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On Politics is the journal of the University of Victoria Undergraduates of Political Science. It seeks to provide opportunities for undergraduate publishing, and to encourage undergraduate scholarship. The Journal publishes high-quality academic writing from a multitude of theoretical perspectives and sub-fields within the discipline of political science, as well as interdisciplinary perspectives. With these broad aims and inclusive features, *On Politics* presents an accommodating format to disseminate scholarship of a political nature from those who seldom gain the opportunity. *On Politics* publishes two issues per year.

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Fighting for Agency

Deconstructing Women's Violence in the Israeli Defense Forces and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

Heather Doi

International Relations (IR) scholarship is notorious for overlooking how women's participation, inclusion and exclusion unfold in the political realm; and yet, mainstream IR literature abounds with gendered boundaries and stereotypes.¹ Not until the early 1990s did feminist IR scholars seek to deconstruct the "oppositional logic that mystifies categories like woman/man, domestic/international and peace/war."² These dualisms are central to IR theory and practice, visible in the annals of political theory. Firstly, the ancient Greeks defined public life by the "politics, war and diplomacy" only a privileged few could practice. In Machiavelli's canonical text, *The Prince*, politics is a militarized game wherein only a masculinised *virtu* can hope to tame contingencies, represented by the female goddess Fortuna.³ Ann Tickner notes that today, Machiavelli's Fortuna, or woman, is the problem of anarchy in realist international relations.⁴ These select examples show how gender divisions and roles live on in theory, but it seems less probably that they persist in today's intertwining mix of global political actors.

More than ever, women are visible in male-dominated institutions and areas of scholarship such as national defence, peace and conflict studies, and military organizations.⁵ As women's salience in global politics increases, we notice more often that they also commit acts of proscribed and sanctioned violence. Women's violence penetrates the deepest corners of IR theory and practice defying the entrenched links between men, masculinity and militarism; women still face assumptions about femininity, appropriate female behaviour and hostility when they are defied.⁶ Women's violence is thus viewed not as a human capability, but a

transgression of their femininity and the gender roles laid out for them. This still occurs, twenty years after feminist IR research revealed gender subordination and divisions in the key areas of global politics. Feminist IR must now go beyond “seeing” violent women, to acknowledging women’s agency through violence, in spite of existing stereotypes.

I will use a feminist IR perspective to compare the extent to which women’s sanctioned violence in the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) and proscribed violence in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), allow for women’s agency. I define women’s agency through violence as the ability to cogently choose, in relation to institutional influences, to act in pursuit of a goal. Other actors must first recognize this reality before women’s violence can be viewed as an act of political agency. I argue that although both of these organizations welcome women into their ranks, gender role stereotypes embedded in national narratives overwhelm the possibility of the idea of women’s violence as a means of satisfying a political goal. Furthermore, we must not assume that the immediate experience of violence is indicative of true agency. Subsequent implications of women's violence and their effects on surrounding, individuals, groups and institutions, are often a more accurate barometer of lasting gender stereotype deconstruction. Firstly, I outline how feminist IR that applies gender as a dynamic analytic category can deconstruct the idealized gender identities and roles regulating women’s political experiences. Secondly, I examine the conditional agency of women in the IDF who are conscripted to military service, but kept out of most combat roles by gendered traditions and national narratives. Lastly, I look at the female fighters in the LTTE who are caught in the debate over whether violence is emancipatory, or a coercive tool that removes agency. In this paper I hope to capture the problematic realities of a political environment that often supports female agency, but only insofar as gender stereotypes are left intact.

Methods

Feminist IR: Illuminating Questions

The boundaries set by idealized gender roles and identities reinforce the limits of acceptable gendered behaviours. These constraints on women's agency require a feminist IR outlook to question existing gendered theories and practices where they have not been questioned before. Using an "explicitly feminist" approach, Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry identify three prominent narratives commonly used to help us come to terms with women's violence.⁷ The mother, monster and whore explanations suggest that a woman's violence reflects her "womanhood," not her capacity for independent, and potentially politically motivated, thought.⁸ These narratives respectively characterize a woman's violent actions as a reaction to her role as wife or mother, as a pathological flaw that destroys her femininity, or as "inspired by sexual dependence and depravity".⁹ They reduce the multi-faceted explanations for women's violence to gender stereotypes, and simultaneously deny the possibility of women's agency through violence. Similarly, when women in the IDF and LTTE engage in combat or suicide bombing, they transgress existing national narratives that perpetuate the link between men and militarism. In these military organizations, men are agents – they choose their actions – and women are stripped of this capacity to choose.¹⁰ At the same time, it is too simplistic to assert that all women, or humans for that matter, commit violence unaffected by institutions and the global political context.¹¹

A feminist approach is necessary to uncover the gender roles and stereotypes dictating how violent women are perceived; they question the core understandings of global political theory and practice to eliminate women's subordination. As Tickner points out, feminist approaches to International Relations emerged as a challenge to the discipline's dominant social scientific methodologies.¹² They surfaced alongside the "postpositivist"

debate comprising critical theory, postmodernism and historical sociology among others.¹³ Most feminist empirical IR research has rejected the “social scientific path,” the process of forming and testing hypotheses, choosing instead to rely on “postpositivist methodological framework.”¹⁴ As a result, feminist IR poses questions and illuminates puzzles that are distinct from social scientific findings. For example, Tickner notes that social scientific approaches, informed by a western scientific worldview, measure progress based on how questions are answered.¹⁵ A social scientific approach to women’s sanctioned and proscribed violence might evaluate participation by quantifying their numbers. However, presence is not necessarily indicative of women’s agency, nor does it explain why women’s violence is often attributed to womanly dysfunctionalities. In contrast, feminists assert that “*the questions that are asked* – or more importantly, *those that are not asked*” are just as important, if not more so.¹⁶ Queries that begin with gender subordination and lead to investigations into women’s portrayal in the media, the stereotypes surrounding gender identity, and the possibility that violent women are political actors are a sampling of what feminist methodologies seek to uncover. It is clear that the difference between social scientific and feminist methodologies is not just that one sees gender while the other does not; rather, their directions of inquiry are shaped by the different ways in which each formulates and values knowledge.

Gender Illuminated

Gender is perhaps the most important tool for feminist inquiry. My discussion of global political violence, women, and agency applies gender as a dynamically conceived analytic category used to uncover gender stereotypes and roles. But what does this mean in practice? Gender is widely applied in feminist research, and debates abound over whether or not it is conducive to fluid and inclusive political analysis; however, Mary Hawkesworth notes that the analytic category itself and its influence in shaping

the scope of feminist inquiry are less frequently investigated.¹⁷ As a tool for feminist methodologies, gender has developed and transformed over time. One possible conception and application of gender is as a “research guide or ‘heuristic’ that illuminates new questions for feminist inquiry.”¹⁸ As a positive heuristic, gender is broadly conceived. It frames “puzzles or problems in need of exploration or clarification,” and investigates them through a “trial-and-error” approach.¹⁹ Used in this way, gender highlights the intertwining “symbol systems, normative precepts, social structures, and subjective identities subsumed under gender’s rubric.”²⁰ In my discussion, gender highlights power relations between the state and individual, man and woman, and nationalist narratives within military organizations and society at large. In doing so, it acts as a positive heuristic.

Alternatively, gender as an analytic category can also perform a negative function, tightly bound up with central feminist assumptions. Since feminist discourse originally set out to repudiate biological determinism, gender as a negative heuristic is focused on challenging the natural attitude.²¹ The natural attitude posits among other things, that individuals are either masculine or feminine, with any divergence from these distinct categories regarded as “either a joke or a pathology.”²² In my examination of women’s violence, gender as a negative heuristic explains the separate understandings of gender role and gender role identity. This means that violent women can have a strong sense of themselves as women without subscribing to the hegemonic notion of what constitutes femininity.²³ The different applications of gender as an analytic category clarify that gender is not a simplistic variable, nor can it be homogeneously applied. When narratives, power relations and stereotypes overlap, gender is applied as a fluid analytic category, used to deconstruct the convoluted context in which women’s global political violence occurs.

Feminists have traditionally used gender to challenge gender essentialisms; however, the resulting plethora of definitions

and uses has raised doubts over gender's effectiveness as an analytic category.²⁴ Susan Bordo identifies a "gender skepticism" arising firstly from the preeminence gender has enjoyed in feminist analysis, and secondly from assumptions about gender as a cultural construction.²⁵ Lesbian and non-white feminists often argue that gender is an "isolate[d] model" excluding race, class, ethnicity, nationality, age and sexuality.²⁶ Privileging gender as an analytic category caters to "white, middle-class feminists who have the luxury of experiencing only one mode of oppression."²⁷ When used as a generalized category, gender might only succeed in truncating the deep-rooted cause of an issue, identifying it as an effect of "gender" while ignoring the intertwining issues mentioned above. Furthermore, a gender specific analysis risks overlooking those women whose oppressive experiences are not restricted to gender oppression. Secondly, gender analysis that understands masculinity and femininity as social constructions, while assuming the sexed body is biologically determined, is challenged by feminist postmodernist understandings of the body, sex, and sexuality as socially constructed.²⁸ Although the analytic category sets out an explorative framework for gender analysis, these skepticisms reveal that there is much at stake over the gender definition itself. It is clear that although gender has established itself as a fundamental tool for feminist analysis, it must first be interrogated and aired of its assumptions if it is to act as an illuminating analytical force.

Just as women's presence in politics does not denote agency, acknowledging gender as an analytic category does not guarantee emancipatory insight into the gender-biased political sphere. Gender must be conceived and used critically lest it become as permanent and divisive as the natural attitude. One keystone understanding of gender, advanced by second wave feminists and discussed by Newman and White, distinguishes "between the biological aspects of being female or male and the cultural expectations of femininity or masculinity."²⁹ During this time, gender grew to encompass a "range of variation in cultural

constructions of femininity and masculinity,” turning it from a punitive, prescriptive category, into an analytical tool capable of separating gender identity from gender roles.³⁰ With the assumption that sex and gender were separate in gender based analysis, feminist scholars increasingly contradicted the natural attitude and argued for a persistence of gender identity. This attitude prevailed even when individuals were “thoroughly disaffected from and refusing participation in prevailing conceptions of femininity.”³¹ This analysis of gender meanings and the analytic category is central to a critical assessment of the stereotypes afflicting women’s participation in violent conflict. It provides a foundation for refuting gender stereotypes that categorize women as inherently passive: women who commit violence transgress gender roles, but they are still women. However, this textbook definition does not address the implications of these transgressions. As a result, feminists disagree over whether to recognize women’s violence, as an act of political agency.

In *Mothers, Monsters, Whores* Sjoberg and Gentry put forth a more sophisticated conception of gender as an analytic tool, discussing its implications for women’s political participation. They interpret gender as “an intersubjective social construction that constantly evolves with changing societal perceptions and intentional manipulation.”³² Because gender adapts alongside societal norms, feminist politics become more than just an issue of “self, psyche and sexuality.”³³ Gendered analysis must necessarily tie the individual to interactions with greater social norms and structures. When gender comprises both individual decision and structural influence, it establishes the conditions for the possibility of human agency. This definition also emphasizes gender fluidity across cultural lines, and variability through time. Although Sjoberg and Gentry do account for differences in the way men and women “live gender,” they gloss over race, class, ethnicity and nationality as primary gender mediators.³⁴ For women in the IDF and LTTE, gender subordination is as much a product of

militaristic nationalism, as it is a product of idealized gender stereotypes. Nationalist narratives structure the discussions over women's roles within the larger organization, and the significance of their individual actions. Ultimately, the factors affecting agency are more diverse than a simple dichotomy between men and women, masculinity and femininity. To foster a sophisticated understanding of gender that will enhance feminist objectives, gendered analysis must draw on other sources of oppression such as nationalism, ethnicity, class, race and age.

