Women and Development: the Contribution of the Paraiba Women's Forum in Northeast Brazil

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The central concern of this paper is women's empowerment and the contribution of those women's groups that constitute the Paraiba Women's Forum to this process. The paper is based on an ongoing research project, initiated in 1996, being carried out in the state of Paraiba in the Northeast Region of Brazil. The data was collected by means of an open-ended questionnaire applied to all the groups, observation of activities - meetings, workshops, seminars -, and the analysis of documents produced by these groups and of their own records and archives. Documents produced by the women's movement at national and international levels also produced secondary data, as did a review of the fast growing literature on feminism and the women's movement.

We begin with a brief description of the context surrounding the setting up of the Paraiba Women's Forum before developing a framework of theoretical considerations on the issue of women's empowerment in which we give particular emphasis to an analysis of political participation and to the nature, structure, aims and component parts of the women's movement. The discussion concerning the space in which women's struggles for empowerment take place is a polemical one. Despite the growing influence of the concept of the 'third sector' we consider that the term 'civil society' still retains much greater theoretical weight in Latin America. The women's movement of which the Paraiba Women's Forum is a component is defined as a social movement and in our analysis of the groups which constitute the Forum we outline their historical influences before discussing the different types of organisation, the scope of their activities, the type of user, the sources of financial support and, finally, the kinds of activities which are favoured as a means of furthering women's empowerment. Lastly we analyse the concept of networking or 'articulation' as practised by the members of the Forum and its implications for the strength of the movement.

The Paraiba Women's Forum

The Paraiba Women's Forum is a network of women's groups established in 1991 under the influence of the UN Decade of the Woman and the National Action Plan.
During the same period Women's Rights Councils were set up at all levels of
government and Women's Police Stations and SOS Women NGOs spread throughout
the country. The Paraíba Forum is currently composed of twenty-four groups
calculated by their heterogeneity and by the common political objective of striving
in a democratic form to transform society and the social relations of gender. The
Forum is part of the Brazilian Women's Movement.

The early activities of the groups were linked to the process 'Heading for Beijing', in
preparation for the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women. The Conference
approved the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action whose central concern is the
empowerment of women: "No true social transformation can occur until every society
learns to adopt new values, forging relationships between women and men based on
equality, equal responsibility and mutual Respect."(United Nations, 1995:73). The
Beijing Platform of Action encourages the development of Forums.

Amongst the central concerns of the Paraíba Women's Forum are those of
strengthening group action and working together in an articulated form. Theoretically,
this "articulatory" character of the Forum is expressed as the creation of a space for
dialogue and the exchange of information. The principal thematic areas on which the
activities are centred are education, health, work and violence.

The groups which constitute the Forum are spread throughout the State of Paraíba
which covers an area of 56.585km2, with a population of 3.305.616 (IBGE, 1996).
The principal urban centres of population are: João Pessoa (549.363 inhabitants);
Campina Grande (340.316 inhabitants); Patos (86.036 inhabitants); Bayeux (84.169
inhabitants); Cajazeiras (51.396 inhabitants); Alagoa Grande (30.004 inhabitants);
Teixeira (12.913 inhabitants); and Pirpirituba (10.823 inhabitants). Women make up
fifty per cent of this population. (IBGE, 1996)

Women's Empowerment: a Theoretical Approach

In the literature women's empowerment is interpreted in different ways. For some
authors it constitutes a process of social mobilisation around women's major concerns,
such as divorce, property, cost of living and environment (Andreas, quoted by
Friedmann, 1992:116). For others, it is a change in women's state of mind (Logan,
Conference on Women, in 1995, emphasises the importance of women's
empowerment "for realising the full potential of economic, political and social development [...]." (UN 1995: 37).

UN studies also indicate that there is no place in the world where women enjoy the same living conditions as men. The conclusions drawn from the Gender Development Index (GDI) clearly indicate that no society treats its women as well as its men and that gender inequality is strongly associated with human poverty (HDR, 1997). On a gender-disparity-adjusted HDI (Human Development Index) which takes into account income, educational attainment and life expectancy, Brazil is situated in 63rd place in the Human Development Report Ranking on the Status of Women amongst those countries considered of medium human development (UNDP, 1994: 144).

