

**Casablanca Dialogues**  
A Brief Report Flagging Some of the Issues  
around which the Conversations Revolved at

Casablanca  
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A group of women thinkers, along with some others, who could also be called women leaders, having a track record of engaging in public policy domains, - local, national and international; and who represent a diversity of experiences ranging from feminist scholarship to international law and international economics and heads of UN Development agencies - met in Casablanca. The concern that drew these women for a serious deep reflection was the state of the world, with special reference to the increasing distance between the rich and the poor, as well as the *shifting* global power landscape; which has been recognized, in various fora, from the official mainstream ones to the alternate space of civil society.

## **The Process that lead up to the Meeting**

### a. Bulletins:

In order to collectively build the agenda for the meeting and to bring about cohesion in the group – a number of bulletins were prepared and circulated prior to the meeting. These drew the common concerns and themes that the participants were engaged with and showed the areas of convergence. Participants were able to respond to the bulletins and also raise other issues

### b. Profiles:

In a bid to increase the familiarity of the participants with each other prior to the actual meeting a photo gallery with a brief bio of each of the participants was created and circulated

### c. Circulation of papers:

A number of key papers by the invitees as well as other relevant papers were collated and circulated well-ahead of time. This facilitated the participants again to become aware of the issues and become familiar with the work of the other member of the group. It also helped the dialogue at the meeting itself be more grounded

### d. Review of literature

To ensure that there is a knowledge base which serves as a foundation for the discussion, a selective literature review of over 100 documents on the theme of the meeting \_ Women, Weave Peace into Globalisation was prepared. This outlined the debates that took place on each of these issues.

The group not only considered women's experience of development in the developing countries, but also the analysis and proposals that were emerging from those within the 'club of women thinkers' on the trends, and how and where responses were necessary.

## The Meeting

The meeting was conducted in a semiformal manner.

The idea was to create a space for people who are ideologically committed to the women's movement, who have had long experience and are engaged in similar work, but working with different approaches and being located differently. It allowed for dialogue across disciplines and locations- as well as across positions and experiences.

While the meeting was centred around conversations – they were pegged to the presentation made by the various participants – on specific issues – macroeconomics, “macro-judiciary” the international women's movement etc.

The meeting drew women with varied backgrounds and from different countries and revolved around the broad theme of women, peace and globalization. After the brainstorming we narrowed it to *Getting the Fundamentals Right, Women, Water and Wealth*.

### Women, Water and Wealth.

Transliterates as follows

- Women as idea creators, and the women's movement as the hope for organized creative rebellion.
- Water is symbolic of so many dimensions of our lives and aspirations - political, social, economic, environmental, health and cultural
- Wealth as a symbol of poverty and inequality, and the current driving force in the world, money and accumulation

We pledged to build a more appropriate theory and development framework which would enable women in poverty to walk out of it, or not to be trapped into it. The website that we have launched ([www.casablanca-dream.net](http://www.casablanca-dream.net)) gives you an idea of some of our process and outcomes.

When we met the Berber carpet weavers in Casablanca, through Fatema , they were our universal sisters from the mountains , and the plains, passing on skills from grandmothers to grand daughters, conserving their resources natural as well as cultural, knowing the kind of society they want to build , but being overwhelmed and often over powered by the increasing mechanisation of carpet making, the inroads into their homes by the ethic of money making, the enticement of the so called modern world .

The underlining argument was that there was a need to unpack the fundamentals – the constructs, the “knowing” as they exist and concepts that inform policies and actions – and from the basis of knowledge that women have provided, they would be “reconstituted”.

## The Issues

### The State of the State

The state is a contradictory institution and a site of struggle. It has today become an institution of dominance and control – over its own people and often people in other countries – by its policies and by war if necessary as in the case of the USA. It is able to criminalize whole communities (usually the minority communities). People are less able to negotiate with it and put up their demands to it. While it is the MNCs and the bigger global powers that can manipulate the state now

Simultaneously, there is a rolling back of the state in areas of welfare, and there is a growing privatization of many aspects of the state given the current thinking that the state is an impediment and that we will move away from social service. The risk has been shifted from the state to the individual, woman.

As a response to, and in opposition to, the neo-liberal stand that the role of state must be minimised; people who reacted have gone to the opposite side and have wanted an omnipotent state and have also posited the state as the only alternative to the market. In economics you have the Keynesians who exaggerate that everything the state is doing is good because of the neo-liberals who are at the other end.

However, the state also has the potential to provide a level playing field; to mediate and negotiate with the other powers to ensure that the rights of citizens are protected. It offers a sense of belonging and a chance to participate in policy making. Being without a state (stateless) is also a way of disempowerment.

The feminist critique of the state has become much nuanced. The fact that the state in a bid to protect its citizens can be oppressive; the limitations of the idea of citizenship and that the institutions of the state are all patriarchal have all been themes that has dealt with.

So there is a real dilemma that we are faced with. How are we able to imagine a state that is not male dominated from where we are located now?

Now people who are less in power are also again calling for the state and the rule of the law. There is a need to re-negotiate our relationship with the state – to make it more inclusive, to make the state accessible and working for everybody, to leverage the state such that it works for all the people, to reclaim the state. To explore the possibility of changing the relationship between the state and its citizens, we have to give the people who are elected a mandate and we need to introduce checks and balances to ensure that they live up to that.

The risk of cooption is inherent in engaging with the state; but not dealing with the state is also not an option. The possibility of changing institutions that we have not created or shaped is very limited – even though we need to transform these institutions – the parliament, the govt machineries, to move towards the kind of state that we want.

Therefore, there needs to be a tension and a distance between the state and a collective of citizens who are monitoring it. There is no ideal state; we have to keep at it – monitoring the state.

For example, one of the questions we need to ask is why our governments adopted the structural adjustment programmes in the first place and therefore there has to be a way in which the responsibility has got to be shared between the international players and our own governments as well. The crisis may have been created elsewhere but what has been the contribution of our own governments?

For example, Nigeria is an interesting case-study. There has been so much oil that has been taken out and now people are pressing for better deals and for a voice in the negotiations and pressing to make their government accountable- though it is a big struggle? Because beside the MNCs our own governments (often elected by us- and at other times not) are also involved in this and therefore it is inadequate to point solely to the MNCs, even though MNCs often use all kinds of power to ensure that they get a deal that suits them.