Women in the IDF: Harmless Soldiers

The "varied and complex" gender dynamics of militarism comprise a multitude of these factors affecting women's political agency.³⁵ In the Israeli Defense Force women are conscripted as soldiers alongside men. Conscription appears to do away with gendered boundaries that secure militarization as a male domain; however, women's political agency is restricted by deep-seated gender roles within the military, and by the constant struggle to uphold an unchanging national identity. Because the IDF is a highly organized, hierarchical organization, military forces have the power not just to interpret women's actions as inconsequential, but to stymie their attempts to move into combat roles, leadership positions, or to express themselves as individual actors in defiance of the male-centred, nationalist narrative. The IDF's reluctance to allow full female agency is indicative of the gendered divisions of power within the military, as well as within civil society.

On February 3, 1948, the IDF conscripted women between the ages of nineteen and twenty five to military service without children between the ages of eighteen and twenty-eight, to military service.³⁶ Initially, conscripts served in the Women's Corps as nurses, cooks, drivers, and clerks; they looked after the needs of women soldiers in the IDF; and taught children in Israel's immigrant neighbourhoods.³⁷ Although conscripted women overwhelmingly performed stereotypically peaceful or nurturing

duties, their inclusion in the armed forces meant women also contributed to the symbolic and literal building of the nation. Sjoberg and Gentry describe a similar situation with Palestinian women's enlistment in resistance organizations. Although Palestinian women delivered seemingly feminized tasks such as teaching literacy skills, giving health education, working in nurseries and kindergartens, "these services integrated women into the organizations and normalized their appearance as the public face of the Resistance."³⁸ Similarly, the IDF is not just a military that mobilizes for war and then disbands: it is an omnipresent force whose primary goal is to uphold a national identity. Women's incorporation into this pervasive organization dedicated to upholding the Jewish community at once fixes women soldiers in gendered roles, while also granting them political agency through the larger militarized structure.

Conscription brings women into the IDF; however, their capacity for individual agency is overpowered by a nationalist narrative that determines the nature and extent of their participation. Ben-Amos (2003) argues that since the 1948 War of Independence, Israel's national identity has been concentrated in the image of a dead, Israeli soldier.³⁹ The national identity is a mythical force purportedly "meant to reach back into an immemorial past, and move into an indefinite future, transcending the finitude of each individual."⁴⁰ In glorifying the homogenous, collective unit, this narrative quietly excludes those who do not fit into the imagined story, including Arabs, "oriental Jews" and women.⁴¹ Although women are not traditionally included within the militarized, masculinised national identity, they are prescribed another role in upholding the nation. While men act as warriors for the homeland, women are traditionally framed as the "caring housewife, antithetical to the military role."⁴² In 1949, Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, David Ben Gurion gave weight to this argument when he upheld the decision to ban conscription for women with children, describing motherhood as a "sublime and sacred thing."⁴³ Although Ben Gurion found it unproblematic to

have young men serve in the army, he described “taking an eighteen year-old newly wed away from her husband’s embrace as little short of a crime.”⁴⁴ These historical examples show that the national narrative is upheld by gender stereotypes valuing women as caretakers or reproductive forces. When conscription increases women’s salience in non-violent roles, they are allowed to be political actors and soldiers. When women seek participation in combat, they transgress stereotypes underlying the national narrative, and are challenged by gendered divisions of power.

Gender stereotypes play out in the IDF’s resistance to women in military combat. Exclusion from combat roles is significant, not because women’s violence ensures their position as political actors, but because it uncovers engrained gender essentialisms prevalent in military organizations. These are the underlying beliefs that allow for female conscripts and recruits, all the while denying them equal participation rights. Women’s roles in the IDF have expanded since 1948, and yet they are still excluded from “combat positions in the field divisions, including armor, infantry, artillery, and combat engineering.”⁴⁵ This gendered division of military duties is not exclusive to the IDF, and lingers within the United States military as well. Holly Yeager writes that although American women are allowed to serve in ninety percent of military occupations, “they are still barred from jobs or units whose main mission is direct ground combat.”⁴⁶ Women in the military walk a fine line between what their gender makes available to them, and what it holds just out of their reach. Sjoberg and Gentry capture the paradox surrounding women in the military: They “are soldiers, but not combat soldiers; they have weapons, but are generally not expected to use them.”⁴⁷ These restrictions exist despite a marked increase in numbers of women in the U.S. military since Vietnam, and our “general acceptance of women on the battlefield.”⁴⁸ Feminist scholarship must deconstruct these stereotypes so that women can exercise agency while transgressing the idealized boundaries of femininity.

The hypocrisy of accepting women into the military, while simultaneously imposing gendered restrictions upon arrival, is characteristic of women's military participation. In "Redefining the Warrior Mentality," author and retired Lieutenant General, Claudia J. Kennedy, expresses a similar sentiment drawn from her personal experience in the U.S. army. Kennedy notes that women entering the military are framed on one side by a debate over gender roles, and by the historically entrenched conception of militarized masculinity on the other.⁴⁹ This creates a "climate in which the armed services have welcomed women with one hand and pushed them away with the other."⁵⁰ Women have been integral to the IDF's success since its formal establishment. Their various contributions to the state military, both combative and non-combative, have helped shape Israel's political history. In this way, women exercise agency as members of the Israeli military. However, when women engage in combat they betray the masculine, military imagery invoked by the national narrative; opportunities for equality or agency are subsumed by the more important goal of upholding a cohesive military and protecting the Jewish community. Insofar as women fulfill their reproductive duties to the nation they are allowed to participate in this narrative, but claims to equality through military participation are muted by an overbearing nationalism.

The LTTE Debate

Like women in the IDF, Tamil women of Sri Lanka are also caught at the centre of a debate over nationalism and gender roles. In the 1990s, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) succeeded as the leading militant Tamil group⁵¹, marking the beginning of two decades of conflict between the LTTE and government of Sri Lanka (GOSL). In 2002 an unstable ceasefire was reached, but "it was a "no-war/no-peace situation" in which fighting had largely stopped, but peace was yet to be secured.⁵² After two decades of fighting, Sri Lanka had become a "landscape of war," upon which 70,000 people had died, and another 1.6

million Tamils had been displaced.⁵³ Amidst the suffering, thousands of Tamil women joined the LTTE's women's wing, Birds of Freedom, engaging in combative and non-combative operations to aid in the self-governance fight against the GOSL.⁵⁴ Through conflict, women militarily defended their "collective cultural identity," confounding stereotypes of the male aggressor and female pacifist.⁵⁵ However, a reluctance to give up on these ingrained stereotypes has stirred debate over the possibility of agency for women within a terrorist organization.

The LTTE maintains that through participation in liberation movements its women are emancipated from oppressive social structures.⁵⁶ The opposing position, often backed by Western sources, asserts that these women are manipulated and used as "men's pawns in a patriarchal society."⁵⁷ These arguments, both for and against women's agency through proscribed violence, contrast the discussions about women in the IDF. Because Israeli soldiers participate in state sanctioned violence, women's equal access to combat is a step towards gender equality and the abolishment of militarized gender stereotypes. In contrast, Tamil women committing proscribed violence are more likely to be judged as subordinated, or victimized by the male-dominated terrorist organization. In both of these situations, agency is not just determined over gendered criteria, but is also subject to the power of state politics. In the following paragraphs I will engage with both of these arguments, emphasizing that women are complex actors whose decisions are informed, as are men's, by a mixture of individual conviction, cultural restrictions and institutional norms. We cannot understand why women perpetrate proscribed violence if we compartmentalize motivation solely with the actor, or solely blame her actions on the surrounding hierarchy, ideologies, and social norms within which she acts.

An estimated 8,000 to 10,000 armed combatants make up the LTTE,⁵⁸ and approximately 35% of these are Tamil women.⁵⁹ The high percentage of Tamil women in combat contrasts severely

with the gendered breakdown of IDF combat forces, which showed that in 2000, combat forces comprised only five percent women.⁶⁰ In fact, the LTTE's conscious efforts to include women in its political and military initiatives are "unique among Tamil and many other guerrilla, terrorist and criminal group."⁶¹ The move also represents a transgression of the restricted roles that traditional Tamil society and culture allocates for women in the public sphere. Adele Balasingham, wife of the LTTE's chief political advisor, describes female militarism as a natural extension of Tamil nationalism, and a means of reaching women's equality. Balasingham states that by participating in the liberation struggle, "[y]oung women broke the shackles of social constraint, they ripped open the straight jacket of conservative images of women."⁶² In this depiction, traditional virtues are replaced with courage, and a newfound "thirst for liberation."⁶³ Unlike female conscription to the IDF, which occurs in spite of persistent gender role stereotypes, the Tamil struggle claims to deconstruct stereotypes that objectify women and their sexuality. Female agency is rooted in the violent overhaul and reconstruction of the cultural norms regulating women's place in society.

While the LTTE claims its female cadres have unwavering confidence in their missions, Western scholarly analysis often implicates terrorist organizations of coercing women into committing suicide terrorism, or engaging in combat.⁶⁴ Stack-O'Connor argues that the LTTE is unconcerned with women's liberation from social oppression, and is only borrowing strands of Leftist ideology and feminist theories to achieve its real objective: the independent Tamil state.⁶⁵ Stack O'Connor is not alone in her suggestion that women's interests are secondary to the Tamil national struggle. Cathrine Brun suggests that the name, *Birds of Freedom*, is meant to suggest that women can achieve freedom, but only through the "nationalism of a Tamil homeland."⁶⁶ These arguments correctly identify the Tamil's quest for self-determination as the framework within which LTTE members are expected to act. Insofar as women act as self-sacrificing,

courageous defenders of the Tamil nation, they can claim freedom through violence. Women are urged to shirk the diminutive expectations of traditional Tamil culture in favour of militant behaviours that serve the Tamil nation. However, it must be noted that while both women and men are undoubtedly influenced by this nationalist narrative, they have experienced extensive "economic, social and political marginalization" in post-colonial times.⁶⁷ These other forms of oppression should be equally explored as factors inciting women to engage in political violence. Furthermore, while the highly militarized, nationalist setting influences women's decision to commit proscribed violence; it does not eliminate their own reasoning and motivation for joining the LTTE as female fighters.

The debate over Tamil women's agency within the LTTE has been summarized in two arguments. Firstly, the LTTE claims that its women are overthrowing oppressive structures and seeking liberation through violent conflict. In juxtaposition, scholars such as Stack-O'Connor⁶⁸ and Brun (2008) regard women's involvement in the LTTE as a strategy initiated by the LTTE to support its only real goal: Tamil self-determination. These positions provide valuable insight into the coexisting narratives of collective and individual freedom, but frame the question of agency too narrowly. Richter-Montpetit argues that although scholars frequently investigate "for whom gender inequality is deconstructed," analysis must be pushed further to uncover "at whose cost that deconstruction is achieved."⁶⁹ So, although the LTTE has reconfigured female sexuality and aimed to alleviate gender subordination, new roles glorifying male masculinity are enforced in their place. Gender subordination has not necessarily disappeared, but changed shape. For example, while LTTE women are glorified as liberated souls, "normal women" are now seen as inferior to Tamil women.⁷⁰ Tamil women who choose to strengthen their collective identity through the LTTE are recognized as political actors, albeit within a restrictive nationalist

framework, while others are subject both to political and gender subordination.