For Friedmann (1992) empowerment includes economic, political and social issues, but whilst economic empowerment is related with productive actions,

"social power is concerned with access to certain 'bases' of [...] production in social organisations, and financial resources. [...] Political power is not only the power of vote; it is as well the power of voice and of collective action. Although individuals may participate in politics on a personal basis, their voice rises not only in local assembly but also, and at times more effectively, when it emerges with many voices of larger political associations". (Friedmann, 1992:33)

Although social and political power embraces fundamental elements for challenging power relations, they are apparently intertwined since information, knowledge, skill and participation in social organisations are basic to those collective actions designed to further women's rights and involve political participation (Friedmann, 1992). We consider political participation to be

"Any political action that is situated, even partially, inside the limits and the rules of the political system with the aims of maximising the actors' advantage in political decisions". (Melucci, 1977:120)

Within the concept of political participation as developed by Melucci, participation can be expressed in two different forms: on the one hand, participation signifies recognition of belonging to a system, identification with general community interests and actions in order to achieve specific objectives and, on the other hand, participation can be defined as the defence of particular interests in a competitive context, an
attempt to influence the distribution of power. Political participation in the groups that make up the Paraíba Women's Forum is chiefly identified with women's general interests and the development of action in order to accomplish collective objectives.

In Paraíba, women's political participation is shaped largely outside the field of formal institutional politics (Pinto, 1994): the majority of political activities developed by women activists occupy that space defined as non-institutional politics. Waylen (1992) divides non-institutional politics into two broad categories (i) activities that are in some way oppositional in the widest sense of the word. Three groups of activity are included in this category, those centring on: human rights, community organisation and the rebirth of the feminist movement; (ii) those activities that are organised in defence of the status quo and are, therefore, considered to appeal to traditional maternal values and roles.

The space in which women accomplish their political participation is generally denominated as the Women's Movement which Jaggar defines as "a diverse collection of groups all aimed, in one way or another, at 'advancing' the position of women". (Jaggar, 1983:5)

Jaggar's definition indicates the diversity of institutions that support the women's movement. These institutions are feminist groups or women's organisations, of a politically and socially heterogeneous character, which "are run by women, for women, using a non-profit structure and which deem their work to be part of a wider women's movement." (Riordan, 1996:4) The position of women to which Jaggar refers is commonly characterised by gender inequality and oppression.

The literature which examines the causes of gender inequality and female oppression as well as prescribing strategies for women's liberation is rich and ideologically diverse. Tong (1995) suggests at least four important theoretical tendencies: liberal feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism, and post-modern feminism. However, based on the inexpressiveness of Radical Feminism in Brazil (Saffioti, 1987; Viezzer, 1989; Sternbach et al, 1992), and the heterogeneity of the groups which compose the Paraíba Women's Forum, we agree with Alvarez (1990: 25) when he suggests that feminism, in practice, is a partial ideology that can prove compatible with liberal, conservative, radical or socialist ideologies although this compounds the controversy over which strategies would be most effective in combating women's oppression.
An additional perspective of feminism, introduced by Walkiria Alencar de Sousa, a Paraibian feminist activist, focuses on its methods of work:

"the feminist movement is characterised by its methods of work which consist of dynamics and techniques with the objective of (de) constructing stereotypes of women's sexual and social roles in order to get deeper into their secular history of submission through the subjectivity that recovers the sensibility, feelings and emotion of a whole history of life marked by oppression and often by violence." (Sousa, 1997:22)

Sousa's emphasis (1997) on feminist methods refers to a specific methodology developed by women for women's education and development which includes the fundamental elements of women's empowerment, i.e. information, knowledge and skills (Friedmann, 1992). The objectives of education are to change attitudes and behaviour, and to develop the exercise of the power of reason (Mejia, 1996). Lima (1988) divides group techniques into two types: the self-awareness groups ('auto-consciência'), and the line of life ('linha da vida') groups. The former's chief characteristic is that the group meets regularly to reflect on women's discrimination as evidenced in culture, in discourse, in political / scientific theories and in daily life and to produce studies and research on women. The latter is characterised by the sporadic 'one-off' nature of the activities: women take part in a meeting, workshop or seminar but not as part of an organised programme. Both techniques use the workshop as their preferred instrument, which has become a strong characteristic of the Brazilian women's movement.

Within the Brazilian women's movement, Saffioti (1987) suggests the existence of two basic kinds of militant activists: the liberal-bourgeois and the socialist feminist. Our initial data on the groups and activists who form the Paraíba Women's Forum lead us to agree with Saffioti. However despite the existence of the two types of apparently very different activists - Jaggar suggests that the overriding goal of liberal or liberal-bourgeois feminism is the end to all legal forms of discrimination against women whether that be in terms of rights, employment, education, etc. whereas socialist feminism's distinctive contribution to our understanding of human nature is its recognition that differences between women and men are not pre-social givens, but rather are socially constructed and therefore socially alterable (Jaggar, 1983:303) - both tendencies in practice appear to adopt a pragmatic posture frequently exchanging information and tending to work together.
Space of Women's Struggles For Empowerment

The women's movement is developed in a space characterised by theorists as the non-profit sector. In the literature the definition of non-profit organisations is problematic. Salamon and Anheier (1992), in their analysis of these difficulties, suggest that "the most certain and straightforward system for defining the non-profit sector is the one provided in a country's law" (Salamon and Anheier, 1992:133). In Brazil, non-profit organisations are defined by the State as public entities. The Civil Code provides for the establishment of non-profit organisations independent of public or private commercial interest, and these organisations are eligible to apply for tax exemptions (Landim, 1997).