But there is also simultaneously a need to move beyond the state to the internationalism.

There also a need to understand that the Western state is not the only model we can explore. There are other models and also use of other concepts to make the state accountable – for example the Islamic concept of Zakaat – where ten percent of your income has to go for charity to the poor. The modern Muslim states that profess to be Islamic most often do not follow this and hence can be challenged.

The tension is also between finding little toe-holds within this neo-liberal state and making limited and precarious progress or seeking ways in which we can redesign the state such that things change drastically for the disempowered.

## **Knowledge and Power**

The feminist unpacking of knowledge has gone from the mere inclusion to questioning the basic conceptual framework of many disciplines. Examples were drawn from histories that had edited out the experience of women, from economics that had rendered invisible much of women's contribution to the economy; from political science that had failed to deal with the power of personal and informal spaces. The binary approach of most disciplines that seeks to prove one or the other hypotheses has also been taken apart by feminist scholars and practitioners.

The idea of what constitutes knowledge and how it was constructed was explored and the hierarchies of knowledge – the written over the oral; the codified over the traditional, the academic over the activist, the economic over other social science disciplines – was questioned. The moot point was also how these hierarchies were established in the first place and how we recognise and affirm different forms of knowledge; and understand what works in different situations.

The very basis of supposed academic objectivity received and the even the so called pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, was probed. Therefore, while producing work that passes the strict academic rigour one also needs to reject the dominant paradigm within which knowledge is constructed. Therefore, knowledge and what gets approved of as valid knowledge is a political process. So there is no knowledge that is free from politics or social construction.

The World Bank and the IMF, the academia are all sites of power that play the role of being gatekeepers to knowledge. The knowledge-building exercise then is de-linked from the ground realities and this raises some fundamental rethinking about what knowledge is and who defines this as such and those who teach, what do they teach and what informs what they teach? As well as the link between its thought and the political agenda.

The goal was to work towards a participatory process of knowledge creation where the experiential learning is valued as much as the structured and formal learning processes.

This idea is not new and historically, there have been evidence of cultures learning and strengthening each other by “adding their brains to that of others”; even as they carried in trading activities with each other. In their need to understand the “other”, they have used translations and other methods. But most importantly, it has called for respect and dialogue.

Now, this recognition of the importance of information and knowledge has taken a new turn with the Pentagon spending huge amounts of money on “information war”- with the cyber space also being seen as one that should be captured.

However, the process of knowledge production and the end use of this knowledge and the changes that it can lead to are very important. It is not merely the putting together of something. For example, a time use survey with women can be used as a tool to help them become conscious of their contribution to the economy and actually lobby with the finance ministry to ask - Why are we women particularly poor when we are doing most of the work? Or women realizing the extent to which they provide health care and then forming a network to support each other. Women within institutions and organisations can be supported by women outside in various ways – and the support of information and knowledge being provisioned is also of great strategic importance.

This also leads to the fact that the policies are often sculpted ignoring social realities because the knowledge of the marginalized is ignored, scorned or discounted; and they therefore are fitted into some pre-constructed moulds. We need to learn from the poor who survive poverty and women who resist patriarchy and the blacks who deal with racism. This will lead us to question the given models, the given construct of the state, of the poor, of knowledge itself. For example, there are instances of creating completely new definitions – of rape, of citizenship, of peace and security, of work, of spirituality etc, that reject, expand and turn upside down the old given definitions.

This requires us to be fearless and irreverent but also to move beyond a superficial understanding of issues. We also need to acknowledge that there is a responsibility that we have due to our advantage in accessing information to pass this on to others and to allow for information to be used to mobilize against certain kinds of development that further harms the already underprivileged sections – irrespective of who is pushing these projects – even if they are donors or multilateral agencies. There is a need to make the “knowledge holders” accountable – to point out that the policies and projects that they have pursued have irreversible consequences and people have been affected. So there is a need to change the process of knowledge creation and verification of what valid knowledge is and make that a democratized process.

Women have been blocked for centuries from influencing the power arena but we also know that we need to strategize and think of many strategies to adopt in different situations and places. For example, the knowledge of the religious texts can be used to take apart the misinformation that the fundamentalists and the state spreads. Knowledge then becomes a channel through which to counter oppression and can be a source of power to those otherwise considered as powerless.

Dreams, as a term used by the group indicated a deeper way to know, a belief leading to an action and a will to construct a reality that was more equal, just and peaceful.

## **The Poor and Poverty**

Poverty and inequality as realities were issues that gripped the entire group. There has been increased sophistication in an understanding the phenomena of poverty and its various manifestations; there has also been an attempt to sharpen the measure by which to determine the levels of poverty and to categorize it and its intersection with other axis of disadvantage such as race, gender, ethnicity etc. The idea of feminization of poverty has been explored and a more nuanced appreciation of the issue has emerged.

The high incidence of poverty – especially among women, the threat to their livelihoods and the decreasing per capita investment by governments were all noted by the group.

However, seeking to define poverty was in itself an issue. Who are the poor? The suggestion that the poor are worthless, with no knowledge or cultural and other forms of wealth has to be contested strongly. There is also a stigma attached to the word poor, poverty, in many languages and there are so many words that describe the institutionalized forms of poverty. The stigma sometimes implies that it is the poor who are responsible for their poverty – the sort of lazy bum syndrome. Given the current thinking, there is a tendency to shift the responsibility of getting people out of poverty – away from governments and towards the individuals themselves.

However, within certain traditions and faiths there is also a recognition that the community has the responsibility to ensure that people are not poor. And that if a person steals only to sustain oneself then the person is forgiven because the community realizes that they have committed a crime against her – by letting her starve – in the first place.

The word poor does not need to be viewed as a put downer. It is a way to search for solutions to change the inequality and the exclusion. We have to define poverty and arrive at a generally accepted definition so that our policies and our programmes will be targeted to answer their needs. If not the excluded will continue to stay excluded.

Poverty is an issue of power which is related to social relations. Poverty occurs due to the intersection of inequalities. We have to say that we have poor people because we have rich people. Mainstream discourse separates the poor from rich while they are two sides of the same coins and as long as we do not acknowledge this, we perpetuate poverty and this is done even by those who are academics and supposedly creating knowledge. So we have to own and transform the word poverty. We need to link it with a sense of injustice –and the privileged have to take responsibility. The term poor, too can be manipulated like the terms religion, culture and so on by people who claim to be the “true”

representatives of the poor. However, we need to know that the poor can be powerful, that they can be rich in many ways too.