Conclusion

In this paper I demonstrate that although women's salience in sanctioned and proscribed violence is increasing, idealized gender role stereotypes characterize the national struggles within which these women act. To this end I established the importance of deconstructing gender stereotypes in feminist inquiry, examining agency attributed to women in the IDF, and to female combatants in the LTTE. In the IDF, women soldiers are expected to embrace the contradictions of militarized femininity, providing a military presence without impinging on the role of the male war hero. Female fighters in the LTTE are integrated into all aspects of violent conflict, validating their womanhood insofar as they prove themselves able to act like men. Even when women's access to violence increases, national narratives create a rigid guideline for participation that includes those who fit within characterizations, or subscribe to the dominant institution's ideologies. For those who don't fit within the framework, full agency is still denied. In both the IDF and LTTE, women are simultaneously ascribed and denied political agency and gender equality. However, despite these conflicting messages women are remaking gender boundaries, participating in violent conflict as soldiers, combatants, relief workers and suicide bombers. In spite of institutional, cultural and political barriers to women's participation in violence, women are active agents in times of conflict.

Notes

¹ Annica Kronsell, "Methods for Studying Silences: Gender Analysis in Institutions of Hegemonic Masculinity," in *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*, ed. Brooke A. Ackerly, Maria Stern and Jacqui True (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 110.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 237.

⁴ J. Ann Ticker, *Gendering World Politics: Issues and Approaches in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2001), 34.

⁵ Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics* (London, New York: Zed Books, 2007), 3.

⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁸ Ibid., 29-30.

⁹ Ibid., 12.

¹⁰ Ibid., 17.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² J. Ann Tickner, "Feminism meets International Relations: Some Methodological Issues," in *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*, ed. Brooke A. Ackerly, Maria Stern and Jacqui True (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 19.

¹³ Qtd. In Tickner, "Feminism meets International Relations," 19.

¹⁴ Tickner, "Feminism meets International Relations," 19.

¹⁵ Ibid., 23.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Mary Hawkesworth, "Gender as an Analytic Category," in *Feminist Inquiry: From Political Conviction to Methodological Innovation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 147.

¹⁸ Ibid., 145.

¹⁹ Ibid., 149-50.

²⁰ Ibid., 150-51.

²¹ Ibid., 151.

²² Ibid., 146.

²³ Ibid., 152.

²⁴ Ibid., 147.

²⁵ Qtd. in Hawkesworth, "Gender as an Analytic Category," 147.

²⁶ Hawkesworth, "Gender as an Analytic Category," 147.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Jacquetta Newman and Linda A. White, *Women, Politics, and Public Policy: The Political struggles of Canadian Women* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2006), 11.

³⁰ Hawkesworth, "Gender as an Analytic Category," 147.

³¹ Ibid., 152.

³² Sjoberg and Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores*, 5.

³³ Hawkesworth, "Gender as an Analytic Category," 174.

³⁴ Sjoberg and Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores*, 6.

³⁵ Lynne Segal, "Gender, War and Militarism: Making and Questioning the Links," *Feminist Review* 26 (2008): 28.

³⁶ Israel Defense Forces, *Conscription to Women's Corps*, http://dover.idf.il/IDF/English/about/History/40s/1948_1808.htm

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Sjoberg and Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores*, 116.

³⁹ Aver Ben-Amos, "War Commemoration and the Formation of Israeli National Identity," *Journal of Political & Military Sociology* 31, no. 21 (2003): 173.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 171.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Yechezkel Dar and Shaul Kimhi, "Youth in the Military: Gendered Experiences in the Conscript Service in the Israeli Army," *Armed Forces & Society* 30, no. 3 (2004): 435.

⁴³ Qtd. In Martin van Creveld, "Armed but not dangerous: Women in the Israeli Military," *War in History* 7, no. 1 (2000): 87.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Dar and Kimhi, "Youth in the Military," 434.

⁴⁶ Holly Yeager, "Soldiering Ahead," *Wilson Quarterly*, Summer 2007 (2007): 54.

⁴⁷ Sjoberg and Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores*, 59.

⁴⁸ Yeager, "Soldiering Ahead," 57.

⁴⁹ Claudia J. Kennedy, "Redefining the Warrior Mentality: Women in the Military," in *Sisterhood is Forever: The Women's Anthology for a New Millennium*, ed. Robin Morgan (Washington Square Press, 2003), 409.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Sunila Abeysekera, "Gendering Transitional Justice: Experiences of Women in Sri Lanka and Timor Leste in Seeking Affirmation and Rights," in *Engendering Human Security: Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Thanh-Dam Truong, Saskia Wieringa, Amrita Chhachhi (London:Zed Books, 2006), 6.

⁵² Cathrine Brun, "Birds of Freedom: Young People, the LTTE, and Representations of Gender, Nationalism, and Governance in Northern Sri Lanka," *Critical Asian Studies* 40, no. 3 (2008): 401.

⁵³ Patricia Lawrence, "The Watch of Tamil Women: Women's Acts in a Transitional Warscape," in *Women and the Contested State: Religion, Violence, and Agency in South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Monique Skidmore and Patricia Lawrence (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 92.

⁵⁴ Alisa Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers and Freedom Birds: How and Why the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam Employs Women," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19, (2007): 45.

⁵⁵ Lawrence, "The Watch of Tamil Women," 12.

⁵⁶ Tamilnation, "Women and the Struggle for Tamil Eelam," *Voices of the Tiger Bulletin*, February 1990,

<http://tamilnation.org/women/90womenguerillas.htm>

⁵⁷ Sjoberg and Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores*, 139.

⁵⁸ Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers and Freedom Birds," 45.

⁵⁹ Lawrence, "The Watch of Tamil Women," 99.

⁶⁰ Dar and Kimhi, "Youth in the Military," 34.

⁶¹ Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 44.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 46.

⁶³ Lawrence, "The Watch of Tamil Women," 99.

⁶⁴ Sjoberg and Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores*, " 134.

⁶⁵ Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 47.

⁶⁶ Brun, "Birds of Freedom," 400.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 401.

⁶⁸ Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 46-49.

⁶⁹ Cited in Sjoberg and Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores*, 3.

⁷⁰ Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 47.

Mexico and Neo-liberalism: how Social Movements in Mexico have done little to change the Neo-liberal policies.

Lindsay Stringer

Introduction

The concept of social movements and grassroots organizations has expanded rapidly in the past few decades. According to O'Brien et al. the changes in the global political system have shifted from multilateralism to what is known as complex- multilateralism.¹ That is to say that global politics are no longer determined solely by states, but also increasingly by inter-governmental institutions and global social movements. The effects of the decisions made by global financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank have generated strong grassroots opposition. In Latin America for instance there has been heavy involvement by these two institutions, and an increasing organization against them. Mexico is a good example of the people organizing at the grassroots level in order to combat the policies of the IMF and World Bank. This paper will argue that social movements in Mexico have generated response from the government, but that they have not been able to make any substantial changes to the neo-liberal economic policies implemented in the country. This will be shown by exploring the effectiveness of social movements in Mexico, by analyzing of the necessity of neo-liberal economic policies and how the government made it difficult for groups to organize, and finally by showing that neo-liberal policies and agreements like NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) still exist. For the purposes of this essay Social Movements will be defined as non-violent organizations that challenge government policies, but not the government itself. This

definition will not be able to include the Chiapas Uprising as violence was used to get the Mexican government's attention.

Mexico was the first country in Latin America to default on its loans and require assistance from the IMF and World Bank. This defaulting led to a period of Structural Adjustment and neo-liberal economics being implemented all over the country. Analyzing neo-liberal policies from aftermath of the economic crisis it is easy to see where they went wrong, but at the time neo-liberal economics were seen as the best way for a country to develop. They were based on principles of: free-trade, reduction of public sector, deregulation of markets, and reduced state intervention.² The idea was that if corporations within a state could generate enough wealth then they would automatically create more jobs and improve the overall standard of living throughout a country. On paper these practises seemed to make the most sense for countries who were struggling to make ends meet during the 1980s OPEC oil crisis. However in reality these policies really only served to make the lives of big business owners and politicians better.³ The rural and working class found that their overall standard of living decreased as they were suddenly expected to pay for newly privatized amenities such as health care and education.⁴ The adverse effects of neo-liberalism on the rural and working class caused an increase in grassroots social movements that challenged the government on their policies. These movements were hampered by the government polices and thus too weak to organize on an effective level.⁵

Structural Adjustments in Mexico: 1982-Present

This section will be reviewing the changes made in Mexico during this period of Structural Adjustment and

how these changes affected the rural and working class. The second part of this section will go through the various responses from the rural and working class to the neo-liberal changes made. Finally the last part will evaluate how effective these movements were at getting the governments attention.

1982 saw the beginning of the changes to the Mexican economy. Triggered by the global oil crisis Mexico under President Miguel de la Madrid moved to stabilize the economy. Under de la Madrid the *tecinos* (highly trained specialists) were a majority, and with their economic training developed plans to bring Mexico into the world market.⁶ Claudio Holzner states that “the technocratic nature of reforms in Mexico and other Latin American countries...[insulated] the policymaking elite from popular pressures...”⁷ The World Bank and the IMF put pressure on the Mexican government to deepen the austerity measures in the country’s social and economic programs to become consistent with neo-liberal economics. The effects of these measures included: decline in wages to half of what they were in the 1980’s, the undermining of unions and workers’ organizations, and the shift of labour mainly into from formal to informal primarily through the *maquila* (*maquiladoras* are assembly plants created along the Mexico/US boarder right after the implementation of NAFTA) sector.⁸

According to Nora Hamilton “accelerated changes in Mexico’s economic trajectory...have led to the creation of new social groups.”⁹ The measures created new tensions mainly through alienating large segments of society and by widening the gap between classes. One of the groups to gain momentum during this period was the Women’s Movement. Women’s organizations had existed prior to the new austerity measures, but were able to grow and increase

their activism as more women were forced to enter into the work place.¹⁰ Women's movements in Mexico have been centered on the gender biases and differences that have dominated Mexican society for decades.¹¹ With the opening up of the economy and the increase in transnational trade, Women have been able to take advantage of the new networks available to them. Joe Bandy and Jennifer Mendez chronicled how women in the *maquiladoras* along the US Mexican border were able to organize support.¹² In this case it seems that the opening up of the economy was able to give women the avenue needed to gain international support. One example given by Bandy and Mendez is the case of how the *Support Committee for Maquiladora Workers* (SCMW) and the *Asociación Nacional de Abogados Democráticos* (ANAD) were actually able to use US laws of sexual harassment in the work place against an American company and win.¹³ This was only made possible under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which allowed them to go to US courts because Mexico does not have such laws. Daniel Mato states that "Even though these networks exist and are sustained through the participants' mutual interests, at their core there are power relations and conflicts of interests."¹⁴ Despite the success of women's worker organizations under NAFTA and neo-liberalism Bandy and Mendez still acknowledge the increasing marginalization of women under these agreements.¹⁵ Men predominantly organize at the worker level; as men's organizations become stronger women's ability to organize is effectively undermined.¹⁶ Even though women in this case were able to use open markets and globalization to their advantage, it is not the case with all other social movements.

