Think Piece

Gender and citizenship in the information society :
A perspective from Pakistan

Farida Shaheed

The **Gender and Citizenship in the Information Society** (CITIGEN) research programme, launched in 2010, aims to explore the notion of marginalised women's citizenship as a normative project or an aspiration for equitable social membership contained in the promise of an emerging techno-social order. Six research partners from Sri Lanka, Philippines, China, Thailand/Taiwan, Bangladesh and India are studying various aspects of the terrain. Also three eminent scholars of the field from Costa Rica, Pakistan and Thailand, are writing think pieces delving into the research subject from their perspectives to further enrich the research process.

Think Pieces are paper contributions by prominent scholars and practitioners studying the intersections between the micro-context of community information ecologies and macro socio-political developments.

Author

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1.   Introduction

The CITIGEN programme seeks to understand how emerging techno-social paradigms shaped by new information communication technologies (ICTs) is or can recast the citizenship of women. As stated in the proposal, the intention is to use the lens of citizenship to explore "the changing context of the rights, entitlements and agency of marginalised women as a social category in the emerging social relationships architecture effected by new technologies (Gurumurthy, 2010: 4)." Amongst the questions raised are: to what extent and in which way(s) have/can techno-social developments lend new meanings to citizenship and with what implications; how have/can citizenship practices leverage new technologies and how emerging technologies have/can influence such practices in terms of renegotiating women's formal citizenship in local contexts.

The background note seems to suggest two possible approaches to research: (1) using the perspective of development to see how ICTs for development (ICTD) have impacted women's citizenship, (2) focusing on the techno-social paradigms to see how the opening of possibilities and affordances impacts inclusions and exclusions, that, interacting with the social and institutional environments, shape women's citizenship. As someone long involved in women's citizenship issues - both in research and practice - I prefer to take gendered citizenship as a starting point, in particular, the interplay between women's uncertain status as citizens, the determining role of immediate controlling actors, and women's need to maintain belonging/acceptance within sub-state communities as their principle means of survival. As a self-acknowledged dinosaur in the ICT world, I also start from an activist engagement - that in the context of this research may be viewed as the end-point - to reflect on how techno-social paradigms may have impacted activism on the ground.

A basic assumption of the project "is that information society represents a significant power shift (Gurumurthy, 2010:5)." I have no doubt that the many dimensions of the digital paradigm are helping to shape social, economic, and political realities and that these new influences can affect people's sense of self, i.e. their subjectivities, at both the personal and collective levels. I also accept that shifts of power may have occurred and that ICTs have wrought – sometimes immense – changes in (some) people's lives. I am less convinced, however, of the extent to which shifts in power and major transformations can, and indeed should, be attributed to the rapid developments of ICTs, including the new social network media. Important as it is to identify and acknowledge the nature of change brought about by new communication technologies, it is even more important to not lose sight of the underlying power structures and dynamics at play. This seems especially important today, when people are riveted by the unfolding events in the Middle East, concerning which ICTs are often forwarded as having contributed significantly to the popular uprising. It is worth remembering that the actual number of social network media users is relatively small.

Forgotten in the enthusiasm over social media network, is that following *Al Jazeera*, there are now some 500 pan-Arabic television networks operating in the region. Would digital technologies such as Twitter, Facebook and others have had the same impact had they remained unconnected with the older broadcast media? Personally, I doubt it. This is not to say that technologies have not impacted the public sphere, for they have. Journalism, for example was forever changed by the Iranian protests in 2009 (referred to as the 'green movement') following general elections. When the inability of regular journalists to operate in Iran caused a virtual blackout of news, it was filled by ordinary citizens using ICTs. This removed the stigma of using unverified ICT sources for news. The opening up of this space in the public domain of journalism/news media space for citizens' engagement and contributions is itself significant because it allows citizens to contribute to the construction of the public discourse, to challenge official constructions and to build counter-publics. This ability can be especially important in an age when 'the public' is witnessing itself projected more than ever before - in vox pops, phone-ins, studio-audience discussions, soap opera dramatisations, reality TV formats, and beyond - but rarely controls the images projected (Coleman and Ross, 2010).

In societies such as Pakistan, it is in altering the private-public nexus that ICTs offer the possibility of a breakthrough for women's citizenship. The breaching of the public-private divide by ICTs holds out the tantalising possibility of by-passing the mechanisms of patrol exercised by male (as well as some female) patriarchs, especially within the family, to offer access to seemingly infinite informational and communication resources, thereby readjusting spatial frontiers. Additionally, especially in more rigidly controlled and authoritarian dispensations, ICTs can provide platforms as public spheres of discourse and debate that are either not possible or carry high risks outside this space. For some women, they may also provide an otherwise denied means of engaging with the socio-political events and actors impacting their lives. But this begs the question of how the advent of ICTs plays out in societies where the notion of being citizens entitled to rights and a State which has obligations towards its people - rather than favours to be distributed at whim - has rarely transcended the promises on paper to become part of people's psyche and experience; where loyalties continue to be given (and expected) not to the far-distant State but to the local power elites positioned at the meso-level between the State and individual citizens; where, instead of demands for rights and entitlements, favours and patronage continued to be the order of the day? Can ICTs contribute spaces to, and allow the emergence of, discourse and action for expanding (or alternatively constricting) notions of self and citizenship? Answers cannot be meaningful without taking into account the nature of information and connections that ICTs provide access to, in different circumstances. It is the 'local contexts' referred to in the CITIGEN proposal which will determine whether the impact supports a democratising of the polity and promotion of gender equality or not. Secondly, it seems important to not take for granted that merely having access to information, or even a means of self-expression, is sufficient to reorient

people's individual and collective sense of self and their relationship with the state, i.e. concepts and practices of citizenship.

My contention, therefore, is that it is of the utmost importance to consider not merely whether and how ICTs enable a breaching and reconfiguration of gender spaces and frontiers, but *what kinds of messages and dynamics* enter the 'private' domain of women by means of such a breaching. The experience of women in Pakistan would indicate that the outcome may not necessarily be positive, that what enters the breach of private-public frontiers can be deeply misogynist, and result in women making 'choices' that challenge feminists.

There are several dimensions that merit consideration in examining the possible contributions of ICTs in reconstructions of citizenship and counter-publics. The most crucial aspect is the relationship between the virtual world of ICTs and the tangible world, with its grounded realities of everyday life where the struggle for, and shifts in, power take place. This includes the importance of ICT linkages with the news and broadcast media. From the perspective of social movements, a second important dimension relates to individual vs. collectivised actions. The lifeblood of social movements, which are the only way in which citizenship can be effectively (re)negotiated or configured, is collective action. Notwithstanding some collective aspects, at the end of the day, digital ICTs, whether social media networks or email, consist of individual acts, rather than collectivised interventions.

