

SESSION VI: Towards a synthesis of CITIGEN's thoughts and practices – what does the network society have to do with discourses of gender and citizenship

This presentation attempted a tentative synthesis of the research projects undertaken by the CITIGEN research programme.

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Anita Gurumurthy began with a summary of the CITIGEN research work which constitutes six research projects and five think pieces. Four teams undertook action research while two undertook empirical research. Three of these researches were located in South Asian countries – India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh; and three were in South East Asia – Philippines, APWLD based in Thailand, China. The associated think piece authors were Supinya Klangnarong, Farida Shaheed, Margarita Salas, Heike Jensen, Desiree Lewis and Crystal Orderson.

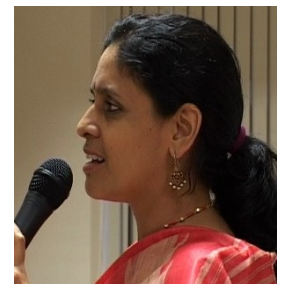
Anita opened her presentation by admitting that it was a tentative theory and analysis because reports were coming in and reviews were still taking place and hence these concepts and theories were still in the making. Moving to the presentation, she said, that the questions covered by the programme were:

1. How does social discontinuity effected by digital technologies recast participation and political membership of marginalised women?
2. How does it shape 'older' questions of social and gender justice?
3. How does the political female subject emerge in the contemporary moment?

CITIGEN adopted its analysis - not just a critical feminist approach - but also went back to some traditions of political philosophy to look at the study of the normative and what ought to be. It is very important to acknowledge that many of the standpoints in the analysis proceed from the body of work that has been done on the subject especially by Southern feminists whose work we have been following for a very long time and this has been on a range of issues - studies on local governance, how local actors influence local governance, how agencies are framed in the local

context to the whole question of global politics and global justice and how feminists of the South have engaged with it. These are the lenses that have influenced the analysis.

Going back to some of the discussions that happened previously in the first session in order to just crystallise the backdrop of the analysis - Castells is undoubtedly the father of the theory of the network society. For Castells the shift was from a world which is a 'space of places', to a world which is now a 'space of flows'. So everything is in fluidity, and therefore, the space of some places has been elevated to the hubs that make modern capitalism and the rest of the places have been rendered irrelevant. So, that is, in crux what the network is doing to us. That is not a fact but a theorisation of the contemporary.



Anita Gurumurthy

In post industrial society, the architecture of production and social relationships is governed by technology. There is pervasive change that dislocates the subjective-ontological (the way we frame ourselves and with each other) as also the social/interpersonal. One often reads about the time space compression - an essential facet of contemporary modern life.

So why did CITIGEN investigate the question of citizenship? Citizenship allows one a way to look at the promise of technology without getting dystopic and depressed. It allows to look at the tension between the formal and the aspirational/normative . It is also important that in a mapping of the current situation, you can see how a proliferation of non-state actors and associated changes in the scope, exclusivity and state authority over its territory, is making it very difficult to understand who is governed, who are

citizens, what is government and in this global existence is there a possibility of a global state.

Norm making and the default sense of norm making has actually assumed very great proportions on it being influenced by segmented and privatised systems of justice. One of the examples Sassen gives is the case of the international commercial arbitration that happens. So people do not seek courts of law but arbitration actually happens outside the legal system and this is attributed to the fragmentation of society itself.

There are other reasons, and this is very important to make explicit although this has been implicit in our conversation, that while global capital is beautifully controlled even as it is decentralised, global civil society as much as it is decentralised today is really lacking in a unified sense of purpose and coherence that can contribute to a progressive agenda of social justice or global justice. So we have a situation where we should be very clear where the power is. There is a growing tension between openness and control in the flow of culture and information and these are manifest as was seen in the previous session, in the high stakes battle over IP policy and digital rights management technologies.

Cultural industries seek to control the traffic of their content over peer to peer (P2P) networks. Hence there is a big battle regarding IP and control over culture and content. Commercial content providers are beginning to explore alliances with Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to filter network traffic in order to prioritise commercial content delivery of P2P traffic. The Internet that you know that delivers content to all at the same speed may not be the same in the years to come. Imminent changes are that - those who can pay more (which is the commercial private sector) will be able to benefit from the bandwidth which is super fast.

