

# WOMEN'S POLICY JOURNAL OF HARVARD,

JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT



VOLUME 3 • SUMMER 2006

## ARTICLES

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*Barbara Bamberger*

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## CALL FOR PAPERS DEADLINE: 18 DECEMBER 2006

The *Women's Policy Journal* is accepting submissions for its Summer 2007 volume. The journal is a student-run, nonpartisan review dedicated to publishing interdisciplinary work on policy making and politics affecting women. By bridging the divide between academics and practitioners, the journal seeks to educate and provide leadership that improves the quality of public policies affecting women with the intention of furthering communities' economic, social, and political empowerment.

We seek papers that explore the impact public policies have on women both in the United States and around the world and provide new insight into issues affecting diverse groups of women. Articles and commentaries can either offer a gendered or a woman's perspective on pressing political, social, and economic policy issues or investigate the role of women in the policy-making sphere.

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- All figures, tables, and charts must be submitted as entirely separate files.
- A cover letter should include the author's name, address, e-mail address, daytime phone number, and a brief biography.
- Five hard copies of the article should be provided.
- An electronic copy of the submission on a labeled CD should be provided.

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## EDITOR'S NOTES

From the early stages of the editorial process, our goal for this volume was to create an open and original dialogue around women's issues. Instead of confining the content to a particular theme or setting boundaries for the topics to be covered, we decided to let the editorial process motivate a core subject. However, we soon found that "women's issues" had expanded to include environmental policy, education, women's economic and political empowerment, public health, national security, and work-family integration, to name just a few. Our mission for this volume thus became clear: to illustrate that *every issue is a women's issue*.

The following content makes the case that all public policies affect women. Despite the prevailing view that women are primarily concerned with holding positions of soft power and supporting issues of family, reproductive health, and education, women like Massachusetts State Senator Dianne Wilkerson and Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Kathleen A. McGinty are evidence of the contrary. Today women are key players in addressing "hard issues" and finding solutions to the most pressing public problems, including those that extend beyond the boundaries of what are traditionally considered women's issues.

Throughout this volume, we strive to address and foster a dialogue about some of these hard issues and prove that women are, and should continue to be, involved at all levels of policy making and politics. In articles, commentaries, interviews, and reviews, our authors and editors have brought to the forefront key issues, including alternative energy policy; public employment and domestic labor; environmental policy and poverty; women in the military; the integration of work and family; and women's political empowerment in the United States and Iraq. In reading the journal, we hope the content is viewed and received as a vehicle to stimulate creative thinking about all "women's issues."

Most importantly, I would like to thank the journal's managing editor, Marissa Bohrer, who has been a constant source of support and advice to everyone on staff. Her hard work, determination, and dedication to the journal have been truly invaluable. I also extend a very warm thanks to all of the journal's staff members for their devotion to this volume, especially our publisher Christine Connare and our faculty advisor Richard Parker. In addition, we are grateful to the Women and Public Policy Program at the John F. Kennedy School of Government for its steadfast support of this endeavor. I would also like to thank our Executive Advisory Board for its enduring commitment to our mission and publication. Due to the substantial efforts and devotion of these individuals, the *Women's Policy Journal* has come back strong. We hope it will be a lasting resource for new and inclusive dialogues on policy making and politics affecting women.

Sincerely,  
Dianne Munevar  
Editor-in-Chief



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## ARTICLES

- Gender and its Place in the Energy Sector**  
*Barbara Bamberger* .....1
- Female Labor Between Public Employment and Domestic Service: The German Cleaning Trade as a Test for Current Labor Market Strategies**  
*Dr. Nicole Mayer-Ahuja* .....21

## COMMENTARIES

- Access to Safe Water and Sanitation: The First Step in Removing the Female Face of Poverty**  
*Nancy J. Haws* .....41
- Environment, Energy, and Democracy: The Case for Complexity**  
*Kathleen A. McGinty, Secretary, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection* .....47
- A Dialogue on the Diverging Roles and Responsibilities of the Modern American Woman**  
*Barbara Ehrenreich and Phyllis Schlafly* .....53

## INTERVIEWS

- Breaking the Marble Ceiling**  
An Interview with Massachusetts State Senator Dianne Wilkerson  
*Interviewed by Dianne Munevar* .....61
- Seeing the True Face of Iraq**  
An Interview with Mishkat al-Moumin, Iraq's First Minister of the Environment  
*Interviewed by Katie Connolly and Kavita Choudhry* .....71

## BOOK REVIEW

- Attention Kmart Shoppers—This Is Not *Your* Revolution!**  
*This Is How We Do It: The Working Mothers' Manifesto* by Carol Evans  
*Reviewed by Jonathan Schleifer* .....77

## FILM REVIEW

- Good Shoes Can Open All Political Doors**  
*Running in High Heels* directed by M.T. Manelski  
*Reviewed by Melanie Roe* .....81

## ON THE WEB

- Recommended Websites**  
*Dianne Munevar and Marissa Bohrer* .....85

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# GENDER AND ITS PLACE IN THE ENERGY SECTOR

*Barbara Bamberger*

*Barbara Bamberger has conducted gender-based participatory evaluations for rural energy projects in Brazil and in Uganda and is currently managing studies on the effect of energy development on subsistence whaling activities in Alaska Native Villages under contract with the United States Minerals Management Service. She has been involved in international- and national-level policy planning, was a moderator for "Women Waging Peace: Operationalizing UN Security Council 1325," and was a delegate to the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. Bamberger holds a master of environmental management degree from the Yale School of Forestry, Yale University (2002), a master of arts in sustainable international development from Brandeis University's Heller School for Social Policy (2001), and a bachelor of science in economics from the University of Wisconsin Madison (1984). She is an applied social scientist with EDAW Inc., an international environmental consulting firm.*

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## **Abstract**

Gender is recognized as a critical factor in the effective management of development sectors such as agriculture, health care, forestry, water, and education in developing countries. Gender is not similarly appreciated when it comes to the energy sector, which is mistakenly viewed as gender-neutral and technology-driven. Yet women are the chief producers and consumers of energy at the rural level and they hold the most potential for driving sustainable development, despite being disproportionately effected by the lack of access to state energy services. Why has energy lagged behind other sectors in this regard? How has gender theory and practice contributed to this lag? How can national planners incorporate gender into energy planning? This article analyzes these topics, presents recommendations, and explores the potential for gender analysis in social and environmental impact assessments. It suggests that poverty and economic development cannot be fully addressed without taking into account gendered access to energy services.

## **Introduction**

Energy is one of the most important components of sustainable development, affecting peace and security, the environment, and social and economic development. Energy policy and infrastructure are critical factors in economic growth, transportation, and the provision of services. Despite the prevalence of modern energy systems in developed countries, however, more than two billion people in the developing world have no access to modern energy services and still rely solely on traditional fuel sources such as wood, biomass, charcoal, and animal waste. Reliable and affordable access to energy is, consequently, a vital link in poverty eradication.

For countries working toward the goal of poverty reduction, expanding energy services to rural communities is a key component in national-level energy planning. Rural communities are often the last to be integrated into a national energy infrastructure because of the lack of density and income potential for investors. Yet they are also often the poorest and thus most in need of access to energy to spur economic and social development.

One factor in the poverty-energy nexus remains a critical but missing element of national energy planning: accommodating the unique needs of the end users in rural communities, primarily women. The most direct route to improving the quality of life in developing countries is to improve women's access to energy resources, because it is women, as the chief producers and consumers of energy in rural areas, who have the greatest impact on improving the social and economic conditions of their families and communities. With limited access to clean, reliable energy services, women spend up to five hours per day collecting firewood and four hours a day engaged in labor-intensive activities (World Resources Institute 1994; Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations 1996). This lack of energy access prevents women from moving beyond subsistence chores to promoting the sustainable development of both their families and their communities.

Donor agencies such as the World Bank, recognizing the link between energy infrastructure and economic development, have invested millions in loans toward building new energy systems. These same agencies also understand that involving women in development leads to improvements in a country's economic, health care, and educational growth. These two paths have been followed simultaneously but independently. Merging the two strategies is the critical next step in national energy planning.

### **Taking Gender into Account**

Why should planners take gender into account when considering national-level energy policy? Gender plays a critical role in determining who does what within a society with regard to the production of goods and services. It also determines who controls these vital energy resources. This role is particularly relevant in rural areas, where access to natural resources, land rights, and loans are limited (Fortmann and Bruce 1988).

As primary caretakers in the household and as workers outside the home, women are linked to the energy sector in many ways, albeit indirectly. Women throughout the developing world are heavily engaged in activities that require energy as an input, such as cooking, pumping water, transporting and selling goods, establishing small enterprises, and collecting fuelwood. Women also have the primary responsibility of providing health care for their families and educating their children. These activities all require access to energy resources. Energy poverty, consequently, disproportionately affects women, and girls are the first to be pulled from school to help their mothers in time-consuming tasks such as collecting firewood.

### **Why Are Gender-Driven Energy Policies Important?**

Energy is a prerequisite to improving livelihoods, education, and economic opportunities within rural communities (Balakrishnan 2000). Women's lives are at the center of these activities. The greatest impediment to increased energy access for women is that macro-level planners view energy solutions as technology driven and gender neutral, failing to take into account that men and women, who have different societal roles, also use energy differently. Governments and multilateral agencies, for example, tend to favor large-scale central power systems and the importation of liquid fuels over small-scale grid or off-grid systems. This approach, however, fails to take into account the fact that central power systems serve urban areas and business interests first, leaving populations in rural communities behind. The result of such policies is that social and economic development is hindered as women must spend their time searching for fuel and attending to their families' short-term needs rather than focusing on their families' long-term development.

A critical starting point for governments eager to improve wealth distribution and access to energy resources would be for national energy planners to recognize the role women play in energy consumption and production in rural areas. By developing policy initiatives that reflect gender distinctions and break down consumption patterns in households and communities, planners at the national level would be exposed to the variety of ways that gender dictates who the end user is and would be better able to provide cost-effective services in planning infrastructure for energy distribution. Gender-based rate structures, in which fuels used for "gendered activities" such as cooking are subsidized, may be one mechanism of enhancing energy access. If planners view macro-level pricing structures as inherently linked to other national goals, such as reducing poverty and encouraging economic development in rural areas, gender-based rate structures may be accepted by governments as a natural step toward fulfillment of such goals.

### **Disaggregation Has Yet to Occur**

The energy sector has produced data that is well-researched, categorized, and disaggregated and has a long tradition of differentiated policy for the poor, industry, agriculture, and other sectors. In planning large energy infrastructure systems to distribute natural gas, kerosene, hydropower, or electricity, disaggregated pricing schemes are used to serve various sectors of the market. Industrial and agricultural sectors, for example, have different rates than do rural household or manufacturing sectors. In both developed and developing countries, some of these rates are deeply subsidized to further national or regional development goals. This pricing system is possible only because the energy market is one of the most disaggregated markets in the world. Given the emphasis placed on data analysis to make energy markets more efficient and responsive, it is thus surprising that planners do not consider gender when establishing consumption and pricing mechanisms.

As mentioned earlier, planners tend to regard energy as gender neutral, failing to recognize that women and men tend to use energy differently. The perception of

energy as a gender-neutral commodity, however, is reinforced by a lack of accounting of women's work in the home and the informal economy as well as by the failure of gender theory to acknowledge the link between gender and energy. In that disaggregation is acknowledged to be critical to understanding and responding to the market, the "lack of statistics about how, why and how much energy is used by men, women and children is not the reason but an indication that attention is not being paid" to this issue (Parikh 1995).

### **Illuminating the Invisibility of Women's Labor**

In both developed and industrialized countries, only 34 percent of women's work is recognized and included in the United Nations System of National Accounts (United Nations Development Programme 2000). Women's informal and non-monetized work is entirely absent from most national economic data sets, and this invisibility carries over when it comes time to set national energy policy. The undervaluing of women's work, due to women's participation mostly in the informal sector, "makes it difficult to reduce their drudgery" (United Nations Development Programme 2000). A recent World Bank United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) case study on Bangladesh states:

Energy policies and international donor agencies have sought to increase the supply of energy, assuming this would propel economic development without considering demand or the local level context. This focus on economic growth patterns has accentuated the oversight of gender agendas in energy planning, because women's unpaid labor contribution to the gross domestic product is often inadequately accounted for. (Berthaud et al. 2004)

Energy policy is particularly driven by economic growth patterns, and its tariff schedules are based upon disaggregated production within industry, agriculture, commercial, and residential sectors. Women's labor, if absent from this data, will also be absent when setting up pricing strategies at the national level.

Planners, furthermore, tend to view consumption patterns of a "household" as a homogeneous entity. Households, however, are complex cultural systems where intra-household decision making for cooking, lighting, and economic activities are disaggregated by gender. And, finally, the traditional fuels used in rural areas are often omitted from the national energy inventory because there is little cash economy in these areas of developing countries.

### **Energy and Gender Theory**

Given the prevalence of women's work in the informal economy and the lack of gender disaggregation or analysis in the industry as a whole, policy makers have to date ignored the relationship between gender and energy in promoting sustainable development. Until recently gender theory has failed to recognize this link. Gender theory has evolved over time, providing a nexus between women's work and the environment. These theories, however, have not provided an adequate entry point for energy into the gender and development equation. As a result, gender and energy continue to lag behind other gender-environment sectors.

The slowness of gender theory to recognize the direct link between women and energy can be attributed in part to the unique characteristics of energy in comparison to other environmental sectors: the gender-environment link is more subtle with energy because of its use as an input, which constitutes an indirect relationship, rather than an output, which constitutes a more direct, visible link between gender and the environment. The manner in which gender theory has been integrated into development practice over the years, however, also led development planners to emphasize, unintentionally, certain environmental sectors over others.

Though feminist theory and practice has shifted over the years, both remain focused on the direct link between women and the environment. The narratives derived from both women in development theory (WID), in which efficiency is the determinant of women's decision making, and ecofeminism, a social movement that considers the oppression of women and nature as interconnected (Ruether 1992; Mies and Shiva 1993), reinforce a view of women as caretaker, which requires a visible and obvious relationship between women and nature that draws upon the romantic notion of women working the land. Maintaining such a narrative moves the gender-environment debate forward in a general sense and for some specific sectors but not as aptly for energy, which, as an indirect input into women's work, is considerably less visible. Neither WID nor ecofeminism, furthermore, approached development as context specific (Zein-Elabdin 1996), and it is this element, more than any other, that defines energy planning.

The integration of gender theory into development also resulted in the development of separate programs targeting women, rather than the integration of gender elements into existing programs. Women in this context became "a special case" and were treated differently from the mainstream. While certain environmental sectors might have been well served through gender-specific projects, the energy sector was not; because gender has an impact on the magnitude, use, and revenues of these energy systems, gender-based planning must happen in the earliest stages of the planning process. By separating women out from this process, gender theory had the unintended consequence of marginalizing those for whom the projects were intended, namely women. In the case of energy planning, the results of this approach were isolated energy projects that were not integrated into community-based or off-grid planning. While subsequent theories such as gender and development (GAD) and women, environment and development (WED) eventually emerged to replace WID and ecofeminism, the legacy of WID and ecofeminism remains and continues to influence development planning.

### **Incorporating Gender into Energy Planning: Some Successful Examples**

Rural communities are the last to be "hooked up" in national energy projects because of the lack of density and income potential for investors. When planning takes gender into account, however, energy begins to reach the rural poor, supporting economic growth and development. Several recent examples of gender-responsive planning support this hypothesis. The government of Mali, with support from UNDP, recognized the potential for economic development and

poverty reduction and set a goal of serving 10 percent of Mali's rural population and improving access for eight thousand rural women (United Nations Development Programme 2001, 61). In response to requests from women in participating villages, decentralized energy systems (known as multifunctional platforms) were developed to serve three villages, with a plan to expand the program to more than 140 villages over time. The multifunctional platform consisted of a diesel engine, providing off-grid energy for grinding, processing agricultural products, pumping water, charging batteries, and running lights. As part of the government's gender-responsive approach, women were also trained to operate and maintain the engine, as well as sell energy services to local customers (United Nations Development Programme 2001, 63; Diagana 2001). By the year 2001, 149 engines were operating. According to a UNDP evaluation, all systems were self-sustaining, freeing time for women and increasing income-generating activities such as seed oil extraction, production of shea butter, and rice dehulling.

Despite this success, however, obstacles remain: UNDP reports that explicit integration of this project into national energy planning remains a challenge. "Although there is considerable knowledge and awareness of the platforms in Mali, there is little evidence that the concept is being integrated explicitly into national energy, industrial, or other sectoral development plans. Case studies should be set up to analyze how the energy freed by the platform is spent and to create an indicator of human energy; this analysis should be done in collaboration with Mali's National Direction of Statistics and Information" (United Nations Development Programme 2004a.)

In Bangladesh, electric grid extension to rural areas will not be viable for another twenty years. In conjunction with the UNDP, an engineering team conducted a survey on energy use inside the household and held a series of gender-based consultations where they identified women's skills and solicited ideas to design an appropriate energy service and delivery mechanism (ENERGIA News 2001, 12). Women in the community identified electric lighting as a high priority. As a result, the project replaced traditional kerosene lamps with battery-operated lamps, improving indoor air quality and lighting for rural households. The lamps use small portable batteries that are rechargeable by a small diesel generator the women run at a battery charging station (Energia News 2001, 12). Through a microenterprise funded by UNDP, a women's cooperative began to manufacture the lamps. Selling two lamps a day provides wages equivalent to a skilled laborer, raising the woman's income and social status.

And in Brazil, off-grid photovoltaic energy provides power to the Avani de Cunha Lima Agricultural Family School in Valente, Brazil. Through support from USAID and Winrock International, the school now has lighting for classrooms and a quail hatchery, as well as a thoroughly modern computer lab with Internet access via off-grid clean power that is tied to a wireless access tower (USAID 2001). The quail hatchery is run by students. PV energy provides lighting to incubate the eggs, and as a result of this program, girls, as well as boys, began to have access to the internet, learned business and agricultural skills while running the hatchery and selling eggs to the community, and could study in the evenings. The cumulative impacts, in this case, included promoting girls' attendance in school



and their participation in activities that will support their livelihoods in the long term. Gender studies have shown that girls' participation in school increases with greater access to energy, as they can study in the evening, feel more secure and safe, and overall, girls' participation tends to lead to broader, long-term community benefits (UNDP 2004c, Clancy and Skutsch 2003, Oxaal 1997). In rural areas, where girls traditionally attend school in smaller numbers than boys, energy services lead to greater equity by providing a safer environment and more opportunities to study in the evening when girls are less likely to be working in fields or doing chores.

### **How Gender Can Be Incorporated into Macro-Level Energy Planning**

For national energy planning, an effective gender-based approach takes into account different social, cultural, and economic realities based upon gender differences. This requires a shift in institutional thinking from the "just add gender" approach—adding gender on top of an existing project—to a systematic redesign that takes into account women's energy needs at every stage of project planning. To plan national-level energy infrastructure, disaggregation at the village level is necessary. This disaggregation includes (a) data analysis; (b) participatory consultations; (c) product design; (d) evaluating attitudes and perceptions of the product and the design; (e) macro- and micro-level pricing; (f) product marketing; and, (g) training on system maintenance and mechanics.

Planners must avoid lumping all women together in one "user group." Gender differences are heavily context-specific to the community in which the project is being carried out, and these differences must be analyzed. Clearly understanding the beneficiary is critical to the success of both micro- and macro-level energy projects. Planners need to examine the time trade-offs required with different energy systems and whether certain systems are likely to place additional burdens on women's lives. To avoid such unanticipated consequences, women should be part of the team that develops the policies, participating in both system design and receiving training in system maintenance. Such an approach is particularly important where the policies serve local communities with specific programs. One can learn from the experience of a renewable energy project distributing biogas stoves in India. This project ultimately failed because women had not been involved in the program from the outset; the design, testing, and monitoring of the stoves was conducted solely by men. Though the women were to be the project's beneficiaries, by the time they were included they had no stake in the project and, therefore, little interest in the stoves (Dutta et al 1997; Cecelski 2000; Dutta 2003).