However, poverty is a challenge and it calls us to reexamine the field of economics and some fundamental questions of how poverty is reproduced. It also makes us reexamine the kinds of social relations that are reproduced to keep poverty intact in spite of years of growth and “prosperity”

In fact, the policies adopted by the government have led to large scale poverty. If we view poverty in the light of economic justice – is it possible to expand the scope of criminal law to bring in the state and the MNCs and other perpetrators to show that people have suffered greatly and that there is a systematic and wide spread ‘violence’ and therefore it is a crime against humanity.

So, there is a basis to claim that poverty is a crime and that there is a collective responsibility to ensure that no one is hungry. Thus when poverty is seen as a crime – it is a structural issue. Then there is recognition that there are other forces that are responsible. So we are moving in that direction. We may not be able to identify really who the responsible party is for the poverty but at least it would be challenging as it would de-stigmatise it. And the interesting question is who is responsible for poverty. Is it governments? MNCs? There are many ways we can look at it. For example, does the fact that there are so many people who are not getting a living wage mean they are perpetual poverty? Then, we go on to see how living wages are calculated and so on. This is a futuristic idea and requires us to build the research, tools, language to be able to frame it in this manner.

## **Security and Insecurity**

Today, war and conflicts are not of one nation against the other – but often there are other formations (religious/political) that also have access to very sophisticated weapons and technology and people can organize themselves in violent ways and use the “killing power”. The state therefore no longer has a monopoly to violence on large scale and then the question is what security is; what the use of boundaries are (as the violence is not from across the border but “homegrown”). Hence, being borderless is no more insecure than having boundaries that are guarded as they have not helped the citizens of a country feel more secure.

Moreover, when security is defined as keeping the “other” locked up - we can see how so many women of colour, so many minorities etc, are in prisons and this institutional violence in the form of the prison industrial complexes are also exported to other countries.

Despite the state becoming bigger and bigger armies, weapons, surveillance and huge budgets; it cannot protect the citizens. So this is a challenge – the women are saying we do not trust the state – this is the case even for the so called modern Western democratic and secular state. The Hizbullah, for example, has changed the game completely in that it made the most venerable Israeli citizens who are in Middle East and share the same space, realize that the Israeli army which was supposed to be invincible – could be taken on; not by an army but an outfit that is neither an arm of the state nor is it state controlled.

Nor is it the clash of civilizations – the conflict between Shai’s and Sunni’s that has been the direct fall out of the invasion of Iraq also points to the complexity of the social fabric of a nation.

Women generally have no arms and neither do most men. There is only a small group of people and the MNCs who benefit from arms sales. At the same time, we need to look more closely at the notion that women are more peaceful. Is it because they have not had a chance to be as violent as men; is it due to some conditioning or due to social roles – of being mothers that they are less prone to attack. Is it an essentialist argument? We have also seen examples of women perpetuate the worst kind of violence and sometimes it springs from a need to protect what one feels is threatened or when a person is violated, then the need for revenge gets the better of us –even women.

When the state and non-state actors embrace violence as means to express a political opinion then the general level of violence goes up. So we need to give an idea that killing is not viable any more.

Security is related fundamentally injustice and poverty. In Philippines, a study of the ongoing conflicts showed that the cause of the conflict could be pinned down to a sense of injustice – that there is a discrepancy between the rich and poor that they are unfairly treated that they feel cheated and then feel driven to violence.

We cannot have security without social equality and justice. It is not fair to claim that it is the poor people who are violent.

But that we cannot talk about violence without talking about justice. The agenda has to shift to how we can move towards security through removal of poverty and inequality rather than patrolling the borders or monitoring of citizens and painting people as terrorists and potential terrorists.

Security, therefore, has to be linked to issues of justice and this is a step forward and a better way to weave peace.

## **Our Movement Ourselves**

The ability of the women’s movement to be self-reflexive has been one of the reasons why it continues to be a strong forceful movement today.

Africa is a continent on the move, but it is also a continent that is sliding backwards.

The journeys for equality and justice have been a long and arduous one. The participants traced some of the steps of these courses. From the first wave in the west that focused on the right to vote, about citizenship to own property, to divorce. In many former colonies, women participated in multiple ways and in sizeable numbers in the war of liberation. And the initial struggles were just to be there to be included and often our governments did and did not take us seriously. So, access became the keyword – access to education, to health, to training for jobs, to credit etc. All sorts of access.

Then, the focus moved to equity and that women should be included in the development plans and that the participation of women in this process in the government was picked

up as important. And in the 1985 conference, we started raising new issues. We moved towards conscientisation and getting political, away from one woman and one sewing machine. Moving away from merely access to rights.

Now we have started to talk about governance and have achieved participation in politics and there are policies for women. We have established that women count – in terms of equity that women ought to get the same wage as men, the same rights as men etc. We also have put into place gender policies and budgets. So even while we have taken huge strides, we have not transformed things, and in many ways, we seem to have actually come full circle.

With the increasing old and new vulnerabilities that women face today due to the embracing of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) by various governments at the behest of the IFIs; the huge areas that face conflicts, if we were to use the empowerment framework we will see that we are forced to refocus on welfare since the poor are stuck at bottom two rungs of welfare and access- rather than participation and empowerment – which are the next two stages. We are again talking of family planning and other issues that we thought we had moved beyond. And the reality is such that it becomes difficult for us to go to the women and talk of other issues – even like gender budgeting.

It seems that there has been a sliding back into trying to ensure that the state not roll back from the welfare activities that it used to undertake; of protecting the gains that have been made. This has taken up so much of our energies that we are scarcely able to move forward.

This ability to question and reassess our actions and strategies, our formulations and understanding is a sign of a mature self-conscious movement. That is willing to keep an open mind and be persistent with the questioning and even if it needs to start all over again. That is the power of the women's movement.

The agenda for the movement has that women should be able to exercise their choices and options and not live in a world where the choices are taken away in the name of protecting her or for her own good or any such thing. The common agenda for women, even when mediated by a whole range of other things, is that the quest for emancipation is something one can never run away from; and the primary task remains to change mindsets as laws and other mechanisms offer limited protection to women. What are used is not the law but value-systems, cultural practices etc. They often conveniently use whatever is useful for them to suppress women

We need to speak for all women. Can we talk about women's issues but in a popular way so that we give every woman the hope that change can happen. Therefore, the movement has to have particular values and a particular direction and these have to be set by people themselves and translated and interpreted by them. The forces we are fighting against are mostly though not merely local and therefore the need to come together at wider levels as well and fight at many levels.