The 'non-profit' is a characteristic of diverse categories of women's organisations which are defined in a variety of forms -social movements, popular movements, associations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) - and which develop activities in what is diversely known as civil society or the third sector. The lack of unanimity in relation to the conceptualisation of these terms or their breadth can be exemplified by the variety of positions presented and discussed during the First Meeting of the ISTR Latin American and Caribbean Third Sector Research Network held in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in April of this year.

The history of the concept of Civil Society is a long and polemical one which we do not intend to discuss in this paper. In essence it is the realm of voluntary adhesion whose key attributes, according to Marshall (1994), are

"(...) that it refers to public life rather than private or household-based activities, it is juxtaposed to the family and to the state, and it exists within the framework of the rule of law". (Marshall, 1994:55)

It became an important part of the vocabulary of Latin American social activists towards the end of the 1970's when opposition to military regimes in power in several countries in the region was at its height.

The origins of the concept of 'Third Sector' are firmly rooted in North America although its presence in the Brazilian literature can be traced back to the beginning of this decade. In Brazil the term is employed above all by organisations from the private sector i.e. the second sector, as a synonym for civil society. Although the growing
literature on the Third Sector contains a great diversity of definitions and classifications (Salamon and Anheier, 1992; Fernandes, 1997; Thompson, 1997; Uphoff, 1995), in the case of Brazil we consider the concept developed by Fernandes (1994), as that which, at present, best summarises the principle characteristics of those entities which make up the Third Sector:

"(...) a conjunct of private organisations and initiatives that aim to produce public goods and services [...] Public goods and services here implies in a double qualification: they generate no profits and arise in response to collective needs. [...] It is presumed that the organisations should offer collective services which do not pass through the exercise of power by the State." (Fernandes, 1994:21-23)

With regard to the different types of organisations which offer collective services to the public Gohn gives great importance to the 'social movement' which she conceives as

"social political actions constructed by collective social actors from different social classes, articulated in certain scenarios of the social, economic and political state of a country, in order to create a political field with social force in civil society." (Gohn, 1997:251)

She considers that these actions develop a social and political-cultural process which creates a collective identity for the movement based on common interests, shared principles and values which operate primarily in non-institutionalised spaces.

Gohn's concept of social movement comprehends organisations of civil society as supports for the social movement. However, in practice, in the Brazilian women's movement, there is a rivalry between those groups that 'supposedly' form the women's movement i.e. the associations and the non-governmental organisations. We use the qualifier 'supposedly' because the evidence suggests that the former -the associations- consider themselves as the legitimate participants of the movement:

"I think there is a huge difference between the movement and the NGOs. The NGOs have a professional character, while the movements, the groups, trade unions, have a representative character. [...] The NGOs do not represent a section, they contribute to a section, they have an advisory character, rather than a representative character."
This position gains support from an activist of the Grupo Fala Preta from São Paulo (Workshop "Feminist Movement and NGO in Brazil", 29/10/97) who agrees with the postulated difference between NGO and women's movement, and adds that the non-governmental organisations tend to be professionalised, structured, and possess a technical and administrative team that works full time and that in order to pay these 'employees' the NGOs have to obtain financial support. In contrast, the women's movement is made up of volunteers who meet when possible and when they need to meet, and consequently do not need to look for financial resources. This internal dissent reinforces Melucci's argument that "the organisation of a social movement reproduces the dynamic which characterises any complex organisation" (Melucci, 1977:126).

Gohn's concept of social movement refers to support and according to the activist quoted above a social movement is made up of "volunteers", however Melucci suggests that there exist three different kinds of incentives which lead people to participate in social movements: (i) material or utilitarian, those that link people with organisations through goods or economic resources; (ii) solidarity incentives, such as prestige, recognition, affection, originating in exchange and group integration; (iii) normative or value incentives, the reward is constituted by the accomplishment of ends or values established by the actors.

In the literature the difference between social movement and NGO is related to their respective roles. For Gohn (1997) the role of the NGO is that of intermediary, whilst for Scherer-Warren (quoted by Gohn, 1997) its purpose is to elaborate projects and organise and allocate tasks. The discussion above suggests that activists are not acquainted with the existing theoretical models and try to solve the issue in a pragmatic way.