Through multidisciplinary teams that include social scientists and anthropologists, energy consumption can be gender-differentiated and therefore designed with the customer in mind. For example, planners that take gender into account would know that women are the primary users of water pumps and so would not design pumps that are too large and too heavy for women to operate. By making explicit the link between gender, energy, and development, the national planning process sets the tone for incorporating gender into micro-level planning.

### **National-Level Planning**

Is it possible to incorporate gender into energy policy making at the macro level? The answer is yes. Rural electrification, off-grid renewables, and energy pricing plans are all established through national energy policy. Energy rates are determined by pricing mechanisms that take into account distribution, type of service, and consumption patterns. Gender-based rates would establish affordable pricing specifically targeting a woman's consumption patterns based upon the fuel needed for a "gendered" activity. These rates, it is important to note, do not refer to separate rates established for men and for women. Instead, these rates target activities necessary for social and economic development. For example, given that certain fuels can be used for household lighting, enabling children to study in the evenings and women to engage in income-generating activities, a subsidized "education rate" could be established for those fuels, which could also be sold wholesale to the women with the intent of developing a secondary market and providing income generation to the women of the community.

Most of the attention given to gender in energy pricing has been within the household sector. As mentioned earlier, women's work is not confined to the household; it spills over into agriculture, food processing, and manufacturing (Parikh 1996). Activities, from brick and coal making to preparing food for kiosk sales, all need fuel. National energy pricing structures could include fuel rates established to provide economic development assistance for microenterprises and manufacturing within rural communities. If the principles of pricing include cross-subsidization to promote weaker groups within the society, then such pricing should be brought into natural resource, poverty, and economic development policies.

Planners must also avoid a technology-first approach, which results in oversized or undersized systems and, ultimately, a high failure rate for an otherwise proven technology. To understand the gender effects of a particular energy intervention, each component must be analyzed. For example, though liquid propane gas (LPG) may be available, the size of the tank may be too large for a woman to easily transport home and too expensive if they are living in a cash-poor economy. In response to this dilemma a cooperative solution is currently being developed by UNDP and the LPG industry to design smaller LPG cylinders that are both more affordable and transportable (United Nations Development Programme 2004b; United Nations Development Programme 2005).

One successful example of a gender-based energy project is the Winrock International photovoltaic (PV) off-grid water pumping systems in the Mamirauá Sustainable Development Reserve (Winrock International Brazil Clean Energy Group 2004; USAID Brazil Energy Program 2003). This program's goal was to provide off-grid clean water and energy to rural communities along the Amazon River in Brazil. Its success is due in part to the PV systems being sized both to deal with the limitations of the technology and to fit the needs of the village. Equally as important to the project's success, however, was that project planners brought the village into the planning process at the outset, identifying project staff with deep familiarity of the region, which increased the legitimacy and participation among the villages. Five years after the inception of the program,

gender-based participatory research methods were employed to evaluate program impacts. The evaluation found that the water pump increased time available for household chores, participation in the village cooperative, and fishing. It also found that water pumps placed in the center of the village provided less benefit than the water pump that had piping leading directly to each household in the village. Finally, it was shown that in order to keep the system up and running, including women in the maintenance and training of the system ensured continuity of the systems over time.

### **Credit and Pricing Options**

Obtaining financing for any project, let alone energy systems, is particularly difficult for women in developing countries. In Kenya, for example, it is illegal for women to own titles to land, yet land is the required collateral for any loan. This policy makes it impossible for women to obtain credit to develop an energy-intensive small business, which typically requires a large amount of start-up capital. While women contribute to the majority of agricultural labor and food production, they receive less than 10 percent of the credit going to farmers because banks require that loans be provided to the wage earner or property owner, conditions many women in rural areas cannot meet (Cecelski 2000, 29).

In countries where a woman needs her husband's signature or must provide collateral to obtain a loan, programs can be designed to provide micro loans specifically for sustainable energy provisions for new or expanding business operations. These credit programs are designed to encourage deployment of cleaner fuel technologies (such as LPG, more efficient fish smokers, and biogas digesters) by targeting new and expanding businesses while supporting rural enterprises.

Credit mechanisms are also essential and must be easily accessible by women. "Policies that support credit opportunities for women must address the collateral and revenue-stream requirements of commercial credit organizations and take into account the legal status of women that might exclude women as borrowers" (United Nations Development Programme 2001, 11). Planners can address this issue by establishing credit programs with collateral requirements that women can meet. In rural areas the poor may have a difficult time paying for energy because of seasonal income. Increasing flexibility of payments over the year can help address this issue (Saghir 2005, 15).

### **Affordability**

The affordability of energy is determined by national policies; national policies, in turn, dictate the fuels that will be subsidized. Fuel subsidies can result in either greater access to fuel supply for women or, in practice, difficulty in obtaining fuel supply due to competing demands. In India, a kerosene subsidy was established with the intent to provide rural communities with cheaper kerosene in comparison to diesel. Because kerosene and diesel have a similar chemical composition, kerosene can be replaced with diesel for some uses. Businesses caught onto this loophole and began to switch from using diesel for industrial purposes to kerosene to reduce their costs. The subsidy became a burden on the country: the fuel didn't

get to the villages because of heavy demand by industry; kerosene was used in place of diesel in autos; and the women in the villages did not get access to the kerosene. Eventually the subsidy was removed.

The World Bank discourages subsidies and states that little evidence exists that subsidies have worked well at helping the poor purchase fuels. However, some level of cross-subsidization occurs in both developed and developing countries. When energy rates are determined by pricing structures that take into account distribution, type of service, and consumption pattern, rates differ from sector to sector. The pricing of fuels for cooking, illumination, schools, health facilities, and small enterprises should be less expensive than pricing for industry or transport. "Special consideration is often given to weaker sections of the society. For example, pricing of electricity for agriculture differs for industry. Pricing of gasoline for motor vehicles is different from pricing of kerosene for cooking" (Parikh 1995).

One possible approach is to design a rate structure specifically targeting a particular energy demand identified through household surveys. As illustrated earlier, one example of such a rate structure could be a gender-based rate to incentivize energy use for home illumination in the evenings: given that lighting in the evening promotes studying and microenterprise, the price for such lighting would be set at a rate to promote this use. Imagine, for example, that a woman in Kenya uses firewood and charcoal for cooking and buys a small jerrican of kerosene that will last her family a month. She pays nothing for the fuelwood because she grew the trees in her garden, and she pays fifty schillings for the kerosene and 250 schillings for a month's worth of charcoal. The kerosene is used for lighting the house in the evening, when the children are doing schoolwork. The charcoal is used for cooking and the firewood for heating. In response, a planner could establish a rate structure for kerosene and for a fuel replacement for charcoal. This special "education rate" is applied to kerosene for lighting the household in the evenings, thereby providing an added benefit to the woman of the household who can conduct income-generating activities in the evening while the children study. The planner coordinates this activity with other education and poverty-reduction programs, potentially offsetting any subsidies through such coordination. The rate is set such that small, fixed payments can be paid over a period of time, providing more flexibility for those that cannot afford monthly energy tariffs.

Pricing that is affordable must, of course, be accompanied by fuel availability. Although this seems obvious, there have been numerous cases where subsidies that have targeted rural households have been usurped by industry, rendering the fuel unavailable, even in cases where women could afford to make the purchases.

### **Subsidies and Taxes**

Import taxes that are applied to some fuels and not to others affect women's ability to pay. Gender-sensitive policies consider the effect of subsidies and tariffs on women. Subsidizing fuels that target women requires understanding the cost of current subsidies for other fossil fuels. An example may be establishment of a national policy to provide a zero tax rating on particular fuels and their associated

appliances and distribution network. A zero tax rate coupled with a reduction of existing subsidies on kerosene facilitates the movement of LPG into the rural sector and evens the playing field for LPG delivery and targets women's businesses, effectively reducing energy poverty in rural communities. Additionally, if there are high subsidies on fossil fuels, such as those that often exist on kerosene, those subsidies should be made visible when comparing costs of different energy options, so a true cost comparison can be made when considering new power sources. The construction of a new micro hydropower plant, for example, might seem expensive compared to the existing cost of kerosene. Once the subsidy is removed, however, a better comparison can be made.

Discussions have been ongoing about the prospect of developing a system to get around this distribution problem and to ensure that those entitled to receive a subsidy get the fuel. A more expensive but cleaner option than kerosene, LPG is considered the next step up on "the energy ladder," a ladder which describes energy movement from animal dung (the bottom rung) to firewood, kerosene, and then, finally, to electricity (the top rung). An effective LPG distribution system would require the use of smart cards by those entitled to subsidies. Swiping the smart card, which is similar to swiping a credit card, would act to release the valve and distribute LPG to the appropriate beneficiaries. Without the smart card, distribution would be disabled.<sup>1</sup> Of course, this is a technological solution and may not be feasible in small villages. The point is that better regulation might reduce the stealing of kerosene. Pricing should be kept separate for industrial and residential sectors to ensure subsidies intended for households get to those individuals.

Distribution must also be considered with gender in mind. A distribution system that provides small portions of fuel can be more easily carried by foot than larger systems. A photovoltaic water pump must be designed so that the pump system is not too tall and not too heavy, so women in the village can easily utilize it. For LPG, distribution of LPG cylinders in two-kilogram rather than twelve-kilogram containers makes the use of LPG as a household fuel more likely.

### **Harmonizing National Energy Planning with International Efforts and Micro-Level Planning**

Within the realm of gender theory, it has taken more than twenty years to comprehend the full importance of the need to redesign development projects to take gender differences into account. A gender lens must be incorporated into development projects by doing more than simply conducting a "gender analysis." Redesigning project implementation at the micro level, and policy planning at the macro level, must be informed by a gender lens that goes beyond disaggregating needs. Rather, it requires a multilevel approach. In taking into account different social, cultural, and economic realities based upon gender differences, a gender-energy link should be incorporated into international indexes as well as micro-level planning.

At the household or micro level, a full analysis and disaggregation of who uses what, where the access points do and do not exist, and the economic structure of the community must be understood. Dianne Rocheleau, Barbara Thomas-Slayer,

and Esther Wangari (1996) argue that “incorporating a feminist analysis can illuminate the ways in which gender positions both men and women vis-à-vis institutions that determine access to land, to other resources, and to the wider economy.”

At the international level, an energy-gender index could be developed whereby energy projects are measured against a country's gender and poverty-reduction goals over time. This indicator would provide a country-to-country comparison and, like the Human Development Index (HDI), would measure a number of different factors including, for example, cumulative time savings for women from no longer having to search for fuel, improved levels of education for children from better lighting after dark, improved health due to drinking and irrigation water availability, and increased income generation from small enterprises.

### **Incorporating Gender in Social Impact Assessments**

In the United States, projects that fall under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) require environmental impact statements to analyze socioeconomic and environmental justice impacts at the local level. Multilateral financing agencies, such as the Asian Development Bank, require environmental impact assessments (EIAs) to authorize loans and approve private sector investment operations. The World Bank, additionally, requires environmental and social assessments for nonstructural adjustment lending projects. Environmental impact assessments are naturally a frontline tool in facilitating disaggregated analysis of energy projects by gender. It seems reasonable to consider a policy shift to institutionalize gender analysis within the context of environmental impact assessments. Such disaggregated analysis helps planners understand who will benefit within the community and target the project more precisely to the various needs identified among different sectors within a community.

Though gender analysis is a starting point, the incorporation of gender into required EIAs provides a tool for planners to consider negative impacts and alternative projects with regard to gender. A gender impact assessment based upon an EIA model, for example, was recently implemented in the Netherlands under a Dutch instrument called the Emancipation Effect Report (EERs). In Mieke Verloo's (2001) critique on gender mainstreaming, he analyzes the Dutch experience of implementing gender-impact assessments. Verloo concluded the strength of the Dutch experience was that the gender-impact assessment was applied successfully as an evaluative tool at the national level to analyze nine policy areas including education, justice, tax policy, and agriculture. Critical points of attention included the political support for the instrument, the translation of conclusions to alternatives, and the fact that the analysis was neither too time consuming nor too costly. He points to findings from an evaluation of the impact-assessment process by Woodward and Meier, which argued, first, that it is absolutely critical that an assessment not only analyzes the solutions proposed, but also that it critiques the way policy proposals construct the problems in the first place; and second, that gender assessments were conducted at too late a stage, when policy plans could not realistically be changed (Verloo 2001).

## Conclusion

National energy policy making cannot proceed without a strong link to poverty policy making, both of which must encompass gender. Planners at the national level must view energy planning as an integrated part of a larger poverty-eradication scheme. If planners view pricing tariffs as an integrated strategy with other national goals such as reducing poverty and encouraging economic development in rural areas, gendered energy pricing may be more readily accepted as a natural step toward fulfillment of such goals.

A national energy policy that fosters human and economic development can only be realized under conditions that enable gender-sensitive energy planning. Because energy use is an input in other work, and much of women's work within rural communities is outside the monetary system, women's work is not integrated into national economic statistics. This invisibility has aided the assumption that energy is gender neutral simply because it does not show up in statistics or official disaggregation. Including a gender perspective in energy planning will lead to greater empowerment for women, and this empowerment is a prerequisite to sustainable development. To achieve this, planners must eliminate the invisibility of gender in energy planning, disaggregate consumption by gender to fill in the data gaps, establish gender-based local and national energy planning, and ensure that national energy policy making does not proceed without a strong link to poverty policy making.

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### *Endnote*

<sup>1</sup> From personal communication with J. Parikh in 2001.

**ASIAN AMERICAN POLICY REVIEW  
ANNOUNCES THE RELEASE OF**

**VOLUME XV**

The 2006 issue of the **Asian American Policy Review** is devoted to the theme "**Heterogeneity: Deconstructing Asian America.**"

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- Interviews with Sam Yoon, the first Asian American to be elected into the Boston city government as a city councilor, and Karen Narasaki, president and executive director of the Asian American Justice Center. Both discuss the diverse elements of the Asian American community.
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# FEMALE LABOR BETWEEN PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT AND DOMESTIC SERVICE: THE GERMAN CLEANING TRADE AS A TEST FOR CURRENT LABOR MARKET STRATEGIES<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

As Europe struggles with a crisis of joblessness, various labor market policies have been suggested to remedy the situation. The ultimate policy question is whether unemployment can be reduced by policies that privatize the public sector and promote the low-wage sector. This issue is particularly salient to women since women have always been overrepresented in low-wage jobs. This article analyzes major labor market interventions and their outcomes at both the European Union and the national levels through the case of the female-dominated cleaning trade in West Germany. In particular, analysis focuses on the three main strategies of low-wage job creation: expanding the public sector; tolerating gray labor markets; and providing incentives to households in hopes that they would become employers. Shifts between these strategies resulted in "double privatization": cleaning jobs were transferred from the public sector to private companies and households. However, these policies generally did not boost employment in the long run; the modest numerical growth in jobs was mainly due to full-time employment being split up into "minijobs," without subsistence wages or social insurance coverage, which were often illegal. In an era in which women increasingly depend solely on their own paychecks, such employment increases their economic vulnerability.

### **Beyond Theories of Paths and Models: Low-Wage Employment in Germany**

Numerous theories hold that Germany is no stronghold of low-wage employment. Both common sense and academic reflections on “welfare state regimes” and “varieties of capitalism” argue that the German labor market is more highly regulated than that of other countries. Gösta Esping-Andersen (1990), in his widely debated study on welfare regimes, characterized (West) Germany as a prototype of “conservative” welfare capitalism: it prioritizes securing stable and well-paid employment for males by keeping females and the elderly out of the labor force through family policies that strengthen the male-breadwinner model and early-retirement schemes. Theoretically, the relatively strict labor law and the traditional system of collective wage bargaining should prevent low-wage employment in Germany altogether.

Despite these academic debates revolving around the veracity of such models and the corresponding existence of “path dependencies,” the facts are that fundamental changes already have occurred in the German labor market. For instance, there is an increasing number of sectors that are not at all covered by collective (wage) bargaining. In other sectors, collective agreements now explicitly establish and govern low-wage employment (Pohl and Schäfer 1996).<sup>2</sup>

Women, in West Germany as elsewhere, have always been overrepresented in low-wage jobs. On the one hand, women are frequently employed in declining sectors after qualified males have left, such as in the textile industry, or in newly expanding, unstable sectors before the jobs become attractive for skilled workers (“Facharbeiter”), such as electronics in the early twentieth century. In such transitioning sectors wage standards are hard to establish or to defend (Müller, Willms, and Handl 1983). On the other hand, paying women low wages still seems to be more acceptable than paying them to men, since female incomes are often treated as dispensable “extra earnings.” Despite declining marriage rates and exploding divorce rates, women are still considered to be less dependent on their individual income. Both the sectors in which women are employed and the norms governing their employment lead to women’s notorious overrepresentation in low-wage labor.

In addition to women’s labor market vulnerability in terms of wages, their positions are even more tenuous because they are less likely to even be employed. Women are prominent among the ranks of the unemployed and jobless, but the female jobless are largely unaddressed by policy. Unemployment has been argued to be less problematic for women because wives and mothers are believed to have an “exit option” not equally available to males. Women’s unemployment is sometimes even explicitly desired: in times of economic crisis<sup>3</sup> campaigns against “double earners” have pressured married women to quit their jobs so that men can find employment. Ideologically, women’s labor, like their earnings, is seen as optional.

Such attitudes are reflected in the rates of female labor force participation. In 2005, the female unemployment rate of 10.3 percent was considerably above the male rate of 8.9 percent.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, these figures still underestimate the problem, as it is far more common for women than for men to refrain from registering as “unemployed,” even in cases of involuntary joblessness. The number of persons



who are officially registered with the Federal Agency of Labor Exchange and receive unemployment benefits is thus much smaller than the number of jobless persons overall. In the past, this gap between the registered unemployed and the jobless was usually considered not to be problematic since it was mainly attributed to jobless wives and mothers who were believed to “stay at home” voluntarily to look after the household and their children. This voluntary opting out no longer seems to be as common. Instead, the ever-rising share of the jobless women who registered themselves as unemployed in recent years shows an increasing interest by women in gainful employment. Furthermore, despite this visible increase of women’s inclinations toward gainful employment (“*Erwerbsneigung*”), there is also a considerable group of women that is now counted as part of the silent reserve (“*Stille Reserve*”). They are not registered as unemployed because of missing entitlements or personal frustration, but they would readily enter employment if the labor market permitted it. In 2003, for instance, roughly 31 million persons in Germany were gainfully employed, 2.7 million were registered as unemployed, and 1.4 million constituted the silent reserve (Baethge et al. 2005, 280).

Above all, these figures indicate that many jobless women in Germany have not had sufficient options for entering gainful employment in the last few decades. So, despite academic theories to the contrary, it may not come as a surprise that there is indeed a substantial low-wage sector in Germany. Moreover, these “McJobs” are concentrated in traditional female strongholds. Today, 15.7 percent of all employees earn less than two-thirds of the national median wage in Germany.<sup>5</sup> Forty-five percent of the low-wage group, but only one-third of all full-timers, are employed in the service sector, and 57 percent of low-wage earners are female, whereas women constitute merely 35 percent of all full-time employees (Rhein, Gartner, and Krug 2005). Even if the current “precarious feminization of the workforce” (Beck 1999, 70) is increasingly forcing men into low-wage jobs, we still need to turn to labor market strategies originally aimed at women in order to reconstruct the generation of this low-wage sector in Germany.