So, is there a crisis of categories for feminism? And how can the imbrication of the digital and the non-digital as a condition of being sited materiality and having global span, be examined? (Sassen). Which means that we are today sited in the physical material corporeal, we have a body, but at the same time we have a global span. This is a question that is very intriguing. This condition arises in account of the fact that the digital is interlaced with the real such that the real is also

digital. The dichotomy between the virtual and the real is quite intriguing. The dichotomy will not take us far and we will understand why, from the empirical evidence of the CITIGEN researchers. From several readings and the outcomes of the CITIGEN network, two things came out. One is space and the second is hybridity.

Space very evidently as what we are talking about is - the complete dislocation of the conventional categories that allowed us to imagine space and hybridity which includes the point that Srilatha made about anonymity that there is at stake. This is not the first time this has been imagined, Donna Haraway spoke long ago of the cyborg - the human machine condition where the machine is an extension of yourself. Our phone is an extension of ourselves even though it may be in our pocket or bag or whatever. We have enormous separation anxiety if its away from us.

To that extent this hybridity is very important to feminism because it allows women to subvert because we have been using space so creatively. Within this we need to talk about why space and why hybridity and here the work of political geographers is useful.

What political geographers have said is that it is really important to understand that there is an attention to spatial scale (Erik Swyngedouw) that is very important to the contemporary moment. Who is local, who is global, who is in the household, who is in the public - asking questions of scale, scalar politics as they call it, politics of scale and space - this is at the heart of power. Sassen also talks about the important political task of examining the in-between spaces, what she calls frontier zones - between the local and the national, the national and the sub-national, the local and the global - these frontier zones allow us both opening for productive engagement as well as theorisation.

Why hybridity? This has been an important concept in anthropology as well. People who have done anthropology may be familiar with the notion of liminality. Liminal is that state of flux which is in-between and generates a particular crisis. Out of that crisis emerges the possibility of a regeneration. This liminality becomes very important because when women, for instance who are confined to their homes are unable to have anything to do with public space are introduced to a chat room, then something happens. For the very first time when someone is



able to connect to the world like that, there is a certain subjectivity that arises that is the condition of liminality, that is the condition between which opens up enormous possibilities. It is our responsibility as Southern feminists researchers to actually ground it beyond this post modern conception of nothingness and to engage with questions of materiality and identity/multiple subject positionings so that we do not become fundamentalists in what we are talking about.

Three vectors were then introduced which were three ways to make sense of what all the researches at the macro level are actually saying. Those three vectors were – place-making; political subjectivity/claims-making; semiotics and sense-making.

Place-making implies how we, as feminists, make place - what do the research projects tell us about how places are made in the space of flows; how are claims made; how does political subjectivity take birth. In the meeting more than once people have spoken about semantics, about how grammar is changing, and what that means - it actually means that certain old meanings are going away and making way for us to create new meanings so in the realm of politics and feminist politics, semiotics become important and it is important to then understand the semiotics that are at play.

Before proceeding Anita added some caveats. One was that to understand the gender politics of scale and hybridity – we must transcend the dualities of public-private and local-global. It is also important that the politics of exploring place-making, requires us to look at the intersections of the scaling effects of the network and the strategies of emergent identities. What are women in Manila in those slums, doing? We have to look at how the intersections of network, scale and identities are actually coming together. And in this ask the question how do connectivity, mobility, and interaction cohere in generating political subjectivities and positionalities in the network?

Place-making is the first vector. Place-making as a study of the dynamic and radical complexity of place-politics, has been introduced to us by feminist political geographers again. As a concept it connects agency and place. It is a counter to dystopic interpretations of capitalist hegemonies

in the network society. It is important to examine how place-making happens and this 'defense' of place and place-based practices is seen as a very creative engagement with transnationalism (Escobar's work). Therefore, place in the CITIGEN project becomes for us a rhetorical device, a conceptual aid, of choice to make sense of other social categories – race, gender, class – suggesting the 'scalar turn' in social theory. Political geographers use the term to explain how scale has become very important in our lives and the 'scalar turn' has become very important to social and feminist theory.