The term "Non-Governmental Organisation", created by the U.N during the forties (Gohn, 1997b), covers a variety of institutions. In Brazil, the term NGO spread in the early 1990s, almost as a substitute for the term "social movement" (Gohn, 1997b). The concept includes international NGOs, i.e. those Northern NGOs that support national or intermediary NGOs in the South. According to Scherer-Warren, NGOs are,
formal and private organisations aiming at public interest, non-profit, self-managed and count on the participation of part of their members as volunteers, with the purpose of sharing actions of educational, political, technical, advisory, providing services and material and logistical support to specific target populations or segments of civil society, with the aim of spreading their power of participation and achieving social transformation at micro level (daily/local life) or at macro level (systemic or global).” (Scherer-Warren, quoted by Gohn, 1997)

Finally, the term 'association', in Brazil, is virtually synonymous with 'non-profit' since it comprises "a variety of forms and activities ranging from recreational and sports-related clubs to cultural and artistic associations, and to labour unions." (Landim, 1997:335)

Thus it becomes clear that there exist diverse and, at times, conflicting interpretations concerning the space occupied by women's struggle. Our definition of the conceptual nature of the Paraíba Women's Forum as a social movement in that it strives to achieve social change and to transform the relationships between women and men, is based on Gohn and Scherer-Warren. Whilst the NGO, in practice, plays an intermediary role (Gohn, 1997), it also provides services and material and logistical support for specific target populations. (Scherer-Warren, quoted by Gohn, 1997)

**Women's Groups in Paraíba**

In Brazil the female population is higher than the male (IBGE, 1991). However inequalities between the sexes are visible in the economic, political and social spheres. Women, for example, represent 35% of the economic active population, but their share of earned income is only 28,7% (HDR, 1997); they earn low incomes but the number of families sustained by women increases each year - from 18,1% in 1991 to 20.8% in 1996, and 1/3 of these families lives in a state of extreme poverty. In Northeast Brazil this percentage of women-supported families rises to 21,42%; and whilst women represent 44,18% of state employees only 13,24% occupy the highest administrative and management positions (Paula, 1998). In the National Congress only 7,4% of elected representatives are women (Suplicy, 1998): in the last General Election in 1994, 33 female federal deputies and 5 senators were elected. One of the few fields in which women's situation is relatively stronger than that of men is in Education. Of 46,2 million Brazilian students in public and private primary and secondary schools and universities, 51% are women (Leal, 1997). Although this factor could potentially contribute to a change in women's position in society, it will clearly
depend to a large degree on the orientation given to the contents of and to the relationships created in the schooling process. According to Stromquist,

"Feminist definitions of democratic schooling would contend that gender awareness within educational programs is essential to develop a new concept of citizenship among women. [...] It calls not merely for the teaching of democratic values but also for empowerment of all students via the ability to analyse gender subordination, seeing how public and private discourse mesh with and are supported by structures and institutions to create and sustain gendered representations and practices."

(Stromquist, 1998:13)

In the State of Paraíba, the women's movement arose from a tradition of individual women's participation in institutional and non-institutional politics. In 1945 two women candidates, Neuza Vinagre de Andrade and Luzia Ramalho Clerot, ran for seats in Congress and two years later (1947) Luzia Clerot and Maria Augusta de Oliveira ran for seats in the State Assembly (Rabay, 1996). In the non-institutional sphere such women as Anaide Beiriz, an intellectual who played a vanguard role in society in the late 1920s; Elisabete Teixeira, who took part in the Peasants' Leagues (Ligas Camponesas) in the Northeast Region, in the period 1961-1964; and Margarida Maria Alves, the president of a branch of the Rural Workers' Trade Union, who led a movement of sugar cane workers demanding proper work-contracts and better wages and was murdered in 1983 as a consequence by a gunman hired by a local "coronel" as a consequence, are all part of an inheritance which influenced the women's movement.

The first women's groups arose during the military dictatorship. The Grupo Feminista Maria Mulher was formed in 1979, the Grupo Raízes, in 1984, and the União de Mulheres de Cruz das Armas, in 1986. The issue of women's health was the dominant theme during these early years. The Grupo Maria Mulher and Grupo Raízes were autonomous, composed of volunteers, the majority of whom came from academic circles and received no support from financial agencies. The União de Mulheres de Cruz das Armas was composed of women from the urban periphery and linked with the Communist Party of Brazil (Abath and Ireland, 1998).