### **Low-Wage Strategies in the Cleaning Trade**

The growth of low-wage jobs, which shapes labor markets in Germany and in other early industrialized countries, is usually attributed to rising unemployment rates and thus to processes of long-term economic change. With the advance of the economic recession around 1973, mass unemployment emerged as the principal problem of governments for the first time after World War II. This problem was compounded by “sectoral” shifts that primarily impacted the low-skill population. The industrial sector declined in importance since the early twentieth century, and employment in the service sector spread (Klammer et al. 2000). However, the changes in employment were unevenly distributed. Women, who were increasingly pushed into the labor market after the war, largely found themselves in the growing service sector (Müller, Willms, and Handl 1983).

Overall, the increase in low-skill services could not make up for the decline of unskilled industrial labor as job growth was more or less restricted to high-skill services in the 1990s (Baethge et al. 1999, 4–7; Häußermann and Siebel 1995,

32–34). Under these macro-economic conditions, persons with limited formal qualification constituted an ever-increasing share of the unemployed. In 2005, 20 percent of early school leavers registered as unemployed in Germany.<sup>6</sup>

These developments provoked reflections about how to create additional low-skill employment in the low-wage sector by means of active political intervention. Since Germany was thought to suffer from a “service gap” in comparison to Anglo-Saxon countries, it was argued that enormous numbers of low-skill jobs could be generated in the service sector if these services were only cheap enough to attract customers (Baethge et al. 1999; Scharpf 1986; Streeck and Heinze 1999). In particular, private households were made out as promising potential employers of cleaners, gardeners, child minders, and nurses. To motivate employers to create these jobs, it was suggested that the wage gap between employer and employee be widened. This could be achieved either by granting tax benefits to employers; by diminishing wage costs artificially through publicly subsidizing wages or insurance fees; or by cutting unemployment benefits in order to force recipients into low-paying jobs (Hoffmann and Walwei 1998; Kommission 1997; and, for a critique, Mayer-Ahuja 2001).

For many years, political debates have mainly revolved around the question of whether low-paying employment functions as a “bridge” into better-paying jobs or whether it entails a lasting exclusion of employees from regular labor markets.<sup>7</sup> The actual capacity of the low-wage sector to increase employment opportunities, however, is usually taken for granted. This unanimity is surprising, especially in view of the fact that there is hardly any statistical evidence for that often repeated assumption from the last few decades; the development of the low-wage sector as a whole has not been documented, and even data on particular occupations are rare and scattered. For this reason, the labor market recipes of low-wage strategists need to be tested by reconstructing whether they have succeeded in generating employment growth in a single but typical sector in the past.

The cleaning trade can be considered as one of these “typical” sectors in at least three respects. First, cleaning jobs are characterized by low wages, “flexible” working contracts, and high fluctuation rates (Mayer-Ahuja 2003). Hence, according to neoconservative concepts, this sector should display ideal conditions for employment growth. Secondly, professional cleaning, like most supposedly low-skill occupations, is a stronghold of female employment. Finally, the cleaning trade’s history was shaped by the most important governmental strategies for generating employment for persons with limited formal qualification in Germany as well as in other European countries.

The following case study analyzes the actual impacts of three low-wage strategies on employment growth.

1. In the 1920s and again from the 1950s, a public cleaning service was established. State offices, schools, or hospitals employed cleaners on full-time or extended part-time basis in order to provide “needy women” with subsistence wages, social insurance protection, and a long-term job perspective. From the late 1960s, however, these jobs were massively reduced by means of privatization.

2. Especially private cleaning companies profited from a certain tolerance toward a gray labor market where labor law and collective agreements had hardly any relevance. As will be discussed below, most jobs in private cleaning companies, which expanded from the early 1970s, met the pattern of marginal employment (*"geringfügige Beschäftigung"*) as working hours and income stayed below the threshold defined for the German health, old age, and unemployment insurance. Hence neither contributions nor wage taxes were due, and even the flat charge for wage taxes (*"Lohnsteuerpauschale"*) was frequently avoided. What came to be known as *"minijobs"* were thus not registered by social insurance or revenue administrations and constituted a stronghold of illegal employment.
3. The first efforts to fight unemployment by offering incentives to potential employers stretch back to at least the mid-1980s, when social assistance rates, functioning as sort of a minimum wage, were virtually frozen, and legal obstacles to unlawful dismissal and agency work were reduced (Schmidt 1998; Adamy 1988). Moreover, employment in private households was subsidized by tax reductions from 1989. Though first these laws were ridiculed as *"maid privilege"* (*"Dienstmädchenprivileg"*), their provisions were further increased in 1996.<sup>8</sup> Currently, even more far-reaching tax deductions for those who employ maids (as cleaners, but especially as child minders) are being discussed as a means both to create low-skill jobs and to boost the declining birthrate of academic middle classes at the same time.

The three organizational arrangements of professional cleaning—cleaning in the public service, private cleaning companies, and private households—thus arguably mirror the most important strategies applied by West German governments since the early 1970s in order to generate low-wage employment. These strategies were often in accordance with European Union (EU) policies. In the following sections, the shift of importance between these arrangements will be reconstructed. Focusing on quantitative developments, we will address the question of whether any of these low-wage strategies has resulted in substantial employment growth in the German cleaning trade. We also will briefly turn to the consequences for the women concerned as well as to repercussions for German and EU labor market policy.

As with the low-wage sector in general, very little has been done to track the posited growth in employment in the cleaning trade. Although professional cleaning occupied the third (1984) or the fourth (1989) rank in Germany among female occupations in the 1980s, it has been neglected by official statisticians persistently (Duda 1990, 15, 30). Hence, in order to gain at least an approximate idea of the cleaning trade's employment performance during the last decades, researchers need to assemble widely scattered and fragmentary source material to create a kind of *"mosaic."* Such a mosaic forms the basis of the following case study.

### **Job Creation in the Public Cleaning Service**

After World War II, jobs were explicitly created in the public sector as a means to provide "needy women" with subsistence wages and long-term job perspectives. Many of these jobs were concentrated in the public cleaning service. While the exact figures are not recorded, most public sector cleaners did have full- or extended part-time jobs.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the standards of these jobs were high: unlike most female-dominated jobs, they provided social insurance coverage and were governed by collective agreements. However, shrinking government budgets and a neoconservative movement that disdained public employment led to the gradual decline in public sector employment and the turn toward privatization.

In the postwar era and until far into the 1970s, most cleaners in Germany seem to have been employed in the public sector. According to a survey conducted by the "confederation of towns and communities" ("Städte und Gemeindebund") of North-Rhine-Westphalia,<sup>10</sup> more than half of the cities relied exclusively on public sector cleaners in 1977, and an additional 40 percent of all the cities complemented the work of "public staff" with the services of private cleaning companies (Tofaute 1977, 59). It can thus be argued that the professional cleaning sector was still dominated by public sector employment in the mid-1970s.

This dominance is more striking given that the reduction of the public cleaning service had commenced as early as 1960. After all, cleaners had been among the first public sector employees affected by privatization. According to representatives of the public sector trade union ("Gewerkschaft Öffentliche Dienste, Transport, Verkehr"), such privatization measures usually started "at the edges, where the economically weakest [such as low-skilled women] are employed" (Die beuten 1976).<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the wages in the public service were rising as a labor shortage drove down the supply of willing workers. The labor shortage raised the cost of the emerging private cleaning companies as well, but private services still remained attractive for public institutions because they took responsibility for the time-consuming recruitment of cleaners.

After the recessions of 1966–1967 and 1973–1974, unemployment figures rose, and more women had to accept cleaning jobs. Under these conditions, it would have been easy (and necessary) to recruit "needy women" for the public cleaning service again. However, the economic crisis made public revenue shrink. Finally, when the European Union's Maastricht Treaty of 1992 imposed sanctions on member states increasing their national debts by more than 3 percent of the total budget, public spending and especially public sector employment were cut even further.<sup>12</sup> Hence, public cleaning services were continually reduced; in the 1960s however, "the reason behind it was the labor shortage in communal cleaning, whereas today [in the 1970s and later], the wish to privatize results from budget deficits"(Minssen 1977).

The decline of public sector employment and the turn toward privatization could have affected various occupational groups, of course, but attention was explicitly focused on cleaners. As early as 1972, the Federal Court of Finance ("Bundesrechnungshof") revised the budget of the Federal Postal Administration, concluding that privatization could cut cleaning costs to one-third; the aim to provide for "needy women" was no longer mentioned (Bundesdrucksache 7/2709,

29.10.1974, quoted in Kellner 1983). In the following years, neoconservative dislike of public employment,<sup>13</sup> shrinking public budgets, and the increasing number of women who had to accept low-wage jobs no doubt contributed to the decline of public cleaning.<sup>14</sup>

While the increase in public sector jobs up to the 1960s and the later reduction of public employment have shaped the cleaning trade's history fundamentally, they have only left minor marks in German statistics. Relevant data is more or less restricted to the "Mikrozensus,"<sup>15</sup> which indicates that the number of public sector cleaners in West Germany was reduced continuously from 110,000 (1975–1976) to 65,000 (1998),<sup>16</sup> i.e., from 1.2 percent to 0.5 percent of all gainfully employed women.<sup>17</sup> While figures may indicate the broad degree of change, they do conceal considerable regional differences in speed and amount of privatization, as well as the fact that some public institutions reinstalled their cleaning services after bad experiences with private companies (Zimmermann 1978).

Additionally, there were significant changes not only in the number of jobs, but also in their quality. For instance, the total number of working hours in the public cleaning service must have been reduced even more dramatically than data on the number of jobs reveals. In the 1970s, most public sector cleaners had been full-time employees; in later years, the share of part-time employment increased (Tofaute 1977).

This shift away from full-time work arguably reflects a general trend in employment, which has affected many industrialized countries. In Germany, the late twentieth-century expansion of female labor force participation was due mainly to an increase in part-time jobs, often in spite of women's willingness to work full time. In 2002, 19 percent of all gainfully employed women had a part-time job with social insurance coverage, and 16 percent worked in minijobs without insurance, even though more than half of these women would have preferred longer working-hours (Baethge et al. 2005, 17, 110).

These changes in job quality are not attributable to privatization alone. Even in the German public sector, "marginal employment" spread—in 1987, 62,000 minijobs were recorded; ten years later, their number had gone up to 173,000 (Friedrich 1989, 36; Friedrich 1997, 49). Most of this growth in public sector marginal employment was concentrated in the female-dominated cleaning service (Deutscher Bundestag 1989, 25). Hence, the number of cleaners employed in the public sector was not only *reduced* by at least one-third between 1973 and 1998, but the remaining jobs comprised fewer and fewer working hours. As employment and wages fell, the opportunity to earn subsistence wages in public cleaning was thus continuously diminished.

### **Private Cleaning Companies and the Tolerance Toward Gray Labor Markets**

In the process of privatization, the duties of the public cleaning service were transferred to the staff of a swiftly increasing number of private cleaning companies whose total volume of business expanded as enormously as their employment figures.

In 1973 as well as in 1998, one-third of this exploding turnover was earned by means of cleaning public buildings, which gives additional weight to the

assumption that the employment growth in cleaning companies was a direct consequence of the public cleaning service's privatization (Zimmermann 1978; Seumer 1998, 257–259).

However, the *total number* of cleaners registered in the Mikrozensus did not change considerably; in nearly twenty-five years, this occupational group only increased by 60,000 persons. Still, a striking change is indicated by the fact that the share of cleaning companies grew from 30 percent of all cleaners registered in 1973 to about 90 percent in 1998 (Trades Statistic: Statistisches Bundesamt, Fachserie D, Reihe 7.1).

This comparison may exaggerate the degree of change effected by privatization, as marginal employment was included in the trade statistics but thoroughly underrepresented in the Mikrozensus (1998, 16). After all, the majority of cleaning companies' staff seems to have consisted of "minijobbers."

These minijobbers experienced less job stability and earned even lower wages than women in the public cleaning service. As early as 1977, a survey of the employers' association of cleaning companies concluded that 77 percent of their staff were marginally employed, this share reaching 90 percent "in extreme cases" (Ostwald 1978). Despite the increase in the total number of employees, 75 percent still had minijobs in 1985 (Küpper and Stolz-Willig 1988, 8–9). After that, their share went down to 60 percent in 1987 and 40 percent in 1992, according to the first official statistics on marginal employment in Germany, and there is evidence that it stagnated around 55 percent between 1993 and 1998 (BIV 1993; Friedrich 1989, 36, 84; Friedrich 1993, tables 4d, 21a; Friedrich 1997, 46).

The relative decline of minijobs may be due to the fact that bigger and more consolidated cleaning companies took to planning their labor needs in advance instead of relying on jobs resembling "flexible" day labor. In addition, more women seem to have been interested in working longer hours, as "housewives and mothers," who had constituted the vast majority of staff in the 1970s, were increasingly joined in the 1990s by women who wished to earn more than "a little extra money," but could not find more attractive part-time or full-time jobs because of mass unemployment. Whereas cleaning companies in 1980 found it difficult to recruit staff for four working hours per day, in later years employers increasingly reported employee wishes for extended part-time and even full-time-work (Kommentar 1981; Was sagen 1990).

Whatever the reasons for the rise and decline of minijobs in cleaning companies, their underrepresentation in the Mikrozensus suggests that the total number of cleaners may have been higher and the share of private companies accordingly smaller than available data suggests. Yet there can be no doubt that privatization mainly caused a replacement of cleaning jobs in the public sector by jobs in private companies without creating much additional employment for the women concerned.

This substitution of public sector cleaners by the staff of private cleaning companies resulted primarily from the fact that the latter could rely upon cheap, flexible, and short-term minijobs. This utilization of marginal employment was actively supported by German labor policy in two ways: it was overtly encouraged, and it remained largely unregulated.

On the one hand, marginal employment below a certain threshold of income and working hours was explicitly rendered attractive for employers by the German government for the first time after 1973. When minijobs had first been exempted from social insurance schemes in 1927, women could decide whether they wished to pay contributions and, in turn, become entitled to insurance protection. However, as soon as the postwar labor shortage commenced around 1960, minijobs were *automatically* excluded from social insurance as long as they did not reach a certain level of income and working hours defined by central government (Oertzen 1999, 122–131). This aimed at forcing women, who needed to earn more than “pocket money,” into registered employment. These policies, which rendered minijobs much less attractive for working women, aimed at turning female part-time workers into “regular employees” as they were hoped to increase their working hours in the long run.

Ironically, shortly after these measures had been introduced, economic recession started. Under these declining economic conditions, women with minijobs were no longer considered an important reserve of labor power that had to be pushed into “typical” or “proper employment.” Instead the “atypical” labor market, made up of all jobs that were not full-time employment and did not offer complete coverage by social insurance schemes and collective agreements, was now actively reanimated. This marked an important policy shift as the German government had tried to abolish “atypical jobs” in the prosperous postwar years, and it paved the way for a gradual erosion of German “standard employment” (“Normalarbeitsverhältnis”) after 1973. Marginal employment, for instance, was to affect more and more employees as the threshold for social insurance coverage was now repeatedly increased (Mayer-Ahuja 2001). In 2002, the Mikrozensus reported that the share of marginal employment had reached 7.7 percent of the gainfully employed workforce in Germany (Baethge et al. 2005, 249).

On the other hand, policy implicitly encouraged marginal employment as German authorities only took halfhearted measures against illegal minijobs. Because minijobs were neither registered by social insurance nor by tax authorities, they were allowed to mushroom. Hence, many women (illegally) combined several minijobs without paying social insurance fees (Buch 1999, 148). It is also indicative that in some cleaning companies, sometimes 30 to 50 percent of the staff were caught without valid residence or work permits in infrequent controls of migration officers (Zu Ende denken 1982). Although some steps were taken to reduce this gray labor market,<sup>18</sup> such laws were hardly ever enforced effectively.

On the European level, tolerance toward illegal employment seems to have been equally widespread. Although European integration and freedom of movement were known to contribute to social dumping, no binding minimum labor standards were introduced. Moreover, the EU Commission implicitly encouraged countries to facilitate the undermining of their own labor standards; since 2004, the Commission has vigorously proposed a service guideline, aimed at allowing companies to offer their services in all EU countries according to the standards in their country of origin (European Commission 2004).<sup>19</sup> This would have led to a decline in standards overall. For example, if Polish cleaning companies could

clean German buildings on the basis of Polish wages and Polish labor law, German authorities would not have to turn a blind eye to substandard jobs any longer; the substandard nature of such jobs would have been legalized explicitly by EU law.<sup>20</sup>

As to the question of employment performance, the case would be perfectly clear, then, if the cleaning trade were only made up of the public cleaning service and private cleaning companies; although a whole sector of the labor market had been virtually turned upside down by privatization, this process seems to have resulted in an employment growth of *only* 60,000 jobs between 1973 and 1998, many of them containing fewer working hours than before. Hence, abandoning the first low-wage strategy of employing "needy women" in the public sector after 1973 and instead following the second low-wage strategy of tolerating, for instance, marginal employment despite its often illegal character did obviously not succeed in generating a substantial increase in employment opportunities.

### **Turning Private Households into Employers**

Today the German government presents its efforts to fight unemployment by making private households demand consumer services as one of the most promising policy instruments. This approach, which was identified as the third low-wage strategy above, took effect in the cleaning trade much earlier than in other parts of the labor market. Again, the effectiveness of this policy in combating unemployment is largely unsupported by empirical evidence.

At first glance, available data suggests that domestic service has been losing importance more or less continuously in twentieth-century Germany. In 1950, about 9 percent of all gainfully employed women were registered as full-time or part-time domestic servants, but, eleven years later, their share had decreased to 3.4 percent (or 342,000 women), and it dropped even further to 0.3 percent (32,000 women) in 1997 (Müller, Willms, and Handl 1983, 27, 35; Hatzold 1986, 17–19; Friedrich 1997, 46).

During the prosperous postwar years, this decline was not considered problematic, as new low-skill jobs were generated in industry and the service sector. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, rising unemployment figures directed the government's attention toward the declining levels of domestic service.

In 1986, the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs commissioned a research project on the questions of "if and how registered employment could be increased through jobs in private households" (Hatzold 1986, 1). The results were hardly surprising: they confirmed the popular neoconservative assumption that registered jobs in domestic service could not spread because the wage gap between employers and employees was not wide enough. In the 1920s,

"a senior executive officer...almost certainly employed a full-time maid for six days a week. This amounted to little more than 10 percent of his income. Today, a senior executive officer in the same situation cannot afford a full-time maid, because he would have to spend about half of his income on her service" (Hatzold 1986, 13).



In Otfried Hatzold's (1986) opinion, the price of low-skill employment had been inflated since the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949 because of trade union efforts to close the wage gap altogether. According to his view, if only wages were low enough, private households would be motivated to create employment.

Although this neoconservative view appeals to contemporary common sense, the vanishing of maids in the 1920s and in the years of postwar economic growth was not due to exorbitant wages in the first place. Instead, domestic service, like public cleaning, suffered from recruitment problems. Even women with limited formal qualifications and family obligations could easily find more attractive and better-paid, full-time or part-time employment in factories, offices, or shops (Hatzold 1986, 13). After that, even the mass unemployment of the 1970s and 1980s did not suffice to make women return to domestic service. Moreover, the tax reductions introduced by diverse "maid privileges" could not persuade many households to spend money on servants' wages and insurance fees.<sup>21</sup> Some demand for domestics existed, but it remained limited.

Hence, governmental efforts to revive registered full-time or part-time employment in private households proved rather ineffective. Instead, another group of domestic servants seemed to be growing in the last quarter of the twentieth century: charwomen ("Zugehfrauen" or "Stundenfrauen"),<sup>22</sup> who were employed on an hourly basis and who had "survived" all attempts to reduce marginal employment in the period of labor shortage. Despite the paucity of data on minijobs in private households, charwomen were made out as a potential source of employment growth in the mid-1980s. Their mere existence stimulated low-wage strategists to claim that mass unemployment could be substantially reduced if governments only succeeded in making such consumer services attractive enough. This optimism was founded both on the vague impression that the last few decades had seen a beginning revival of domestic service and on a clearly perceivable trend toward social polarization.