The poor in Mexico have also been adversely affected by changes in Mexico. Despite the growing number of social movements immediately following the

implementation of neo-liberal economic reforms the number of people participating in politics has dropped.¹⁷ Holzner argues that despite an increase in democratic practices, such as multi-party politics, in Mexico the actual ability of the poor to participate in politics has been constrained by the neo-liberal economic changes.¹⁸ In fact, the political participation of the high income bracket of society has increased while the low income participation has stagnated or decreased.¹⁹ Holzner outlines three reasons why the political participation of the poor has decreased since the implementation of neo-liberal reforms. Firstly, since poverty has increased the poor are finding it significantly harder to obtain the materials they need to organize in an effective manner.²⁰ Secondly, liberal market reforms eroded the poor's ability to organize by fragmenting their membership.²¹ Lastly and most significantly for Holzner, is the lessening of the state in the economy sends the message that the state and the elites do not care about the poor and their interests.²² This increases the gap between the rich and poor, and puts the poor in a bad position to do anything. Given that the poor have attempted to organize, but that their level of participation has gone down suggests that the neo-liberal reforms have had a negative effect on the poor's ability to organize.²³ This can affect the overall perception of democracy in the Mexican government, as Holzner suggests, which in turn can de-legitimize those in power.²⁴

The neo-liberal reforms that were implemented in Mexico and other parts of Latin America have opened the flood gates for an increasing number of social movements and grassroots organizations. However many of these movements have had difficulty organizing at a strong enough level in order to generate changes in policy from the government. As will be explored in the next section the Mexican government has responded to some of these

protests, but the level of change that has actually occurred has not been enough to actually change the adverse affects on people in Mexico.

The Mexican governments' response to social movements

It can be argued that since the Mexican government did respond to the growing unrest over the neo-liberal policies that the social movements were successful. However they were not successful in the goal of reversing the policies. The response by the Mexican government of Salinas was to appease the Social Movements and distract them from the real issue of reversing the policies. This section will evaluate the various half- hearted attempts to appease the people of Mexico, but these attempts were just that: appeasement and half-hearted. Firstly, it is important to evaluate the various poverty alleviation programs that were implemented and how they changed with the various presidents. Secondly, it is important to evaluate how effective these programs were at achieving their goals. It is important to keep in mind that during the economic crisis Mexico was at a loss as to what to do. They had exhausted all other options and turned to neo-liberal economics as a last resort, as did many nations in Latin America and the developing world during this time period.²⁵

By 1988 Carlos Salinas was elected to office and began what is known as the National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL). At this time Mexico was still operating under a virtual one party democracy which was dominated by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Other parties were allowed to run, but elections were dominated by the PRI. According to Marcus Kurtz, PRONASOL was designed to combat poverty, but still be compatible with neo-liberalism.²⁶ The plan was one of the most ambitious

poverty alleviation strategies to date in Mexico. The program included providing subsidized food and water to poorer neighborhoods and funding the building of infrastructure. One of the most interesting aspects of PRONASOL was the fact that under Salinas it was meant to work closely with social organizations to help keep the corporatist and clientelistic elements of other poverty relief programs out.²⁷ PRONASOL was most effective under Salinas as it provided some innovative strategies that combined social growth programs with market oriented strategies to provide subsidized food, water, and other infrastructure projects for both the urban and rural poor.²⁸ However, PRONASOL was not as neutral as Salinas sold it to be. Both Hamilton²⁹ and Kurtz³⁰ point out that it was targeted at areas where the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), the main opposition to the PRI, was strong. The program seems to have been politically motivated rather than a genuine response to grievances.³¹ The strategy initially worked for Salinas as it boosted his level of support to almost 61 percent of the vote.³² This was however short-lived as in the early 1990's there was yet another economic crisis in Mexico and the program was passed into the Presidency of Ernesto Zedillo.

Zedillo was not the original choice to succeed Salinas. Luis Donaldo Colosio was the chosen candidate; however on March 23, 1994 he was assassinated. It was not clear who was responsible for his assassination, but it created a tense atmosphere for Zedillo as he entered the campaign. Under Zedillo the PRONASOL program took a turn for the worse. When Zedillo took office the thought of social security was at the bottom of his list.³³ Shortly after his election the Central Bank announced that it had used up all of its foreign reserves and the peso was allowed to float, and soon it had dropped below 40 percent of its original value.³⁴ This forced Zedillo to completely re-orient his

political agenda. The PRONASOL program became the PROGRESSA and as it changed its name it became less and less effective.³⁵ Up until 1992 it had been administered out of the Presidential office, and under Zedillo most of the organizational features of the program ceased to function.³⁶ Kurtz attributes the lack of sustained poverty alleviation to the weakness of the rural civil society and their inability to put adequate amounts of pressure on the government. The Mexican government did not see the need to have a sustainable poverty alleviation program because there was no strong opposition to the government.³⁷ Where there was strong opposition to the party, the government implemented programs to gain support, but allowed them to fail as soon as the support was directed back to the PRI.³⁸

When the Mexican government undertook PRONASOL it became a political strategy to take support away from the PRD and the National Action Party (PAN), this strategy worked as support grew for the Salinas administration.³⁹ Since the program was never autonomous it never really lost the clientele nature of many other programs.⁴⁰ It was tied to the government and directly administered by the Presidential office which meant that only people who were willing to turn their support to the PRI would receive the benefits.⁴¹ Even though grassroots movements and civil society were able to organize it did not really cause the government to make changes to the economic system. This is still evident by the neo-liberal economic policies that are still in existence today.

Neo-liberal policies still in existence

Given the attempts made by the government to appease the people of Mexico it is worth evaluating where the neo-liberal policies still exist and how they are being implemented. Since most of the neo-liberal policies are still

in effect it means for the most part that the social movements failed.⁴² This section will evaluate the government's policies and how they have not changed very much since the debt crisis of the 1980's. This section will first evaluate the 1994 signing of the NAFTA agreement which was seen as a high point of neo-liberalism. Secondly, this section will evaluate what Mexico's position has been regarding the international arena. Even though Mexico has begun to consolidate its democracy it is still questionable as to what extent civil society has a voice and a say in government policies.

NAFTA is a free trade agreement between Canada, the United States, and Mexico. It was vied by many as a new era for economic development for all three countries, and in particular Mexico was looking forward to receiving the opportunity to develop along with the United States.⁴³ As mentioned in the previous section it seems that NAFTA might have had positive effects on some groups' ability to organize. It is true that neo-liberal policies and globalization do tend to make it easier for groups to organize transnationally, but these policies are also the policies that marginalize the people in the first place.⁴⁴ According to a report on NAFTA, "the policy of free trade has been ruinous" for Mexicans as it pushes them further into a marginalized position.⁴⁵ Instead of just competing in the local or regional economy Mexico is forced to participate in the global economy on an uneven playing field. NAFTA justified the sale of many of the previously state owned enterprises in an effort to increase privatization.⁴⁶ This move included a number of major banks in Mexico. The 1995-6 Banking crisis was an "unintended consequence of the neo-liberal policies and banking privatization."⁴⁷ Many people could see that the deepening of neo-liberal policies would have a negative effect on Mexico.⁴⁸ According to Marios the negative

effects include: by 2007 85% of the banking in Mexico is now foreign owned; small or medium sized enterprises and people have little to know capital; and where privatization was supposed to 'democratize' capital it led to increased class concentration.⁴⁹ NAFTA is still in effect and it does not appear to be going away any time soon. As the current economic crisis is hitting and many countries, including the United States, are moving into to more inward focused economic policies, it will be interesting to see how long NAFTA survives.

Given that social movements in Mexico wanted to see a reversing of the neo-liberal economics they have thus far been unsuccessful. During the 1980s in Latin America Mexico was so far into debt and bad economic planning that the neo-liberal policies were seen as the last and only option for the Mexican government. Even recently the Mexican government, which has seen a transfer of power from the PRI to the PAN, there has not been a shift away from neo-liberalism. Vincent Fox was even elected after promising to remove the policies; however he was faced with no alternatives because all other forms of economic planning were seen as worse than neo-liberalism.⁵⁰ Globalization has been cited as the root cause for the expanding neo-liberal policies, but it is also this same globalization that has allowed social movements and grassroots organizations organize at the global level.⁵¹ This is what has facilitated the creation of the complex-multilateralism that O'Brian et al have argued for.⁵² The transnationalization of free-trade and the opening up of markets has had negative effects on many societies, but it has also facilitated the cross-border organization of social movements.⁵³ The women of the *maquilas* were an example of how organizations are utilizing the newly opened borders to organize and gain support. Many new social movements all around the world have fought neo-

liberalism and free trade, and as in Mexico many leaders around the world respond with sympathy and half-hearted policies that never really change anything.

Conclusion

Neo-liberalism has opened the door for many new social movements around the world. The neo-liberal economic policies of the industrial West have had profound effects on the stability of the developing world. In the case of Mexico there have been reaction to the neo-liberal policies put in place, but they have unfortunately not yielded the desired results. It does however provide a step in the right direction and also opens up dialogue for the possibility of something stronger. Mexico has seen an upsurge in civil society organizations; however, those organizations have been unable to make the Mexican governments change its policies. This is because the organizations were too weak to organize at an effective level, even when they sought cross border support. Also, because the government had no other options during a time of crisis, they did placate the organizations with programs such as PRONASOL to try and steal their attention away. Lastly, because the neo-liberal policies that these organizations were fighting against are still in existence, and even though the current economic crisis suggests that neo-liberalism is failing the Mexican governments is still pursuing neo-liberal policies.

Notes

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Ethical and Political Implications.” *Comparative Education* 38 (2002), 368.

³Harry E. Vanden, and Gary Prevost. *Politics of Latin America: The Power Game Third Edition*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 169.

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¹¹Joe Bandy, and Jennifer Bickham Mendez, “A Place of their own? Women’s Organizers In the Maquilas of Nicaragua and Mexico.” *Mobilization: An International Journal* 8 (2003): 174.

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¹³Ibid. 176

¹⁴Daniel Mato, and Emeshe Juhaz-Mininger (trans). “Transnational relations, culture, Communication and social change.” *Social Identities* 14 (2008): 431.

¹⁵Bandy and Mendez, “A Place of their Own.” 185

¹⁶Ibid. 179

¹⁷Holzner, “The Poverty of Democracy,” 93.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid, 93

²⁰Ibid. 95

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid. 95-96

²³Ibid, 117.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Vanden and Prevost, “Politics of Latin America.” 169.