The groups which make up the Paraíba Women's Forum were mainly formed during the current decade and are, like their predecessors, politically and socially...
heterogeneous. In Table 1 (see Appendix 1) we classify the women's groups according to the following criteria: (a) category of organisation: organisation centred on women's issues such as feminist NGOs and associations; sections or parts of a broader organisation such as NGOs, associations, trade unions, political party, Catholic Church and State; (b) scope of activity: local, regional, national, international; (c) type of user: urban and rural women; middle-class, working-class with different levels of schooling; (d) financial support: international agencies, State, membership, self-financed, without support; (e) activities carried out: women's promotion, courses, seminars, mobilisations, advisory activities, counselling, workshops, meetings, visits, project development, theological studies, skills training, research, etc.

With regard to (a) 'category of organisation' we highlight the role of the Catholic Church and of the State. The Catholic Church encourages 'formal' equality between women and men in society (Machado, 1993: 107). The question of sexuality and birth control, both of specific interest to women, are also practically prohibited as topics for discussion within the church. (Caldeira, 1990:64) The participation of the State in the movement is a consequence of the Beijing Platform of Action, which constitutes an agenda for women's empowerment and includes actions to be taken by governments, by multilateral financial agencies and development institutions, and by national and international NGO's and women's groups. In Brazil, the Conselho Nacional dos Direitos da Mulher (National Council for Women's Rights) is responsible for establishing links between the Beijing agreements and the Platform of Action. In Paraíba this responsibility lies with the State Council for the Defence of Women's Rights (Conselho Estadual de Defesa dos Direitos da Mulher) and the Campina Grande Municipal Women's Council (Conselho Municipal da Mulher de Campina Grande) both of which are members of the Paraíba Women's Forum. However, among activists there is no unanimity with regard to the role of the State nor of the Beijing Platform of Action and the implications of these partnerships for the autonomy of the women's movement creates tensions and conflicts.

Although not all the organisations which belong to the Forum are solely dedicated to women's issues - some are women's organisation whilst others are parts of a broader organisation - and clearly have different regional, national and international affiliations, the majority of the groups were created by indigenous activists, with origins and experience in political parties, trade unions, and several other kinds of association. The exceptions are two centres, Abacaxi and Maracujá which count foreign activists among their participants and Caju and Pitomba which are branches of
international movements. Abacate e Pinha are state councils, whose foundation was encouraged by the United Nations and Beijing Platform of Action.

The scope of the organisations (b) is varied, although the majority covers a municipality, a sub-region or the whole State.

The users (c) are heterogeneous both in terms of socio-economic situation and in terms of needs and interests. Molineux (1985) draws attention to what she calls 'gender interests' or the needs of women (or men) which contribute to determine their position in society. These she divides into 'strategic' and 'practical' gender interests. Strategic gender interests are those derived from the analysis of women's subordination, and are associated with the feminist movement, whilst practical gender interests arise from the concrete conditions of women's position within the gender division of labour. In Figure 1 (see Appendix 2) we depict the needs of women based on our analysis of the questionnaire applied to all twenty-four members of the forum and the activities developed by the groups in response to those needs. Although the majority of users of the groups have practical interests, i.e. the need for literacy, sanitation, water, day-care for children, education facilities, health care, agricultural training, employment, better work conditions, artcraft skills, cookery, electricity- the activities developed by the groups cover strategic interests i.e. struggles for rights and citizenship, political formation, discussions on gender issues, mobilisation, awareness campaign, documentation and information, training, workshops, courses and meetings. This strategic approach to practical needs is explained by Molineux (1982:234):

"the formulation of a strategic interest can only be effective as a form of intervention when full account is taken of these practical interests. Indeed it is the politicisation of these practical interests and their transformation into strategic interests that women can identify with and support which constitutes a central aspect of feminist political practices".

Despite the saying which claims that "Whoever pays the piper, calls the tune" the question of 'sponsorship' (d) was a difficult one to investigate. Several respondents left questions regarding sponsorship in the questionnaire unanswered. In general the centres avoid giving details about sponsors and, above all, about the amount they receive each year. This fact suggests competition between the groups for access to external financial sources (Fernandes, 1986), and that the capacity to secure external financing is seen as a demonstration of administrative efficiency which is translated
into political and social recognition.

Support for NGOs comes from six sources\(^{14}\): (i) International Co-operation - understood as financial resources from developed countries or multilateral agencies placed at the disposal of developing countries; (ii) Brazilian Co-operation - funding from Brazilian civil society organisations; (iii) Public Funds - provided by the State; (iv) Funds from Business - originating from international foundations, since Brazilian private enterprises do not co-operate with the women's movement; (v) Funds from Individuals - provided by membership; and (vi) Provision of Technical Services - payment in exchange for services provided to another group or entity.