The first part of this paper presents a brief overview of some key issues related to female citizenship. The second section examines how the breaching of the jealously guarded borders of the traditional private-public through media impacted fairly isolated women in Swat, one of the regions most devastatingly impacted by Pakistani Taliban. In this area, radio, facilitated by new technological possibilities in this field, mobilised women not against but for the Taliban agenda. The final section reflects on the opportunities afforded by social network media and digital technologies for those with access to reconfigure the meaning of citizenship, based on the experience of activism and humanitarian relief in Pakistan.

2.   Is women's citizenship more imagined than real?

Before interrogating the possible impact of emerging techno-social paradigms shaped by new information and communication technologies in practically (re)shaping citizenship from women's perspective, it seems appropriate to review what citizenship means and how it interfaces with people's lived realities. The masculinist nature of the State has been written about and critiqued at some length. It is suffice to reiterate here that the spaces available for individual citizens and others inhabiting the territory of the State are also gendered; and, in many instances, the 'family' and male patriarch are legally accorded a privileged position. In this piece, I would like to focus on the spaces available for women to engage in socio-

political processes as citizens.

I have argued elsewhere that, at its simplest, citizenship is the conferring of official belonging to a state, inherently linked to and deriving significance within the parameters of the nation-state. This view is reflected in the writings of others. As the "official stamp of 'paid up' membership to a collective entity", citizenship is supposed to give an identity and provides a status that confers certain rights and entitlements (Shaheed, 2007 and 2005). But does it? And if it does, who enjoys these entitlements, to what degree, and with what limitations? Regardless of differentiated treatment commonly accorded to majority and minority groups (ethnic, religious, linguistic) as well as urban centres and rural peripheries, the Nation-state paradigm presumes a direct relationship of the State with all its citizens. In democratic dispensations, citizens are entitled - and assumed - to engage in public decision-making through State-approved and provided means and opportunities: (Shaheed, 1997) electing their representatives to sit in parliamentary processes, holding their representatives to account by making their views heard through lobbying/petitioning/letter writing, advocacy initiatives that articulate voices of civil society of the public sphere, including through peaceful demonstrations. It is within the context of a public sphere, social organisation and notions of community that the questions raised by the CITIGEN project are located.

As Ephraim Nimni reminds us "The prevalent form of political organisation across the world is the nation-state, yet a nation is not a state (Nimni, 2008)." Where this is generally true, the problems arising out of disconnections between the State and the Nation are intensified in post-colonial states, many of which emerged as State-nations rather than Nation-states in which the State never fully replaced self-governance structures pre-dating independence. Simultaneously, underlying the notion of parliamentary democracies and reflected in Habermas' conceptualisation of the public sphere, is a presumption of a highly individuated society in which people acted independently in their own self-interest. However, the problem of a dissimilar status as citizens as well as the issues related to multiple belongings extends beyond ex-colonial states. Nira Yuval-Davis, for example, has forwarded the idea of 'layered citizenship,' to describe this differentiated treatment (Yuval-Davis, 2007; Werbner and Yuval-Davis, 1999). While I concur with the conveyed concept of a differentiated relationship of specific groups depending on socio-economic positioning (including identities derived from religion, ethnicity, gender etc.) with the State, I hesitate to use 'layered citizenship' simply because it seems to suggest a neat stacking - or layering - of identities. In reality, the social collectivities to which women (and people generally) belong are far from neat: they overlap, intersect and sometimes conflict with each other. The flip side to a 'layered' or nuanced, differentiated citizenship consists of the degrees of disenfranchisement experienced by groups of people, based on various criteria relating to identity, in which gender is but one of the factors for exclusion, albeit a critical one.

The presumption of individuated citizens as free agents is also false, especially, but not only, in post-colonial states.[1] Research in South Asia, for instance, shows that "most people live according to social principles fundamentally opposed to individuation, being apt to act according to the membership of groups like castes, religious communities or linguistic block (Ekatra, 2002)." When newly independent states "adopted a so-called modernistic rationalistic ideology that would, it was presumed, gradually replace the tradition and irrational," they found instead that tradition exhibited "a surprising resilience" (Ekatra, 2002). Not only do local elites and power brokers/wielders block access to state entitlements and policy benefits, there has often been a "large scale appropriation of the modern state mechanisms by the traditional power elite" (ASMITA Resource Centre for Women, 1999). Globally, the family institution has always played a determinative role in accessing citizenship rights. Additionally, in countries such as Pakistan, pre-existing affiliations of the State's new individual citizens to clan/caste (*biraderi*, *zaath*) and tribe, with their own particular power dynamics have remained of primordial importance. When the usually, and often deeply, misogynist traditional mechanisms operate in rigidly gender-segregated environments, this greatly impairs women's ability to enter and participate in any kind of public sphere. The complex webs of social belonging that, far from withering away with the advent of the modern nation-state, have continued to exercise power regardless of the State and have an immediate adverse impact on the female citizenry, as highlighted in a South Asian research programme exploring issues of governance, democracy and women's citizenship.[2]

Gendered relations of power are complex and, in (re)negotiating citizenship, women need to address the overall composite reality of the gendered relations they confront. In this, specific power dynamics play out at different levels in diverse spheres of life, sometimes in contradictory fashion. The dynamics and negotiations involve not only the State and the public sphere but non-state entities such as the family, community and other actors, as well as the interface of the domestic-public domains. The numerous pulls of diverse social groups to which people simultaneously belong, and from which they derive their sense of collective identity, I believe, are pivotal determinants of both perceptions and experiences of citizenship. For women, who are so commonly called upon to be both bearers and symbols of collective identity, experiencing citizenship is even more problematic than it is for the marginalised men since the control exercised by family and local community denies them access to information, benefits, and rights that could facilitate negotiating new or expanded spaces. Rather than the Nation, it is the boundaries of the collective sub-state identities that define for women their sense of self within rules imposed by those with the power to dictate the gender regime: what women/girls and men/boys can, and cannot, do. In many parts of Pakistan,

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1 It is only recently that the individuated and culture-neutral relationship of the state with its citizens posited by T. H. Marshall in 1950 has started to be challenged. (Craith, 2004)

2 *Women & Governance, Democratic Process - Reimagining the State* research project was carried out in 1998-1999 under the auspices of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (Colombo, Sri Lanka) in north and south India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan.

and also elsewhere, the control of local actors in local contexts is so strong that it renders the State invisible, and inconsequential in the lives of many, if not the majority.