So, following Massey, who in 1991, wrote thoughtfully looking into the future, - the global space of place – she said there are three things about places we should remember: Places do not have single but multiple identities; Places are not frozen in time but they are processes; Places are not enclosures with a clear inside and outside but they are very porous.

What we need to understand and why this interpretation is very useful can be understood through a small story told by Sallie Marston – when you look at the start of the 20th century a lot of things happened which radicalised space for women and women were actually at the lead of many scalar turns in the 20th century. How did they do it? This is coming from the European context - one was that they said they wanted birth control; second, they said we are against the first world war; and the third was that they wanted a place in their municipal councils and counties. This led to the suffrage movement in many countries. This rescaled society in many ways. First of all it brought the household into the public, household became a space to contend with. The second is that it gave citizenship to women. In many ways this understanding of geographical politics of scale is really important to the questions of citizenship.

The second vector, is political subjectivity and claims-making. How does a citizen happen? We are unhinging the question of citizenship from national territory. Because people talk about being a 'netizen' or a 'global citizen', at some level the normative understanding of citizenship is already unhinged from the notion of nation state. So how do you understand a citizen.

One of the works to read is Samaddar. He theorises that unlike the classical Western



subject, where Western institutions had a historical continuity and democracy came as a result of a wealth of historical continuities, for most of us in the South, one fine day we were decolonised, somebody was given the task to write a constitution and we were citizens. So it was not a metaphysical exercise of debating liberty for 200 years or more if you look at Socrates onwards. Which is why it is important to understand post-coloniality and the context that the political scientists like Anupama Roy, who have been writing about how many of the governments in India are making changes to who will have a claim over property based on random interpretations of who a citizen is. That also shows that for the political subjects who are resisting, who are seeking a definition of inclusion - for them the struggle is ongoing based on what kind of claims they want to make. It is interesting in a democracy like India, this debate around rights and the kind of authority the legal normative has - it is actually a process in the making. In the recent years we have had a right to education, a right to information, people are contemplating a right to food, so the whole notion of citizenship is a kind of a process in the making. Hence, one understands political subjectivity as something that is in process.

Politics, Sammadar says, is thus a discourse of actions; and political knowledge is a form of activity. Political knowledge is not the enshrined something, political knowledge emerges in the way we sit in collectives and talk to women and ask them what is it that happened after the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme came. What is it that they are disenfranchised about. Where do they want to assert their identities. So it is in some sense a pedagogy.

The network society context is very important here because what it does do to our subjectivities is what Heike mentioned previously. Only when we understand what it does to depoliticise our subjectivity will we be able to understand where we need to assert out political subjectivity. So what we have today is from the Rawlsian ideal of the male individual, we have a post-modern identity - how is that made? A British scholar, declares Castells, obsolete. He says Castells says there is a self and the net and there is a bipolarity, and constantly the net and the self are in a struggle. In the past 10 years since Castells wrote, something dramatically different has happened in this time space compression. Today there is no difference between the self and the

net - they are one. So that the self has escaped into the net. For the young people, its not so much of what you are doing on Facebook as yourself, but what you are doing in relation to others on Facebook that is important. So in a sense, nodes look to other nodes to orchestrate or choreograph their behaviour. This has led to sexualisation of everyday life, the commodification of everything - including of marginalities, of marginal knowledge - yoga, ayurveda. It complicates the whole business of that individuation, that process that is so necessary, to actually escape into yourself to discover which is the kind of politics that is important. It complicates the building of collectivity, because everybody who is on Facebook, in a sense, is part of a collective. The question is would that be a politicised collectivity? It really infiltrates the formation of political subjecthood. So how does political subjectivity emerge that is not antithetical to collectivity?