It is only the movements that have a broad horizon, vision of where civilization should go in order to challenge fundamentalism and the neo-liberal forces. We need to keep that vision within the movement. To do this, we need to listen and build from the ground – knowing that we have no simple answers. And when we go to the communities and see

their lives we have to ask what it is that we want to change, what difference we want to make – and from here that the alternative vision has to be shaped and reshaped continually.

There is self- perpetuating and also self-interest among women to join the movement – even those who do not yet have a feminist consciousness, seek to come together – believing that there is a reward in this and this is the drive that propels the movement forward.

But when you live in a society that systematically and historically has seen you as a non-significant, there may be many compromises being made for survival, due to deep conditioning, due to the price you have to pay for sticking your neck out and taking a stand – and sometimes we are seduced by “fraud agency” i.e. where we think we are exercising choice but are actually making a bargain with patriarchy.

This, therefore, is a continuous process of learning and growing. It requires us to love what we are doing and also ourselves and the communities. We need tremendous energy to keep going – aganst setbacks. We also require developing an audacious attitude.

We also need to ensure that we have proof (that is what we are not talking in the air)

Love	L
Energy	E
Audacity	A
Proof	P

So what we need is something that fires the imagination then the collective form, the campaign starts and the movement is more successful.

The successes have varied. One of the very innovative creations of the feminist movement is one that was creating and using different spaces differently. For example, an unstructured and non-hierarchical space is extremely liberating in that women feel they can talk about what they are doing, they can voices opinions and share experiences – often of things they have had no chance to talk about. The open space allows for the growth of collectives, of networks and become “power spaces” that provide momentum to act. It shows that women have so many unexpressed thoughts that they want to share. These spaces have been spaces where women have been able to gain self confidence. It came out of the felt need of women to dialogue without any clear structure or targets. These spaces become participatory driven and a space that is relevant and strong.

Women have entered new domains and some of them occupy political spaces and become a conduit to channel the voices of the women to the governments the bureaucrats, the UN agencies and say to them that this is what the women of the south want.

The movement has been able to foster leadership, at various levels, and of different kinds. These include leaders, who, after providing the initial guidance and in navigated or negotiating with governments and others; and then opening other spaces; have moved away. The change in leadership can only happen when these spaces become intergenerational, and when the movements and women’s organisations represent the needs of the young. The young do not identify with many groups. What is needed is not

just intergenerational dialogue but also the young have such a different interpretation of the world. If we are thinking in terms of revitalizing the women's movement, we require to take the young along. We also need to instill the spirit of activism in the young. The importance of intergenerational spaces is that each had different insights. So, while older women leaders of the movement need to provide opportunity and space for the young; we must recognize that there are ways in which young women also silence older women.

The different fragments of the women's movement have also been able to converge at vital times and mount a combined front to take on various regressive forces; to become a strong lobby and institutionalize changes in various bodies and systems – whether it is making it possible to have domestic violence recognized as a crime; the banning of the sale of a country liquor, helping women effectively enter the arena of politics. In certain places, it is a leading movement that is standing up to the fundamentalists and now it has eclipsed even the parties (left and others too) and even the government.

Women's movements at their best have been able to attract all sorts of people from the deeply religious to the atheist, people of different political persuasions, and professions, besides the differences based on other social categories like class, race etc. Women who are located differently talk different languages and the movement needs to provide spaces for all these voices even while attempting to stay coherent and cohesive. This requires humility on all sides.

It is also true that poor women when they have an issue – very different women have come together crossing usual classifications and have made the strike.

Women's movement have been able to make changes; and alter in real ways – in the laws and institutions, in the language, in actual women's lives. It is collective actions that give you a strategy.

So, if women are given a little place then they go all the way. This is the capital that we need to build on; the sense of confidence that women are capable and their ability to move themselves forward. This can become a model or an idea that we can take forward.

The one million women in the local self governments are longing to be associated with the women's movement even though they have or may not have any feminist perspective but there is such a desire to establish themselves as women across parties as the "other" is oppressive. The men laugh at them and think they are witless idiots. So they need to bond across womanhood in order to struggle against the traditional patriarchal power.

Women's movements, however, have often failed to embrace them. The idea of a women's movement itself has often taken on bureaucratic undertones and NGOs sometimes are in themselves a deterrent to having a good strong movement. Women find it more difficult to start thinking about taking action and initiative without being manipulated in a particular direction by NGOs that have targets to achieve or certain set programmes to follow; or are too compromised to allow for a vibrant independent movement.

Most women also feel that they have lived their lives in fragments – their spiritual life, the political life, their economic life and only sometimes can the movement offer a space for an integrated coming together.

There are different models that have worked in different situations. There are, for example, right wing movements – that have mobilized people in large numbers and they are able to enthrone many people to act as volunteer. There are other strong progressive movements like the Save the Narmada Movement in India that have been clear, consistent objective and have worked at the grassroots as well as the international level. They are uncompromising but broad based. They have struggled long and have been extremely principled and totally non violent. It is a great example and has many lessons for us to learn from. But the truth is that the leaders are not from the area and the second rung of leadership is still to emerge. And even within the movements, care has to be taken that we do not develop a few “poster” women from the movement at the cost of real leadership. And even among NGOs and women institutions, there is a problem of retaining the more senior and educated women who are either migrating to other countries or to bigger institutions – weakening the organizations.

For many countries, while the freedom struggles were clearly political, mass-based, having a well-defined goal of liberation; at some point, there was a consciousness of different identities and different groups – of women, youth etc, began to be formed and also many NGOs came into being particularly in countries where expressing political opinion in public is difficult. And while many of the NGO leaders were people with a political background – today the scene is often that of people with a fancy education but little actual grassroots experience and political understanding to head these NGOs and then they become mere service delivery organizations.

There are also questions of volunteerism itself. Is this a euphemism for the further exploitation of women by shifting the burden of work that governments are supposed to do to the community– especially the women, or is volunteering a way for people to participate and shape some of the developments that impact their lives? Or are people taking responsibility and not becoming over dependent on the state? What about the spirit of volunteerism?