Increased civic and political knowledge and a greater sense of empowerment and agency are considered to construct citizenship in a positive manner; the greater sense of empowerment and agency indicated by "changes in individual or group perceptions of their right to participate, as well as their capacity to participate (Gaventa and Barrett, 2010)." Research I have been engaged in recently on women's empowerment confirms that, in order to engage in the public sphere, women first need to believe they have the 'right to be rights-claimants'. In other words, women need to develop a citizen subjectivity before they (re)negotiate or (re)shape notions and practices of citizenship. It also suggests that a new collective subjectivity is the key to women exercising agency for empowerment in ways that challenge the power structures supporting systemic gender inequality (Ng, 2010). A change in individual self-perception is a precondition for any emergent collective sense of self; but it is the process of collective reflection and strategising that is pivotal to change. So long as women respond to their situations in an individuated manner, the tendency is to expand individual personal spaces within the existing system without challenging the structures and systems. A critical ingredient for new collective subjectivity and action is the availability of public discursive spaces (WEMC, 2010; Gurumurthy and Batliwala, 2009). Moreover, women can reject the legitimacy of current power arrangements without necessarily challenging these because of what they perceive to be the entailing prohibitive costs. The potential for ICTs to effectuate paradigmatic changes in the citizenship landscape, then, depends on: (a) catalysing women's subjectivity *as citizens*, (b) facilitating women to overcome individuated isolation to engage in collective reflection and strategising, (c) encouraging women to cross over from the spaces of communication to engage with the real power structures within which their lives are embedded.

Researching the women-gender-citizenship nexus has made me acutely aware of the quite incredible absence of interaction between female citizens and the State in Pakistan that belies the nation-state premise of a direct relationship with its citizens - at least in the case of women. The paucity of interaction between female citizens and the State's multifarious institutions, departments and officials led to me to question whether female citizenship may be more imagined than real (Shaheed, 1999). Women live largely isolated lives confined within the frontiers of domesticity, excluded from virtually every public sphere, all of which are monopolised by men. (In contrast, men are not restrained to the outside public sphere; they are positioned in both worlds and greatly influence the power dynamics of the 'private' sphere.) Perhaps an *a priori* question to ask in the case of Pakistan is thus whether women view themselves as citizens at all, and the significance and importance they attach to their relationship with the State. Of course, women are not homogeneous; where women share the drawbacks of a female identity, they are divided and differentiated by the power

and resources they enjoy through class, religion, ethnic identity as well as for example, rural-urban location. This positioning within society inevitably determines the impact ICTs, and all other factors, have on their lives, their self perceptions, socio-political engagements, etc. Contending with the specificities of their local contexts, women's ability to leverage new technologies to renegotiate formal citizenship is never alike for differently situated women. These differences must be kept in mind while exploring whether and how ICTs enable women to by-pass the custodial mechanisms of control to receive and engage with the wider public sphere. Furthermore, it may be essential to consider how ICTs can help women to confront and alter the power dynamics they face on a day-to-day basis, as a pre-requisite to a (re)shaping of citizenship.

Fatema Mernissi considers that ICTs have induced a revolution in the Arab world by virtue of creating 'digital chaos' (*al-fitna raqmiya*) wrought by new technologies which have destroyed the *hudood*, or outer boundaries/limits, of traditional space frontiers which divided the private arena assigned to women and the public one where adult males exercised authority (Mernissi, 2005). I do not doubt that the introduction and proliferating use of new ICTs is revising the boundaries of gender space frontiers and how these function, or that this impacts gender dynamics and interactions. Nor do I question Mernissi's assessment of what is happening in the Arab world.

I do think it vital, however, to interrogate the notion that digital chaos automatically facilitates women in reconfiguring the concepts and practices of *citizenship* in ways that promote gender equality, regardless of particular circumstances. Gender relations are not always equivalent to gendered citizenship. Public sphere institutions, including ICTs that provide citizens with hooks with which to anchor or better leverage their interventions in public socio-political spaces can only help to construct counter-publics and (re)shape citizenship notions within the pre-existing parameters of particular socio-cultural as well as political and economic environments. It is necessary to consider the possibility of the breaching of frontiers leading to other, less welcome, outcomes. Underlying 'techno-enthusiasm' there seems to be an assumption that the breaching of the public-private divide and a reconfiguration of social spaces and norms must inevitably exercise a positive influence on gender equality and promote greater democracy. I cannot agree, since the unstated presumption is that only progressive forces use ICTs. This is patently incorrect, as is the equation of all civil society institutions and interventions with progressive forces (Phillips, 2009; Shaheed, 2009).

Still, in principle, ICTs should be particularly relevant as means of subversion for women in countries such as Pakistan where the imposed gender-normative prescriptions exclude women from engaging in the male-dominated public sphere arenas - be it party rallies and meetings in the political arena, or teashops, clubs, sports and entertainment events in the socio-cultural arena, and to a large extent the major institutionalised

spaces of religion. Logically, for those with accessibility, these new spaces should offer a welcome oasis of engagement - and relief. Yet, in the northern Swat valley, as discussed below, alternative media space was effectively 'captured' by non-state interests who, using ICT to breach the traditional private-public domestic-political divide, transported a fragment of 'public sphere' into the 'private' domain of homes to co-opt women in their own agenda. From a feminist perspective, the resulting mobilisation and engagement defied familial male control over women but paved the way for entirely the wrong type of radicalisation. Of course, the radio is hardly a new technology and no social network media were involved. Nevertheless, the use of radio as a means of information and communication was a novelty in that area, and it did breach the domestic - public divide.

3.   The Radio Mullah of Swat

On the morning of 2 April, 2009, the Pakistani nation watched in shock, and then increasing outrage, the footage of a woman being publicly flogged in Swat, once the country's verdant, peaceful and favoured tourist destination. The grainy images, shot by a mobile phone and lasting only seconds, show some fairly burly, bearded men, presumed to be from the Pakistani Taliban, forcibly holding down a woman and beating her with a thick stick in a public street in front of an entirely male crowd; the woman's cries, for mercy and repentance, suggest she was young. None of the spectators intervene; the leader exhorts his companions to hold her down more tightly to stop her from squirming. Aired first on one television news channel and then by all, the relentless images and cries for mercy finally dislodged the public's inertia, galvanised the Supreme Court into taking *suo motto* notice and built public support for concerted military action to end the vicious, brutal and brutalising rule of the local Taliban which had virtually controlled Swat since 2007. The clip evidenced the power of the moving picture, repeatedly broadcast to bombard our senses. The only contribution of new ICT was the ability of the ordinary citizens to use mobile telephones to capture images and voice to be shared with others including, in this case, the mainstream media.