The literature is divided concerning the relative advantages and disadvantages of international co-operation. For Oliveira (Harazim, 1994) foreign funds are an option for Brazilian NGOs, which prefer the former to local sources, since Brazilian foundations lack tradition in this field in which respectability is an important ingredient. Fernandes (1986), on the other hand, argues that local poverty is not the unique explanation for the majority of financial agencies being foreign. This also includes a cultural and capitalist issue since even those transnational enterprises which are responsible for non-profit foundations in their home country, appear to be influenced by the lack of social commitment in Latin America. Onorati (1992) draws attention to the ability of NGOs to raise funds from banks, corporate associations or direct commercial activities, but also indicates that NGOs can become bound to them with a consequent loss of autonomy. For him the organisation's degree of autonomy is directly related to its ability to establish priorities, evaluation criteria, styles of management and choice of social actors which can differ from those imposed by forces which control the current development model.

Onorati's argument concerning the autonomy of NGOs deserves serious reflection. The large majority of activists seem more concerned with competition between organisations and the possibility of obtaining large financial support than with the consequences of it for the organisation. For them their relationships with their sponsors are "good", that is all. Only Laranja and Pitanga commented this issue and expressed concern about it:

"international co-operation is concerned with Brazil as a strategic area rather than with Brazilian culture and needs. The agencies do not know anything about Brazilian social issues, such as, for example, women's issues. They divide the world into 'backyards' and exchange these back yards between them like, for example, USAID
which formerly financed population control in Brazil but now targets populations in Africa. While the priority of international co-operation in Brazil is gender development". (Isabel. Pitanga. Questionnaire. 25/11/97)

As one of the activists interviewed put it "we deal with international agencies, they visit us, we discuss together, however we cannot always pray the financial agency's prayer". (Rosa, Laranja's activist. Questionnaire. 10/08/97)

Of the 7 associations included in the Forum, only five declare the origin of their funds: Laranja, Acerola, Banana, Araçá, and Caju. Laranja obtains resources from national and international co-operation and sells art-craft; Acerola receives one minimum salary (R$ 120,00) from the local council to pay the rent of the house where the co-ordinator and her family live; Banana rents the first floor of its own house and the members donate R$1,00 a month when they can afford it. Araçá receives funds from community associations and Caju is self-financed although the respondent did not offer details about the matter. Pitomba's respondent left questions about funding unanswered whilst the respondent at Cajarana explained that their difficulties in obtaining financial resources were perhaps linked to ideological issues since, in its early days, the centre was a Communist women's organisation. It is important to note that seven entities of the Paraíba Women's Forum obtain financial support from federal, state or local government.

A further issue that deserves analysis with regard to the Forum's capacity to contribute effectively to women's empowerment is its ability to the articulate or network with other groups and with women in general. The power of the social movement lies in a combination of internal and external resources; the organisers of a movement depend on social networks in which supporters are found and on mobilising structures that link to one another rather than formal organisation in order to be successful. (Tarrow, 1994)

Articulation (or networking) is a 'magic' term used by the Brazilian women's movement with different meanings and one which generates discussion and rivalry between groups. But when analysed from the point of view of outcomes, it refers to the effectiveness of the organisation as reflected in the external environment. Articulation is above all a synonym for recognition by other groups and by potential sponsors. Melucci (1977:141) conceptualises it as "the capacity of making relationships with other components of the environment (organisations and social groups) to obtain support and consensus." - a definition which Oakley (1980)
reinforces.

The groups that form the Paraíba Women's Forum use articulation/networking as a means of covering different aspects of women's issues in addition to which each group builds their external links according to their chosen thematic areas and particular interests.

In Table 2 (see Appendix 3) we provide evidence of the Manga and Pitanga Centres' capacity to network within the Paraíba Women's Forum. Almost all the other groups interact in some way with the Manga Centre. This interaction includes above all: advisory work/services on women's issues; exchange of information, ideas and experience; study groups on women's issues; participation in events -workshops, seminars, meetings- organised by the Manga Centre; and training. Cajá is the exception: its informant said that they have no articulation with the Manga Centre even to the point of avoiding working with it. This information was not corroborated by our own observations: we met the co-ordinators of both groups working together on several occasions.

Whilst centres like Manga and Pitanga clearly exercise an important networking role other groups like, for example, Banana and Goiaba lack such basic information as a complete list of the members of the Forum and still others consider themselves discriminated. Araçá, Cajarana and Banana, for example, are not even invited to the Forum's meetings. In the opinion of the co-ordinator of Abacate, "there is struggle for power within the Feminist movement which results in information being monopolised and work boycotted."