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- ²⁸ Hamilton, "Mexico," 327
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Kurtz, "Understanding the Third World," 308
- ³¹ Ibid. 308
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Tara A. Schwegler, "Take it from the top (down)?: Rethinking neoliberalism and political hierarchy in Mexico" *American Ethnologist* 35 (2008), 695
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- ³⁵ Kurtz, "Understanding the Third World," 308
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- ⁴⁰ Kurtz, "Understanding the Third World," 308.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Holzner, "The Poverty of Democracy." 117
- ⁴³ Ibid. 116
- ⁴⁴ Bandy and Mendez, "A Place of their own," 175-6
- ⁴⁵ NACLA, "NAFTA's Road to Ruin: The Decline of the Mexican Social Compact Part II," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 41 (Sept/Oct. 2008): 11. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier (EBSCO) March 23, 2009.
- ⁴⁶ Thomas Marois, "The 1982 Bank Statization and Unintended Consequences for the Emergence Of Neo-liberalism," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 41 (2008), 150
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- ⁴⁸ NACLA, "NAFTA's Road to Ruin," 11.
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Paving the way in the Land of the Midnight Sun: Yukon Women in Politics

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Recipient of the Best Upper-Level Undergraduate Paper
Awarded by the British Columbia Political Science Association

Introduction:

The Yukon is nestled in Northwestern Canada and is a territory famous for the northern lights, the midnight sun, cold winters, giant mosquitoes, the gold rush and its welcoming and charming population always on Yukon time. There is, however, something that is often overlooked when one thinks of the Yukon, and that is the advancements Yukon women have made in politics both at the territorial and national level. The Yukon has represented a series of firsts and significant achievements for women in politics. The first woman in Canadian history to lead a political party which was successful in having its members elected came from the Yukon and the first woman at the head of a national party in all of North America came from the Yukon.¹ The Yukon has also been one of the very few places in Canada to elect a woman as Premier. The Yukon has often been at the top of the charts for its election of women, and one of the only places where women have achieved the targeted percentage or even surpassed it.² These numbers have, however, been dramatically reduced in recent years. This paper will give an overview of Yukon women's contribution to politics, and the challenges they face. This paper will focus on the achievements of Audrey McLaughlin, former New Democratic Party (NDP) leader in the House of Commons, Pat Duncan, former Yukon Premier, and Elaine Taylor,

current Deputy Minister in the Yukon Legislative Assembly and will discuss their experiences as women of power, or as Joyce Hayden calls them, “political pioneers”.³

Women as Political Pioneers:

The Yukon was born out of the 1898 Klondike Gold Rush and is now home to approximately thirty-two thousand people.⁴ Since this time, women have had a continuous role in shaping the Yukon into the territory it is today. On April 3rd, 1919, the Yukon Act was amended to give Yukon women the right to vote, and to seek elected office.⁵ In 1935, the Yukon elected its first woman to Parliament, Mary Louise Black as an Independent Conservative Member, and in 1967, Jean Gordon was the first woman elected to the Territorial Council, which was renamed the Yukon Legislative Assembly in 1978.⁶ That year, Hilda Watson became the first woman to lead a political party, the Progressive Conservatives, in the Yukon.⁷ There has been at least one woman in the Legislature since 1967 but women have yet to hold the balance of power, meaning they have yet to achieve gender parity in the Yukon Legislative Assembly.⁸

Since its inception in 1898, only nineteen women have been elected to the Yukon Legislative Assembly and three to the House of Commons.⁹ One of these women, Audrey McLaughlin, would go on to become federal leader of the NDP. In Canada, there have only been four jurisdictions which have elected women to a quarter of the seats in their legislative assemblies. The Yukon has done this twice, in 1989 and 2000.¹⁰ Along with British Columbia, it is the only jurisdiction to have done so twice.¹¹ Women constitute about fifty-two percent of Canada’s population, yet only makeup twenty –two percent of those elected to Parliament, which makes one realize

how much more work there is to be done to ensure Parliament reflects the country's demographics.¹² Women make up around forty-nine percent of the population of the Yukon, yet currently only account for eleven percent of the seats in the Legislature.¹³

Given its small population, the Yukon legislative assembly has only eighteen seats.¹⁴ In politics in general, the glass ceiling is set at around twenty-five percent of elected women in a legislature.¹⁵ The Yukon, despite its small size, has been able to exceed this on a couple occasions. In 2000, the Yukon had over twenty-nine percent of women in its legislature.¹⁶ This changed drastically in the 2002 election, when it dropped to seventeen percent.¹⁷ In 2009 it is currently at eleven percent.¹⁸ Linda Trimble and Jane Arscott, in *Still Counting: Women in Politics across Canada*, argued that “the Yukon slipped from the top of the 'electing women's' chart to the near bottom”.¹⁹ Despite this, many women have brought commendable change to the territory and the next section will focus on the achievements and experiences of a former Member of Parliament (MP) and federal leader of a party, a former Premier of the territory and a current Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA).

The Achievements and Experiences of Yukon Women in Politics:

The Honourable Audrey McLaughlin

The Honourable Audrey Marlene McLaughlin was born in Dutton, Ontario, and moved to the Yukon in 1979 to work as a social work/community development worker.²⁰ When Erik Nielsen, a Progressive Conservative (PC) who had been the Yukon's elected MP for twenty-nine years, retired in 1987, McLaughlin decided to run for the

leadership of the Yukon's NDP and was elected.²¹ Following this, she ran in the by-election where Yukoners once again put their faith in her and she was elected to the House of Commons.²² As an MP, McLaughlin pushed Northern issues and women's issues and often returned to the Yukon often to keep in tune with her constituency.²³ The House of Commons provided McLaughlin with a new experience and a new view on politics. She referred to the House of Commons as an "old-fashioned Men's Club."²⁴ When I asked her about her experience as the first woman leader of a federal party and what challenges she faced, she answered that:

"Anyone who is a first at anything always has challenges [...] The challenge of being a woman leader is that there are not many role models to compare it too, other than men [...] Women in positions of power tend to be seen as too aggressive [...] I was deemed to be conciliatory, too interested in team building, all things that Obama is now being admired for [...] Being the first can be a cultural change, it's just like Obama's election in the United States [...] (In terms of women in leadership) Many people unconsciously see this as a power shift, particularly men and when you have a power shift there is a reaction."²⁵

At the time of her election, there were only twenty-nine women MPs representing about ten percent of the seats.²⁶ In her autobiography she further discusses her experience, saying that:

"When you stand up in the House to speak, you look over a sea of blue and grey-the men in their club uniform, the business suit. Here and there you will see a splash of colour: the women. When you

walk into your first committee meeting, chances are you will be the only woman. The entire place was steeped in the assumption that women were interlopers...”²⁷

In 1988, she was reelected to the House of Commons with fifty-one percent of the vote.²⁸ That year, the NDP achieved the most seats yet for the party at the federal level with forty-three seats but the number of women elected did not increase.²⁹ Only five women were elected with the NDP, and only thirty-nine women were elected to the House of Commons out of two-hundred and eighty-eight seats.³⁰ As an NDP MP, McLaughlin kept pushing for a woman to be appointed to Chair, or House Leader or as a whip but kept being told that it was not the right time.³¹ In 1989, Ed Broadbent resigned as leader of the NDP, opening the door for a leadership race and McLaughlin saw this as the opportunity to take matters into her own hands and make it the time for a woman leader.³² McLaughlin was only the third woman to run for the leadership of a federal party and after a campaign ‘from coast to coast to coast’, she became the first woman in North America to lead a national political party, a huge step forward for women.³³ Furthermore, an article in the *Whitehorse Star* credited McLaughlin’s win as “a major step forward in putting the Yukon on Canada’s political map...”³⁴

Despite this achievement for women in politics, McLaughlin was still shocked by the behaviour of many of the men in the House of Commons.³⁵ One of the most shocking moments was when the men of the House of Commons laughed as Margaret Mitchell, the NDP MP for Vancouver East, spoke about wife battering and made jokes about the fact that “they don’t beat their wives”.³⁶ They were, according to McLaughlin, ironically proving to be abusive towards a woman trying to speak about women’s

abuse.³⁷ To McLaughlin, feminism has always been linked with social democracy, something that is fundamental to the NDP.³⁸ She argues that:

“Feminism means women having the ability to earn the same amount as men, and to get the same status as men for work done. It also means having your work acknowledged and your experience valued [...] every issue is a woman’s issue. How can the environment, defence, the economy and peace not be women’s issues?”³⁹

When asked what the main challenges for women in politics in general she stated:

“The portrayal of women in politics in the media is definitely a major issue. They are the arbitrator of what people know. The reason I hear the most for not getting involved is that women feel that they don’t want all the hassle and be harassed by the media over their looks and families and the list goes on. For women, this is a hurdle because women in politics aren’t the norm so they are singled out since the norm is typically a man, and in most cases, a white man [...] Family life is also a challenge, my children were grown when I became involved so it was easier to balance it but this is a tremendous issue. Finding that balance is difficult and people often judge you for it and if you do not have children, like Kim Campbell, you are accused of not understanding the problems of Canadians [...] One of the biggest challenges is that women aren’t taken seriously in general, whether it be in business or politics, but the most difficult thing is that most of the time women don’t take themselves seriously either and when we devalue ourselves we leave the

door open for other to do the same. They always think that they aren't qualified but they are! The challenge as Charlotte Whitten puts it: 'Whatever women do they must do twice as well as men to be thought half as good. Luckily, this is not difficult.'⁴⁰

Despite the challenges, McLaughlin always held her head high and governed with attention and care throughout her time in the House of Commons.⁴¹ She was in the House of Commons through some of the most controversial issues in Canadian history: the Meech Lake Accord, the GST debate, the Gulf War debate, the Charlottetown Accord, and she proved to be more than capable of dealing with these issues⁴². Her success was a tremendous step forward for women and some, such as Joyce Hayden, have referred to her as "the best riding representative the Yukon has ever had."⁴³

The Honourable Pat Duncan:

Patricia (Pat) Jane Duncan was born in Edmonton, Alberta but moved to the Yukon soon after.⁴⁴ Following the completion of her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Carleton University in Ottawa, Duncan returned to the Yukon and became an advance person for the Progressive Conservative MP at the time, Erik Nielsen.⁴⁵ She worked with him in Ottawa for two years before she followed the 'call of the North' back home to work.⁴⁶ In 1995, she decided to seek candidacy as a Liberal MLA, which came at the same time as her second pregnancy.⁴⁷ She conducted her entire campaign while she was pregnant, something she was both commended and criticized for as many argued that she should be focusing on raising her family as opposed to running as an MLA.⁴⁸ This issue affects women in politics everywhere as the balance between

family and politics is one of the hurdles most frequently identified by women in politics.⁴⁹

Duncan won the general election in September 1996 as the Liberal MLA for Porter Creek South.⁵⁰ Two years later, Duncan was elected leader of the Yukon Liberal Party where she served as the Leader of the Official Opposition in the legislature and in the 2000 general election Duncan led the Yukon Liberal Party to a majority government, defeating NDP leader Piers MacDonald.⁵¹ The Liberals were elected in ten ridings and received 42.7% of the popular vote.⁵² She became the first Liberal Premier of the Yukon and the territory's first woman Premier, and was also the first woman to win an election in which all the competing parties were led by men.⁵³ As the first woman elected as Premier, it took a bit of time for the media to realize that a woman had been elected to such a high-standing post in politics, as *The Globe and Mail* kept announcing “Mr. Duncan’s” victory.⁵⁴ This may also serve to show, however, the disconnection from the rest of Canada towards Yukon politics. Duncan was the Yukon Premier from April 2000 to November 2002.⁵⁵ In 2002, there were only three female party leaders across the country and Duncan was the only Premier.⁵⁶ To date, Duncan has been one of two female Premiers elected through general election.⁵⁷ There have been two others, Nellie Cournoyea of the Northwest Territories and Eva Aariak in Nunavut, elected through their consensus government system for the Premier position as opposed to a general election.⁵⁸ Despite this, the territories have all had a woman Premier, showing significant advancement for women north of the 60th parallel.

For Duncan, “politics is the medium I’ve chosen to explore my ideas and make a difference”.⁵⁹ It was not always easy to do so, however, and of her experience as a

woman in the Yukon Legislature, Duncan has said that “the high testosterone level in our Legislative Assembly gets to me at times.”⁶⁰ Her experience as a woman leader has led Duncan to believe that “women do their homework, work harder, and are better team players than men.”⁶¹ In 2002, the Yukon was home to the highest percentage of women representatives.⁶² Duncan wanted to ensure that it was a hospitable environment for women, so she pushed for non-sexist language to be adopted and pressed for consensus on the need to avoid violent terms and images in parliamentary debates and succeeded.⁶³ This was a significant advancement for women in politics.

On October 4, 2002, only two years into her five year term, she called a general election for November 4, 2002⁶⁴. Duncan was hoping for a stronger majority as three Liberal members had defected, changing her majority government to a minority one⁶⁵. Many Yukoners were angered by this quick return to the polls and the Liberals suffered a crushing defeat and the Liberals were reduced to only one seat: Duncan’s⁶⁶. The Yukon Party, led by Dennis Fentie, a former NDP MLA, won a majority by a landslide, claiming twelve out of the eighteen seats.⁶⁷ The number of women in the Yukon Legislature was reduced from five to three, representing a loss of twelve percent due to the small size of the legislature⁶⁸. At the 2005 Yukon Liberal Party leadership convention, Duncan was defeated by Arthur Mitchell and did not seek re-election in the 2006 general election.⁶⁹

Tumbling Down the Electoral Chart: What’s Happening Now in the Yukon?