As the Sri Lanka team spoke about the SMSes - for the women who were introduced to *Minmini* news the meaning of SMS is vastly different from those of us who transact SMS. The meaning of SMS to them is political SMS. For the rest of us we are trying to delete SMS or to avoid the commercial SMS that assault you. In a certain sense, the semiotics of that space - what are those different symbols, those different tropes, those memes - what are those that make a political syntax. These are material-semiotic practices, same as Desiree and Crystal's paper - what happened to video on the cell phone. The video on the cell phone can now actually be a playful thing for young people but in the context of 'Vagina Monologues' which was translated in the local language and sent far and wide along Youtube, the video on mobiles acquired a special meaning, a special kind of semiotics, this is important to localise any analysis. There are diverse meanings, diverse categories and huge ambiguities in relationship to participatory democracy as the questions we have been hearing. Is the public sphere online? Or is it just 'slacktivism'? The whole question is what is 'participatory democracy'?

As Eric Swyngedouw, political geographer said - How are identity, difference and place loyalty, central in any emancipatory project, negotiated with solidarity, inter-place bonding and collective resistance? That is an important question as now you and the net are not different, both of us are



the same. It is important to look at the kind of feminist work being done – it is very few and far between, maybe because it is emergent – one of them is scholar of communication Leslie Shade. She looks at how when initially the cell phone was introduced in 1991 in Canada, it was touted as an interesting thing for women for remote mothering. So you could keep tab of where your daughter went and husband was. Subsequently, the making of pink phones etc. she analyses and says is indicative of a certain generation of meaning, a certain generation of semiotics and sense-making that scripts women as objects and as consumers.

Therefore the question before us is, when you look at the Grameen women, holding the phone or like Aparna's presentation where women are actually looking at the computer and the telecentre and the young girls are using the video to go to the local office and ask questions as an education in citizenship, to them, that space acquires an altogether different meaning.

Moving towards an analysis and interpretation of CITIGEN researches, the questions would be - How do marginalised women enact their citizenship on multiple dimensions of social-space in the network society, and how do they secure an overall coherence of different social orders - rights, community, capitalism, state, etc. through shared meanings, histories and collective subjectivities.

Analysis on how place-making, sense-making and claims-making span through these researches, was then elaborated by Anita. For women in Manila that the Filipino team worked with, the claims-making strategies were tied to the politics of place (church, state, discourses of sexuality). It entailed a publicity of the material gendered conditions of life (women who do not have access to resources, who have several children), and a rearticulation of subjectivity that is marked by marginalities of sexuality, class, and gender. It is both symbolic and discursive of the attempt to bring to the public domain, situated local 'knowledge' that is marginal in the process of national politics over the proposed Reproductive Health Bill.

The women leaders community in Kerala, seeks to forge a political-ethical practice – deploying territory and hybridity contextually (because – the women are actually geographically dispersed

and do not meet often but they are connected on a not-public platform, it is a moderated entry, it is like a membership based club. They have used this web platform, this deterritorialised space, and they use their hybridity, i.e. "even if I'm not present in the next *panchayat*, I will connect with the woman in the next *panchayat*") as feminist devices towards progressive ends. The particular semiotics of their praxis reflect claims to local feminist history (Gramamukhya also includes women writers, women who write fiction, the women leaders interact with them), to Malayalam and to a avowal of open technological platforms (they migrated from a closed software to an open software platform). The ecologies of visibility they create has a threshold effect (this is about the liminality). They generate a politics of presence in the public space (in Kerala) - an alternative network semiotics that politicises gender. The 'place of one's own', for a practice of political pedagogy emerges as a symbolic referent that challenges the mainstream (also true for *Minmini* from Sri Lanka; the SMS network challenges the mainstream media).