It was felt that the international women’s movement now needed to reflect on its journey. We had to ask ourselves if we have become fragmented, confused, losing our ideological edge. When we came out of Beijing we were clear – about fighting the feminization of poverty, about the IFIs. But now, we have moved to evaluate the BPFA not the economic framework and economic programmes that make people poor. There are an ideological corruption of the movement and many researchers and practitioners are getting co-opted by the powers that be in various ways. Whole institutions and centers are being “bought over” by the neo-liberal ideology. And we have let down our guard to the extent that we are not even sure who or what we are fighting for or against – the lines have become increasingly blurred.

It is an indictment of the women’s movement that we have not addressed many issues that we have raised time and again more vigorously. But, we also need to build strategic alliances with other movements in order to do this and also work towards having the women who are living the situations we are talking about at the forefront.

Besides this clear positions, we also need clear strategies to ensure that ‘the diplomacy of the oppressed’ works – to sometimes confront openly and at others to subvert. The

strategies that we have to use include creating linkages between the political leaders, women who are located in various places and the women's movement and also helping women who are outside the system access and influence the official spaces.

But, most of all, the spark has to be an idea –framed simply and clearly. New technologies offer new opportunities for resistance even while we are all aware of the acute digital divide that creates IT “haves’ and “have nots”.

The wide reach and relative easy access can allow for further participation of many people in pressuring governments, police and the courts. It allows people who are far away to also contribute to international policies. We need to use the new media and technology to fight the disinformation and also to send messages that are empowering. The vehicle may be film, glossy magazines, websites, blogs etc, that is appropriate to the situation but the overall vision and focus is important.

The fact that technology makes it cheaper and easier to reach across locations offers us a chance to translate many ideas –such as a women's clearance certificate for all projects to become reality; to open spaces like the courts and the UN; and to present grassroots realities to the policy makers and to document traditions and knowledge systems in creative and innovative ways.

## ***Democratizing Macroeconomics***

The discussions on macroeconomics stressed the limitations with the discipline. Economics seek to dominate over other social sciences but also within the field we are faced with the hegemony of the neo-liberal thinking. It also tends to focus solely on the monetized sphere and fails to take into account issues of unpaid work, the issue of reproduction and the interaction of the monetized sphere and the non-monetized sphere. Macroeconomics tended to adopt a one-dimensional approach and even though often we say that our policies should include everyone; our focus and inputs is in the formal sector. We do not have the instruments that deal with the informal sector.

Many developing countries have a large non market economy, and a high percentage of the activities that are undertaken to increase the well-being of the people, are taken by people and their unpaid work. Therefore, the calculations are done with measures that are not really ours and are therefore inadequate to represent the realities of women in developing countries. The fact that women's contribution to the economy is not recognized, undervalued, and invisibilised leads to an undervaluing of women themselves. From an economics point of view, recognition, affirmation and valorization of the invisible work that women do is crucial.

Therefore, it is not merely a technical matter –even though there are very technical issues; but rather the theories of macroeconomics and the macroeconomic policies should be informed by a certain other aspects of the economic questions such as the social, the political, etc. Therefore, the general indicators are economic or financial and the other social aspects are excluded even though logically it is evident that the two are connected (the social and the economic) but in practice, this linkage is not maintained.

The inability to see the other facets leads to a narrow understanding of economics that prescribes simply to put into place sound economic policies; and that this would ensure

that all is well. Any attempt to point to the problems and miseries of the world is met with the answer that then sound economic policies were not applied.

The arena of macroeconomics is without doubt a political one and therefore how sound macroeconomics policies are defined and by who is more often a factor of the power relationship than merely economic principles.

Therefore, the IFIs heavily influence macroeconomic policies in most developing countries in a variety of ways. The consultants who work with the governments, the ministers in the cabinet, even NGOs and organs of civil society are “bought” over or afraid and then start to toe the line that they put out till the myth that there is no alternative (TINA) is entrenched in the minds of the people. We then fail to see that these people are often driven by other considerations rather than economic ones and therefore support policies that make no economic sense. It is the role of the development economists to raise their voices against these policies.

Similarly, the EU has put out large amounts of resources to help the less better off countries of the EU to catch up with the other and to also become players within the EU; but developing countries are told not to subsidize the poor in our countries; even from our own resources. Institutions like the WTO are used by countries like the US to pry open markets. Therefore, the policies now are getting determined at places outside of the country. Governments themselves are intimidated by the IMF and others. They forget that most of these policies are more in the interest of these institutions themselves rather than the countries and of course within the developing countries the elite also stand to gain by these programmes and hence support it whole heartedly. To be inclusive, policies have to address the one with the most difficulty; however, even though huge benefits are handed over to the corporate to globalize and compete all over the world; the budget to help the poor move out of poverty is shrinking in real terms

These policies are made by people who are the captured agents – captured by the IFI, captured by treasury, captured by the MNCs who influence treasury etc. It is therefore non-economists doing the work of economists like the Minister of Finance; and they are driven by other considerations. Therefore, even when economists who are fighting against these policies demonstrate that this is against the country’s interest and that in fact there is a net resource transfer that is favorable to these institutions, their warning is not heeded.

However, there was another opinion that there is a hegemonic presence of the economists who favors the neo-liberal approach and the space for expressing dissent, for experimentation, for seeking new paths is shrinking rapidly and so too the value of placing people at the centre of development is receding.

It is therefore crucial to rethink our macroeconomics, to seek to transform macroeconomics itself. Many of the problems that the world faces today through the imposition of a macro economic framework by various institutions – such as poverty and inequality and inequality among nations are impossible to solve unless the macroeconomic framework is transformed completely.

For this, we need to work with the tools of the enemy and the enemy is the design of the macroeconomic policies. Therefore we need to make models that economists would

understand what we are saying; we need to look for new methods, new indicators etc. We need to fight this with their weapons.

We have to distinguish between policy implementation and what macroeconomics is all about. The macroeconomic fundamentalists who have made a travesty of what good sound principles of economics are, are like the religious fundamentalists. So we need to bring them back to the basics and ask fundamental questions like - What is the economic principle you are talking about? What is the basis for wanting the budget deficit to go to zero at this time when we are trying to recover from a terrible collapse? And challenge them to show that just because they are saying this is sound economic policies – it is not necessarily so.