In 2009, in the 32nd Legislative Assembly, the Yukon Party occupies ten seats; five seats are occupied by the official opposition, the Liberals, two by NDP and one

independent⁷⁰. There are only two women in the Legislative Assembly, Marian Horne, the MLA for Pelly-Nisutlin, and Elaine Taylor, MLA for Whitehorse West.⁷¹ This represents only eleven percent, which is nowhere near where the percentage of women's representation in politics to achieve gender parity.

The Honourable Elaine Taylor:

I interviewed the Honorable Elaine Taylor, the current Deputy Premier and Minister of Environment as well as the Minister of Tourism and Culture to gain more insight on the current experience of women in politics in the Yukon. Elaine Taylor was first elected to the Yukon Legislative Assembly in the general election of November 4th, 2002 and was re-elected in the general election of October 10th, 2006.⁷² On January 23rd, 2008, she was appointed Deputy Premier.⁷³ Taylor argues that the Yukon provides “countless examples of women who put their name on the ballot, worked to advance a cause and succeeded in bringing about change”.⁷⁴ She argues that she became involved in politics because:

“Like many others who have served office, I too chose to make a difference in my community [...] On the day I was first sworn into office, I was presented a plaque which reads a direct quote from Mahatma Gandhi. The quote reads, “Be the Change You Wish to see in the World”. The plaque sits on my desk and continues to serve as a reminder as to why I do what I do [...] it's about making a difference and part of that is being able to bring different perspectives to the table, perspectives which are representative of those who call Canada our home.”

I asked her about the importance of women in politics and she argued that:

“Women’s life experiences are different from men’s and therefore, women’s perspectives on issues – whether it may be childcare, elder care, health care, education to the environment - are different [...] Equal participation of women and men in decision making is a necessity for achieving sustainable development and quality of life [...] Women bring a different set of skills, life experiences and views about community needs to the table. I want to stress, however, that each and every woman is different from one another [...] Women for a whole host of reasons often tend to be the primary caregiver in any given household. Nurturing and caring for others are traits which women hold near and dear to their hearts. Because of this, women tend to bring a different style to leadership [...] a style which seeks to balance the traditional role of caring with the need to use the power they have to bring about change.”

When asked about the biggest challenges of women in politics, Taylor argued that:

“Women face some unique challenges. Combining motherhood and politics is one of them; that is striving to find the perfect balance between family and work. You see unlike other workplaces, there is no parental leave policy available for members of the Legislative Assembly.”

In 2004, while in office, Taylor gave birth to her first child, a son. Of this experience, she says that:

“At that time (2004), there also weren’t many other examples of women who had had a child while serving in Cabinet for me to draw upon [...] In fact, (I was) only the second woman Cabinet Minister in the country to have a baby. What soon became apparent, amongst the many attributes of being a new parent, were the hours associated with the sittings of the Legislative Assembly [...] These hours would still be an issue of concern if it wasn’t for the will and determination of three women legislators which comprised Yukon’s first ever women’s non-partisan caucus. Those legislators comprised of Pat Duncan, Liberal member, Lorraine Netro, NDP member and I, Yukon Party member [...] the one item that was presented was a motion to amend the Standing Orders to reflect a change in the normal hour of adjournment from 6:00 to 5:30 p.m. The motion, amongst many things, spoke to the recognition of the importance of family and making accommodation for family while serving the people of the Yukon. The proposed change - albeit a relatively small change - meant something different to all of us but the common element was family. The motion passed in the legislature, albeit not without debate in our respective caucuses. The motion, however, was a historic moment in which 3 women representing 3 political parties came together, parked the politics at the door and worked to effect change and that which resulted in more family friendly hours.”

I asked her about the other barriers which seemed to be in the way of women getting involved in politics and she stated that:

“Other barriers which are often spoken of pertain to the culture of parliament – the business of the house in which often confrontation more so than consensus tends to rule the day. Bringing respect, credibility and integrity to politics are traits that people expect of their representatives and deservedly so. Fear of public speaking, public scrutiny and perceptions that in order to run for office, one must hold certain qualifications are but further examples of systemic barriers.”

This led me to ask her where the Yukon is today in terms of women in politics and Taylor responded that:

“I am pleased to report the number of women who are putting their name forward for election is on the rise. In the last territorial election held in 2006, the overall number of women candidates increased as well, albeit the number of women who were elected decreased from three to two. The Yukon Party, as a case in point, fielded the most women candidates than in any other previous election and elected, in turn, the only two women who currently sit in the Yukon Legislature [...] On the municipal front, five of Yukon’s municipalities have women Mayors and a high number of women councilors. Likewise, Yukon has two woman chiefs representing self governing first nations [...] they are all making a difference in their own way, as difficult as the choice may be at times for women [...].”

When asked why politics, the answer was simple: “I do it to make a difference.”⁷⁵

Despite the many achievements made, the number of women in the current legislature is nowhere near where it

should be in order to break the glass ceiling and achieve gender parity and changes must be made to address this.

The Challenges of Women in Politics:

By speaking to these women, it is undeniable that there are facing the same hurdles as other women politicians across the country. These hurdles include, but are not limited to: the balance between politics and family, being taken seriously by voters and male politicians, the representation of women in the media, being the sacrificial lamb, feelings of inadequacy, the lack of role models and not being the norm. These issues are not limited to the Yukon, they are the same issues that the women in politics face across Canada. Jacquetta Newman and Linda White, in their book *Women, Politics, and Public Policy : the Political Struggles of Canadian Women*, identify these challenges as well and categorize them as: ideational, social and cultural; organizational; and institutional.⁷⁶ These issues affect women everywhere and are in great part responsible for why the representation of women is hovering at around twenty percent at the national level.⁷⁷ The key is to work towards breaking down these barriers by identifying the challenges and working together to find a solution to make politics more hospitable for women and to increase their participation and election. Certain suggestions, which have been brought forward to shatter the glass ceiling, will be discussed in a later section.

Why the success of women in the Yukon?

By studying the work of Yukon women in politics, it is clear that although each experienced something different in politics, there are still general themes and challenges that women in all aspects of politics across the country face. The question now remains, what has enabled

the women of the Yukon to surpass these challenges on many occasions? It is hard to determine this precisely but there are several factors at play. The territory's small size is one of them⁷⁸. When I asked this question to McLaughlin she said that:

“The advantage of the Yukon or any other small place is that people can get to know you personally, they know your work, they know who you are and they can connect with you on a more personal level and make their judgement which is not as possible in larger places. When they know you as a person and not just a politician, it seems they are more responsive [...] In the Yukon, it's the personal thing and the fact that you can't separate politics from the general culture and there have been many women here who have had non-traditional occupations and held senior posts that makes a change too. It shows that women can do all things. The Yukon is an anomaly as the Yukon is often considered as a small “c” conservative and there is somewhat of equality between the sexes [...] we haven't made it but progress has been done. But right now there are only two women in the Legislature and that is unacceptable!”

This holds true for many reasons. Many women have identified the depiction of women in the media as a barrier to getting involved in politics and in larger cities or electoral districts, people rely on the media to gain insight on political hopefuls and since the media can often be seen as ruthless towards women, this can alter the way in which they are viewed by voters and elected.⁷⁹ As McLaughlin established, when voters can get to know women politicians on a personal level, they can be more responsive. Furthermore, the Yukon's location in Northwest

Canada is also a factor. The West gave women the right to vote earlier than the rest of the country, and BC women have also made significant progress for women in politics. In addition, the women from the Northwest seem to have been pioneers in politics. Furthermore, the three territories have all had a woman Premier, which shows advancement but much work remains to be done. As McLaughlin puts it:

“The key is to keep going. Yes in the Yukon we have made it on very significant occasions and we have had a lot of women in senior positions but it’s always *A* woman, there is often not enough continuity. At one point there was myself at the federal level, Pat Duncan at the territorial and Kathy Watson at the municipal level as the mayor so there was one at all levels but afterwards, it seemed like there was a feeling of ‘OK, well that was cute-now let’s move on to something serious’.”

This is a continuous challenge in politics. Kim Campbell has been the only woman Prime Minister so far, and was only in power for three months.⁸⁰ It does not happen often, if at all, that a woman in a position of power is able to have another woman successor. McLaughlin says that the NDP was an exception when she was succeeded by Alexa McDonough.⁸¹ Women in politics all have something to contribute, whether it be different views on issues or different perspectives on leadership, it is important that their voices be heard. The glass ceiling seems to be a pretty resilient one in Canada, but it is through the work done by these women, and the work that is continuously being done by women across the country that we will someday be able to break it.

How to Shatter the Glass Ceiling?

The question remains, how can we do this? There have been several suggestions proposed from the women I interviewed and studied, and in Canada as general, such as changing the electoral system to a proportional representation system or implementing quotas.⁸² This is something that McLaughlin finds fundamental:

“This is controversial but I believe in quotas, quotas, quotas. I think that political parties have a real responsibility to implement quotas [...] we tried doing this when I was leader but it just didn’t happen. I do think this is hard to implement nationally but I think parties should do it and Elections Canada should support it with a financial incentive. Also, women need to be more confident. Women always say that they would love to get involved but don’t have the qualifications. I have heard the excuse that, “I do nothing, I stay at home with my kids”, so many times, and that is certainly not nothing! It is an important role [...] It is really important that the women elected believe in equality because there are many women that are elected that don’t believe in that and I’d rather have a man who believes in women’s equality than a woman who doesn’t [...] There needs to be encouragement and support [...] I am also a fan of having women’s committees within political parties because they do two things. They help women gain confidence and also help formulate policies for are positive for women. And they provide an opportunity to include men. Often we talk to the converted so it needs to branch out. If I’ve anything across the world, in Canada and the Yukon, it’s the refrain: Well we love to have women, there just

aren't enough qualified women!" Well come on, who is defining qualified! We have to do that ourselves and we are not doing that enough. We have so much potential."

The Honourable Elaine Taylor echoes this by saying that:

"I believe we need to continue to actively recruit more women. We need to be supportive and we need to start early; that is the more we can talk about women in leadership at all levels, the more successful we will be."⁸³

These recommendations must be taken into consideration and to achieve change, the issue of gender parity must be taken seriously by Canadian citizens and must be on political agendas at the provincial, territorial and national level.

Conclusion:

Through this research it is clear that women have made significant advancements in the Yukon and its politics, and have made it a more hospitable environment for women by altering the language used and the working hours, and continuing to strive for equality. Much work remains to be done, however. Even though the Yukon seems to have always been taking steps forward, the recent electoral numbers have shown only steps back in terms of women's representation. It is through continued dedication and cooperation that we will keep moving forward and reach equality. These women in Yukon politics have braved harsh winters, political barriers and have still shone with their heads held high. These women have risen up to the plate and have achieved many firsts and many significant achievements in Canadian politics. By doing so they have showed Canada and the rest of the world that the

Yukon has a voice and that the Yukon has a feminine voice. Author and former politician Joyce Hayden says it best:

“The many similarities in the lives of the women included in this history cross the boundaries of political parties, race, education, experience and even personal philosophies. By the number of firsts in their lives, it seems obvious that they were all trail blazers and risk takers. They were pioneers who were willing to make personal sacrifices necessary to stand up for what they believed in.”⁸⁴

These women have gotten involved because they care, because they can make a difference and because they can. These women are still pioneers and are still continuing to provide a better society for all Yukoners and by doing so, are working towards a better and more equal Canada.