Of significance from the perspective of citizenship, but lost in the ensuing heated debate that focused on the video's authenticity and the need for prompt State action, was that the Nation had known for some years that floggings, humiliations, and much worse was happening in the valley but, with the exception of human rights activists, had remained silent. Activists also did little more than vocalise protest. By 2006, in the northern agencies (ruled by special dispensation and excluded from general laws) militants were terrorising female teachers into donning prescribed forms of the *burqa* (militants having listed unacceptable 'fashionable' styles); local mullahs had passed a *fatwa* (religious opinion usually taken as edict) that women NGO workers were *'maal-e-ghanimat'* - spoils of war - who 'right-thinking' men should forcibly marry to bring them back into the fold of the righteous; two female vocational teachers had been shot dead. Violence escalated dramatically in 2007, a woman and two men were stoned and then shot dead for alleged

adultery; in September militants beheaded two women accused of prostitution, dumping their bodies on the roadside with a note that all women should be careful or they would suffer the same fate.

Also forgotten in the fury over the 'flogging video' was that the forces who eventually joined the Tehreek-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in Swat, had initially been welcomed by the local population, including many women. In fact, anecdotal information suggested that it was women in particular who formed the backbone of this support. Women contributed their jewellery, extolled their husbands to grow beards, to hitch their *shalwars* above their ankles, to get rid of the 'satanic' television (Bari, 2009). Taken in by Fazlullah's virulent campaign against polio vaccinations, mothers refused to have their children inoculated (leading to a spike in polio cases in the region), and some (male) followers not only attacked government offices but killed a senior doctor and his assistants administering the vaccinations (Shirkat Gah, 2007). Some even sent their sons off to wage war with the Taliban. The pivotal figure was Mullah Fazlullah, whose highly effective use of radio earned him the name Mullah Radio or FM Mullah. His call for a particularly perverted version of *jihad* (holy war) was responsible for the bombing of dozens of girls' schools and the eventual closure of all female education, the banning of women from bazaars and virtually all public spaces, ultimately a reign of complete terror. How was it possible for Mullah Radio to convert women to his cause?

Fazullah inherited the leadership of the Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) (Movement to Protect Mohammad's Rule) from his father-in-law, Sufi Mohammad, who founded TNSM and aligned it with the Afghan Taliban in late 1994 when he led an armed insurrection in Malakand Division (adjacent to Swat) (Shaheed, 2009). Blocking the main transport arteries and kidnapping government officials and judges, his insurrection brought life to a complete standstill, effectively putting into abeyance the writ of the State. The TNSM offered little to women, and beyond the inevitable gendered discourse,[3] women were largely invisible. Women did make an appearance in the public sphere to protest when some 100 veiled women, outnumbered by male students and some elders, blocked the main road on two consecutive days, and distributed bangles to men not joining the movement. (The distribution of bangles - a symbol of femininity - to men is a cultural insult in South Asia, symbolising the emasculinisation of recipient men).[4] In imitation of the Afghan Taliban, TNSM initiated summary kangaroo courts in the name of Islam, 'trying' criminals, executing and publicising brutal punishments, but abandoned these when public outcry suggested this was alienating people.

In the decade of 2000, the vision initially projected by Fazullah was equally vague, promising speedy justice and an Islamic regime, presumed *ipso facto* by many to be just; but the methods and strategy

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3   For example, militants had "vowed to wives they would be divorced if they did not return with shariat." (*Dawn,* 16-5-94). Calling for nationwide demonstrations, politico-religious parties also claimed that 500 women had been killed along with 50 *ulama* and 300 "religious Taliban" "at instigation of the US."

4   Reported in daily *The News* 21-6-95, 22-6-95

used were different. In the 1990s, the modalities for communication and mobilisation were unrelated to ICTs; Sufi Mohammad shunned the media and refused to be photographed. He also never addressed women directly. In contrast, his son-in-law perfected the art of using FM radio; dozens of illegal radio stations mounted on mobile transmitters on constantly moving motorcycles, trucks and even donkeys on different hillsides, bypassed the State's jamming devices; as soon as one transmitter was jammed, another started broadcasting. Also unlike his father-in-law, Fazullah specifically addressed women in many broadcasts with surprisingly effective results. Whilst calling for strict gender segregation and the seclusion of women, Fazullah in effect used the radio to by-pass the authority of family males, to insinuate himself into the '*char diwari*' (four walls) of women's 'private' world.[5] It should be said that in many rural parts of Pakistan access to television and even the older technology of radio is strictly controlled by male family patriarchs, but it is not uncommon to find women listening to radio and watching television programmes surreptitiously when the men are not around. Breaking the 'sanctity' of female seclusion in practice while promoting it generally, Fazlullah's strategy accomplished two changes: a) he brought into women's world a sort of 'public sphere', or at least a fragment thereof, and b) he helped to dislodge and to some extent replace, the traditional patriarchal control over women by family men with his own authority. Women responded in surprising numbers and with astonishing enthusiasm. Women (and men) voluntarily stopped listening to music and watching television; many actually threw their CDs, tape recorders and televisions out of their homes. Using radio technology to full advantage, FM Mullah simultaneously launched an intensive attack against television as satanic - presumably because that was outside his control - conveniently overlooking similarities of provenance and technology.

A number of analysts and activists still refuse to believe that women welcomed Fazlullah and, especially, that they gave him their jewellery which is closely conflated with status and 'honour'.[6] But those who met the women who had fled the 2009 bloody violence-filled military operation to flush out the militants reported that "They [women] were honest, honest about the power of Mullah Radio and his constituency of women listeners (NWFP Women, 2009)." Shut in their homes many women listened to "Raidu Mullah" because, as one woman explained, "He used to talk about Islam, about praying five times a day, about going to the *madrassah* and learning the Quran. We all thought he was a good man." Women confirmed that Fazullah addressed them directly, telling women what their duties were under Islam, about cleanliness, addressing issues of concern to women and, initially, preaching peace. Some red-faced women shared that "Raidu Mullah" even instructed them on how to wash their private parts. This is indeed a shocking transgression of gender-rules and sexuality-related norms since normally even mothers refuse to inform their daughters about menstruation,

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5   The 'private' sphere has of course never been in isolation since it is always penetrated by males; the difference is that this time, it was by non-family men.