We can point out clearly through rigorous research that growth is a necessary but not sufficient condition for employment; and how we are just looking at growth all the time; at inflation. We are stuck with an idea of reducing the deficit in budget and forget that it is a tool of economic policy not an objective of policy. We as economists need to point out to these anomalies.

A macroeconomics policy involves certain factors like output, employment, prices, stability etc. But if these are not done properly, then they have a terrible effect on the poor – especially the women.

We need go beyond a critique of the SAP which we began with, go beyond sheer policy and see the context in which these are being framed. Macroeconomics has a social context in which they take place within distributive struggles – these may be class, gender etc and combination of these. Therefore mere bandaging – such as putting in safety nets etc, is totally inadequate.

What we need to do is to set about democratization of macroeconomics policy making.

There have been interventions that feminists have undertaken at various levels that range from efforts to sharpen the tools and measures, to challenging the basic macroeconomic frameworks.

Programmes have been devised to include the poor; and pressure has been put on governments to put the human face to SAP, new social indicators have been developed, gender auditing and gender budgeting have become popular etc. At another level the old debates on payment for housework, the issues of care economy, the informal sector, etc are revisited. New questions are posed and fresh understanding is being brought into the discourse to develop the concept of the social content of macroeconomics.

For example, the tremendous political work that women are doing in the sense of their huge contribution to various social movements has also gone unrecognized. Therefore, besides the double burden of women in the domestic and the work sphere, they are most often in the grassroots doing the actual work of the social movements. Governments too use them to implement a range of programmes.

Besides these, the efforts are also made to point out that these policies are not gender neutral – they have a different effect on men and women. This was the first phase of the attempt to intervene in the macroeconomic vision and point to what the effects were on men and women; but then we also pointed out that this is not class neutral.

So, issues like trade needed to be thought of not in terms of efficiency or allocations but the larger political economy questions need to be raised – and to do poverty or employment. Many countries have instituted employment schemes or adopt the idea of the state being the employer of last resort; we need to see how these schemes can be made transformative; often they do not address issues of gender and provide only “male” jobs. We also need to think about reproduction and how we can bring in unpaid work into the employment schemes and to generate paid employment. Poor people work very hard and eke out a living in very many ingenious ways but what they want is secure jobs – this is what they want. What is called decent work by ILO. So not only that the jobs keep the needs of the women in mind but also that the process may transform the needs of women as well.

Therefore, despite the fact that efforts like the Millennium villages and so on have some commendable features, if the macroeconomic framework remains the same, it is not going to make a difference. Therefore, merely working on the budgets is insufficient. We need to also scrutinize the fiscal policy itself. Or while we say that microfinance can be very important to empowering women, but we also need to intervene at the level of macro finance – the monetary policy as well. And we see all these as being interrelated.

Finally, the quest is that we give a new vision of macro economics from a feminist perspective and progressive perspective in general.

## **And Justice For All**

From early days, women in the movement have used the law and made a bid to change it – to get the same rights as men, to have violence against women recognized and to have more convictions, change procedures etc. It has a role to play even as we go marching on the streets. And we need to look at how we can change the laws.

The engagement was initially centered on the formal arena of law. The belief that a more favorable legal climate will ease the oppression, provide opportunities, lower the exploitation, and in general, make life better, underpinned some of the actions of the women’s movement.

There was a realization that we need the state, we need courts and laws to set an international standard on dealing with international crimes and resolving conflicts that are international in nature. We have to use these institutions to establish internationally established behavior. We should make the norms of the law in keeping with what we believe though law has not addressed many issues sufficiently – poverty and inequality for example. No matter what forms the law takes, there are no alternatives to it at this point.

However, the repeated patriarchal biases encountered by the women have led them to go beyond merely asking for formal equality. They have sought to expand definitions, form “legal watch” cells to monitor the legal system and they have also begun to work at the international level more actively. This is due to spaces that have opened up to them through instruments like CEDAW, the realization that the issues and concerns of today – migration and trafficking, trade-led growth, the ecological crisis etc, require us to act on an international level. The state too is not any more an entity that we can influence at the

national levels, in this globalised world; therefore we need to claim or reconstitute the international institutions.

If law is to be empowering, then all of us have to be involved in writing that law, using that law, pushing the borders of it. It has happened with some cases, in a country where people have shaped the law and participated in the crafting of the process. The Right to Information Act in India is an outstanding example of this. It is a product of a large mass-based movement.

A case in point regarding the expansion of definitions was the 1998 judgment of the ICC that established rape and sexual violence as a war crime. In Beijing Conference, we had discussions on how we can get the law to recognize rape as a war crime. There was a consensus in the International Law Commission that we need to develop this idea of international criminal justice and this formed the basis of the judgment

At another level, when the political prisoners at Morocco were released, their responses indicated a major shift in approach – rather than vengeance or getting even - they were looking to change the state and the way it functions at a more fundamental level to ensure that such human rights violations never occur again.

The working of the ICC also reflects some of the feminist's demands to change the procedures to ensure that justice is delivered. The judges intervene and ask questions and in a radical departure, the ICC in a bid to give victims the right to access justice so that they can intervene as participants.

Though offering some space, the international law requires us to do a lot of homework, research, strategizing on how best to use the opportunities that present themselves. The Rome Statute has been ratified by 130 countries (two countries opposed it; US and India) all the states that ratified it have incorporated it into their national laws and the Statute has the provision that it is the duty of governments to prosecute these serious crimes. The local population can pressure the governments by pointing out to them that the acceptance of this duty to prosecute for serious crimes can also be applied at the national level.

We need to look at macro-judiciary concerns. To understand that, there is a difference between law and justice, and between promotion of law for its own self and promotion of law as a tool for justice.

Justice as a term can embrace economic justice, a just state; and therefore spreads across politics and economics. There is a need to bring crimes such as poverty, public and private violence against women being brought up before the ICC. Even if we do not 'win', it will be a big first step to push the boundaries.

Framing apartheid as a crime by pointing out that something is morally wrong and systemic and then getting the law to respond to that, was a major breakthrough. The challenge before us is to attempt something similar against those MNCs or IFIs who violate human rights. This would be an attempt to link the issue of justice to economic institutions and a step towards trying to construct a case for making poverty a crime against humanity and those who are responsible for it will be charged. This is a complete departure from the traditional view where the poor were in fact viewed as criminals.

That the economic sphere has implications for issues of justice is evident in many cases and many ways, but one of the issues that were discussed here illustrates this. As a woman's work in the home is not valued in monetary terms, now when women separate, there are legal effects.