This polarization increased the need for domestic-service jobs as they offered a solution for both middle-class women who employed cleaners in order to reduce their workload and less well-to-do housewives and mothers who increasingly accepted these jobs.

At one end of the social spectrum, many middle-class families had acquired an "alternative" lifestyle in the last quarter of the twentieth century, making children's education or the self-realization of women appear more important than household tasks. This same lifestyle rendered housework more time consuming as ecological cleaning agents and natural textiles gained popularity (Lutz 2000, 12). The most important aspect of change, however, was the increase of female employment, especially as many women had to adjust to flexible working hours. High-skill female employment thus rendered domestic service necessary and affordable at the same time. It approached "male standards" to a certain extent, thereby widening the wage gap between these women and their "poor sisters" even further.

At the other end of the social spectrum, then, married women with less formal qualifications accepted cleaning jobs in private households because they faced similar problems. For them and for their potential employers, it had become

increasingly necessary to combine flexible working hours with family obligations. The cleaners were driven into wage-labor, for instance, by “new poverty,” but neither industry nor nondomestic services offered enough attractive employment with working hours adjustable to housework and childcare. Besides, female migrants took to domestic service, as only undocumented minijobs provided a chance to earn a living without valid residence or work permit (Odierna 2000, 71, 97, 198; Thiessen 1997, 49). Hence the return of domestic servants appeared to be in the shared interest of both middle-class and working-class women, but it came at the cost of increasing inequalities in the distribution of wages.

It may thus be argued that the polarization of income standards, so strongly recommended by the third low-wage-strategy, has indeed already taken effect in private households. The question of whether it has resulted in employment growth, however, is not easy to answer because of the lack of reliable statistics—here are, again, only scattered pieces of information. In 1978, for instance, the employers' association of cleaning companies estimated that private households, which were reported to spend one billion DM per annum on cleaning staff, probably employed about 70,000 cleaners (Zimmermann 1978, 32). In 1987, the first official survey on marginal employment suggested that there were 667,000 minijobs in private households. Supposing both figures were correct, the number of private households' employees would have increased tenfold in the course of only one decade. This is exactly the kind of data that seemed to strengthen the assumptions of low-wage strategists, but its persuasiveness is weakened by the fact that more or less *reliable* surveys on this are not available before 1987. In the decade following 1987, however, the expansion continued to be considerable, but not as dramatic as indicated by the above figures. The number of minijobs in private households increased from 667,000 in 1987 to roughly one million in 1992 and 1.2 million in 1997 (Friedrich 1993, tables 4d, 21a, 38b, 54b; Friedrich 1997, table 2a). Of these, in 1993 only 60 percent and in 1997 merely 40 percent were believed to have required cleaning duties rather than gardening or child minding (calculation based on: Friedrich 1993, tables 4a, 4d, 21a, 22d; Friedrich 1997, tables 2a, 3a). Comparing these figures with the Mikrozensus, which counted 528,000 cleaners in 1992–1993 and 582,000 in 1997, in public cleaning service and cleaning companies, charwomen in private households thus seem to have constituted the biggest single group of cleaners in the 1990s.

Nevertheless, the number of cleaners in private households was declining in the 1990s according to official statistics. Even if we suppose that this amazing result is due to statistical errors, and that cleaning jobs expanded as dynamically as the entirety of domestic minijobs (which increased by 500,000 between 1987 and 1997), there is no reason to believe that “more jobs” automatically coincided with “more employment opportunities.” After all, there is some evidence that in both private households and cleaning companies, many women (illegally) performed several minijobs at a time without being included into social insurance schemes. In the mid-1980s, for instance, 586,000 minijobbers reported to be employed in private households, whereas 1.3 million households indicated that they employed minijobbers (Hatzold 1986, 17; Friedrich 1989, 36, 84). Hence, many cleaners must have been combining several (in some cases up to fifteen) minijobs (Odierna

2000, 59, 61, 103). This strategy on the part of individual workers thus compensated for the loss of income, but not for the loss of social protection that would have been connected with registered full-time or part-time employment.

### **Consequences for Women: Intensified and Increasingly Precarious Labor**

In the German cleaning trade, then, “double privatization”—i.e., the continuing transfer of jobs from the public sector to private companies and households—implied that an average employment relationship contained a diminishing number of working hours, as registered full-time or part-time employment was increasingly replaced by minijobs.

One consequence of this development was the intensification of the labor process; as cleaning areas were usually not reduced in proportion to the working hours, a shift from full-time to part-time employment implied that women had to clean the same or even bigger areas in less time. Hence, the physical strain reached a degree that rendered full-time employment almost impossible. An employee of a Hessian cleaning company stated in 1987: “Well, I would never in my life go cleaning for eight hours a day. This will get anybody down. See, I am finished in the evening after four hours, but for eight hours, I would never go on cleaning” (Merz 1995, 131).

Moreover, the cleaning trade’s double privatization rendered these jobs more precarious in the sense that material standards, standards of legal protection, and standards of social integration (into the informal solidarity of colleagues and formal structures of articulating interest) were increasingly undermined (Mayer-Ahuja 2004). To start with, cleaners’ incomes were diminished by the reduction of working hours as less hourly wages were paid. Moreover, collective wage agreements, which were previously enforced by powerful trade unions in the public (cleaning) service, lost importance. Private companies often ignored collective agreements, and most employers in private households were not even aware that a collective agreement for charwomen existed. As a result, rather than being supplied with additional job opportunities, many cleaners had to perform a number of full-time, part-time, or marginal jobs in order to maintain their standards of income in the period under review (Jindra-Süß, Kleemann, and Merz 1987, 24–25).

The undermining of legal standards has already been discussed when pointing to the apparently enormous share of illegal minijobs. It is often argued, especially by representatives of cleaning companies, that this was mainly resulting from women’s own wishes to earn “fast money” without having to pay taxes and insurance fees and without having to produce a work permit. Doubtlessly, these advantages of working in the gray labor market may have appeared convenient to many cleaners, but as soon as a conflict with their employer arose, they could not appeal to court without accusing themselves of illegal employment. Hence even legal standards to which minijobbers were actually entitled could not be enforced effectively. Moreover, some laws and many collective agreements explicitly excluded minijobs because they were not considered “proper” employment. For instance, before 1991 the law on the continuation of payment in case of illness (“Lohnfortzahlungsgesetz”) did not apply to workers with minijobs. This

protection was only extended after a complaint by cleaner Ingrid Rinner-Kühn led the European Court of Justice to direct the German government to change this law (European Court of Justice 1991).

Finally, standards of social integration were gradually undermined when cleaners were employed less permanently in the wake of double privatization. After all, public sector cleaners had been part of the staff working in a public building, were represented by the same works council, had often been employed for years, and performed various side duties (like looking after patients in hospitals). Employees of cleaning companies, instead, were considered "foreigners" who usually worked in deserted buildings, displayed a high fluctuation rate, and were hardly ever represented by their own works councils. These factors further facilitated wage dumping and "hire and fire" strategies. Cleaners in private households were even more vulnerable. They had no colleagues at all and faced their employers individually, which could lead to convenient working conditions in some cases but also to sexual harassment and poor wages in others, particularly if the women had an illegal migration status.

### **Lessons for Labor Creation Policies**

In conclusion, we need to return to the question of whether any of the three low-wage strategies, which can be studied in Germany as well as in other European countries, has generated substantial employment growth in the German cleaning trade between 1973 and 1998. We can state with some confidence that the evidence at hand does not warrant any answer in the positive. Statistics are far too scarce to reconstruct the development of employment in this part of the labor market in any detail, but the scattered data ascribes no considerable generation of employment to the process of double privatization. Moreover, even the limited expansion of jobs was mainly due to the fact that registered full-time or part-time employment was split up into several minijobs, which were at least partly performed by women who took to combining jobs in order to earn a subsistence wage. Consequently, the number of jobs increased, but the number of working hours stagnated or was even diminished by a massive intensification of the labor process. Of the three low-wage strategies, it can thus be argued that only the employment of cleaners in the public sector, which was slowly abandoned after 1973, had been an effective means of supplying women of no or limited formal qualification with an opportunity to earn their own living. Tolerating a gray labor market and offering incentives to potential employers did not result in any substantial job growth but merely increased the precarious character of labor in the cleaning trade.

These lessons from the history of professional cleaning have important repercussions for future efforts to create new jobs. The European Union's "Lissabon Strategy" (announced in 2000), for instance, postulates that member states should take measures to increase female employment rates, thus turning Europe into "the world's most dynamic and competitive knowledge economy." It is obvious that this addresses the employment rate of highly qualified middle-class women, but will only be effective in increasing employment if these women are provided with affordable child care facilities and disburdened from household

tasks. Reviewing the history of professional cleaning, there are only two options to achieve this aim. The first option would be to promote low-wage employment in private companies and households even further, despite its precarious and frequently illegal character. The cleaning trade's history may illustrate, however, that indirect governmental intervention that forces wage earners to accept low-pay and inferior-rights work has so far not succeeded in generating large numbers of jobs despite mass unemployment and increasing social polarization. Hence, future schemes of implementing such low-wage strategies will probably have to rely on higher levels of direct pressure on the wage earners concerned—and will have to do so without any empirical proof that similar measures have substantially reduced unemployment in the past.

The second option, then, would constitute nothing less than a break with neoclassical principles of job creation in Germany as well as on the EU level. Such a reorientation has long been proposed by heterodox economists who hold that a marked increase in public investment<sup>23</sup> is needed in order to reverse the decay of public infrastructure and the dramatic cutback of public sector employment (Memorandum 2005). Investing into public jobs in crèches, kindergartens, service pools, or health care would not only improve the chances of highly qualified women to combine wage labor and family obligations, as the Lissabon Strategy demands, but would offer the same to women of lower-income strata who are even more dependent on public services. Moreover, there is empirical evidence that the extension of public employment (in sharp contrast to neoclassical labor market strategies) has indeed created additional jobs, especially for women, on various qualification levels.<sup>24</sup>

Low-wage strategists argue that “(almost) every job is better than none” (Streeck and Heinze 1999). The history of the German cleaning trade, however, proves that their traditional labor market recipes have not generated more employment. Instead they have merely rendered existing jobs more intensive and precarious. It is high time, then, for a change of direction in professional cleaning and beyond.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on Nicole Mayer-Ahuja's work (2003). The designations "German" and "Germany" refer, in this article, exclusively to the former Federal Republic of Germany (1949 to 1991) and to unified Germany (after 1991). Statistical data on the long-term development of the cleaning trade, however, refer to only the territory of West Germany (Federal Republic until 1991, "alte Bundesländer" thereafter).

<sup>2</sup> Low-wage employment is defined in European Union statistics as work generating less than 66 percent of the national median income.

<sup>3</sup> Such as the Great Depression of 1929, the years of Nazi rule before World War II, and again in the early 1970s.

<sup>4</sup> Author's tabulations from Eurostat.

<sup>5</sup> Employees are defined as those with more than fifteen working hours per week (European Commission 2004).

<sup>6</sup> In contrast, only 5.6 percent of those with university degrees were registered as unemployed. The European Union average displays a similar but slightly smaller difference of 10.3 percent of the early school leavers to 4.7 percent of those with university degrees. Author's tabulations from Eurostat.

<sup>7</sup> Current data indicates the latter development (Rhein, Gartner, and Krug 2005).

<sup>8</sup> From 1989, couples with two children, lone parents, and persons in need of care who employed domestic servants with insurance coverage could subtract labor costs up to 12,000 DM (roughly 6,000 €) per year from their tax sum (§ 10, EstG) (Thiessen 1997, 43–44). In the "programme for growth and employment" this sum was increased to 24,000 DM, and personal preconditions were abandoned (Klenner and Stolz-Willig 1996, 195).

<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, statistical evidence on labor market development, employment figures in different sectors, and especially individual or collective labor biographies are rare before the mid-1970s. It can be reconstructed, though, that there were indeed full-time jobs in public cleaning.

<sup>10</sup> Home to one-third of West Germany's population.

<sup>11</sup> All German quotes translated by author.



<sup>12</sup> In Germany, private cleaning companies profited from this situation because their union rates were not only much lower than in the public sector, but also thoroughly ignored by many companies. Because many women did not even know about the wage level, sick leave, or paid holidays to which they were formally entitled, the staff of private cleaning companies constituted cheap and "flexible" competition to public sector cleaners.

<sup>13</sup> "A decisive step towards socialism" (Faltlhauser 1976).

<sup>14</sup> Full-time cleaners were supplanted with part-time employees through the intensification of labor and the expansion of cleaning areas per person. As the supply of unskilled labor rose, cleaners were less able to insist on full-time standards and were left to accept the reduced wages and increased workloads.

<sup>15</sup> An annual survey of 1 percent of the working population.

<sup>16</sup> Statistisches Bundesamt, Fachserie 1, Reihe 4.1.2, cleaners employed in "Gebietskörperschaften/Sozialversicherung" up to 1995 resp. in "öffentliche Verwaltung."

<sup>17</sup> The total number of gainfully employed women rose from 9,580,000 in 1976 to 12,416,000 in 1998.

<sup>18</sup> Steps included issuing "social insurance passports" in 1991, for instance.

<sup>19</sup> The "Bolkestein directive."

<sup>20</sup> After public protest against this directive had contributed to the French rejection of the European Union constitution in 2005 and had boosted trade union marches in February 2006, the leading political forces of the EU seemed prepared to compromise on the "country of origin" principle at the time of writing.

<sup>21</sup> This marks a difference from the French case, where "service cheques" proved to be much more successful from 1994 (inforMISEP Nr. 48, Winter 1994).

<sup>22</sup> Female persons who work in private households for a limited (usually small) number of hours and do not live in their employer's home.

<sup>23</sup> Such public investment has been reduced in Germany from 2.6 to 1.4 percent of gross national product since 1995.

<sup>24</sup> For the Swedish experience, see Häußermann and Siebel 1995.



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# ACCESS TO SAFE WATER AND SANITATION: THE FIRST STEP IN REMOVING THE FEMALE FACE OF POVERTY

*Nancy J. Haws*

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*After earning a bachelor of fine arts degree from Colorado State University, Nancy Haws began her career as an art director for a major advertising firm headquartered in Denver. She then formed her own advertising and marketing business, and for the past twenty-four years she has designed advertising, marketing, and communication programs for companies in the oil, gas, and mining industries, as well as for the real estate industry. Although Haws's professional focus has been in the private sector, she is equally committed to serving her community. For many years she has participated as a volunteer and consultant for several nonprofit organizations, including the Piton Foundation, the Colorado Business and Professional Women's Organization, the McCormick Foundation, and Water For People.*

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In virtually all developing countries, finding, collecting, carrying, and managing water is a difficult and dangerous task. With very rare exception, it's considered women's work. In many areas, women and children spend up to two-thirds of their waking hours in the act of hauling water. In fact, according to the World Health Organization, each year in Africa alone more than forty billion work hours are lost to the need of obtaining drinking water (World Health Organization 2004). I have learned about the importance of water access firsthand through my volunteer work with Water For People, an international, nonprofit development organization committed to the long-term impact of increased access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation and health. During the past three years, I interviewed, photographed, and videotaped hundreds of underprivileged community members from Guatemala, Honduras, Bolivia, Malawi, and India, and I am now convinced that abject poverty in the developing world is directly related to the absence of healthy water supplies and sanitation facilities. Until these fundamental human rights are afforded to all of humanity, especially women, poverty can never be eradicated.

Nothing demonstrates this form of female bondage more clearly than an interview I conducted with Rose Ndhlovu, a member of a remote community in Engocwini, Malawi, on 21 July 2005. Her plight still haunts me. I encountered Rose one morning with my video team as we were hiking through scrub brush on a hilly trail. Several yards ahead we spotted a group of women and girls shouting and arguing with each other. Scattered around them was a motley array of corroded aluminum tubs, plastic bottles, and old antifreeze containers. As we approached we saw that the women were yelling at a young mother, with her infant strapped to her back, who was descending into a hand-dug seep pit near the roots of a tree. Apparently she was attempting to gather more water after she had slipped, lost her balance, and accidentally spilled some of the valuable water she

had collected. The other women, worried that there would not be enough water left for them when it came to their turns, were angered.

The onlookers glared at us with varying degrees of curiosity. Rose, a stocky, middle-aged woman in tattered clothes, approached me with interest. She explained how she had left her home around four in the morning, leaving her children in the care of her husband and eldest daughter until she returned on foot by midday. Since rainfall had been quite scarce in her village, water sources had become increasingly difficult to find. Rose and some friends noticed the moist leafy branches of a tree and decided to dig by hand around its roots with the hope of discovering water. After digging about eight feet down, they found small pockets of water. They waited for hours for a bucket of mud-colored liquid to percolate up slowly from the earth. As Rose and her friends waited, villagers from neighboring hamlets realized that these women had located a water source. They decided to help by looking for a large, twisted tree branch that they used as a ladder to climb down into the well. Rose described how she lines her pail with leaves to prevent even a drop of water from being lost. Unfortunately even this water is almost guaranteed to be contaminated, though still welcomed by parched throats at home. She lamented that family members and friends, primarily children, frequently suffer and die from diarrhea and other illnesses related to contaminated water sources. It became obvious that the tragedy of this situation was the reality that these women understood that the water was of poor quality but had no other options available to them for survival.

I will never forget looking into those faces filled with desperation that day. A single bucket of water may provide the only sustenance for an entire family each day. Some days, during extreme drought seasons, that single bucket of water is not even available.

The sheer backbreaking routine of finding and collecting water is only one aspect of the debilitating link between water and women in the developing world. The filled containers women carry often weigh as much as forty-five pounds, the equivalent of walking with a large airline carry-on bag on your head, for miles at a time, several times a day (International Year of Freshwater 2003). The effort regularly uses 25 percent or more of a woman's daily caloric intake; the heavy weight of the containers of water often causes long-term joint pain in the hips, knees, necks, and backs (Sass 2002). The daily strain placed by these heavy loads on a woman's hip and pelvic area can cause difficulties, especially during pregnancy. Perhaps the greatest short-term danger is the frequent contact with water that is often contaminated with bacteria, which increases women's risk of contracting one of the many waterborne diseases prevalent in the developing world.

Not only does water collection and management create physical problems, but it also negatively impacts women's social and economic status. The enormous amount of time associated with these activities excludes women from educational and income-generating opportunities, as well as cultural and political activities. It's part of the reason why every two out of three illiterate people are women and why women make up 70 percent of the world's poor (United Nations Department of Public Information 1997).

This gender bias effectively removes women from life outside the home and family—from participation in the broader community. But it's a fate that is not inevitable.

Over the past three years, through my visits to Water For People program sites, I have learned about the value of simple, appropriate technologies coupled with basic hygiene education. These interventions often make the difference between improved health and livelihoods and a lifetime of illness and drudgery for community members, especially women.

On a recent trip to Sagar Island in West Bengal, India, I met with two industrious women from Bankimnagar Village, Laxmi Rani Pramanik and Sujata Das, who were born in this forgotten area. Tired of the high-salinity content in the drinking water and the acute health problems it causes, the women banded together to request support from a local nongovernmental organization (NGO) to build a tube well that would provide them with a source of safe water. Unwavering in their fervor, Laxmi and Sujata were able to solicit more women to join their group. As their numbers expanded so did their opportunities to spread awareness about the importance of safe water. The village women reminded one another of the advantages of standing together if they truly wanted to stop diarrhea from debilitating and, all too often, killing their children.

Although they had been wary at first, it wasn't long before the men of Bankimnagar recognized the seriousness of the women. Encouraged by the women's commitment, the men came forward and together they formed a "water committee." The committee opened a bank account in order to build up the financial resources needed to maintain the tube wells into the future. When the tube well construction material finally arrived, the women were asked to keep track of how many feet of pipe came in, how much was being used, and what was left over. This was their first lesson in record keeping. The women then asked Water For People to provide training in the basic maintenance of the water system so that not a single day or a single rupee would be wasted in finding a plumber for repair. Another local NGO maintains a bank account to facilitate buying local and affordable replacement parts. The proximity eliminates time spent crossing the river to buy the spare parts.