6   Sarfraz Khan, a university professor of political science from the region, for instance, took up the issue at the National Conference on women Religion (HBF), and insisted on the falsity of such claims to the author subsequently as well.

delegating this task to some other female relative. Presumably, it was in respect to 'lectures' such as these - also made available on cassettes - that Fazlullah instructed his female audience to listen outside of the hearing of their men folk.[7]

Mullah Radio's popularity was immense. Women lined up to donate their jewellery, the poorest contributing their nose-pins. Donations were not without an element of moral coercion however: gold was condemned as sinful; many pamphlets circulated at the time lectured women (and their men) on the dire consequences even after death of sinners, particularly women - both in terms of possessing gold and in terms of listening to the forbidden television. As one woman testified: "Once I heard from Maulana [Fazlullah] on the radio that how on the Day of Judgement my gold will become *sisa* (lead) and will burn my eyes and my body, I was so frightened that I collected all my jewellery and asked my husband to give this to Maulana." Some women later recognised the jewellery they had donated adorning the neck of Fazlullah's wife, but most of the gold went into funding Fazlullah's *madrassah*, militants and armed insurrection. As his hold consolidated, "He asked them [the women] to rise in the name of Islam, rise in the name of religion. Rise as the most important part of society. Force your men to fight."[8]

Some women listeners were wary, one saying she did not trust Mullah Radio and therefore refused to allow either her daughters or daughters-in-law to listen. But most women only realised in retrospect the extent to which "*Radio Mullah ke haramtobe wo"* (Mullah Radio spelled trouble for us) and regretted their earlier support, but it was too late of course. Fully unleashed, the reign of terror brought 'butchery squares,' brutal summary hangings, beheadings and mutilations, the forcible extraction of either financial support and/or conscription of a son, the denigration and humiliation of a school teacher made to walk to her execution wearing ankle bells to signify she was nothing more than a prostitute, the rape of women whose breasts were cut off, the head-shaving of women who went to retrieve their sons from the Taliban. The all-pervasive reign brooked no interference or opposition. The not-so-new communication technology of radio had been leveraged to reshape a brutalised and brutalising new polity, citizenship rights were not renegotiated; they were eliminated, as was the presence of the State. Ruing her earlier support, a woman, whose son had been killed by the military rather than Taliban in the 2009 army action, averred with a vengeance, "They are beasts these Taliban. They are not human. May God finish them all like they have finished us. May God punish these animals for what they have done to us. I hope the army finishes every last one of them."

Why did women respond so readily, so enthusiastically to the FM programmes? Some activists and

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7   Related by informant Arshed Jan, a local resident, who heard this instruction upon entering his home to find his mother and some female relatives gathered around the cassette player. The women switched off the tape *and so he never heard the contents*.
8   Aqeel Malik, Project Director of FM 96, who launched counter radio programme in February 2009 as part of the publicity arm of the military to challenge the prevalent FM Mullah discourse.

humanitarian workers believe that women's ignorance, naivety and isolation played a big part in making 'them the captive audience of Fazlullah, or, as they call him, "Mullah Radio" (NWFP Women, 2009). I do not believe the answer is so simple. In addition to a desire to overcome ignorance, about religion amongst other things, other factors need to be considered.

The isolation of women is an important element. The extreme deprivation of human contact and possibilities of socialising outside family networks combined with rigid and severe patriarchal control lend a different meaning to the experience of listening to an unrelated male 'authority' who addresses women directly as actors, subjects in their own right. Radio broadcasts can be seen as offering, through the importation of a new 'public space' into women's private lives within the prescribed seclusion of homes, an opportunity to be active; to 'rise as the most important part of society'. This must surely have bolstered women's sense of their own worth, of counting for something outside mundane routinised and constrictive lives. It hints at an underlying desire to be active participants beyond the current constrictions of accepted gender frontiers. Fazullah's allure also stemmed from his informing women that they were entitled to some rights, provided this was in the pursuit and greater glory of religion. On this path, women's agency in disobeying husbands and opposing their views was not only permissible, it even had religious sanction. Of relevance here is the insight of previous research that showed that few women prioritise what are considered to be the classical rights of citizenship, starting with franchise. Of far greater and more immediate concern to most women is how to address the forces that keep them disempowered in their daily life (Shaheed, 2009; WEMC, 2011). As Sana Haroon suggests, the "Taliban dictates mirror those of society in some respects. Yet at the same time they prompt inversions of norms which privilege and recognise familial control over women's sexuality, and the prerogative of family to apply sanctions from breaches of norms (Haroon, 2011)."

The Asia-based WEMC research on women's empowerment confirmed that not only do women need to believe they have the right to be rights-claimants, they need to conceive of themselves differently to take action to challenge the forces keeping them disempowered - in other words they need to develop new subjectivities. I believe this is precisely what Mullah FM did: he gave women a new sense of self and the legitimacy to reject the traditional power rules of gender within their homes and the authority of their familial male guardians. Women themselves repeatedly mention that he addressed them directly, and called for them to act on behalf of Islam, peace and justice. While this needs corroboration through more detailed field research, all my previous research suggests that it is not unreasonable to presume that this direct call to women - addressing them as thinking actors capable of independent action - was a significant factor in women's response.

The case of Swat supports a rather uncomfortable conclusion; this is that in local contexts which severely

disempower women in everyday domestic life, women may be willing to 'sacrifice' their entitlements as citizens (such as voting, participating in the outside world, the physical public space) in order to gain greater decision-making powers in the everyday. Of course 'sacrifice' implies that women are cognisant of possessing such rights, something which seems to be contradicted by the evidence. Yet the conundrum of Swat carries an indication of at least a desire on the part of women to actively engage in some aspects of the wider world. Female listeners were not just a passive audience. They took multiple actions in response to the radio broadcasts: contributing their jewellery, extolling sons and husbands to grow beards, to change their style of clothes, to throw out television sets, etc. These actions need to be acknowledged as acts of subversion: it is not a small matter to contribute your jewellery which not only has an economic but also symbolic value associated with a woman's sense of her worth; it is especially not a small act when it can lead, as it did, to being divorced by their husbands. (One woman, whose location across the river was beyond the FM range, expressed her utter bewilderment at her sister's decision to donate all her jewellery even though her husband divorced her for this.[9]) Women's actions suggest that Fazullah's speeches gave women a source of legitimacy for asserting themselves, in the first instance, vis-à-vis their husbands/male relatives. There was also an aspect of contributing to the public discourse - or at least becoming more informed - since Fazullah encouraged women to call in with their questions. My interpretation is that armed political Islamists occupied important alternative media space to challenge the traditional domestic/private-public gendered frontiers, and that the transportation of a fragment of 'public sphere' into their homes gave women a new sense of self as subjects and socio-cultural actors. Women did develop a new subjectivity. Only the new subjectivity did not derive from, nor was it connected to, the State and the rights conferred by citizenship in terms of legal and policy entitlements. Women's ability to act stemmed from a new religious subjectivity. But the legitimacy was restricted and women acted largely within a limited domain, mostly confining their new-found activism to personal domestic matters. The linkage with the dominant and male-dominated public sphere was muted and indirect. (While women's questions were never broadcast, the extent to which their questions were addressed in Fazullah's broadcasts is unclear.)