## **Politics and Empowerment**

The arena of politics has been considered as an all male bastion for long; with the occasional woman politician as an exception rather than the rule. Therefore, the initial struggles were to get women into politics – to include women – similar to the struggle in development and law. An interesting example of deeply entrenched this bias is the recent happening in Burundi. When the warring parties were to meet to draw up the peace plan– it was to be an all male affair. Not one woman was to participate. It took an intervention by Nelson Mandela to suggest that women be present. The warring parties disagreed on almost everything but the exclusion of women.

While within freedom movements women have often participated and been involved in both the liberation struggle and the reconstruction and development efforts that follow – they feel that they have expressed themselves. However, they often start to realize that it is not so simple and that the 'politics of presence' is valuable, and not just, the 'politics of ideas' i.e. that is not sufficient that the concerns that women want to peruse get reflected in the political agenda rather there is necessity for women as a group to be represented by women in various political bodies.

The idea of facilitating many women to enter the field of formal politics has led to quotas, affirmative actions etc, to the extent that in India there are a million women who are elected to local self government bodies. Numbers matter in terms of forming a critical mass, in terms of the need for the composition of the political bodies to represent the populations that they act for. Further, above all, the issue of politics (informal and formal) is, at the heart, the agenda of empowerment.

The role that women are expected to play in politics is itself a contentious issue. Often the women's movement is disappointed that women leaders do not represent the issues of women; that some of the women have come into power only with the blessing of patriarchy, that women get co-opted or have other loyalties (party, race, caste etc.) that are the priority for them and hence they do not bring in women's issues or a feminist perspective. But the reality of governance also means that we have to make choices.

However, often it is a process and a journey. While women may at first be dummy or proxy candidates, they gain confidence and experience and start to articulate the issues of their constituency. For many of them, it is an entry into a completely new domain and they are overwhelmed.

Therefore, we need to build coalition among women of different political parties and one of the strategies is of creating a common platform for women's involvement. The movement also needs to support these women who, even when in positions of power, are unable to take up the "hard" issues. Some of them feel isolated and the movement too, often drives a wedge between "us" and "them". It is important from both a strategic and ethical point of view to bridge this gap and work together as much as possible, while

understanding that these women are working in very patriarchal and male dominated kind of environments.

Leaders of the women's movements can also play a role in allowing working class women and women from the rural areas who generally never had a chance to be proximate to those in power, to have access to and dialogue with these women.

At the same time, we have to be aware that the next stage beyond participation, which is needed to go up the ladder is consciousness rising in order to be able to make decisions. Sometimes even women, who are ministers and have been in the movement, find it difficult to move to this next stage. They reach the participation stage but do not have a feminist politics to actually change things. Therefore, we need to do more than merely getting women into governance.

So it is a dilemma. We need to understand how politics works, how governments work, how international politics affects us at the local level. And the struggle for the inclusive governance has to continue. The political struggle to change things so that the poor are better off has to continue. The struggle to build a movement that is so strong that it can actually influence these spaces has to continue.

## **ards Transformation**

The assessment that the women's movement is sliding backwards now; or that the feminist agenda is totally stalled, lead the group to explore ideas of change and transformation.

At one level, it was argued that we are caught in trying to ease the situation for poor women – of providing them soft landings, safety nets and so on. So we work to introduce new schemes either as NGOs or as the government that we hope that it lifts women out of poverty. At another level, we seek to influence the institutions arguing to include women. At the same time, we are aware that much of our efforts in these directions are quickly reversed or does little to actually help women at the grassroots or create a new set of issues for us to contend with – as the microcredit programmes testify.

It would appear that we have to make a choice – between mainstreaming women's concern and transforming these very institutions. The dilemma that seems to present itself is between an incremental approach and a transformative one; whether we need to work at the policy level and that change must happen there and percolate down or whether a bottom up approach is what we should follow. Perhaps these that are presented as dichotomous choices are false. The struggle has to be at many levels simultaneously. However, we have learnt that we need to move beyond merely getting into these male spaces and just including women in an instrumentalist way. We have to distinguish between the short-term strategic gains and the long term vision.

However, often we are all so caught up in just meeting these immediate needs that we lose sight of the larger vision; or are unclear about it. How we ensure that women's interest and the empowerment of the most marginalized comes into the agenda and is acted upon.

The time has come for us to not only flag our location in the political economy, or the brilliance of our struggles; but also we need to build **ideas**, in the sense of theoretical and philosophical constructs. We need to not only critique existing institutions – the courts, the IFIs, the religious ones, academia etc, but actual creativity in constructing ‘new’ theories, new compositions., emerging naturally out of the feminist experience.

So there is a need for rebelling against given models and frameworks- of the fundamentalists, of the neo-liberals, of the conservatives. The rebellion against the given constructs and mantras has to be at the level of ideation.

However, for rebellion, to be effective, it requires a mass; in turn, mass requires solidarity. And solidarity requires an idea which inspires and induces that solidarity. Our quest here should be for that idea around which we can unite. Rather like Gandhi’s fistful of salt (*When Mahatma Gandhi picked up a fistful of salt from the beaches of Gujarat, he was not trying to give free salt to the people of India. It was a symbol, an idiom of political assertion, but in a language, a vocabulary which represented the masses of people, not the elites*)

This fistful of salt can be the idea of ensuring that the calculation of the unpaid work is included into the national accounts, it could be the setting up of the International Criminal Court, it could be that women juries to interpret Islam for women

Whatever it may be, it requires a vision of transformation; it requires tremendous courage; but also a deep wisdom that makes it possible to have a universal vision; that allows for a wide range of woman to feel that it resonates with her needs and the kind of society that she wants. A radical vision of not only the state but even beyond the state; it is also a set of cultural practise and of a new kind of society which is an inclusive vision anchored in the values of social justice, equality and peace. It is this that should guide our work at various levels.

It is being a rebel with a cause that will lead us to not merely flag new issues and add more details but to redesign – the state, religion, justice, economic paradigms, etc. This will mean bringing issues of unequal power relations into the macroeconomic framework; issues of poverty into justice, issues of universalism into religion etc. We are not doing this just to tinker with the paradigm or add gender to the paradigm but to transform the knowledge base. And to use this to educate the powers that be; to use the knowledge to negotiate and navigate through the corridors of power. To give new words to the women who are sitting in the cabinet to ask if they are just implementing plans that exist or are they doing it differently; to challenge governments and show that the models, the path they are following is not making a real difference – it is not working in our country; to push the UN in its agenda and to have local NGOs to pause from mindlessly implementing projects. They motivated to do things differently.