Laxmi and Sujata were very anxious to show me their community's newly installed water pump for which the members of Bankimnagar provided all of the labor. The two women took great pride in displaying their skill at taking the water pump apart and reassembling it. According to Sujata, "Now that we have a water pump nearby our homes we do not have to walk but a short distance to collect safe water for our needs. During menstruation, we can bathe in the privacy of our homes. We wanted to make sure that we could fix and maintain the pump ourselves because our village is so remote that we don't have access to repair services. Since most men work in the fields harvesting, our abilities to repair the system ourselves make us much more self-reliant. We now enjoy several hours of freedom to harvest more rice, sew, and use our talents at other handiwork that generates additional income besides fishing all day. We spent years hauling water from sunrise to sunset. We must take good care of the water pump because it provides a healthier and happier life for our families and community."

What was created was a simple water source. Yet this very basic bit of infrastructure, taken for granted in the developed world, now serves as a focal point to bring women together and discover themselves in their new roles as more productive human beings. The health education sessions have taught them simple ways of taking care of their own health and that of their families. Awareness of illnesses related to unsafe water sources and unhygienic practices has enabled them to quickly recognize and help reduce waterborne problems. Instead of spending money on frequent visits to the doctor, the women are now able to use the money for better nutrition and for their children's education. Women can also use some of these extra funds to engage in micro-enterprise opportunities like participating in sewing co-ops, canning vegetables, and selling their goods at local markets. Participation in micro-enterprises allows the women to contribute to family incomes and thus raises their status within the community.

Although helping people to access safe water is an integral step in the pursuit of a higher quality of life, effective public health interventions can never be achieved without the provision of hygiene education and adequate sanitation. Unhealthy hygiene practices like open defecation and the improper disposal of human waste create serious public health hazards. Lack of proper sanitation also is a primary factor in the decision of many girls to drop out of school early. Statistical data from the Women's Environment and Development Corporation (WEDO 2003) suggests that about one in ten school-age African girls do not attend school during menstruation or withdraw at puberty because of the absence of clean and private sanitation facilities in schools. Recently, when Water For People installed toilets, drinking, and hand-washing stations at Gabberia School, located on the outskirts of Kolkata, West Bengal, discussions with female students and teachers from these schools explained that access to separate latrines and hand-washing facilities increases attendance dramatically because these women can remain in school with more consistency and without fear of harassment or shame.

Studies show that the promotion of simple hygiene practices like hand washing can reduce the spread of water-related illnesses by up to 35 percent (World Health Organization n.d.). Along with this highly effective public health intervention, the human potential gained through improved access to adequate sanitation is evidenced by the success of a Water For People-funded hand-washing facility and several latrines built near an elementary school in the village of Pahuit, Guatemala. A student, Claudia Letica Torna Somal shared her joy with me at being able to go to school. When I interviewed her on 2 May 2005, Claudia's smile broadened as she explained, "I always dreamed of going to school so I could learn to read and write like my brothers. Now that we have a tap stand in our village, a hand-washing station, and latrines near our classrooms, I can attend school each day instead of hauling water."

At a global level, the United Nations, governments, think tanks, global businesses, associations, and nongovernmental organizations seem to recognize the salience of efforts to expand access to safe water in the developing world. Included in the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)—time-bound and quantified targets to which developed countries have committed their resources—is a goal to halve the proportion of people living without access to safe water and

sanitation by 2015. Two other related MDG goals include the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women and the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger.

The United States also pledged its commitment to the provision of safe water. On 16 November 2005, President George W. Bush signed into law the "Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act of 2005." This law will make safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy. According to Ambassador John McDonald, chairman of the Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy and a leader in global drinking water issues for almost thirty years, "This bill provides the platform on which we can advance U.S. action and implementation, as well as build on the Millennium Development Goals and the UN Decade of Water adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2003" (WaterWorld Online 2005).

While policy generation and redirection on the world stage are essential, much of the action that will improve the lot of women in the developing world has to take place on the ground, close to home. In my work with Water For People I have come to realize that community organizing is the key to sustainable development, far more than water pumps and pipes. When this community organization involves the direct participation of women, the chances for success are significantly enhanced. If progress is to be achieved in improving personal health and community well-being through better access to water and sanitation, women have to be involved and, in most cases, have to lead the way. This requisite is not an ideological bias or a philosophical prejudice. It is simply a matter of experience and cultural norms. Women suffer more when it comes to water deficiencies, but they also have the problem-solving skills and the motivation, based on their role as primary caretakers for the family, to do something about it.

As a result, anything that raises the status of women within their communities, any advocacy, economic support, and direct involvement on the part of the developed world that focuses on full-scale participation by women in planning, decision making, and ongoing management related to safe water and sanitation is a positive and necessary step. Concurrently, international development organizations like Water For People, working with their in-country partners, have to make certain that the role of women in water-related projects is clearly defined, with training and education built into every program.

I used to regard exotic images of women and girls carrying pots of water on their heads and hips with awe. I marveled at the strength and grace of these bearers of liquid gold constantly visible from predawn until deep into the night, traversing rutted roads, narrow highways, and dangerous alleyways. After so many years of working with them, I still ponder the images of mysterious women carrying pots in exotic places around the world. But I am increasingly hopeful that these images are becoming part of history. Only when safe water and sanitation are available close to home, as an acknowledged human right and a practical benefit, will the dehumanizing mask of poverty be removed forever to reveal the feminine strength, dignity, potential, and resources that promise to make this world a healthier one for current and future generations.

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# ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY, AND DEMOCRACY: THE CASE FOR COMPLEXITY

*Kathleen A. McGinty,*

*Secretary, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection*

*Kathleen A. McGinty became the first woman to head the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection in 2003. Previously, she created and headed the first-ever White House Office on Environmental Policy and acted as deputy assistant to President Bill Clinton. She was and remains the only woman to chair the White House Council on Environmental Quality, an office established by law in 1969.*

*Most recently, McGinty served as vice president for asset management at Natsource LLC, a financial services firm specializing in energy transactions. She also served as director of Proton Energy Systems, a leading fuel cell infrastructure company, and as an advisor for a European venture capital firm interested in clean energy.*

*A native of Philadelphia, McGinty earned a chemistry degree from Saint Joseph's University and a law degree from Columbia University School of Law. The ninth of ten children, McGinty and her husband, Dr. Karl Hausker, reside in Cumberland County with their three daughters.*

*Energy and the environment are not often fields in which women emerge as leaders. As the first woman to head the White House Council on Environmental Quality and the first woman to head Pennsylvania's Department of Environmental Protection, McGinty defies the odds. The Women's Policy Journal is committed to giving women like McGinty a place where their voice can be heard. We asked her to discuss her leadership role in the development of progressive alternative energy programs and the political approach that has made her such a successful advocate of alternative energy sources and the environment.*

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Leadership is often equated with making decisions between starkly painted poles. That polarization is even more pronounced today with 24-hour news cycles, rushed reporting, and a general short shrift regarding complexity.

Indeed, the public's appetite for stridency has been on the increase. Witness how President George W. Bush's "you're with us or you're against us" assertion with respect to the war in Iraq was received by many as indicative of strong political leadership, of "backbone," and, even further, of moral fortitude—no matter that such overdrawn lines alienate nations long and faithfully our allies and discourage investigation into a case for war that patently deserved scrutiny.

By contrast, recall the press treatment of and public reaction to the "Third Way" policies championed by former President Bill Clinton. During my service in the Clinton administration, where I was the first and to this day the only woman to head the White House Council on Environmental Quality, I learned that the best way to approach problems is to allow for all perspectives of an issue to be represented at the table. It was not always easy, but it was the only way to achieve real, lasting solutions. This is exactly what the Third Way is all about.

Aimed at finding and building a common ground on issues long thought to be hopeless battlegrounds, the Third Way approach to policy making is premised on the principle that the most difficult issues do not lend themselves to resolution through “yes/no,” “Black/White,” “win/lose” prescriptions. Practitioners of Third Way thinking believe such “either/or” policies present seductive slogans but not sustainable solutions. Far from extolling the virtues of this approach, the public and press often derided it as cloying, an attempt to be “all things to all people,” and a descent into “moral relativism.”

Today, compromise is infrequently understood as the essence of democracy. Instead, interest groups and the press have effectively castigated compromise as capitulation or abandonment of principle.

Polarities certainly have dominated the discourse on energy and environmental policy in America. Many environmentalists consider approaches that promise profit or fail to punish as counterfeit. Much of the business lobby sector vigorously resists meaningful efforts to tackle environmental problems, criticizing such efforts as recipes for financial cataclysm.

Vice President Dick Cheney's outlook on energy security is demonstrative of this polarized perspective. Belittling conservation as at best a sign of “personal virtue” and single-mindedly pushing drilling in ecologically sensitive areas as the only promising path, the vice president seems steeped in a mindset that demands environmental sacrifice for energy gain.

In Pennsylvania, we are working to create a different reality, an approach that identifies environmental problems as economic opportunities in disguise. On energy, we are embracing challenges not as occasions to *impair* our environment but rather to *repair* it.

Pennsylvania is home to one of the nation's most progressive alternative energy portfolio standards, ensuring that 18 percent of all energy generated by 2020 comes from clean, efficient, advanced resources—not just traditional renewables like wind and solar, but also coal mine methane, waste coal, and coal gasification. Some groups were unwilling to move toward real environmental progress and were determined to kill legislation that suggested new energy technologies such as wind and solar be utilized along with the more traditional coal energy source. Fortunately, progress won the day—and so did the environment.

Besides diversifying our energy sources, Pennsylvania is also addressing water quality. The number one water quality problem in our commonwealth is highly acidic water, which is due to the large quantities of water that burst forth from centuries-old abandoned mines and the rainwater coursing over the mountains of waste coal left behind by old mining operations. To date, this water and that refuse coal were seen only as a liability—a \$15 billion remediation responsibility that the state was unable to handle. Further, these problems were a drag on our economy. As we competed to have new companies make Pennsylvania their corporate home, many CEOs were turned off by the scarred landscape in our coal towns. Additionally, recreational fishing, a multibillion dollar annual revenue producer for the commonwealth, has been seriously hurt by the 2,000 miles of streams that are dead from the acid discharge.

But today a new perspective is taking hold. Responding recently to questions about whether technology had changed to enable the progress we are making, it became apparent that technology was the same but our attitude had profoundly changed.

The water? It doesn't drip from mountainsides; it gushes out at thousands of gallons per minute. With the support of very modest amounts from our new Pennsylvania Energy Harvest Grant Program, a \$15.9 million award, and another \$43.7 million leveraged in private funds over three years for clean energy projects, we are installing microturbines at these discharges and making clean hydropower. In several projects, the electricity generated is being used to power the treatment facility that removes the acid from the water—rendering economic reclamation projects that otherwise were too expensive to undertake. In other cases, hydropower is helping the bottom line of important employers in the state who have been hard hit by escalating energy prices.

And consider what makes the water acidic in the first place: iron and other valuable minerals and metals. Previously, Pennsylvania would spend millions disposing of the iron sludges produced by the plants treating the polluted water. Today, we see these materials as valuable commodities. One business now uses them as a pigment to make popular paints. Others now put the iron sludge directly into their metalworking processes, making precision ball bearings, for example, or high-quality steel. Previously only a harm to our competitiveness, we now see that combating acid mine drainage can deliver substantial economic benefits.

And what of those massive piles of waste coal? We've learned that clean, cheap energy lurks in the heaps. Waste coal boilers, using circulating fluidized bed (CFB) combustion technology, are also inherently cleaner than pulverized coal-fired boilers. For more than thirty years, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection has collected company-specific information necessary to obtain estimates for all toxic pollutants. This data demonstrates that dioxin levels are four times lower, whereas most metals are ten times lower per gigawatt hour than pulverized coal-fired generation. Further, CFBs achieve very high levels of mercury control, up to 95 percent, for very low relative costs. Similarly, emissions of nitrogen oxide and sulfur dioxide also are lower than pulverized coal-fired boilers. Moreover, since the fuel essentially is free, our newest such plant produces power more cheaply than any other coal plant in the state. With just this one plant, some 100 million tons of waste coal will disappear from our landscape, leaving reclaimed land and clean water behind.

Waste coal also can be gasified. In this kind of process, all of the sulfur, mercury, and other problem pollutants are removed. If the gas is liquefied, then zero-sulfur fuels are produced. As the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency works to cut sulfur in diesel fuels, and traditional refineries struggle to meet the mandate, the ecological advantage of liquefied waste coal becomes apparent. Carbon and other greenhouse gases also can be sequestered from these gasification plants, thus producing fuels that power our vehicles and warm our homes without dangerously warming the planet.

We are very proud that the nation's very first coal gasification-liquefaction plant is being built in Schuylkill County in northeastern Pennsylvania. The

commonwealth is stepping up to ensure its success. We will be a customer for this plant, buying all of our diesel and heating needs for at least a decade to come. The price? Again, since the waste coal feedstock is free, we will pay a fraction of the price we currently pay for conventional diesel, even as we enjoy the benefit of some tens of millions of tons of waste coal cleaned up from our communities.

Old power plants are the leading producer of toxic pollution in Pennsylvania. This problem requires regulation, and we are insisting on controls that go beyond the new suite of federal requirements soon to be in place. But we are taking less obvious steps, too. Specifically, we are diversifying our electricity mix and putting clean, renewable resources to work for us as well. Our new Alternative Energy Portfolio Standard secures our commonwealth's current standing as the leading state east of the Mississippi in the deployment of wind energy, while catapulting us to the head of the line with respect to solar energy. Requiring nearly 700 megawatts of electricity from solar photovoltaics in fifteen years, our law's solar mandate is three times more demanding than that of any other state, though it is encouraging to note that New Jersey and California may put in place more ambitious mandates still.

Has our focus on renewable energy been a drain on our economy? Hardly. Our lead in wind enabled us to compete successfully to become the U.S. home of Gamesa Corp., a Spanish company that is the second-largest and most profitable wind energy company in the world. In these days of hand-wringing over the outsourcing of jobs and loss of manufacturing to overseas rivals, Gamesa will create 1,000 jobs in our state and invest tens of millions in capital plant and equipment. We also are now in the running for a major investment opportunity from a German company that makes solar technologies. If successful in this bid, the commonwealth will gain still more manufacturing jobs and millions of dollars worth of state-of-the-art equipment.

Wind, solar, and biomass energy are helping our economy in an indirect way too. Agriculture is still the biggest revenue producer in our state. And the rural landscapes that grace our state continue to make Pennsylvania a beautiful place to live and work. But our farmers, like farmers everywhere, are hard-pressed. Escalating energy costs, competition from abroad, and sprawling development combine to threaten the viability of many farming operations. But in renewable energy our farmers are finding a way to shave their own energy costs, develop a new "crop" as they deploy biomass digesters, or host wind farms or site solar arrays on their extensive barn roofs. New revenue streams and mitigated costs brought about by renewable energy are helping to keep our farmers on the land and our landscape verdant and productive.

Pennsylvania has a storied industrial history. We are determined that industry and manufacturing will also be part of our future. Unfortunately there is a legacy of polluted land and abandoned factories to deal with. Where there are still viable parties to pursue, we (will) ensure they pick up the remediation tab. Our new compliance and enforcement policies ensure we are not tolerating scofflaws and cheats—those who would "pollute and scoot."

But a broader effort is needed. We have launched a concerted campaign to clean up and revitalize used, polluted places. At 2,000 cleanups and counting, our "land

recycling” program has relieved communities of toxic menaces, brought light and productive activity back to places that were dark and enabling of crime, lured business back to these sites, and effectively created or retained some 40,000 jobs. Precious open space is also preserved as development is spurred in our older cities, towns, and boroughs.

Other examples abound demonstrating that the most effective approaches to environmental problems stimulate economic growth. Concerned about methane pollution? Yes, we all should be since methane is some twenty-one times more potent as a greenhouse gas pollutant than carbon dioxide on a per-molecule basis. In Pennsylvania, we now insist that landfills put the methane generated by decomposing trash to work for our economy. We tolerate flaring only as a last resort.

Now, much of that methane is being used to generate electricity. Even more promising, the gas is cleaned and piped to manufacturers who are using it as a low-cost substitute for natural gas. One project supported by the commonwealth supplies gas to four major employers, enabling them to stay in business even as soaring gas costs drive many businesses overseas. The volume of gas captured from the landfill in this project is of a volume sufficient to heat 34,000 homes.

Similarly, methane escapes from coal seams that are being or have been mined. To date, methane gas has been seen only as a pollutant and a threat to the safety of miners. But new technology enables capture of the gas, which then can be used for heat, as a feedstock in the chemical industry, or to generate electricity. Just one of the potentially thousands of such projects that could be supported in Pennsylvania captures a volume of gas sufficient to heat 15,000 homes and is providing free gas to a local school district otherwise pressed for resources.

There is one danger in sharing these examples: in retrospect they seem easy and therefore not the “stuff” required to tackle the most serious of issues. But the truth is that this kind of innovation is arrived at only after the most careful and exacting of processes, where very different perspectives are welcomed, where old assumptions and preconceived notions meet with rigorous challenge, where longer-term perspectives take precedence over short-term (and usually short-lived) gain, where it is understood that the details matter, and where most often no single interest group emerges triumphant.

This is as it should be. Democracy, as Winston Churchill said, is messy. The U.S. Senate has been vaunted not for rendering quick or facile judgments, but rather for being the “greatest deliberative body in the world.”

“My way or the highway” and “I’m right, and you’re wrong” types of thinking are the hallmarks of dictatorship, not democracy. Such haughty, self-righteous exercise of power is not ennobling of our country or demonstrative of moral resolve. It is instead something foreign to democracy and deeply threatening to our system of governance and our very way of life.

Today, it is imperative that we embrace the complex and resist the allure of the simplistic. The future of our environment, the prospect of energy security, and indeed the very possibility of continued democratic self-governance demand that we meet this challenge.



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# A DIALOGUE ON THE DIVERGING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MODERN AMERICAN WOMAN

*Barbara Ehrenreich and Phyllis Schlafly*

*Barbara Ehrenreich is a renowned and prolific social critic and essayist. She is the author of thirteen books, including the New York Times bestseller Nickel and Dimed (Owl Books, 2002). A frequent contributor to the New York Times, Harpers, and The Progressive, she is a contributing writer to Time magazine. She received the Sydney Hillman Award for Journalism and a Brill's Content "Honorable Mention" (1999) for a chapter of her book Nickel and Dimed. Ehrenreich has a Ph.D. in biology from the Rockefeller University and has been the recipient of numerous grants and awards, including a Ford Foundation Award for Humanistic Perspectives on Contemporary Society (1982), a Guggenheim Fellowship (1987–1988), and a grant for research and writing from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (1995).*

*Phyllis Schlafly is a leading conservative political activist known for her best-selling 1964 book A Choice, Not an Echo and her opposition to the feminist movement. During the 1970s, she led the pro-family movement against the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Schlafly is a widely published author and commentator who maintains an active presence on the lecture circuit. In 1972, she founded the Eagle Forum, a conservative organization originally headquartered in Alton, Illinois. She also founded and is president of a sister organization known as Eagle Forum Education & Legal Defense Fund. Currently, she continues to serve as president of both organizations. Schlafly received her B.A. from Washington University, a master's in government from Harvard University, and a J.D. from Washington University Law School.*

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Alexandra Aquino-Fike, *WPJH* senior editor of commentaries, recently spoke with Barbara Ehrenreich and Phyllis Schlafly to discuss the impact of feminism in the United States, particularly the changing roles and responsibilities of women in the workforce and in the home. Increasingly the media portrays career women and mothers as being at odds, often asserting that women must make a choice between advancing in their profession and taking care of their families. By engaging in open discussions on how gender roles affect us all, we can better understand how to develop more effective policies at the domestic and even international level.