Moreover, the novel communication modality was not entirely unidirectional. If Fazullah deliberately and stealthily penetrated the 'private' space of women daily, and may even have suggested minor rebellions against the patriarchal establishment within the home, broadcasts did provide women with the possibility to at least phone in with their further queries, although it does not seem to have provided any means to engage directly in discussion with those sending the message. (Even the project director of the alternative State-supported radio attempting to replace the message on the airwaves, which invites call-ins, does not expect any calls from women.) Nor did any of the women fleeing the carnage ever mention collectively discussing the radio messages, suggesting that the unlikelihood of discussions and engagements

9   Interview with Humaira Shaikh of Sabowan, an initiative working with displaced persons of the Swat conflict and a project to re-educate children trained as suicide bombers so as to re-integrate them into mainstream society.

beyond their immediate families. To be able to engage in such discussions seems to be an obvious requirement for reconfiguring citizenship.

Some of the questions for activism are: how can activists catalyse new subjectivities using ICTs that promote construction of citizenship that are meaningful to women themselves? What alternatives can be proposed in terms of a non-compromised space that can allow for alternative representations of self and citizenship taking into consideration (increasingly) unsafe actual public sphere play out with being restricted to the private 'safe' space within homes? This is especially significant in contemporary settings where multiple publics coexist and the very existence of a bewildering array of diversity threatens to fragment audiences, as it did in the context of Swat. It should be mentioned that the vitality of launching a radio of the women's movement was proposed during the 5-year review on progress on the Beijing Platform for Action in Pakistan in 2000. In the light of the subsequent events, it seems particularly unfortunate that this never became a concrete initiative of the movement.

4. New ICTs and movement building: Social networking media, internet and mobile telephones

Without ethnographic and other research it is difficult to ascertain whether ICTs have strengthened a sense of female citizenship amongst Pakistani women and/or broadened their participation in the public sphere, and with what consequences.

The most visible impact of ICTs in terms of gender dynamics in Pakistan is probably the arrival of the mobile telephone. By making possible inter-personal communication despite the strict enforcement of gender segregation rules, this technology significantly widens the scope for interpersonal relationships. While this has reshaped the parameters of male-female relationships as evident in the field,[10] I am not convinced that the change has transpired into the notions of and practices of citizenship and constructions of the public in ways that advance women's equality, citizen subjectivity and activism in the public sphere - at least not so far.

On the other hand, tactically, the cellular telephone has proved to be enormously helpful in all kinds of social movement activism. It has been used to track and support activists and citizens picked up by the police, as well as for mobilising and coordinating meetings, discussions and demonstrations.

The most vivid illustration of how the mobile phone can change the practice of citizenship was evidenced in Iran when it was deployed to create instant demonstrations in tube stations and on public highways,

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10 *Shirkat Gah*'s WEMC research teams in two provinces consistently found that youngsters were using the mobile telephone to strike up friendships, including heterosexual ones, which would not have been possible otherwise e. Young men in very remote isolated areas also reported that the mobile phone was used by well-to-do 'aunties' i.e. older women from the affluent families, to solicit sexual favours. *Shirkat Gah WEMC Field Diaries*, Balochistan and Punjab.

following the 2009 elections. In Pakistan too, as seen in the anti- emergency activism in 2007-8 and far larger and prolonged lawyers' movement that followed, ICTs, including the mobile telephone were put to good use, facilitating the sharing of crucial information about police warrants, charges and arrests along with the relocations and conditions of those arrested. It was also vital in arranging for bail and sending/receiving documents. A whole plethora of groups and individuals contributed to the information that was collated and made available publicly, mostly on the net via email list-serves and dedicated sites opened overnight. But whether this has had a gendered impact needs more investigation. In terms of Pakistan's public sphere, ICTs were used more effectively in support of humanitarian assistance first following the massive 2006 earthquake and then the even more widespread 2010 floods. But the impact of these has often - though not always - depended on linkages with the mass media broadcast. Finally, the availability on the net of the texts of government bills and other proposed policies has allowed access to information - and sometimes feedback/inputs - that would not have been possible for the average citizen before, especially women. Significantly, however, in all instances, the communication and information sharing was supported by civil society organisations that helped to channel the flow in ways that supported the movement in question.

With respect to the government-citizen online interface, while I do believe this is a positive development that does away with the need to insinuate oneself into closed circles often needing to curry favour merely to gather information that, by its nature, is public, I cannot help but wonder how many individual citizens log onto the sites to gather information, how many send in their thoughts, and most importantly how much attention is paid to such contributions in the closed spaces of bureaucracy? Based on the Pakistan experience, I doubt whether this new channel would have been effective had there not been women associated with the movement who managed to get elected into the parliamentary process. It was this connection, forged outside ICTs - not infrequently on the streets - that provided the real channel for influencing the polity. Equally, an important element in the ability of the lawyers' movement to sustain itself is the atypical positioning of lawyers in the market place. Unlike salaried people employed in both the public and private sectors, lawyers are self-employed, dependent on their particular clients, and an absence from work - even though presenting economic hardships for many, does not impact future work possibilities such as would be the case for farmers/peasants if they fail to till their land or harvest their crops. These realities outside the ICT-world play an enormous and determinative role in social movements.