This idea/dream underpinned by a strong mass movement ,therefore, is the solution. Organizing at multiple levels and having a strong movement and being clear on our goals and really challenging the current injustices; based on the transformed knowledge base.

## **Issues of Identity**

The question of identity is a fundamental question for women. Movements are generated by an assumption of commonalities based on gender/sex. Simone de Beauvoir’s famous and seemingly obvious question “What is a woman?” still preoccupies the movement.

The essentialist argument that men and women are different suggests that these are naturally determined –and hence outside the realm of politics and culture. It also suggests a universal sisterhood that has long been challenged. Difference among women based on race, location, class etc are now acknowledged.

So, the moot point is how we deal with this category of women. Is it more important not to think of the number of men and women in power; but rather to note what kind of consciousness they bring in to the job and what interest they represent in trying to change the state? For example, Margaret Thatcher was a woman who did change the state substantially. However, she was a conservative and did not come from a certain ethic; a certain political process. So, the mere division of the group as women and men may be problematic as women may pursue other agendas that are not necessarily feminist.

There are also differences among women and often women including those in power can be very dominating. There are various kinds of domination and women are often in positions of privilege.

“it may be stretching a point ... (she is apologizing) but the women’s movement needs to learn from this single minded politics the strategic value of mobilizing around a single identity.” Sometimes as the women who were co-opted, they assume another identity as a political leader or whatever, but her primary identity is not that of a woman from the movement.

The idea of one single identity also needs to be examined as there is the question of which identity one privileges over the other. Does membership to a women’s movement mean that other identities have to be subsumed? Or is it possible that the movement is broad enough for different concerns to find a place?

The identity then, is more based on an objective – like saying we will unite to eradicate poverty –to have one political agenda; and not necessarily a bodily identity. But a definite manifestation of patriarchy is a fact that statistics reveal that women are worse off than men in all sorts of ways. She is the one that has maximum HIV/AIDS, lower education, greater poverty etc. So we unite on the basis of being a woman in order to fight this condition. If we focus on those who are worst affected, we will have an identity that we can use. It comes into the old word, class and within class, there is racism, casteism. Who are we standing for? If we are standing against injustice, inequality and poverty, then we have a reason to unite in a political manner.

The other challenge that the issue of identity poses is the manner in which fundamentalists and fanatics in all societies choose to use this religious identity to bond people together.

Almost all cultures and religions discriminate against women. Even though people try to read other religions and then try to justify their own by comparing; actually, all of them discriminate against women in one way or the other. So the way the fundamentalists portray god also seems like he is a cruel god who decides, after creating women, that they will be less than men. That is such a strange belief.

Fundamentalism appears in many forms – religious, cultural, parochialism etc and even market fundamentalism. All of them are challenges in any society to the women’s movement and to all progressive movements. Women are affected in various ways by

the growing religious and fundamentalism – from being forced to adhere to certain cultural and religious norms, to being targeted by the “modern” world for being backward; from feeling a need to conform, to a need to express her individuality. The idea of the clash of civilizations has led to so many women in the Islamic world being oppressed. And the questioning of this becomes difficult; and this self-censorship as well as intolerance of dissent is a dangerous trend.

The fundamentalist forces have grown also because of the withdrawn of the state from how the state is made to withdraw from its responsibilities and those who are religious fundamentalists come in and fill that space. Besides the mindless fundamentalism that they engage in they do start by provisioning things to people and that is how they get power. So one fundamentalism is linked to other fundamentalisms and they reinforce each other.

The only manner to challenge them is by offering a universal inclusive vision of society. In Islam the Umma is universal –beyond the nation state. However, most fundamentalists have a view that excludes the “other” and selective interpreting texts to suit their own ends. For example in applying the Shariat – which says women should have the right to education, property, to marry who they like – these are not applied.

Fundamentalists also use the identity of culture and say that this is “against our culture” Or that certain human rights abuse should be allowed as it is “part of our culture”. This is used to silence voices that disagree and that say that the version of culture being put forward is a distortion, a partial rendering and that this does not represent the views of all of those who belong to that culture.

In some sense, cultural fundamentalism is more dangerous than religious fundamentalism. You may escape religion by becoming a non-believer or by conversion; by that is not possible with culture.

A suggestion to explore this issue further was to take forward Amartya Sen’s idea that we should aim for a world where we are able to choose our identity according to the moment, the time and what we need. The choice of identity should be ours; and it cannot be the one imposed on us. People cannot presume. We could conduct a workshop with Amartya Sen about rewriting identity or women supporting the choice of identity as one of the freedoms – to think with the experts on how to frame it in such a way that if one is attacked by cultural fundamentalists one can defend me oneself.

## **Water**

Water as a theme recurred in many ways.

Although water is a natural resource indispensable for lives of human being and sustainable development, under WTO/GATS it was now turned from a public good into a global commodity. The provision of water was largely taken over by private corporations. Due to higher price and the introduction of user fee, people in a impoverished living condition were plunged into further poverty. The current trend of privatization of water,

derives people of their rights, of their knowledge base on working with the water systems of that ecological area, it destabilized livelihoods and whole ways of lives.

In this situation, women tend to be the first to be affected by the lack of access to safe and reliable water source. This is because women are the principle providers of reproductive and care work which hinge greatly upon their role in water management. Women spends enormous amount of time fetching water for food production and basic consumption. For those who living in poverty, lack of access to water is detrimental, health condition in particular; malnutrition, prevalence of eater-born disease, to name a few.

In most traditional societies there is a spiritual symbolism attached to water and therefore it is completely outside of these peoples' cultural experiences to buy and sell water. But now this is happening.

The big irrigation projects, the lack of access and control of water bodies and the break down of traditional water management systems have wrecked havoc. Health problems like water-bone disease and malaria are spreading, the poor are cutting down on other vital expenses to pay for water.

There is more than enough water to both meet human needs for consumption, agriculture and industry. At the same time, water insecurity poses a real threat to human development in many places and for a large proportion of the world's people. Rather these shortages and environmental stresses do not reflect absolute scarcity – but almost always come about through poor policy decisions.

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