The following are the provocative thoughts of Ehrenreich and Schlafly.

## ***WPJH***

What positive and/or negative impacts has the feminist movement had on women in the United States?

## **Ehrenreich**

The feminist movement, in which I have been actively involved since 1970, has fought to increase women's economic opportunities, remove legal barriers to

advancement, protect women from assault and abuse, eliminate degrading stereotypes and imagery, expand social supports for women and their families...the list goes on. Given that second-wave feminism started with small groups of women meeting around kitchen tables, we have been amazingly successful, especially in changing cultural attitudes toward women and expanding professional opportunities. I am deeply gratified that my daughter, who was, not coincidentally, born in 1970, has not had to face the same obstacles my generation did.

Phyllis Schlafly argued in the '70s that feminism would hurt women by undermining the legitimacy of the support they traditionally received from male breadwinners. But as I argued in my book *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment*, that support was never very reliable in the first place and was further crumbling in the '50s and '60s. Husbands may die or abscond; many men never earn enough to support a family in the first place. In demanding economic opportunities for women, feminists were not attacking the homemaker role. We were simply recognizing that it was not a safe or secure one, in addition to not being every woman's choice.

### **Schlafly**

The feminist movement has had a powerful negative impact on women because it makes women believe they are victims of an oppressive patriarchal society. Feminist consciousness-raising is based on identifying and exaggerating grievances against men. Victimology is not conducive to happiness or success in marriage or the workforce. American women are the most fortunate class who ever lived on the face of the earth, a status due to our unique constitutional structure, the high role accorded to women by Christianity, and the American private enterprise and patent systems that produced marvelous inventions that have so reduced the work required to maintain a household.

The feminist movement has carried on a nasty campaign to make the role of full-time homemaker economically untenable and socially disdained. Feminist books are replete with put-downs of the full-time homemaker, such as Betty Friedan's whining that the suburban housewife lives in "a comfortable concentration camp" to Ruth Bader Ginsburg's demand that "all legislation based on the breadwinning-husband, dependent-homemaking-wife pattern" must be eliminated "to reflect the equality principle." Many more women have been devastated by the unilateral divorce laws eagerly advocated by feminists than have enjoyed opportunities in the corporate and professional world.

### **WPJH**

What changes are still needed to achieve greater balance between male and female roles, opportunities, and obligations?

### **Ehrenreich**

You ask what's left to do. Ah, where to start? Ours is very much an unfinished revolution. The degrading imagery still abounds—a vexing issue for those, like myself, who don't favor censorship. Women remain severely unrepresented in Congress and in positions of corporate leadership. We have greatly increased our contribution to family earnings, but men haven't made a commensurate increase in



their contribution to family responsibilities. And while feminism did much to open up the professions to middle-class women, it has had far less impact on the economic condition of women in stereotypically female, nonprofessional occupations.

### **Schlafly**

Government has no constitutional authority to demand equal results of male and female careers. Women and men should have freedom to choose different roles, and if a greater percentage of women choose to be homemakers and more men choose to be coal miners, that should be their right without government regulations or feminist nagging to force an unnatural equality.

### **WPJH**

Today roughly three in five women work in the paid labor force, a significant increase since the 1970s, and the gap between men's and women's wages has narrowed. Yet a disparity remains, and the proportion of working women living in poverty is still higher than for men. Given the rise of women in the paid workforce, please comment on its impact on the well-being of these working women generally and on families (including their partner and children).

### **Ehrenreich**

The big impact of women's work outside the home is that it pays or at least helps pay the bills. It puts food on the tables of the working class; it allows the middle class to save for college tuition. For better or worse, it is no longer optional for most American women or their families.

That said, I see two big problems. One is the inadequacy of the child care available to so many families. High-quality day care for one child costs in the neighborhood of \$1,000 a month, which is completely out of reach for all but the upper middle class. Nor do most families have access to after-school programs. Worse still, many low-wage parents must work more than one job to make ends meet, meaning that their children are significantly deprived of adult company and care.

The other problem is our societal unwillingness to acknowledge and value the unpaid work women (and sometimes men) do in the home—caring for children or elderly relatives. The surge of women into the workforce has possibly contributed to this unwillingness and has bolstered the attitude that every woman *should* be a wage earner. At least this seemed to be part of the sentiment behind welfare "reform," which ended the official recognition of women's contribution as caretakers. Feminists opposed welfare reform because we thought the option of being a full-time homemaker should be open to poor women, whose alternatives are low-wage jobs and crappy child care. Where was the Eagle Forum?

### **Schlafly**

The feminist movement has moved a large percentage of women into the paid labor force since the 1970s. This shift has profited the sellers of consumer goods, but it has not produced happier women, children, or husbands. As Myrna Blyth explains in *Spin Sisters*, women's magazine editors and anorexic television hosts are still selling the notion that women's lives are full of misery, threats, and stress.

Feminists look to the government or to their employers to solve their personal problems. Feminists want the taxpayers to provide women of all income levels with babysitters in order to relieve mothers of society's oppressive expectation that they care for their own babies.

If it were really true that businesses could get by with paying women less than men for the same work, cost-conscious bosses would hire only or mostly women. Since that doesn't happen, there must be other factors. The so-called pay gap in America is not between men and women, but between married women and everyone else who spends a lifetime in the workforce. That's primarily the result of a voluntary domestic division of labor. Women who remain single and childless, take tougher courses in college (i.e., engineering rather than women's studies), stay in the labor force, and work long hours earn about as much as men. Carly Fiorina, when she was the overpaid CEO of Hewlett-Packard, declared, "There is no glass ceiling."

### ***WPJH***

For those working women who live in or near poverty, what sorts of public and private policies are needed to increase their well-being and their families' well-being?

### **Ehrenreich**

The private sector could, just for a start, stop sex discrimination of the kind Wal-Mart is now being sued for. I'd also like to see it become illegal to fire or otherwise punish a woman (or man) who has to take time off to be home with a sick child.

As for the public sector: How about high-quality, public child care for all, as in France? How about subsidized housing, as in the U.K., since rent is the major burden for so many families? Or a higher minimum wage? Not to mention universal health insurance, as in any civilized society.

### **Schlafly**

It's no surprise that the proportion of working women living in poverty is higher than for men; it's because so many mothers are trying to raise children without a husband and father in the home. Most of that unhappy situation is due to feminist-supported unilateral divorce laws, or to the sexual revolution that eliminated the shame of illegitimacy, or to the disastrous liberal welfare system, which channeled money exclusively to the mother, thereby relieving the father of his breadwinner's role. These women need husband breadwinners, which is beyond the power of government to provide.

### ***WPJH***

Can women "have it all" or must they make a choice between career and family? Does a highly educated woman's choice to stay at home devalue her education?

### **Ehrenreich**

In 1975 I would have said, sure, we can have it all. I'm an example. I raised two brilliant and successful children while supporting them (somewhat precariously) as

a freelance writer. Phyllis Schlafly is an example. She's had a dazzling career while raising children.

But here's what worries me about that answer today: Employers are demanding longer hours, and people are having to work longer to earn a living. When we said we'd "have it all" in the '70s, we were thinking of jobs that took eight hours a day, not ten. If there has indeed been an increase in young professional women opting to stay home while their children are young—and this has been disputed by some economists—it's because the demands of work have expanded so cruelly.

### **Schlafly**

Of course, women can have it all; I have had it all. But it's very difficult to have it all at the same time. In the modern parlance, I am a sequential woman. I spent twenty-five years as a full-time homemaker raising my six children, teaching them all to read before I entered them in the second grade. I went to law school after I was age fifty, and I'm mighty glad I didn't try to have my six children after I was fifty. I now have fourteen grandchildren.

A *New York Times Magazine* article, called "The Opt-Out Revolution," is one of dozens of recent reports that describe how bright women, who earned their J.D.s, M.B.A.s, and M.D.s from elite universities twenty years ago, the very ones who should be at the top of the business and professional world, are walking away from the fast track. They discovered that the workplace (just like child care) has its drudgery, long hours, repetitious duties, and an unrelenting schedule defined by others.

### **Ehrenreich**

It doesn't "devalue" a woman's education, or a man's, to stay home with children. I spend a lot of time caring for my granddaughters, who are four and one, and I like to think my Ph.D. in biology helps me understand their cognitive development and answer their questions. But, sadly, it does devalue the woman. One thing I learned while researching my most recent book *Bait and Switch* is that, in the white-collar corporate world, you can't have a "gap" in your resume, even if it's for homemaking. This is part of our culture's continuing devaluation of the caring work that goes on in the home, and it means that the woman whose husband earns enough so that she can opt to stay home with the children may find herself barred from the workplace later on.

### **Schlafly**

Feminists misled young women into believing that a career in the workforce is more fulfilling than marriage and children and that taking care of babies is demeaning to educated women. Most of the women I debated in the 1970s don't have grandchildren. A recent CBS interview with Gloria Steinem showed her displaying her doll collection. Young women should heed Anne Taylor Fleming's plaintive cry in her *Motherhood Deferred*: "Gloria, Germaine, Kate: Tell us, how does it feel to have ended up without babies ... Was your ideology worth the empty womb?"

## **WPJH**

Last year remarks made by former Harvard University President Lawrence Summers at a National Bureau of Economic Research conference on women and minorities in mathematics and science provoked a range of responses from conference participants—and then provoked a much wider debate. What are your reactions to Summers's remarks? What are your thoughts on the responses to his remarks?

## **Schlafly**

Harvard President Lawrence Summers's presentation of three hypotheses to explain the scarcity of women in higher-level mathematics and science should have been accepted by intellectuals and academics as an interesting topic for discussion, debate, research, and Ph.D. dissertations. The issue is not whether men are generally smarter than women, but why there appear to be differences in specific aptitudes and skills. In fact, gender differences in particular areas have been well documented by scholarly studies and are beyond dispute. Contrary to the way he was reported, Summers didn't use the word "innate," and he repeatedly said he was merely putting forth provocative topics for research.

More evidence emerges all the time to confirm the existence of specific gender differences, such as the dramatic discovery that the widely used miracle drug aspirin works differently on men and women. A Duke University researcher analyzed six clinical trials in which fifty-one thousand women and forty-four thousand men took daily aspirin tablets or placebo pills. He found that aspirin cut men's risk of heart attack by 32 percent but not their risk of stroke, while aspirin cut women's risk of stroke by 17 percent but not their risk of heart attack.

It's unfortunate that some women in academia have adopted the notion that investigations into these fascinating differences are not only non-debatable but are non-researchable because they fear the evidence might disturb their ideology.

The responses to Summers's remarks were an embarrassment to educated women and to the academic community. MIT Professor Nancy Hopkins's outburst reinforced the worst stereotype about women: women are too emotional to engage in rational discussion of scientific or intellectual issues. She reminded us of Miss Pittypat in *Gone With the Wind* calling for her smelling salts before she swooned. Taking feminist orthodoxy to new heights, Ms. Hopkins further reinforced the worst of political correctness, namely, that certain subjects cannot be discussed, even in the academic community.

## **Ehrenreich**

There's nothing wrong with making off-the-cuff speculations about innate gender differences in math and science ability—unless you are the president of America's most prestigious university. If you are, you presumably:

1. Have carefully studied the ways in which social forces and prejudices may lead women to avoid the sciences, despite their individual abilities. Your knowledge of such forces would make you at least think twice before spouting out your own intemperate speculations.

2. Are up to speed on current research on gender differences in intellectual abilities, some of which may be going on at your own university, and are prepared to cite such research.
3. Are extremely concerned about the effect your remarks may have on female math and science students in your own and other institutions.

But then, Lawrence Summers never evinced much respect for his own faculty or institution, which is one of the reasons he no longer presides over Harvard. My only regret about the response to his remarks was that it did not lead to his immediate firing.

### **WPJH**

Should the United States promote development policies aimed at greater gender equality in the Middle East as a means for reducing terrorism?

### **Schlaflly**

I take it as a given that American women have more rights and opportunities than women in any other country. Even Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville, as long ago as the 1830s, wrote: "If I were asked, now that I am drawing to the close of this work, in which I have spoken of so many important things done by the Americans, to what the singular prosperity and growing strength of that people ought mainly to be attributed, I reply: to the superiority of their women."

We wish and hope that rising expectations of women will bring enlightenment in other nations about women's equal worth. While we commend private groups and churches that labor toward this end, it is not clear that our government has either the constitutional authority or the wisdom to promote gender equality in the Middle East.

Furthermore, equality for women in the Middle East appears to be moving in the direction of inducing young women to imitate the foolish and dangerous career choice of men who become suicide bombers. Dozens of women have killed themselves as suicide bombers in various Middle East countries. In one widely reported case, an Iraqi woman tried to blow herself up during a hotel wedding reception, but the explosives concealed under her dress failed to detonate.

Some suggest that the desire to become a martyr stems from the marginalization of women in Arab society, but others argue that female suicide bombers are a sign of the rising status of women in Arab culture. Perhaps this perverted theory stems from the feminist ideology that cheers the deaths, amputations, and agonies of American female soldiers in Iraq because their experiences represent career advancement for women and an end to gender stereotypes.

### **Ehrenreich**

I'm not sure greater gender equality in the Middle East would reduce terrorism, but it would certainly help in the battle against the ideology of Islamism, which seems to center on virulent misogyny and anti-Semitism. But I am doubtful that the United States can do anything much now to promote gender equality in the Middle East. Whatever moral high ground we may have had as a result of our relatively gender-egalitarian culture was squandered in the unprovoked invasion of

Iraq and the sickening detentions and torture that characterize our "war on terror." The best approach is for feminist groups not connected to the U.S. government to support Muslim feminists around the world.

### **WPJH**

Should the military be gender integrated? Why or why not? Does gender integration affect the way the military functions? If so, how?

### **Schlafly**

Women have an important place in the military and have performed valiantly in the Iraqi war. But fundamental differences between men and women make total gender integration unwise, unwanted, and harmful to military readiness. The push for an "ungendered military" came first from doctrinaire feminists for whom ideology trumps obvious physical differences. Those who believe there are no differences between men and women, except those due to stereotyping and conditioning, look upon the military as the cutting edge of their political campaign to impose this doctrine on our society.

The demand for gender integration pits female officers against enlisted women. The female officers want the rank, the medals, and the power to command men, whereas the enlisted women know they will be assigned to do the grunt work and the risk taking required in or near combat infantry. Army polls over nine years reported that enlisted women do not want to serve in combat like men. When the survey question did not produce the results the feminists wanted, it was dropped.

The feminists try to tell us that all war is a danger zone now. It is true that all soldiers are in harm's way, but the physically demanding offensive missions of infantry, armor, and Special Operations Forces, attacking the enemy with deliberate offensive action under fire, have not changed. Centuries of experience with war prove that men are better at this task than women.

The saddest part about the current efforts to produce a gender-free military is the way men are induced to lie about it and to pretend that women are performing equally with men. Gender-norming is the rule, which means that women soldiers are graded differently from men and receive higher grades than men for the same performance. America stands for equal opportunity, but in offensive combat units, military effectiveness should come first.

### **Ehrenreich**

The military is already pretty well gender integrated, though I cannot say that this has ever been a very high feminist priority compared, for example, to abolishing war. Gender integration of the military has been inevitable since the introduction of gun-based warfare in the sixteenth century. Before that, when men fought one-on-one with heavy, bladed weapons, the male advantage in upper-body strength largely precluded women's participation in the carnage. But even women of average strength are capable of pulling triggers, driving tanks, and flying fighter planes. Nor is there any reason to believe that women are psychologically less capable of involvement in killing and physical cruelty, as such recent examples as Condoleezza Rice and Lynndie England tragically illustrate.

# BREAKING THE MARBLE CEILING

## *An Interview with Massachusetts State Senator Dianne Wilkerson*

*A lifelong Democrat, State Senator Dianne Wilkerson was recently elected without opposition to her seventh term in the Massachusetts Senate. She continues to defy expectations while accumulating one of the most prolific records of legislative and non-legislative accomplishments.*

*Wilkerson holds a B.S. in public administration from American International College and a J.D. from Boston College Law School. In 1991, she became the first African American female to obtain a partnership in a major Boston law firm. In 1993, she was sworn in as the first African American female to serve in the Massachusetts Senate and is currently the highest-ranking Black elected official in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.*

*Wilkerson's senate district, which includes some of Boston's wealthiest and poorest citizens, includes the Back Bay, Beacon Hill, Chinatown, Jamaica Plain, Mission Hill, Roxbury, the South End, and parts of the Fenway, Dorchester, and Mattapan.*

*Dianne Munevar, editor-in-chief of the WPJH, interviewed Massachusetts State Senator Dianne Wilkerson on 16 March 2006.*

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### **WPJH**

You have accomplished some notable "firsts" in your career. You were the first African American woman elected to the Massachusetts State Senate, the first African American woman in Boston to become a partner in a major law firm, and, currently, you are the highest-ranking African American official in the state of Massachusetts. What are the advantages and disadvantages that come with breaking new ground?

### **Wilkerson**

Clearly, one of the advantages is that every time a barrier is broken, it in fact proves a barrier can be broken. While I certainly don't get up in the morning and think about which barrier I should break today, I certainly do have a very deep appreciation for the significance of what it means when it happens. I would say that proving a barrier can be broken is the most important advantage because people model what they see. And if you don't see it, then it's hard to imagine that you could do it. That's a big part of what I learn everyday, about young people in particular.

The disadvantages, if one can call them disadvantages, have been constant over the past fourteen years. One has been the enormity of the burden, responsibility, and expectations. If you are a member of an historically disadvantaged or marginalized group, and we have many (in fact that legion is growing in Massachusetts), and you have an issue, whether it's a legislative issue, a policy issue, or a community issue—education, you name it—and you're trying to determine who the person is you can talk to about it, the list of people is very

short. And no matter where the people are in Massachusetts or what the issue is, what I'm clear about now is that I'm likely to be on that list.

And so, if you can possibly imagine what it's like to carry that level of responsibility every single day and know that while there are many people who are sympathetic to the things that are important to me and the constituency I represent, they are not all going to be as passionate and persistent about it as I am. So if the burden has to be carried, there are very, very few people who are going to be there helping to carry it.

I think the other somewhat difficult thing is pioneering this movement with the hope that others will follow. If pioneering means you're the first, that's one thing. I think you can get some solace and pride in being a pioneer. If it means many years later that you're still the only one, then that's a whole other reality. This has set on my mind in the last fourteen years that I've been in office. And so, it's kind of sobering when you think about it. Because even if you didn't plan to be the first, if you are in a position, and you break down barriers and end up in that role or in that place in history, I don't know a person who would not want to see other people come after. If not, then it was just about you. And that has nothing to do with a mission for any noble cause or important endeavor.

And for me, it really was about the barriers. And if I can do this, you can do it. One of my mentors is Barbara Jordan. I never met her before she passed away, but what she represented to me was the reality that it could happen. I think she was one of the first Black women to graduate from Boston University School of Law and the first elected to the Texas State Legislature. It was a novelty when it happened. It happened in the generation that I was alive to witness. So sometimes the significance can be real, even when you can't touch the person. You just know it, and you see it, and you read about it, and that's really what it is for me.

#### ***WPJH***

Compared to fourteen years ago, do you think there are more women and other people from marginalized communities achieving positions of power?

#### **Wilkerson**

There are certainly more who want to. It's like you break into the house and you get the secret to the family safe and so now it's open. Now that I know how to get into that safe, I can tell other people the combination. There are people now who see it as a possibility, who see public service as a noble endeavor and something that is important.

So, yes, it's clear to me that there are open doors and thoughts about opportunities and goals and things that are attainable and that we are deserving of as a group of people. That would not have been the case fourteen years ago.

#### ***WPJH***

I'd like to follow up with a related question. You represent a very economically diverse district. How do you reconcile the competing differences between wealthier residents and lower-income residents?