ICTs have undoubtedly created pockets of the public sphere in which the gender rules for private-public segregation do not apply as before in Pakistan, opening opportunities to promote discourses on issues for which physical spaces are deemed too risky, from a secular vision of Pakistan to issues of sexuality and sexual orientation. New spaces for discussion and self-expression, and the relative anonymity afforded by the

new ICTs can act as an equaliser of sorts with quite a few women as well as men posting on their blogs. With online spaces providing 'open' public arenas for challenging hegemonic masculinities, the public sphere of ICTs is a potentially important media for self expression, especially in a society that frowns upon most forms of public female expression. While this is a vital and sometimes vibrant public sphere that introduces new discourses with the potential to alter perceptions and practices of gender, in terms of citizenship, the new openings for discussion, self expression, and contribution to the public sphere can only support "the renegotiation of women's formal citizenship in local contexts" if there are actual, as well as merely discursive, linkages between these 'public spheres' opened by new ICTs and ground realities, and if they facilitate women to breach the boundaries of the real, not virtual, public sphere. A sobering reflection, for instance, is that the discussions of the recently formed Citizens For Democracy (CFD) network in Pakistan (in the wake of the assassination of Punjab's Governor) connects some 3000-4000 concerned citizens who regularly engage in all manner of discussion on the net. Yet, less than 200 responded to a call for a demonstration.

The nature of activism has been changed through ICTs. Gone are the days when signature campaigns required door-to-door and face-to-face encounters, and when activism meant you had to formally compose your own telegram, or letter of protest to authorities in campaigns. It is no longer even necessary to compose a letter similar, but not identical, to the model circulated; you no longer need to pay for postage or even the fax transmission; a simple click of the mouse allows you to be part of campaigns - and there are so many. But if this click does not galvanise you to leave your chair and confront the possible risks of actual protest, is it not merely what Evgeny Morovoz has dubbed 'slacktivism', a feel-good sensation with none of the risks of confronting power (Morozov, 2010)?

A very significant dimension of the new ICTs is the change in the technology of mobilisation they have accomplished. Where, previously, mobilisation in the socio-political arena required a centralised organising force, new technologies have enabled decentralised individuated initiatives. In 2009 in Iran for instance, one of the problems authorities confronted in their moves to shut down the movement was the lack of clearly identified leaders.[11] From the perspective of movements, the dispersed nature of the 'leadership' (outside the political figures) was both an asset and a challenge. As an asset, dispersal enabled continuity in difficult political circumstances, but the drawback was that a dispersed leadership impeded clarity on overall purposes and tactics as it provided no space to debate and decide matters beyond the immediate acts of protest. And as the experience in Egypt indicates, it is not possible to do away with an actual structure, post demonstrations, to negotiate with the authorities. The CFD group in Pakistan faced a similar challenge: created for a single agenda, heated debates followed the suggestion of one of the

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11 This confusion on the part of the authorities was conveyed to me personally by Shadi Sadr and Mahboobeh Abbassgolizadeh, long-time leaders of the women's movement in Iran.

coordinators that the platform also take up economic issues in addition to the rule of law and greater democracy. In the end, the platform has maintained the very narrow political focus it started with. This, to me, points to one of the issues in terms of reliance on, rather than usage of ICTs in the arena of citizenship practices: the general use of ICTs to mobilise does not provide the kind of face to face discussions, consciousness raising initiatives, or study circles of yore, that provided the ideological underpinnings of social movements. ICTs and the connections and information they provide undoubtedly hold considerable scope for facilitating social movements, but they do not and cannot replace analytical engagement and are insufficient without being grounded in real organisations in the tangible world. As Morozov says "They told us it [the Internet] would usher in a new era of freedom, political activism, and perpetual peace. They were wrong (Morozov, 2010)." This is not to deny the extremely valuable contributions that ICTs make to limited objectives. One example of this is in monitoring elections in Mexico, where "technology-savvy, socially conscious citizens have seen success organising and advocating through social media, especially on Twitter […] [and where] innovative new platforms are beginning to take flight," creating new opportunities for ICT to benefit civil society (DuPont, 2011).

Furthermore, in the midst of the enthusiasm over the use and impact of ICTs in the Arab Middle East, starting with Tunisia, it serves us well to recognise that while a little over 12% of the Tunisian population is engaged in social network activities; Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen are estimated to have a combined total of 14,642 Twitter users; Facebook is used in Egypt by some 4.58% as of July 2010, some 15,000 being connected in a country of some 80 million people. This means 85% of the people were not connected. Similarly, during the ICT 'revolution in Iran' in June 2009, there were only "19,235 Twitter users […] about half the number of people who attend a professional football game (Inoljt, 2011)." Hence, it is important not to over-determine the role of social media networking as driving the social change movements in the Middle East. New ICTs have undoubtedly enabled a far greater sharing of and access to information for those who are connected, but the digital divide remains severe and, in the case of Pakistan, the divide is highly gendered, with women excluded from most public access points to the Internet. Mobile telephones are an exception of course, but limited to the relatively affluent and mostly the urban population. In any case, had the mass media not picked up the tweeting and other ICT means used by citizens to post and share events, helpful information, concerns, and analyses in the Arab uprisings, it is unlikely that we would have seen the impact we did. Also, as revealed by events in the Middle East, the "parable for the potential and pitfalls of a social-media enabled revolution" is that "the very tool that people are using for their activism becomes the very means by which their identities could be compromised (Madrigal, 2011)."

I do not deny that the spaces provided are important and, for instance, the recent call in Saudi Arabia demanding the same reforms for which others had been arrested in 2003-4, has been made possible through the Internet.

Not yet sent to the authorities, the demand has been posted and signed by 123 individuals, though it is not clear whether the signatories include any women. This in itself testifies to the possibility and importance of the new opportunities and spaces ICTs provide, in terms of public sphere and citizenship matters. But, by itself, it is simply not enough. The 'flogging video' of Chand Bibi in Swat would not have had anywhere near the same impact had it simply been posted on YouTube. Its airing on 'authoritative' news media helped it (a) reach far more people and (b) led to immediate action. Consequently, while examining the possible impact of ICTs in the Middle East, it is vital to identify what galvanised the populations onto the streets. I am uncomfortably aware that the first public political use of the mobile phone in Pakistan that I recall is its instrumental use in one of the very early bombings in the 1980s when mobile phones were quite rare.

Finally, I have seen little evidence of the ability of ICTs to address the meso-level power dynamics that regulate women's lives, impose restricted notions of the self and control their dreams of alternative futures. These are the social collectivities - in addition to families - that impose gender rules in the community and hence determine women's ability to enter and engage in the public sphere, and thus the scope for activities. This does not mean that people are not leveraging the advantages and possibilities offered by ICTs to confront local factors and actors that keep them disempowered at the local level. It only means that I have not heard of examples, in contrast to reports on ICTDs which are quite numerous, and seem effective in their own contexts. I am curious about whether and how the new ICTs could be leveraged to challenge the authority of, say, the local dispute resolution forums found throughout South Asia (the *jirga* or *panchayat* in Pakistan for instance). This is an area that needs investigation and research.