Notes

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⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

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- ³⁰ Hayden, Joyce. *Yukon's Women of Power: Political Pioneers in a Northern Canadian Colony*. 1999. p. 467
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- ³⁹ Hayden, Joyce. *Yukon's Women of Power: Political Pioneers in a Northern Canadian Colony*. 1999. p. 469
- ⁴⁰ McLaughlin, Audrey. Phone Interview March 26th, 2009

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- ⁴¹ Hayden, Joyce. *Yukon's Women of Power: Political Pioneers in a Northern Canadian Colony*. 1999
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- ⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 480
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
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The Right to Bottle Feed versus the Right to Life: Lessons Learned from the Prevention of Mother-to-Child Pilot Programme in South Africa

Stephanie Patricia Kowal

South Africa serves as a quintessential example of how debates surrounding HIV/AIDS policies unfold on the ground. The prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) pilot programme in South Africa was rolled out in 2001 using vertical policy, that is to say, implanting untailed policies from other countries into the South African context. South Africa's population spans a host of different socio-economic conditions making a one-size-fits-all PMTCT programme ineffective or even detrimental, especially in the case of infant feeding patterns. This paper will argue that the feeding pattern portion of the PMTCT pilot programme was unsuccessful because it failed to give the necessary attention to the contextual nuances of the HIV endemic in South Africa. In order to build the argument I will first, discuss what the PMTCT pilot programme entailed and the cultural barriers that hindered women from exclusively or effectively bottle-feeding. Second, I will explain why the government and weak health care infrastructure were also barriers of proper formula use.¹ Finally I will use recent studies of exclusive breast feeding, flash heating breast milk, and the Kesho Bora Report to illustrate why innovative and more culturally sensitive responses would produce more successful PMTCT than vertically implementing policies based on the West's best practices.

Each year 700,000 children across the world, 90% of them being from Sub-Saharan Africa, are infected with HIV through mother-to-child transmission (MTCT), either in-utero, during delivery or as a result of breastfeeding.² Methods to reduce MTCT have been formed for all stages of possible transfer. Taking antiretroviral therapy as well as extra medical intervention, such as Nevirapine prophylaxis, while the infant is in-utero has decreased the chances of MTCT enormously.³ Equally, it has been decided that choosing a caesarean section over natural birth is the best practice for HIV positive mothers. The largest success for PMTCT is the practice of strict bottle feeding. Bottle feeding has guaranteed that a HIV negative child will remain that way throughout infant feeding. Breast feeding results in a 5 to 20% risk of vertical transmission.⁴ Furthermore, 40% of MTCT of HIV happens during breast feeding.⁵ Proper formula use acts as a 100% protection from MTCT; therefore, it is considered the best practice in the West. However, infant feeding choice has not proven to be so obvious in the developing world.

Historically nations respond to widespread disease outbreaks using draconian measures. Mandatory vaccinations for small pox, for example, were often administered forcefully by local authorities. HIV/AIDS is unique in that most nations agree that it is unacceptable to form responses that are not entrenched in the standards of human rights law. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that all humans have a right to the highest attainable standard of health.⁶ It is because of this right that the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS developed the *International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights* in 1998. Based on universal human rights,

every mother in South Africa has the right to the best method to prevent MTCT of HIV. Exclusive bottle feeding provides mothers with the option to feed their infants with zero risk of transmitting HIV. For this reason the South Africa PMTCT pilot programme was based on this method. Unfortunately, the socio-economic and political conditions under which these mothers live have caused considerable pitfalls for the use of instant formula and bottle feeding.

As stated by the World Health Organization (WHO), exclusive formula feeding is the best practice for preventing vertical transmission.⁷ The organization however, does recognize barriers to formula feeding. As laid out by the WHO, to prepare formula one requires enough water to wash, rinse and sterilize one's hands, cleaning tools and the bottle pieces. As formula should not be used two hours after preparation, fuel to heat water and sanitize the working area are required.⁸ This is problematic for families living in resource poor conditions because the lack of clean water or hygienic areas causes contamination of bottles and formula, thus bottle feeding causes more harm than good for the infant.⁹ Furthermore, formula costs can act as a barrier to effectively bottle feed. The price of formula can act as an incentive for mothers to add too much water in order to make the supply last longer which results in the infant's malnutrition.¹⁰ In addition, breast milk supply during formula feeding becomes an issue. Breast milk production is controlled by a positive feedback loop; that is, a mechanism which is activated and perpetuated by an external input. In the case of breastfeeding, only as long as the infant suckles and consumes milk regularly will the mother continue to produce breast milk. Thus if the mother loses her access to formula because she cannot afford it, or there is an interruption to the delivery to the clinic, the mother may

not be able to produce enough sustenance or nourishment for the infant.¹¹

Due to these issues the WHO advises formula feeding only when it is acceptable, feasible, affordable, sustainable and safe (AFASS) otherwise exclusive breast feeding should be practiced with rapid cessation at six months.¹² Early cessation is done to allow children to obtain some antibodies from their parents while simultaneously limiting the amount of time they are at risk of MTCT.¹³ However, there is little proof that early cessation helps to avoid MTCT as well as boost infants' immune systems. Rather, many others argue that early cessation may increase the rates of morbidity and mortality in developing countries.¹⁴ These debates question what the 'best practice' for developing countries is. Because of these conflicting opinions, healthcare workers of the PMTC pilot programme in South Africa received inconsistent information and training, and often reported to be confused as to who falls into the right ASAFF conditions. This confusion translated into poor counselling when advising individuals on ideal feeding patterns.¹⁵

The WHO advocates exclusive feeding of one method or the other to avoid the dangers of mixed feeding. Mixed feeding is the feeding of breast milk as well as non-human milk, other liquids or solids.¹⁶ The mixed feeding method is the most detrimental as it subjects the child to the risks of artificial feeding, vulnerability to infectious diseases as well as HIV.¹⁷ Breast milk contains antibodies, which formula does not, and thus builds infant immune systems more quickly than bottle feeding.¹⁸ This is extremely important for populations that live in unsanitary areas or that have unclean water supplies. Bahl et al. found that infants in developing countries that had not been

breastfed had a ten times higher risk of dying of any cause and a three times higher risk of being hospitalized for any cause when compared to those who had been predominantly breastfed.¹⁹ This could be attributed to formula prepared with contaminated water or diluted and kept too long in order to stretch the supply.²⁰ One study found that, as opposed to exclusively breastfed infants, infants of HIV positive mothers that were fed both breast milk and other liquids were twice as likely to contract HIV. Furthermore, those that were mixed fed with solids were nearly eleven times as likely to acquire HIV.²¹ The bottle versus breast question, along with others, and the high incidence of MTCT in South Africa prompted the government to begin the development of the PMTCT pilot programme in 2000.²²

The PMTCT pilot programme in South Africa was modelled on west's best practices. There were eighteen pilot sites, two in each of the nine provinces in order to equally represent urban and rural sites. It was developed to: provide voluntary HIV testing and counselling services to all pregnant women; provide micro nutrient supplements; screen for and treat STIs during the antenatal period; administer a single dose of Nevirapine to mother and infant pairs; adhere to proper obstetric practice during labour and delivery; and give 6 months of free formula, counselling and monitoring of infant feeding practices.²³ In theory this appears to be a well put together criterion for the PMTCT. Unfortunately traditional feeding practices and stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS in South Africa intensely hindered mothers from following the counselling and suggestions of the pilot PMTCT programme.²⁴ Even with the knowledge of mixed versus exclusive feeding and these guidelines, fear of stigmatization, socio economic conditions of mothers and poor counselling adversely affected the

intentions of the PMTCT programme and the allocation of free formula.²⁵

The programme covered a host of policy issues that still surround PMTCT today. Since not one indicator could encompass the full range of nuances that accompanied each site the initial government report on the programme used interviews to assess, more qualitatively, what had happened in the first year of the programme.²⁶ A multifarious and diverse body of analysis has developed since the pilot programme began to expand. The focus of the studies discussed here ranged from bio-medical to social, economic, cultural and so on. The indicators and methods of success or failure are just as varied. Consequently, for the interest of this paper, as with the initial government study, a holistic and qualitative vantage will be preferred for the analysis of the pilot programme. The quantitative analysis and methods used for any topics touched upon will not be discussed in detail and would be better served if explored in their original studies. One of the most highly questioned areas of the PMTCT pilot programme evaluation was around the benefits of free formula allocation and its impact on exclusive feeding patterns.

Ineke Busken's work concluded that traditionally, South African mothers mix feed their children from a very early age for three main reasons. First, they do not feel that breast milk sufficiently hydrates infants and as a result, they regularly feed them water. Secondly, mothers use herbal medicines to treat diarrhoea, colic or other common illnesses. Finally, solids, such as porridge, are given to infants almost immediately after birth because breast milk is thought of as a liquid not as food and thus, is not considered to be enough sustenance. Additionally, South African mothers feel that an insufficient diet and negative

feelings result in poor and too little nutrition in breast milk causing them to feel obliged to mix feed their children.²⁷ Education campaigns could potentially change these notions of breast milk but other socio-cultural factors contribute to mixed feeding practices.

HIV positive mothers often understand the rational of formula feeding and the dangers of mixed feeding but given that exclusively formula feeding is very unusual it can be seen as a signal of HIV positive status.²⁸ In South Africa, HIV is highly stigmatized and often disclosure of positive status results in domestic violence, outing and ousting.²⁹ This creates a fear of stigmatization so great that HIV positive mothers may continue life as normal because they feel that the consequences of disclosing their status outweigh the possibilities of transmitting HIV to their children.³⁰

In addition to cultural norms and stigma, the financial and living conditions of mothers have made safe formula use very difficult. Despite the WHO guidelines for formula feeding, the PMTCT pilot programme promoted formula use in rural areas even though 67% of families there did not meet bottle feeding conditions.³¹ Moreover, 60% of rural women took advantage of the free formula that was provided.³² This high percentage illustrates serious operational problems of the PMTCT pilot programme. One conclusion that can be drawn by these findings is that feeding counselling was not taking the WHO's AFASS guidelines into consideration before distributing formula.³³ Another suggestion that can be made is that within the context of extreme poverty, free formula acted as an incentive to choose a feeding method that was not appropriate for those who are most at risk of the potentially lethal effects of bottle feeding.³⁴ Worries that mothers are

malnourished or cannot produce enough milk to sustain the infant's needs both encourage mothers to buy formula even if they only plan to use it to supplement mixed feeding. Also, the safety criteria of the WHO guidelines was not well-defined and thus both counsellors and, in turn, women are misled as to what constitutes appropriate formula use in resource deficient conditions.³⁵ These studies illustrate that vertical implementation of western feeding policies was unsuccessful in the rural South African context.