The Chinese research of the multiple online public spheres reveals a political public arena that is fluid, highly segmented and contested. Place-making strategies differ across segments of civil society (the older style women's organisations who are quasi-governmental NGOs have different strategies, the network based organisations have different strategies and the women activists who are not necessarily connected to organisations deploy different tactics). The politically active subject online is under constant threat and risk under the Chinese panopticon (this is important because materiality is associated with physical space). The study also reveals how strategies for building feminist political pedagogy, in a context marked by postmodern, post-gender politics. Like in Hong Kong, everyone is hyperconnected there is lots of activism but the research bemoans the fact that people are not connected to the oral histories of women; gender has become a subject in the university; the actual questions of politicisation of gender somehow seem to be more vibrant in the mainland Chinese context than in Hong Kong, therefore it requires a reterritorialisation (as against Kerala where they needed to go online, here there is need to go offline – hence in the particular ways in which feminist politics emerges we do not place a value on whether deterritorialising politics is better or reterritorialising politics is better. Both have a

particular context) of gender politics; where place based strategies of renewed history-making through a reclamation of oral histories has been seen as necessary.

For the migrant woman domestic worker, the network catalyses a new politics of scale; it brings her the mobility to connect to communities of fate – (concept by Fraser which implies linked transnational societies) while also politicising the household (of her employer), as a site of power. It could also potentially construct a new geography of politics embedded in more formal-institutional forms of political claims-making (because in Hong Kong for this politics to emerge where across the countryside domestic workers can come together is better than in Taiwan where labour laws differ and do not allow women time off). Yet, the mobile is also an invasive locative technology that makes her potentially vulnerable as a non-citizen; for membership on the network, she trades her unmonitored privacy. Yet by buying a cellphone and connecting to her peers she is making a political statement - "I'm willing to trade my privacy but I want to be connected".

The emerging scenarios of feminist politics of scale suggested in the South Africa paper, present new theoretical avenues to explore local appropriations of the mobile phone and emergent meanings of resistance. One thing we cannot underestimate and we are seeing in Africa is the totally different meaning of the Internet. Because it is almost as if the generation of the Internet was skipped and they went to the Internet through the mobile. In such a scenario, the global political economy of connectivity regimes is very critical because what Africa is condemned to is a new kind of Internet which is closed; mobile networks are 'closed' networks and come with lock-ins to certain platforms.

In reality, decentralisation per se may not imply greater distribution of power. As Sassen says, the decentralised network on which global financial capital rides, ends up concentrating power. Farida's study of women's participation in public broadcast of religious fundamentalism also points to the need to problematise this. Practices of horizontalisation and consensus politics may prevent coherence and purposive leadership from guiding mobs into movements or from enabling movements that may reach their objectives in becoming more permanent civil society organisations.

In conclusion, depending on particular histories – scalar politics of gender assume different manifestations and accompany a unique semiotics and immersed practices of feminist politics i.e. in different places different things happen when we see women grapple with place-making, express their political subjectivity, identifying with collectivity). Scalar strategies/discourses of citizenship are really very contextual – some places it is reterritorialisation, deterritorialisation (*Minmini*, Kerala), some it is creating community (mainland China), building privileged space (in Kerala), infiltration (South Africa, Manila), etc.) - that then emerge at the intersections of specific conjunctures (capitalism, modernity, post war - conflict), and diverse subject practices.

Tentative conclusions from the programme are as follows:

1. An alternative scalar politics of gender concretise in particular techno-social moments as political practices of place-making, sense-making and claims-making.
2. They arise in and through particular material-technological cultures, where connectivity and mobility, practices of political subjectivity and creation of new semiotics of and positionalities in the network dislocate gender orders.
3. The problematisation of citizenship is tied to political pedagogy. How the subject can define subject positionality and how claims gain recognition becomes important; the process requires an immersion (in place-making – the case of 'freemona' in Egypt is interesting. How twitter helped free Mona where unique place-making strategies were completely virtual. Therefore we should not think of place-making as constantly fighting on the street).
4. As subjects of 'development projects' women may make claims from within the given liberal framework but the politicisation of claims must embrace scalar politics of gender (engage the spaces of global/national church, post-colonial state, the civil society RH Bill movement etc.) and build a new semiotics

that make what is public also visible in the attention economy.