From the perspective of the last twenty years in Pakistan, ICTs have certainly enabled greater communication (half of Pakistanis are estimated to have mobile telephones) and to some extent bolstered the ability of an engaged middle class to hold governments to account more readily, but done little to change the basic contradictions of class, to reduce exclusions and to reshape power dynamics. At the end of day, these are the issues that social movements and reshaping of citizenship, whether from a gender or other dimension, must respond to.

5.   Concluding thought

Although radio is not strictly speaking a new ICT, I nevertheless focused on the Swat conundrum because it so vividly illustrates, and points to, important dimensions of ICTs in relation to women's citizenship and the public sphere. One key lesson is that gender may be transformed in unhelpful ways through the ICTs even when these breach and reconfigure the domestic/private-public space frontiers and all while increasing women's agency.

The events in Swat support the contention of the WEMC research project that, in order to act in their own interests, women need to develop new subjectivities. But it also indicates that unless this new subjectivity is framed within the citizenship paradigm, a new subjectivity may bolster activism and can even facilitate women to change the dynamics of their daily gendered power relations, without necessarily reconfiguring citizenship towards gender equality or expanding women's active participation as citizens.

To produce the desired reconfiguring of citizenship towards gender-equality, communication needs to be multi-directional and accompanied by (a) a reshaping of sources of authority to be more democratic and (b) a public discursive space open to women to (re)negotiate the practices and concepts of citizenship. This did not happen in Swat, limiting the scope for women's intervention in the public sphere: communication was largely unidirectional, authority concentrated in the hands of the broadcaster and radio emissions failed, not coincidently, to provide women a public discursive space identified by the WEMC research as the single most important and consistent requirement for empowerment initiatives. These spaces are pivotal, not least because sharing experiences makes visible to women the patterns of oppression and disempowerment, thereby displacing previously-held notions of their situation being *qismat*, (fate) or just plain bad luck; collective discussions help women to discover and create the best modes of engagement in particular 'local contexts'.

Significantly, in responding to the call of Radio Mullah to be more active, women acted in their individual capacity and not as a collectivised group - even when they publicly lined up to donate their jewellery or called in with their questions, the act of donation and telephoning was individual not collective. Finally, in the light of earlier research in Pakistan, the case of Swat underlines that women may be so severely marginalised in citizenship and suffer such oppression on a daily basis, that they may 'choose' to forgo rights associated with and deriving from citizenship so as to negotiate more space and power within their daily lives. The implication is that the ability of women to leverage ICTs in support of reconfiguring notions of citizenship is dependent on the degree of consciousness of being citizens amongst women. This requires breaking the isolating and often absolute hold of sub-state entities as determinative factors in women's lives. The fragmentation of the public is not limited to the spaces operating through the ICTs , it already exists in many societies such as Pakistan as I have tried to highlight in the first section. This fragmented isolation impedes the building of a citizenship inclusive of all, especially women in segregated societies. To overcome this requires dealing with the forces keeping women disempowered in 'local contexts', i.e. the meso level between the State and citizens. These forces include not merely the family, but other social identities and belongings.

Constituting and nurturing 'local publics' through digital media and other means, to bolster a sense of having the right to be rights claimants as citizens is the real challenge to be addressed. The case also indicates that a

prior negotiation to ease the oppression of women's daily existences may be a pre-condition to (re)negotiating the practice and concepts of citizenship as they affect women. So can ICTs respond to these various needs? ICTs, including social network media, can displace and replace sources of authority in people's lives; they can, albeit less effectively if done in isolation, reorient a sense of self, inducing a new citizen subjectivity; they can provide platforms for interactive discussions. But can they function as the public discursive spaces needed to anchor women's empowerment initiatives?

More generally, ICTs have transformed the technology of mobilisation and organisation, reducing both the dependence on centralised organisations and the need to be formal members of any group. But, as evident in the 'flogging video' as well as in the recent uprisings across the Arab Middle East, the transformative power of ICTs is very closely linked to, and in many ways dependent on, the power - and I would venture authority of - the television networks and other broadcast media. This linkage needs to be explored further to see how social movements can best mesh with the opportunities offered by ICTs with power of other media, without being caught in and manipulated by the latter.

The issue of legitimacy is crucial - the news media in general has a legitimacy that the ICTs still do not enjoy. The sources from which women derive legitimacy for action need to be better investigated and understood. The WEMC research found that the State remains an important source of authority and legitimisation - but that for this, women need to engage with, and be engaged by the State and its institutions. Other important sources included history, especially histories of resistance regardless of whether women were directly involved or not, and knowledge of women's struggles in different contexts. Lastly, new ideologies (which also help create new subjectivities) remain important - hence there may be a need for old-fashioned consciousness raising activities, including by exploring how this can be achieved through ICTs.

Ultimately, the linkages - existing and potential - between the virtual and the concrete tangible world are of vital, overriding importance. Without being linked to social movements on the ground, modifications, reorientations and negotiations through ICTs will have limited impact in effectuating shifts in power. In this, it is essential to bear in mind the various levels at which the gender-citizenship nexus operates when considering the possible impact of ICTs.

As said, I have seen no reports on how ICTs have helped women to address the meso-level power dynamics of the local contexts in which their lives are embedded: the local elites that reproduce the dominant culture, which serves to exclude women from the public sphere and keeps women immobile, through internalisation of the gender norms. To believe that they are entitled to be rights-claimants, women need to overturn the authority of this localised context.

It would be most interesting to see how ICTs can be used to catalyse and support women's dreams of alternative futures in which they "rise as the most important part of society" to reshape what it means to be a member of the particular communities to which they belong as well as in the capacity of a citizen. I hope that the CITIGEN project manages to identify both existing initiatives and to draw the lessons of how better to use the opportunities afforded by the new ICTs.

My experience suggests that ICTs are communication tools that can, and do, facilitate social organisation and notions of self by introducing new information and possibilities for reconceptualising the individual and collective self. But that, as a tool, these new technologies serve different agendas, not all of which aim for greater democratisation. It is well to remember that access to ICTs as public sphere/space does not necessarily translate into shifting paradigms of citizenship in favour of women, or even for women's empowerment from a feminist viewpoint. This depends on who is using such media, with what agenda in mind. Non-state actors with a misogynistic anti-democratic and generally terror-oriented agenda have been using the ICTs fairly effectively, it would seem -- possibly more effectively than those with a progressive agenda (Morozov, 2010; Morozov, 2011). In the final analysis, I would agree with Anne Nelson that, "we shouldn't let the tech-euphoria distract us from the other critical issues," of the realities of power both within and outside the ICT domains.

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