flight overseas but many Pakistanis agree that they, along with elements of the petty bourgeoisie, deliberately conducted a policy of destabilization and to a large extent, contributed to the inflationary situation. It is ironic that after having instigated the situation, these classes then sought to use it as a weapon against the regime.
18. Even though women joined the left, the position of various left groups vis-a-vis women remains unclear. Although in most instances women's rights are acknowledged at a theoretical level, action at the personal and organizational levels leaves much to be desired.
19. The term "mass-base" is used advisedly but should be read with caution. It does not imply that women were immediately involved in this organization in large numbers and from all sectors of society; what it does suggest is that membership was open to women from all classes. There was no patron-client relation such as existed in APWA where upper class women were the providers, lower class women the recipients.
20. The groups that decided to come together under WAF's banner included the Tehrik e Niswan, APWA, Professional and Businesswomen's Associations, and Tehrik E Jamhooriyat Pasand Khawateen to name a few. The leadership of the new organization, however, remained in the hands of independent feminists, unconnected to any of these organizations. Decisions were jointly arrived at through discussion and consultation.

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