5. The associative milieu for an alternate semiotics is what makes for a feminist political subjectivity. Having a technological paradigm that enables 'open' forms of communication and 'collaborative' methods of engagement are certainly not enough. In fact who is to be kept out is as important as how to collaborate; preserving safe/closed space is as important as opening up. From a gendered study of scale and hybridity it is understood that it is important to have closed spaces.
6. Privacy may be traded for other things like safe spaces. Disclosure becomes a political strategy for women. For example, disclosure in closed 'public space' to build solidarity against masculinised spaces of local politics.
7. In the case of the migrant women, the reason they might not be able to engage in that the population is not always stable and can be floating. This is because the global politics of where labour can be outsourced has also a certain geo-political context of women in the Global South who serve households where their labour rights and rights as human beings is heavily compromised.
8. In the attention economy, big interests shape the politics of dissent. Here what is important to study is why did Egypt happen and why did Bahrain not happen – this is actually a function of the politics of oil – where US and Saudi have entrenched interests – and despite organising and mobilisation, the movement has not taken off.

After outlining the questions, Anita revisited Castells. She asked - is this a 'space of flows', the world we are living in? Yes, it is a 'space of flows', but it is also a 'space of places'. For the project of seeking enfranchisement for women and other marginalised people in network society, the 'space of places' remains abiding. It enables the political to descend to the ordinary/real/chaotic/from grand renditions of the idealised 'global' public sphere. The 'space of places' as

normative sites of emergent political subjectivities presents segments of stability (in this world where the net and the self are the same) that allows navigation between normatively bound sub-worlds in the space of flows (that rejects normativity) that also resist the totalising power of the space of flows.

Discussion:

Crystal Orderson noted two points from the African context. The first point raised was about skipping a generation, in the African context there is constant conversation on creating a post colonial state and how the West shaped and had influence in Africa and about how technology actually created some space. The mobile phone has become a safe space to communicate but we have not critically looked at mobiles tying us into other regimes. Secondly, it is interesting how citizenship is under threat. The case study of Free Gender points to this – you have post apartheid South Africa, you have a rights based approach, one of the most progressive constitutions in the world, same sex marriages legalised, yet as a black woman you are not able to live out your sexuality which means your citizenship and your notion of womanhood is under threat so how do you really define that space.

Ranjita Mohanty asked for point four of the conclusions to be expanded. Anita replied by saying that she meant that, taking the example of the Philippines paper, the question raised was - if the blogs were in the local language would the politicians have read it? The outcomes of all these ICTD projects where women were online depends a lot on how it is taken and embedded in other processes and how that is politicised. When women make such moves what they are doing is claims-making, to have a concrete outcome, a certain scalar embedding, is required.

Lisa noted that you have to be careful that several time people are making claims and taking action but might be not using the word claims-making, as is the case in Philippines.

Parminder added to the question - are women already making these connections? These connections being proposed now are different from pre-existing relationships they may be making. There are two differences: One is they are new ways of making those engagements;



something even more important though is that the nature of those actors is also embedded in the new network logic. Whether it is age, capital or civil society or other community groups or just online groups - nature of those actors embedded in the new network logic allows us a telescopic view and thus changes the strategies we make which proceed from the kind of engagements they may already be making.

Srilatha mentioned that the need to be critical is being underscored also because if you do not politicise or inform your claim with an understanding of other struggles around this issue, then it can constrain your claim-making. If you do not understand the proprietary base, you are looking at the issue partially and seeing only a few pieces. This has become even more critical than in the past because of the sheer weight of the history of feminist struggles, scales, complexity, multiple contexts - strategies have been tried, victories and losses, if you do not make this connecting i.e. informing women's struggles with a larger political history then your claims-making process becomes weakened or

diminished.

Ranjita enquired if at all the sites studied, there were parallel physical protests alongside of the virtual. Parminder said that in all sites these debates were part of the larger conversations and movements.

Sepali shared that the blog created by them was part of the larger programme working with women interested in standing for elections and so there were ads, workshops etc. The blog was the 'invented space' which people were asked to access. The impact was that people knew there was this site, and women wrote their stories, but what they wanted to say was not accepted by the print media and this then became a space for exercising expression instead of articulating citizenship. The question then was - what next? Do we go to other women as well? When we identified women bloggers and brought them together for a discussion many of them did not know each other. It was a strengthening of a use of a space, together and on their own.