Poverty was not the only barrier to effective bottle-feeding in South Africa. The government funded evaluation, led by David McCoy, acknowledged that weak human management and physical infrastructure constrained the success of the PMTCT programme.³⁶ A substandard healthcare system left the PMTCT pilot programme with insufficient human and financial resources to properly train nurses how to counsel mothers on appropriate feeding practice choice.³⁷ Furthermore, clinics across South Africa were reported to have run out of formula.³⁸ This is particularly dangerous because of the way breast milk production acts on a positive feedback loop, as described earlier. A cross site study of the PMTCT pilot programme concluded that regardless of the socio-economic conditions of the sites, counselling of formula feeding was dismal, leaving mothers with insufficient knowledge of how to properly prepare formula or how to collect more formula if needed.³⁹ This poor counselling resulted in one third of women who met the WHO AFASS formula use conditions to choose to breastfeed. Conversely, it led to two thirds of mothers that did not live in AFASS conditions to prepare formula and bottle-feed anyway.⁴⁰

Compounded with poor water and sanitation, unequal access to healthcare yielded even poorer results of

the PMTCT pilot programme. South Africa's healthcare annual district health expenditure ranges from R50 (US\$8) per capita to R389 (US\$55) per capita with those needing the most getting the least.⁴¹ Underfunding of the PMTCT pilot programme caused a host of barriers to effectively lowering the rate of MTCT. Lack of human resources often left only one physician appointed to each site causing low staff moral and little on-site mentorship of lower-level employees. In addition, logistical difficulties arose given that any further training of the physician was usually in a larger city, therefore disrupting the service of the clinic.⁴² In 2008, 36% of South African women still believed that vertical transmission was certain if the mother was HIV positive and furthermore, 50% of HIV positive mothers practiced mixed feeding even though exclusive feeding had been promoted since 2001.⁴³ Jeanne Raisler & Jonathan Cohn reported that after four years of PMTCT programmes few health workers had received training on HIV/AIDS, and it is argued that many still shared the general prejudices that stigmatize people with HIV/AIDS. For these reasons the PMTCT programmes have been largely ineffective and not until they become more widely available will these attitudes change.⁴⁴

The inadequacies of South Africa's healthcare system are not easily remedied due to their historical entrenchment in the International Monetary Fund (IMF).⁴⁵ After the oil crisis in the early 1980s the IMF began to grant loans to developing countries; however, these were not without strings attached. South Africa received one of these structural adjustment loans in 1984.⁴⁶ This type of loan was called a structural adjustment loan because the conditions attached ensured that the countries would shift their governance in order to favour market based economies. Characteristic conditions of structural

adjustment loans include: cutbacks in government funding and spending, privatization of government programmes, reduced protection of domestic industry, currency devaluation, increased interest rates and elimination of food subsidies. All of these conditions are geared towards minimizing government intervention in the economy.⁴⁷ The encouragement of liberalization, privatization and the outsourcing of health services damaged the capacity of central governments, resulting in disorganized and fragmented health systems.⁴⁸ Africa, as a whole, still needs investment in health and infrastructure before it can be competitive in the global economy. However, for over two decades structural adjustment loans have been forcing countries, including South Africa, to skip these steps and, in turn, weakening healthcare systems and governments' abilities to respond to the HIV/AIDS pandemic.⁴⁹

In the South African case we can see the legacy of these loans by the under-staffing of the PMTCT programme and the inability of many rural people to access clinics due to poor infrastructure, such as poor road systems.⁵⁰ Although South Africa is now a middle income country showing response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, Peltzer et al found that in some areas of South Africa road systems are still so rudimentary that they hindered mothers from accessing health care facilities.⁵¹ Trying to implement sweeping programmes, such as a national PMTCT programme, within weak health and physical infrastructure highlights the vulnerability of the poor and marginalized to unregulated markets. As the programme funding is stretched, rationing of treatment becomes inevitable and those who are easier to reach (read: higher income, typically urban) target groups receive preference.⁵² Without investment into infrastructure, responses to health and access to clinics become inequitable based along social and geographic disparities.

The PMTCT pilot programme was a package of western developed best practices that did not take South African context into account. Given that HIV/AIDS responses have been built around an individual human rights movement, this is not surprising. Binagwaho argued that the reason that PMTCT programmes fail is because, from the beginning, the Westerners developing the programmes, feel that formula use is too costly and complicated for women in developing countries to use.⁵³ Farmer et al. argue the same notion pertaining to highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART).⁵⁴ Both authors state that even though prevention programmes are rolled-out their managerial aspects are too weak to be effective. This is because they focus on condom use and education instead of going the tougher route and trying to effectively implement HAART or formula feeding.⁵⁵

Both realize that poor health infrastructure makes it very costly and difficult to implement programmes that require sanitation, proper staff training and electricity. However, they do not feel that this is reason enough to set the bar for prevention and treatment programmes at a lower standard for developing countries. To emphasize this view they both cite studies of successful prevention and treatment programmes that used the countries' current healthcare infrastructures.⁵⁶ The success that Farmer and Binagwaho found in Haiti and Rwanda respectively, are valid and uplifting stories of responses to HIV/AIDS. To the authors' credit, they do not use these examples as crutches to avoid questioning the affects that poor governance and poverty have on effectively battling the disease. Rather they argue that while pushing to implement the West's best practices we must also fund programmes that will end 'structural violence'.⁵⁷ Structural violence

being conditions brought forth by economic, political, legal, religious and cultural forces that hinder humans individually or en masse from reaching their basic human needs or their potential.⁵⁸

Fighting to end corruption, poverty, sexual violence, gender inequality, poor water supply, sub-standard infrastructure, diarrhoea, pneumonia, malaria, and the like is an enormous, time consuming endeavour. Unfortunately, today there are over thirty-three million people around the world living with HIV and 2.7 million acquiring new infections every year.⁵⁹ The funding that we have now is not preventing HIV through vaccines, education or MTCT. Binagwaho insinuated that those against bottle feeding feel so because they consider poor, uneducated and illiterate women in developing nations incapable of following instructions for medicines and treatment regimens.⁶⁰ The reason that the programme did not work outside of the western world is not because local citizens are not smart enough or willing enough to implement the programme, but rather, the programme fundamentally did not fit the context of a developing South Africa. In the face of so many structural problems bottle feeding is not now, nor will it soon be the best option for the nation's HIV positive mothers. Claudio Shuftan put it well saying, "...arguing for the right to bottle-feed is at best like arguing for access to a band-aid when faced with a haemorrhage. Poverty is the haemorrhage and it is the dominant human rights violation endured by these women and children,".⁶¹

Funding and research should not be going to free formula campaigns which are often detrimental to infant health.⁶² It is true that 40% of child infections due to HIV are from prolonged breastfeeding but the fact that death due to other diseases is 6 fold higher for bottle fed infants ages

zero to two months make the inappropriateness of bottle-feeding in developing nations apparent.⁶³ If more research were to go into finding contextually sensitive methods of preventing and treating HIV/AIDS surely more people would get the help that they need sooner. There have been some very responsive and hopeful works done in South Africa responding innovatively to the HIV endemic, mainly exclusive breast feeding and flash heating breast milk.

The work that Hoosen Coovadia has done on exclusive breast feeding and HIV transmission is an excellent example of innovative funding use. A study done by Coovadia et al. in South Africa found that MTCT was much lower for those infants that were exclusively breastfed.⁶⁴ Transmission was found to be 4.0% if the mother practiced exclusive breast feeding, lower than the most conservative WHO estimate, 5%.⁶⁵ Children who were fed both breast milk and formula were twice as likely to contract HIV and those who were mixed fed were eleven times more likely.⁶⁶ The study hypothesized that these types of results are due to complex proteins found in solid foods acted as an irritant on the infant's stomach lining. Once the integrity of the mucus lining is compromised there is less of a barrier between the HIV infected breast milk and the intestine therefore increasing the likelihood of HIV transmission.⁶⁷

This type of research found a much more practical way of reducing MTCT for South African women while concurrently cutting the risk of infant morbidity and mortality due to other illnesses. Although exclusive breast feeding is unusual it would not act as a flag of HIV status. Coovadia's study found that with intensive counselling, mothers complied and successfully breast fed exclusively and, for a longer period of time than they would have

outside of the study.⁶⁸ With proper training of health staff, infants could remain healthier longer, thus taking strain off of clinics. Furthermore this type of training could be given to rural women such as respected elders or midwives; therefore, all local mothers could be educated on how to address their children's feeding needs without having to disclose their status or take long trips to the nearest health facilities.⁶⁹ All of these findings could have a greater impact on PMTCT programmes than does unilaterally giving free formula, as the PMTCT pilot programme in South Africa did. Had health workers implemented a programme in South Africa which paid more attention to what conditions the HIV positive mothers lived in, the programme may have been more successful.

Another body of research that is currently being formed in South Africa is flash heating breast milk. Although there still needs to be field work done on the feasibility of the method, flash heating breast milk is fast becoming a new hope for effectively nullifying the transmission of HIV through breast milk. Kirsten Israel Ballard et al. concluded that flash pasteurization of breast milk inactivates HIV-1 cells that cause MTCT.⁷⁰ The sentiment is that this method is easy and effective therefore acting as a better method for PMTCT.⁷¹ A glass jar of breast milk is placed into a pot of water which is then boiled. The boiling water heats the milk, deactivating the HIV-1 virus while still maintaining its antibodies and nutritional properties.⁷² Although this method may fall to the same fate as formula due to lack of fuel for heating, signal of HIV status and such, it may not. Using funding to push formula use, a prevention method that has already proven ineffective in the South African context, is a waste of resources. New research may fail at first but may lead to

far more effective methods to battling MTCT in South African conditions.

The Kesho Bora Report is a very recent example of such research. This report was released at the International Aid Society Conference on Pathogens, Treatment and Prevention, in Cape Town, South Africa in July, 2009. The report found that if women were part of antiretroviral therapy for the last trimester of their pregnancies and through the duration of breast feeding, it would reduce the risk of MTCT transmission by 42 %.⁷³ Although the study was conducted in three areas of Africa, one being South Africa, the feasibility of implementing policy based on this research still needs to be studied. However, as professionals find solutions like these to cut MTCT risks, they give us hope that developing countries are coming closer to obtaining their own zero risk MTCT interventions.

South Africa's PMTCT pilot programme was supposed to train health staff to counsel HIV positive mothers to choose the best feeding option given their individual living conditions.⁷⁴ The number of women that chose inappropriate feeding methods based on the WHO's AFASS criteria speaks to three things. First, the healthcare system's lack of proper resources to spearhead such a project. Dismal training and staffing, unequal access to health clinics and poor infrastructure all contribute to misinformation or inability of mothers to understand the costs and benefits of different feeding choices. The second apparent hindrance of the PMTCT pilot programme is the socio-economic status of many rural or impoverished mothers. Those without access to clean water, sanitation or electricity or heating fuel were left without the means to properly prepare fuel even though free formula was being promoted throughout South Africa. Furthermore, free

formula paired with poverty gave incentive for mothers to take the formula for nourishment rather than PMTCT. This is considered extremely dangerous because given South Africa's traditional feeding patterns and stigma against HIV positive status it promoted mixed feeding rather than exclusive breast feeding. This alludes to a third all encompassing factor in the failure of the programme: inattention to the South African context.

The strong following to implement health policies based on universal human rights to health caused the vertical implementation of West's best practice for feeding in the PMTCT pilot programme. The adverse results that were found prove that these practices do not work in the developing context of poor or rural South Africa. Although this makes responding to HIV/AIDS much more difficult, there is a silver lining. From the poor outcome of the programme came innovative and more case sensitive responses that may prove to become best practices for developing world. In addition these methods may yield results equal to those found in western countries. The lessons learned from the pilot programme have the potential to increase health care outcomes to all women and mothers in South Africa, increase the communication and coalescence of different healthcare units' goals and decrease stigma by bringing HIV out into the open.⁷⁵ Undoubtedly, the goal of HIV/AIDS research and programme development is to find effective responses to the epidemic. This falls true even if those involved must go against the doctrine of universal human rights by finding alternate routes to attaining the same target, in this case finding a zero risk way to feed infants. Attention to context was missing from the South African PMTCT pilot project but hopefully the results will yield a more contextually

vibrant and thus more effective method for HIV positive mothers to safely feed their newborns in the future.

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