## Wilkerson

Well I think first, be clear about where you are on issues. And second, make sure that you are clear with everybody about what those positions are and don't feel that you have to succumb to pressure and change them depending on which of the constituencies you happen to be standing before. And, in fact, there has not necessarily been a conflict between the wealthy and the poor. It's been philosophical, religious, and even social-lifestyle differences. For example, we have a large number of residents, in fact the largest number of permanent residents in the city, who are gay and lesbian. We also have a community in which African Americans make up the largest racial group.

I use that as an example because I think, in the thirteen-plus years that I have been here, it is the biggest diversity of opinion and position that I've had to try to deal with and juggle. I came into this saying that there are many things that I'm flexible about, but there is a short list of things that are principle to me. For example, I am opposed to the death penalty. So it doesn't really matter how many people say, "I support the death penalty." If I woke up tomorrow and learned that 75 percent of my district supported the death penalty, it would not change my opinion on the issue because I'm opposed to it. It's not poll-driven.

That was part of my campaign in '92 when I first ran for state senator. There are some things the voters need to know. If this is a problem for them, then they knew that going in. I won't change my mind about the death penalty.

Secondly, I believe women have a right to control their bodies, and that they are the final arbiter and determinant of what happens—what they do with their bodies.

The third one would be around the issue of the importance of our Constitution. And my interpretation of the Constitution is that all people have to be treated equally, period. And so, a lot of the other things, we can negotiate. What I said in '92 when I first campaigned was that, given the district at the time, and even more so now with its diversity not just in race and ethnicity but in opinion, lifestyle, and religion, there were going to be times when I would have sectors of this community at odds with other sectors of the community. And what I could commit and what I promised to do was never disrespect or compromise the rights of one sector of my community in order to accommodate the rights of another.

With that standard in place, it has not been as difficult because that is my standard and it's been absolutely consistent. You don't have to worry about what you tell one group of people if you tell everyone the same thing. Part of the reason why I've been successful and have incumbent power is because no matter what else people think, they know they can take me at my word.

And that's the reality of what it's like when you have such a diverse group of people coexisting in the same place. You could be talking to a group of single mothers who are trying to figure out how they are going to possibly be able to provide for their children and secure day care for their child because they work. Then you go from there to the Esplanade Association, for example, and they have an issue around where and how the state is planting cherry trees on the Esplanade. And that issue is as important to that particular group as the other issue is to the other group, and so on. And that's what you have to accept.

**WPJH**

Would you talk a little bit about Senate Bill 805, requiring private health plans that offer prescription drugs to include federally approved contraceptives and hormone-replacement therapy and how you got that passed, considering its controversy?

**Wilkerson**

We filed a bill that basically required any employer who negotiates with an insurance company to provide employer-assisted health insurance to include contraceptives as part of that coverage if they provide other prescription drug coverage.

The reason why this became a contentious issue was that we learned that birth control pills were the only prescription drug not automatically covered by employer-assisted health insurance plans for their employees. It really didn't make any sense.

Furthermore, what was happening was that 600,000 women who worked everyday in Massachusetts in jobs with employee-contributed health insurance plans had to go to the drug store and take money out of their own pockets and pay for their birth control pills, the only prescription drug that was in that category.

On the other side, the Catholic church was extremely powerful and influential with respect to policy and legislation in Massachusetts. For decades the church had been successful in making the case that, somehow, legislators were engaging in some inappropriate behavior if we tried to follow through with this policy, and that it was not the business of the legislature. They believed that they should be able to make these decisions.

The other piece is that you match that with what was one of the most powerful paid lobbying sectors, the insurance companies, who were opposed to adding another category that they'd be responsible for and had successfully blocked in previous debates.

Fortunately, two things outside of our control happened that changed the environment and allowed us to be victorious in 2001 when we had not been ten years before. One was the explosion of Viagra onto the U.S. medical scene in 1996/1997. In four years, without any discussion at all in any legislature in the country, Massachusetts in 2000 was in a situation where 76 percent of all employer-assisted health insurance plans were covering Viagra. Birth control pills were on the market for thirty years, and less than 40 percent of employers who were providing health insurance plans were covering birth control pills. Again, this didn't make any sense.

So I'd like to say that what happened in 2000 was we just shamed people into submission. We couldn't get coverage of birth control for people who want to be responsible and prevent unwanted pregnancies, but more than three-quarters of our insurers were prepared to provide Viagra. That was on top of the whole issue around the [Catholic church] sex abuse scandal, which came to the forefront in Massachusetts in a way that silenced the church momentarily to the point where they were not able to exert the kind of moral authority and pressure on the legislative process as they had been able to do in the past. These events gave us

the opportunity to get support from a majority in both the senate and the house and from the governor and have the bill passed into law.

Senate Bill 805 was a victory that had a lot to do with the coming together of all of the things that needed to happen that we could never have planned. It was like the stars all were aligned in 2001.

**WPJH**

What do you see as the most important issues facing your constituencies in the next five years?

**Wilkerson**

I would say education and the increasing inability for regular, hardworking people in this city, in my district, and in the state to earn enough money to provide for the basic needs of their families, even when they want to, when they are focused on it, when they're serious, when they're hardworking. The cost of living is so quickly outpacing income in this country that we are seeing people work twice as hard for half as much.

These issues impact the system in a very direct way, particularly our public education system, which is where the majority of children in every urban and rural center in this country are sitting in school classes around the country. There has been a very steady, but substantial and measurable decline in federal and state support for public schools and public education in this country. We are seeing the result play out in every other sector of our lives: in our health status, in our crime status, and in our employment status. Our children are less and less able to compete for jobs, as more and more jobs are being sent overseas. Fifteen years ago, no one knew about outsourcing. It was such a foreign—literally, no pun intended—concept. Now, we see jobs marching offshore. And we appear unwilling to do what's necessary to stop it. And to me, we need a recommitment on a city, state, and national level to educating the most at-risk students.

What we are doing now is measuring how we do based on the students who are best equipped and best able to learn, and I'd say we are failing. It's less and less the majority of the students because the families, so many of them in my district, live in poverty, and that has ramifications across the board for how children are mentally and physically able to present themselves in school. The challenge is how to get ahold of that and recreate a level of support for public school education that we have always enjoyed in this country.

**WPJH**

Do you think that state legislatures are better able than federal legislatures to find creative solutions for public education, for example?

**Wilkerson**

Yes, but I think we do different things. Historically, it was a shared responsibility. Our healthcare money, the bulk of our education money, mental health, substance abuse recovery money, our transportation, and housing dollars came from the federal government. Those budgets have shrunk and I mean tremendously. And we are struggling to try to figure out how to fill those holes.

Our taxing power and the percentage of revenue that we tax on the state level is miniscule compared to what our residents in this town will pay to the federal government. I'm not suggesting that it shouldn't be that way; however, these residents are taking the lion's share of the mandatory contributions, and we don't get anywhere near that level in return. As a result, it's hurting us in ways which are very apparent. We see more people on the street as housing prices skyrocket, and, consequently, it affects children's education and health status.

**WPJH**

You once described yourself as a professional agitator. How did you come to see yourself in this role, and how has it shaped your career?

**Wilkerson**

I thought about it a long time, how I would describe myself. Because every time I would hear people introduce me—an elected official, a politician—it just didn't seem to fit what I thought I was doing. And it had nothing to do with the public's perception of a politician.

For example, regarding the budget for witness protection programs, we started from the position where I make a case to say we need to do something. And all day, I hear, "They've dug in their heels;" "We're not going to do it;" "Maybe next year;" and "You have to keep at it."

But given who the constituents are that I represent, I think that the challenge is to figure out a way to get people who want to say "no" to say "yes." And so, I do think that it is the appropriate moniker for what I do—to agitate, to get people riled up about something in a way that spurs them to action. "Professional agitator" seems the right description of that role.

**WPJH**

Related to that question, what caused your career shift from attorney to "professional agitator?"

**Wilkerson**

Two things that happened in 1992. One is that it was a national election year. The presidential candidates, every one of them, were talking about reforming welfare as an aspect of their campaigns. During the governor's race, the governor at the time was vowing to reform welfare; in fact, he announced that was going to be his agenda for the 1993 legislative session year. So I was really motivated by a feeling that, if these guys thought that we needed to do major reform, it might be helpful to have somebody as part of that policy discussion who had personal experience with public assistance income programs.

The second piece was that, as an attorney, one of my clients was the Boston Branch of the NAACP. We won a federal case in 1989 where we negotiated a settlement and got a ruling from the federal court that, among other things, had to do with a requirement that the city of Boston had to toughen up their Fair Housing Law.

During that case, I became so frustrated because I felt that the then-incumbent senator was not doing all he could to make sure that it happened, and I felt that I could better use my energy to work at the beginning of the food chain, where

public policy is created. Moreover, I thought if I could be in the policy-making room, I could help shape them in a way that was sympathetic to people and more reflective of the realities of how people live: like the birth control pill bill and the credit enhancement insurance bill that grants private insurers a credit if they write homeowner's insurance policies in urban neighborhoods. Legislation like this was not part of the statutory framework in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts when I ran for state senate in '92.

### ***WPJH***

Based on your experiences, what advice can you give to women who want to become change agents? And tangentially related to that question, what advice can you give to people who want to balance work, family, friends, and hobbies?

### **Wilkerson**

To the first question, I think that the best advice that I could give to somebody, particularly women, is to stop being so hard on yourselves. Specifically, I mean it is not just anecdotal thinking that men appear to believe that they are born ready to be the president of the United States of America. Women, even some who consider themselves progressive in their thinking and in their lifestyle, spend an inordinate amount of time getting ready [to run for elected office]. Men don't think they have to get ready. And so it's not a coincidence that the majority of the women who came into the senate or the house of representatives came as mothers in a second career.

We spend too much time in our lives trying to get ready for civic participation. We need to figure out how to have some level of recklessness, if you will, of risk taking in our lives around public service, around being involved in government, elective office, and appointive office. Because society, I think, as a whole pays for the delay.

I've never believed that women have all the right answers, but I do believe that we have a viewpoint that needs to be a part of the political body as we're developing policy that we are all going to be subject to. And that we don't have more of that, I think, is demonstrated in some of the dysfunction in many areas of our social policy in this country.

For example, we have policy around family that discourages unity, discourages marriage, and discourages a level of support that parents might want to give to their family. Current policy doesn't support the families of 2006 where both parents must work because income is so different from cost of living.

So, across the board you'll see it. Whether it's financial policy, whether it's foreign policy, I believe, would be very different were women playing a dominant and a major role in the discussion. And I'm not talking about, "can't we all get along?" I'm talking about the fact that it has been proven time and time again, women just process things differently. It allows you to go back in a room and work things out in a way that we see on a national and an international level. It's not always doable by others.

And so, women need not, as a group, believe that they must raise their children and see them off to college before they can start their life in a way that will contribute to the public discourse and policy in this country.

**WPJH**

Many countries have quota systems for women in the senate and the parliament. Do you think that a quota system would be beneficial to electoral politics here in the United States?

**Wilkerson**

I think we'd be in a different place if we had it. I don't think it would ever happen in the United States because we have become quota-phobic. And the irony of that is we assist foreign countries to draft constitutions that require very quota-focused elections, but we would never support those same policies here.

I can't tell you the irony I felt sitting in the Republic of South Africa with a constitution that has a 50 percent female agenda requirement, knowing that so many of the people that helped to draft that came from this country, in fact a dominant number of drafters.<sup>1</sup>

And so, I get the sense that what happens is that those people end up drafting constitutions that they wish we had. But I can't imagine a level—or an environment where we could get to a level—of support for that in this country, to the extent it would take a Constitutional Amendment.

**WPJH**

What kind of a different position would that put us?

**Wilkerson**

Here's the other piece to it. If, in fact, you believe that one of the ways to get closer to equal representation in the political body is for women to be of that mindset, then we actually shouldn't need to have a quota to do it because we represent more than 50 percent of the population in this country, even adult, voting age.

If we were thinking along that line, we wouldn't really need that quota system. The problem is that, because of socialization, not only do we spend our lives getting ready, but it also makes us harder and tougher on other women who we don't see conforming to that notion of taking care of all of the other people in your life first before you can even think about running for office. And so, it gets reflected in lower levels of support for women in politics by women than one would imagine.

**WPJH**

At the end of your career, what do you want to be the three things or goals that stand out most about you, that you want people to remember about you?

**Wilkerson**

Probably the three things may be easier to answer than the three goals. I would say one may encompass all three things: that she was true to her commitment that her public career would be about fairness, equity, and justice and that you could see that reflected in the activity, in the legislation, in the achievement, and

positions that she took. That, to me, would be the most important, because that would mean that I accomplished what I came to accomplish, and that it was never supposed to be easy. And it has not been.

But I do love what I do. And it's a very hard thing to explain because it's not about loving it because it's all fun. Because most of it, and I would say most of it, is not fun. It's worthwhile. And it's gratifying when you finish it or when you accomplish it, but not because it's fun. It's very hard. And sometimes you're surprised at the level of resistance that is out there to do things that you would think, "Of course, everybody is going to support this," and "Of course, everybody would think that this is a fair thing to do," and realize that that's just not the reality of the politics of America. But we're changing it. We definitely are changing it.

### *Endnotes*

<sup>1</sup> In South Africa's first democratic election in 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) adopted a 30 percent quota for women on political party lists. As a result, the representation of women increased from below 3 percent to 27 percent in one election in 1994. In the 1999 election, women were placed in every third position on the national party list. At the local level (with a mixed electoral system) the ANC has adopted a 50 percent quota for women on party lists.

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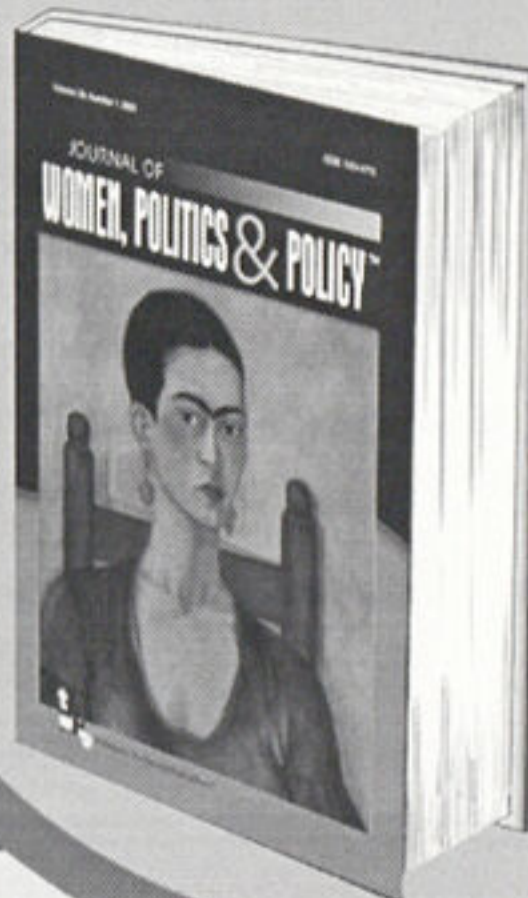
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## SEEING THE TRUE FACE OF IRAQ

### *An Interview with Mishkat al-Moumin, Iraq's First Minister of the Environment*

*Mishkat al-Moumin served as Iraq's first minister of the environment during the interim government. In her role, she not only designed the structure of the Environmental Ministry, but operated it on a shoestring budget of less than half the United Nations's estimate for what her agency needed. She believes environmental problems are international problems and believes in tackling them by starting with small projects to benefit the Iraqi people and to raise awareness.*

*al-Moumin is a former law professor, a human rights advocate, and advisor on women's issues. As the women's issues director of the Free Iraq Foundation, she has trained women to head NGOs and assume leadership. Most notably, al-Moumin successfully helped establish a parliamentary quota system to enable women to hold 25 percent of the seats in the new Iraqi parliament. al-Moumin has been described as "a realist" and "a brave tireless advocate for the environment of her country." She earned her master's in public administration at the John F. Kennedy School of Government in June 2006.*

*Katie Connolly and Kavita Choudhry, editors of the WPJH, interviewed Mishkat al-Moumin on 10 March 2006.*

---

#### **WPJH**

I would like to start with a broad question about your background as a human rights lecturer. You were in Iraq during Saddam Hussein's regime, working as a human rights lecturer and an advocate. Would you talk a little bit about your experiences of trying to do that type of work under the Hussein regime?

#### **al-Moumin**

Yes. Sometimes when you live under such an oppressive or such an abusive regime, at least inside, you start to feel that you want to do something against it. I had been asked to lecture constitutional law and international law. And then I had been asked again to lecture something or to give something to the postgraduate students. And the head of the department said, "You can give them anything you want." That phrase, "You can give them anything you want," was going on and on in my mind. When I went home the first book I picked was *Human Rights and Fundamental Rights*.

So I decided to lecture them on that. Then I asked myself, "What shall I tell them?" I can't lie to them. And I can't tell them that you are living in a country that respects human rights. And at the same time, I can't tell them that there was the bad regime here [in Iraq]. I decided to tell them the truth in an indirect way. I started describing what was happening in Iraqi prisons, what discrimination means, and what equality between human beings means, and so on, giving them details.

And then when I heard that the Iraqi Intelligence Service, who were disguised as students, tried to tell them things, immediately, without any fear, and looking

straight to their eyes, I said, "Well, this was the situation in South Africa during the apartheid regime, and this was happening in such and such year, and they took such and such measures." I immediately started talking in detail about South Africa, describing perfectly the situation, and in a way that matches what I had said earlier.

I wanted my students to see another world—a world that they had not witnessed before. Yet, one of the reasons to come to the Kennedy School was to see that world myself. I felt that I was talking to them about something I, myself, hadn't seen, hadn't witnessed, although I tried to describe to them in detail and give them cases and discuss so many things, some of which took place in Europe and some in America and so on.

**WPJH**

How did your students respond to your teaching?

**al-Moumin**

I got two responses from them. Some of them said that there are no human rights. And we will never, ever, find it. And some of them said that maybe we could find it some way. And some of them used to come to me after the classes, saying, "It's too dangerous. We are afraid that something may happen to you, something bad."

But I thought that I needed to show them [human rights]. It's important to them. And then I talked to the undergraduate students about human rights, the separation of powers, checks and balances, and showed pieces of the United States Constitution so they could see it firsthand.

**WPJH**

Can you talk about how you're feeling about your country now, following the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, and share your perspectives and general feelings on American involvement in Iraq?

**al-Moumin**

Each time I see the news or the word "Iraq" mentioned, I feel someone is stabbing me in my heart. And it keeps bleeding and bleeding and bleeding. And to be honest with you, I don't think it's all America's fault, contrary to what people say and what they feel inside. I think the responsibility is shared between Iraqis and Americans. And the way that things are going on, I think maybe there will be a civil war of some sort, and that may...separate Iraq into smaller states. Maybe one day, they will get back to being one piece together, or we will have a very loose situation.

As for me, I am fine with all of this. I just hope that it won't be through a civil war. I'm still hoping that a civil war won't actually happen.

I think that the one thing that is missing in the whole process, the political process, is that too many elections took place while so many social and economic programs were absent. If we manage to fill the gap between the political process and developments that have occurred in the political process and the social and economic programs and the developments that are needed there, then maybe we would have done something good.

**WPJH**

How long do you think it will take for Iraq to reach a state of stabilization? Do you think it will be in the next couple of years, or ten years, or fifteen years? What time frame do you expect?

**al-Moumin**

I think it will take until we are able to see each other and accept each other as Iraqis. And this is not happening, neither in the short or medium term. We need the sort of leadership that can unify Iraq and start addressing Iraqis as Iraqis, not as Sunnis or Shiite or Kurds.

**WPJH**

Do you think the international media coverage is an accurate portrayal of the current situation in Iraq? How do you feel about the way your country is portrayed in the American media?

**al-Moumin**

I think it's telling parts of the truth. There are still some other parts that are missing. It's not that they don't want to show it. It's not that the media is fabricating things. It's simply because of security situations. Reporters cannot move all over, so they can't tell the whole truth. It's the pieces and bits that they can get access to.