The heterogeneity of the members of the Paraíba Women's Forum and the heterogeneity of former links (ideological, political, and of leadership) with other organisations of civil society necessarily creates tensions and conflicts. Cajá's informant declared that Cajá and Manga have "opposing ideological ideas". Abacaxi avoids working with Umbu "because they are not aware of women's issues and have strong links with the Catholic Church". Such divergences can clearly weaken the effectiveness of the Forum as an instrument of women's empowerment.

**Final considerations**
With such a complex and heterogeneous physiognomy it is not surprising that there exist tensions and conflicts within the Forum. These tensions arise not only from the different status of the groups: NGOs, associations, movements, etc. but also from ideological and religious differences. The role of the Catholic Church within the movement is of vital importance to its survival as one of the principal sources of finance -both direct and indirect-, as a provider of infrastructure and human resources and as a spiritual force of inspiration. However, at the same time, the Church has made discussion of certain important themes like abortion and male domination very delicate for a number of women's groups. Thus whilst the Catholic Church is an important ally it is also an inhibiting factor. Several groups avoid themes and activities which might antagonise the church. Whilst a certain level of suspicion and distrust exists between what are considered the professional ranks of the movement represented by NGOs and non-professionals represented by volunteer militants from associations and movements and between different ideological and political party positions, a prevailing climate of pragmatism apparently blurs these conflicts and permits the groups to work for common objectives.

The forum itself can hardly be characterised as a democratic space. Participation does not take place on an equal basis and certain groups, like the district associations (associações de bairro) who would like to participate, are barred from doing so. As noted above, some groups are systematically not invited to Forum meetings and others are so badly informed concerning the forum as not to know its true composition. In this sense it would be true to say that the sum of the activities developed by individual groups and centres is more important than the dynamic produced by the forum. Individual groups contribute to the process of women's empowerment by means of the training given to activists, by means of the activities they organise for the users of their organisations, by their use or access to the media and by their practice of networking with other groups and with the external environment.

The way in which political participation is conceived and practised within the movement is perhaps one of the areas of greatest controversy. Within the State of Paraíba the number of women in elected representative positions has grown. In 1992 the state elected a total of 216 women councillors and in 1996 this number grew to 336. However, there is at present little research to demonstrate whether in fact these elected representatives support feminist causes. Many of the women's groups reject the notion of double militancy - the conjugation of party politics and feminist militancy. Thus the space in which the majority of the groups operate is characterised by what we have defined as non-institutional politics. However, whilst voicing a certain distrust and refusal of institutional party politics there is an underlying
recognition that many of the feminist causes can only gain force when enshrined in adequate laws. Thus while state and the UN are viewed with suspicion there is recognition that without a confluence between grassroots movements and international movements and national and local governments true gender equality will not be achieved. As Jacquette concludes: "Women's organisations operate at the crucial border between civil society and the state and create new hope that citizenship can be expanded and that a political consensus for greater social justice can be negotiated."(1994:233)

Bibliographical References


Table 1. The Main Characteristics of The Paraíba Women's Forum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Entity</th>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Scope</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>User</th>
<th>Financial Ag.</th>
<th>Main Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Acerola Cardeal</td>
<td>local</td>
<td>association</td>
<td>women</td>
<td>Membership</td>
<td>support issues: law, health, struggles for housing, income</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Abacaxi Arribacã</td>
<td>local</td>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>women</td>
<td>from</td>
<td>Fastenopfer, MZF workshops, meetings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Banana Galo de</td>
<td>local</td>
<td>association</td>
<td>domestic maids</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>cookery course, information on working rights</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4 Caju Rouxinol internatl association professionalwomen self-financed women's promotion

5 Mangaba Bentivi sub-regional NGO rural women Brooklin, Trocaire, E.E.C. trade union and political formation

6 Graviola Rouxinol local association Teachers, housewives, working-class women. ACDI,

Secour Tiere

Monde seminars, courses, workshops,

meetings on women's issue

7

Mamão Galo de

Campina

sub-region

trade union

trade union women trade union

contribution seminars, debates, conferences, mobilization

8

Abacate

Rouxinol

State

government women from

Carirys
Government actions in general

Pinha Galo de Campina

local government working-class women

Government awareness campaign, public policy

Pitanga Rouxinol

local Feminist NGO women, students, professional health workers Bilance, Brazilian Government, F. Ford, IWHC counselling, documentation, control of reproduction assistance

Pitomba Rouxinol national
association Handicapped Women
no answer
visits, meetings spiritual retreat