For example, now a reporter cannot go to an ordinary Iraqi family and spend the day with them. It will be dangerous for him or her and for the family in Iraq. The Iraqi face is not showing. You only see people that are killing, kidnapping, slaughtering each other and strangers. But you don't see Iraqi people who spend the afternoon together; who talk to each other; who have tea together; who care and love each other; who read the newspaper; who go to shops to buy a book because they like to read about the world. These little pieces are missing. And I'm telling you it's not that the media is doing this on purpose. But it's that they can't get to those people.

**WPJH**

In your experience, what do you think are the main challenges of public administration in a post-conflict environment?

**al-Moumin**

The main challenge is to have an environmental law in terms of the environment, not in terms of the administration of Iraq. The main problem, if you want to stop something from happening, if you want to stop pollution, is you need to have some sort of laws that regulate the whole process—how you deal with waste management, hazardous, domestic, chemical waste, etc. All of that, we don't have any kind of regulation to deal with.

Another kind of problem we have is making sure that anyone who pollutes the environment pays a fixed amount of money, regardless of type of waste or volume. I just can tell you that the environment is listed at the bottom of the interests of the government, simply because it's seen as something little, something that has nothing to do with people's health and lives. This is one of the major challenges.

The other challenge is that we haven't raised the awareness of people to a level where they can help you to protect their environment. It's not a one-department job. It's a job that involves people. You have to take into consideration that we don't have that kind of civil society that's so effective that it can help you or do a part of the job with you.

For the administration, or for the ministry as an administrative department, the challenges are the same. It's a new ministry, established in 2004. There is no regulation, no laws. Things are bad there. And I tried my best to put [regulations] in place so people would know what to do. We were badly in need of daily operation manuals. The lack of coordination amongst teams within the ministry was a major setback to the department.

They were no organizational charts. The ministry has no organizational structure: who reports to who; who is responsible for whom. I tried to put this in place with the help of the World Bank and United Nations Environmental Programme, with the help of Iraqi experts from the Ministry of Planning. Finally, we came up with the organization chart, manuals, and regulations.

One of the funny things that I found was that I had a unit that was supposed to report on technical issues to the head of Financial and Administrative Affairs. However, she [head of Financial and Administrative Affairs] had nothing to do with the issues. She is not an environment expert. She knows nothing about environmental testing. Again, it was an organizational development problem.

**WPJH**

Which environmental issues are the most urgent in Iraq?

**al-Moumin**

The thing that's very urgent is the shortage of safe drinking water. Only about 40 percent of people are getting safe drinking water, and that creates a huge environmental problem for them and for the ministry. It increases the incidents of waterborne diseases. It creates a huge problem, and you can't address any other issues unless you come up with a solution that solves this problem. You can't ask them to cooperate with the ministry if they don't have a drop of water to drink. This is *the* major problem.

**WPJH**

And how are you going about addressing the lack of drinking water?

**al-Moumin**

In one city near Baghdad, I started a campaign to distribute safe drinking water that had a label on it to encourage and educate people about the environment and the importance of safe drinking water. Each person would take six one-and-a-half liter bottles. We continued the campaign throughout the summer. The program worked and we replicated it in other places. We started raising environmental awareness especially amongst children. We distributed something called the environmental bag to kids while they are in school—with pencils, colored pencils, and paper, with information about the environment.

**WPJH**

You mentioned earlier that one of the challenges as an administration is the lack of environmental awareness in Iraq. How are you finding the public's response to the environmental issues?

**al-Moumin**

It was a good response but it depends on how you deal with it and how you try to pass the message to the public. The more simplified the message is, the better response you get. I found, for example, there were places where religion was dominating so the way we dealt with it is that we did not go and talk to them about trying to change. Instead, we simply made some kind of agreement with the mosques and the speakers to tell them that it is in the Qur'an, the Holy book of Islam, that each of them should try to protect his or her own environment. And we found verses in the Qur'an that say so.

My idea was that, instead of talking to people about jihad or violence, you take with you the Qur'an and say let's talk about something peaceful that we all agree upon, and we all share that value, and try to help our society through that. And somehow, it really helps.

**WPJH**

I read an interview where you said that the environment is an international problem, and we need international responses. Do you see a better future for global environmental policies? How are we going to progress as a global community on this issue?

**al-Moumin**

I think it is progressing. It's only that it's a new field, and it's a new thing that is taking place. After all, it started in 1979 with the Montreal group, so it will take some time until people agree and understand what's going on. But I think there is progress. At least it's better than not having [environmental discussions]. And now there is an agreement between people all over the world that the environment is important, and that we do have environmental problems. It is progressing, and it will take a little bit of time, and we need a mechanism to work through it. But it's fine.

**WPJH**

Do you have any closing remarks?

**al-Moumin**

The only thing I really wish for is that people could see the true face of Iraq.

**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Interior Secretary Gale Norton in a briefing on 7 October 2004 as quoted in "Iraqi Environment Minister Seeks Support in Washington." Environmental News Service. Available online at <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/oct2004/2004-10-07-07.asp>.

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# ATTENTION KMART SHOPPERS— THIS IS NOT *YOUR* REVOLUTION!

CAROL EVANS'S  
*THIS IS HOW WE DO IT:*  
*THE WORKING MOTHERS' MANIFESTO*

(HUDSON STREET PRESS 2006)

*Reviewed by Jonathan Schleifer*

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*Jonathan Schleifer will receive a master in public policy degree from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University in 2007. He graduated from Rutgers College as a Henry Rutgers Scholar in 2000 with a degree in visual arts and minors in women's studies and philosophy. He was awarded the Rutgers University Leadership in Education Award for his work with SCREAM theatre, a student-run group committed to ending domestic violence and sexual assault. Following his graduation he taught middle school for five years in the South Bronx, New York, as a Teach for America Corps member. Concurrent to his teaching he completed a master's degree in teaching at Teachers College, Columbia University, and was active in the New York peace and social justice grassroots political community.*

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There are great manifestos declaring business is no longer as usual that inspire and provide organizing principles for powerful movements while frustrating proponents of the status quo by insisting on revolutionary change. These types of books justify and outline the character of those revolutions, mapping out courses of action, activating individuals, and organizing collectives. Their authors' language is often poetic and their ideas profound. This is not one of those books. *This Is How We Do It: The Working Mothers' Manifesto* should be shelved somewhere between self-help, how-to, and autobiography.

Perhaps I am making too much of the subtitle, but my expectations were high. Carol Evans's subject matter is vital not only to the twenty-six million working mothers in the United States, caught in the tension of full participation at home and full participation at work, but also to the culture that has created that tension, the workspaces in which it is felt, and the economies in which it functions.

Contending with a gendered history that assigned very particular opposing roles to men and women, mothers and fathers, and successful work outside and inside the home, working mothers straddle this matrix. Throughout her book, Evans writes of the emotional, intellectual, and material conflicts working mothers experience. She provides advice for dealing with these issues taken from the "best practices" of employers and employee mothers. She provides wonderfully innovative examples of strategies for transforming what she calls the "one-size-fits-all" career track into a "flex-track" with room for mothers to have different

creative options such as part-time work, job sharing, telecommuting, sabbaticals, or a combination she calls "sequencing." She fairly points out that work schedule does not reflect commitment and suggests that some may find consulting on projects to be more workable and satisfying than part-time work.

Evans observes that schools still organize the school day, school year, and parental involvement opportunities around stay-at-home parents, with school days ending before the workday, long summer vacations, and midday PTA meetings. In response she offers examples of innovative corporate programs that provide not just day care but also after-school programs for teens and even of an innovative hospital that started its own charter school.

In spite of these crucial observations and novel strategies, Evans's work is lacking a broader analysis, in-depth critique, and rigor. She does not meaningfully challenge the nature of these conflicting roles. She does little more than provide anecdotal evidence for successful practices. Her book fails to provide a compelling rationale for companies to adopt her suggested practices. The companies whose practices she celebrates have been chosen by the *Working Mother* magazine (of which Evans is CEO) for its annual "100 Best Companies" list, which is published in the periodical. The magazine sets the criteria for the selection and then reviews the companies' practices. While this is a worthwhile list to maintain for informing working mothers of the most hospitable places to work, it does not provide a broader picture of how these interventions affect the overall functioning of the companies. Occasionally she makes reference to moral and economic arguments for adopting these "best practices," but they are not supported by the solid moral reasoning nor robust economic data that would encourage implementation of these practices. She does not contend with some essential questions, such as: How do these practices influence the overall morale of the employees? How do they affect corporate productivity and the bottom line? How do they affect competitiveness of the firm and of the employee? Statistical information, when it is used, is a sparse accessory, not a significant motivator of her arguments and agenda.

Evans writes as CEO and president of *Working Mother* magazine and as a working mother herself. She calls on these experiences to illustrate her arguments and to start each chapter. Throughout the book we read about her first job as a waitress, her interest in backpacking, successes at work, and her negotiation with her daughter for an iPod. While generally charming, these illustrations explore little more than her family dynamic and her personal experiences. From her stories she seems to be a model mother and model executive, but her life story, while inspiring, is not very useful in parsing the general phenomena of working motherhood across the workforce and in the population as a whole.

In addition to the anecdotes she has collected and shared throughout the text, Evans refers to research that *Working Mother* magazine commissioned for its twentieth anniversary. It surveyed 500 working mothers across the United States in many fields, investigated their work and home conditions, relationships with their spouses and children, and their attitudes, interests, and desires. Unfortunately the sample size of five hundred from a population of twenty-six million working mothers raises doubts as to the representative value of this sample. There is a need



for expansive research into the following questions: What are the attitudes and experiences of working mothers? What are the social and economic impacts of creative interventions in the workplace? A more complete analysis of these questions could be used to effectively pursue a broader transformation of the way that corporations design their workday and the way our culture views working mothers.

Another considerable fault of the book is the almost exclusive use of examples of professional and executive working women from upper-middle- and upper-class households. Although occasionally she does refer to “not just CEOs and high-powered women,” these moments are rare. The rest of the time the narratives of successful working mothers are usually prefaced with their executive-level positions at companies like Pepsi-Cola, General Mills, and Ernst & Young, or their professional positions, such as an orthodontist. Additionally, Evans is lacking in a serious discussion of race and class differences in the opportunities for creative adjustments to the workday and career track, ability to hire outside child care, differences in family size, differentiated after-school programs, and so on. While the tensions of working motherhood are clearly a struggle for the executives and professionals she refers to throughout her book, there is a clear absence of mothers for whom there are even greater financial and family hardships.

There is a particularly revealing section in which Evans describes the sacrifices of a mother who has taken a pay cut as the result of working part time. This mother is now unable to shop at Nordstrom, drive a Saab, and wear the trendiest of shoes. Instead she learned to love Target, drive a Pontiac minivan, and wear last season's less trendy shoes. I do not mean to diminish this woman's situation as it has clearly altered her lifestyle, but I question Evans's choice. There are certainly many more dramatic examples of working mothers living closer to poverty whose sacrifices go beyond a seasonal gap.

The book is generally exclusionary of women who are hurt most by non-family-friendly practices and does not provide solutions for mothers who exist outside the corporate box. This effectively undermines the movement for change by making the concerns of working mothers appear trivial and excludes the needs of the majority of those affected by these traditional norms and practices. As it is, this is a manifesto for a problem facing many, but with solutions for too few.

Evans's writing style is clearly rooted in her magazine background, evidenced by pithy chapter titles and subtitles like “We Know Ambition Is Not A Dirty Word,” “Go, Girl, Go!” and “If Only Father Time Were A Mother.” While entertaining, in the end, her reliance on anecdotal evidence and a limited research project as well as a class bias are insufficient for the hard sell of reforming cultural assumptions and practices around gender, parenting, and work.

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## *RUNNING IN HIGH HEELS*

(WITH EMILY CSENDES, M.T. MANELSKI, PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY,  
SHERRY HENRY, AND DR. HEIDI HARTMANN)

DIRECTED BY M.T. MANELSKI  
(ELM FILMS AND 52 WOMEN FILMS 2005)

*Reviewed by Melanie Roe*

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In 2006, a prevalent political dilemma is whether the American people are ready and willing to elect a woman to the most powerful position in the world, that of president of the United States. First Lady Laura Bush has declared a resounding yes, while Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice are still considering the possibilities. Democrats and Republicans alike wonder, if a woman runs, can she win? Will women automatically favor her? And what are the advantages and disadvantages a female candidate faces in the male-dominated arena of politics? These are just some of the questions M.T. Manelski tries to answer in her documentary film *Running in High Heels*. In it she explores the meaning and implications of feminism, sexuality, privilege, vanity, and image in the world of campaigns and constituencies. Unfortunately, while she asks the questions and exposes viewers to an array of opinions and issues, the lack of a common thread in the film is all too apparent and unsettling. However, I uncovered five lessons in Manelski's assessment of women in politics today that can guide us as we look toward 2008 and beyond.

The documentary follows the campaign of Emily Csendes, a twenty-nine-year-old woman from an affluent background, who decides to run for state senator in New York after working on Wall Street for a couple of years and then as a public school teacher in Harlem. The film introduces Csendes as she stands on a street corner, in flip-flops and a suit, handing out literature to passersby with a careless one-line pitch "Emily for New York Senate." The tone of her campaign is set by a simple statement made jokingly to her campaign manager (and the camera): "If you aren't voting for me, leave me alone." This sets up lesson number one: first

impressions matter. As the viewer continues to follow Csendes on the campaign trail, that statement seems to keep repeating itself as we find her to be too casual and almost apathetic—someone any other candidate would never want handing out their campaign literature. Moreover, as a viewer, I never felt close to her, and as a young woman with a similar background, I never felt she had the professional drive, nor interest, to represent me.

Interspersed with Csendes's story are Manelski's interviews with various female leaders from across the political spectrum. While her questions seem thoughtful, she fails to lead the discussion, resulting in conversations that seem superfluous to the point. Her objective was most likely to allow these individual interviews to speak for themselves and shed some light on the story and the issue, but I often found myself wondering what their particular comments had to do with Csendes's disjointed race or the analysis of women as political candidates. However, there is one instance in which brilliant editing creates a virtual debate that leads us to our second lesson. As the film tries to uncover the reason why so few women are elected to office, particularly given that women compose 52 percent of the American population, and how we should overcome the all too infamous gender gap, Manelski presents us with a drastic divide between women. We see Phyllis Schlafly, founder of *Eagle Forum* and a prominent conservative, describing feminists as enjoying being victims and "[waking] up with a little list of who [they are] going to hate today." The camera then turns to Sherrye Henry, author of *The Deep Divide*, as she says "I am proud to say I am a feminist." Back to Schlafly as she declares with a look of disgust "their bitterness comes across," and back to Henry who with a smiling face says "it's only a desire to live in an equal existence with all." And so we find lesson number two: we must learn to bridge the gap within our own gender constituency.

Too often newspaper articles and television broadcasts covering female politicians emphasize wardrobe, hair, skin, and general demeanor, which leads us to question why men are not submitted to the same superficial scrutiny. Early in the documentary, Manelski brings to the forefront two of the most traditional fashion features of women: hair and high heels. Csendes is constantly presented as worrying about her hair; as she is preparing for her big debate she seems more "worried about the cameras" than her platform. We wonder if this is about vanity or a product of the exaggerated scrutiny she knows the media will subject her to. Manelski visits a plastic surgeon to discover the depths of vanity within our gender, and the conversation quickly moves to "designer vaginal labioplasty," which makes a point, but does little to advance the documentary's discussion. The film then moves on to high heels as a symbol of femininity and the question of how far women will and should go to conform to this conventional image. Manelski interviews a podiatric surgeon who describes the pains and discomforts women experience in the name of fashion. In her interview, Myrna Blyth, author of *Spin Sisters*, rightly claims that men do not care if you wear Manolo Blahnik's or something from Payless ShoeSource, but we know that women do care, notice, and, most importantly, judge other women according to fashion. The podiatric surgeon has the correct assessment (and reveals lesson number three) when dealing with shoes, hair, and femininity: use them, but do so wisely.

Inevitably, a discussion of women politicians turns to their personal life—the role of marriage and family—and its influence on voters' perceptions. Henry describes the simple but troubling dichotomy: if a woman does not have children, female voters will automatically think “she will never understand my life,” while if the candidate does have children, the voters will tend to frown upon her for leaving her home and children behind. Recognizing this is the first step toward understanding why we are not running and winning and learning how to speak to a public who is not convinced of a female candidate's viability.

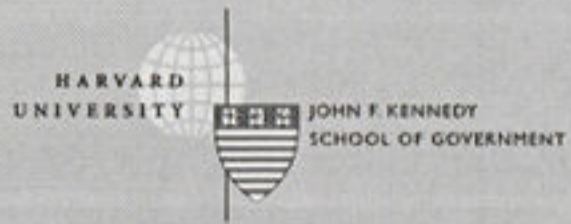
This brings us to lesson number four: We must appeal to women directly and make them realize that a woman's personal life has no greater bearing on her ability to serve in public office than it does for any other elected official. Henry makes us realize the alternative: with little female representation, men will most likely do little to pass pro-women legislation or legislation that is important for women, children, and families.

Promotional material for the documentary credits the film with “[raising] issues that are provocative ‘without pulling punches,’” but perhaps this is where we find the last lesson of *Running in High Heels*. In the cutthroat world of politics in which women are a minority even while being a majority of the population and in which our femininity might work for or against us, isn't it time to look beyond the ladylike image and perhaps throw some powerful punches? As we watch Csendes struggle through her campaign, viewers might often find themselves hoping that she would do just that. This brings us to lesson five: don't shy away from passionately defending what you believe in.

*Running in High Heels* is a fragmented documentary that tries to achieve too much in ninety minutes. Manelski raises many vital questions and pressing issues, but, in the end, it is unclear if we have come any closer to devising some form of a “silver bullet,” or even a general path to follow in order to attain political equality. I cannot help but feel that she opened the floodgates of information and questions and leaves us to search through our interpretations to try and form some sort of hopeful conclusion. I had hoped that the last scene would be one of introspection, where she would look us in the eye and say what we need to look for, achieve, or even ponder. Instead we hear a prediction: if women insist on running in high heels it could take us up to seven hundred years to achieve gender equality in politics. My answer: unacceptable. As we approach the 2008 presidential election, we have the chance to shape the discussions and drastically change the fate of women candidates. We must prove that we can run (and succeed) whether we choose to run in high heels, flats, or flip-flops.

For more information on *Running in High Heels*, go to [www.52women.org](http://www.52women.org).

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## RECOMMENDED WEBSITES

*Dianne Munevar and Marissa Bohrer*

The following websites are recommended for their valuable resources and insights. The websites cover a broad range of pressing topics.

**Women and Public Policy Program, John F. Kennedy School of Government**  
*www.ksg.harvard.edu/wappp/*

**Institute for Women's Policy Research**  
*www.iwpr.org*

**The Initiative for Inclusive Security**  
*www.womenwagingpeace.net*

**Project Hope**  
*www.prohope.org*

**National Women's Law Center**  
*www.nwlc.org*

**Population Council**  
*www.popcouncil.org*

**"Love Your Body Day." National Organization for Women (NOW) Foundation, a campaign of the Women's Health Project**  
*http://loveyourbody.nowfoundation.org/*

**Feminist Majority Foundation**  
*www.feminist.org*

**The White House Project**  
*www.thewhitehouseproject.org/*

**Center for Women Policy Studies**  
*www.centerwomenpolicy.org/*

**Shesource.org**  
*www.shesource.org/*

**Women's Funding Network**  
*www.wfnet.org/*

**Association for Women's Rights in Development**

*www.awid.org*

**Human Rights Watch**

*www.hrw.org*

**Global Fund for Women**

*www.globalfundforwomen.org*

**MADRE**

*www.madre.org*

**United Nations Development Fund for Women**

*www.unifem.org*

**UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund**

*www.unfpa.org*



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