12 Araça Rouxinol State association
Membership Contribution of Members to unite the community
13 Maracujá Rouxinol local catholic group Poor women
no support studies, theology and spirituality

meetings

14

Goiaba

Beija Flor

sub-region

trade union Rural working women trade union

associations to bring women together to discuss women's issues, human rights

15

Laranja

Sabíá

sub-region

association

Rural women OXFAM, Christian Aid, CESE seminars, meetings, training, production, radio programme

16

Umbu

Rouxinol

local Catholic

Group

prostitutes Misereor, Brazilian government Visits, prostitution centres,

Seminars, workshops 17 Jaca Canário Sub-region academic Women Brazilian government Research on violence, radio programme, literacy
Carambola
Rouxinol
State professional
organisation public in general Brazilian government Defence of human rights and social justice

Tamarindo
Rouxinol
local
NGO
housewives Project sent to
Netherlands Artcraft, alternative medicine,
hair care for local community

Sapotí
Rouxinol
local
NGO women from the
popular movement OXFAM, D & P,
EZE Development of projects
Jaboticaba

Rouxinol

State

political party

women Political party

Members Seminars in the municipalities

22

Manga

Rouxinol

local

Feminist NGO women, students,

women's groups

ICCO, OXFAM Training, counselling, workshops, advisory services, seminars, mobilization, documentation. 23 Cajarana Rouxinol State association trade union women no support Skills

24

Cajá

Rouxinol

State

trade union urban trade union women CESE

CCIC Seminars, courses on gender for trade union affiliates

Fastenopfer, Katholisches Hilfswerk Schweiz (Switzerland, Catholic Church); MZF - Missionszentrale der Franziskaner (Germany, Catholic Church); ICCO - Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation (Netherlands); OXFAM (UK and
Ireland); Brooklin (Switzerland); Trocaire (Ireland, Catholic Church); EEC- European Economic Community; Bilance (Netherlands); D & P Développement et Paix (Canada); EZE Evangelische Zentralstelle für Entwicklungshilfe e.V. (Germany, Protestant Churches); Misereor/ Katholische Zentralstelle für Entwicklungshilfe (Germany, Roman Catholic Apostolic Church); Christian Aid (UK, Protestant Churches); CESE Coordenadoria Ecumênica de Serviço (Brazil supported by five evangelical churches: Anglican Episcopal, Methodist, Independent Presbyterian, United Presbyterian, and Lutheran plus the Roman Catholic Church); CCIC Canadian Council for International Cooperation.

**TABLE 2: RELATIONSHIPS OF EXCHANGE BETWEEN THE MEMBERS OF THE PARAÍBA WOMEN'S FORUM**

|   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| f | r | f | f | f | f | r | f | f | f | r | f | f | f | f | f | f | f | f | f | f | f | f | f |

f: frequent ; r: regular; i: irregular; c: correspondence only

The numbers correspond to the names of the groups as they appear in Table 1.

**Notes**


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1. The research project will form the basis for a Ph.D. Thesis to be submitted to the School of Social Policy, University of Manchester, supervised jointly by Dr. Duncan
Scott (UM) and Dr. Timothy Ireland (UFPB).

2. For the purpose of this paper we take 'institutional politics' to mean 'party political militancy'.

3. Lima defines women's oppression as an "abuse of domination among human beings. In practice it is characterised by physical, moral and intellectual 'crushing' which is detected through the pressure exercised by the male sex over the female sex." (Lima, 1988: 36)

4. The terms 'feminism', 'feminist' and 'women's movement' are linked and are at times used almost as synonyms. 'Feminism' is originally of French origin, whilst 'women's movement' is a North American term. The term 'feminism' has different social meanings, for some people it is pejorative and for others it is honorific, however it is commonly used to refer to those who seek the end of women's subordination. (JAGGAR, 1983).


6. Out of a total population of 146,825,475 in 1991, 74,340,353 were women and 72,485,122 were men (IBGE, 1991).


9. DOSSIÊ DE ELISABETE TEIXEIRA. Centro da Mulher 8 de Março, João Pessoa.

10. DOSSIÊ DE MARGARIDA ALVES. Centro da Mulher 8 de Março, João Pessoa.


12. In order to protect the identity of the groups all have been given fictitious titles (the names of fruits found in the northeast region).

13. Beijing Declaration and the Platform of Action - final document of the 4th World Conference on Women, which was adopted unanimously by 189 countries including Brazil. (United Nations, 1995).

14. Our argument in this section is based on an adaptation of Oliveira Neto's (1992) division of potential sources for NGOs.

15. R$120,00 corresponds to US$ 115.00

16. According to Zald and Ash (1966:330) the external environment is made up of "people who identify with the movement (and therefore) represent the potential support base for the organisation [...]".