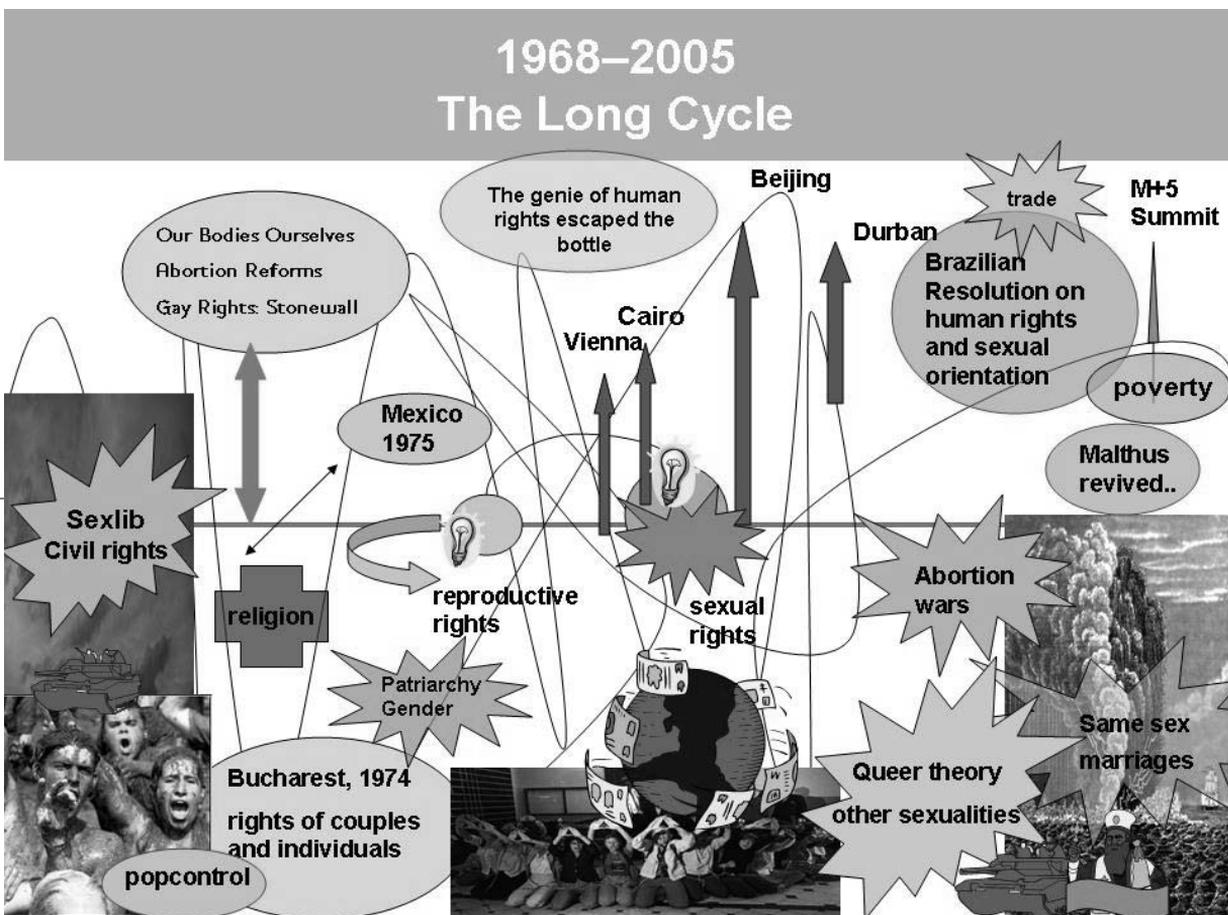


# Sexualities and Development: A Story in Pictures

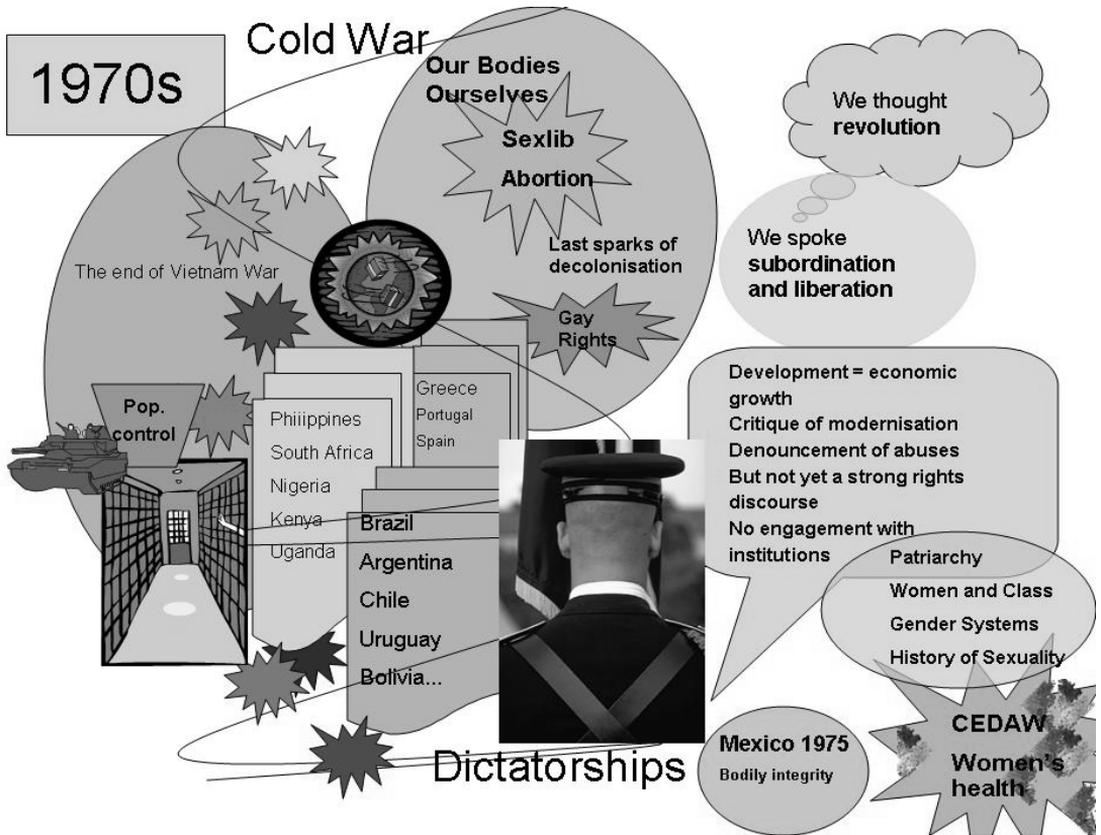
Sonia Corrêa



Current debates on sexuality and development need to be seen in relation to a longer historical cycle. Ideally, this exercise should take us back as far as the seventeenth century. It was then that, at least in the Western

experience, deep changes took place in the way people thought and talked about sexuality in moral, scientific and political terms. These in turn impacted on people's real lives. There is no space in this piece to trace back

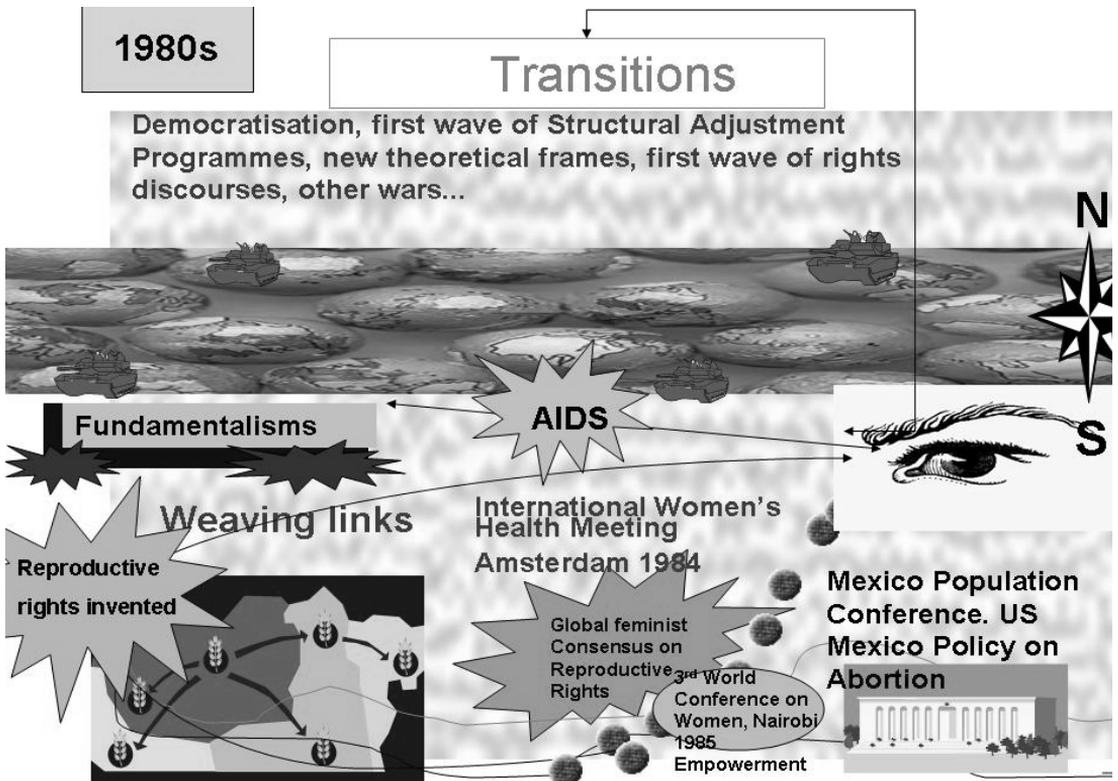
the entire trajectory of this evolving debate. But we can at least locate current debates within the context of the last three decades.



We will start with the 1970s: we can recall a global war (Vietnam), a few dictatorships (including in Europe), but at the same time key conceptual and political breakthroughs in the gender and sexuality field. This included a challenge to patriarchy as a legitimate system and, most importantly, the invention of the concept of sex/gender systems

(1974–5). To this we should also add the *History of Sexuality* by Foucault (1976–8), which remains a landmark of contemporary sex theorising. At the end of the decade, a key transformation would start in the development field with the adoption of the Washington Consensus, so-called because it immediately engaged the World Bank and the

International Monetary Fund (IMF). This advocated stringent cuts in public expenditures and greater emphasis on market forces as the main motor of development, along the lines of the economic reform adopted by the Thatcher administration in the UK.

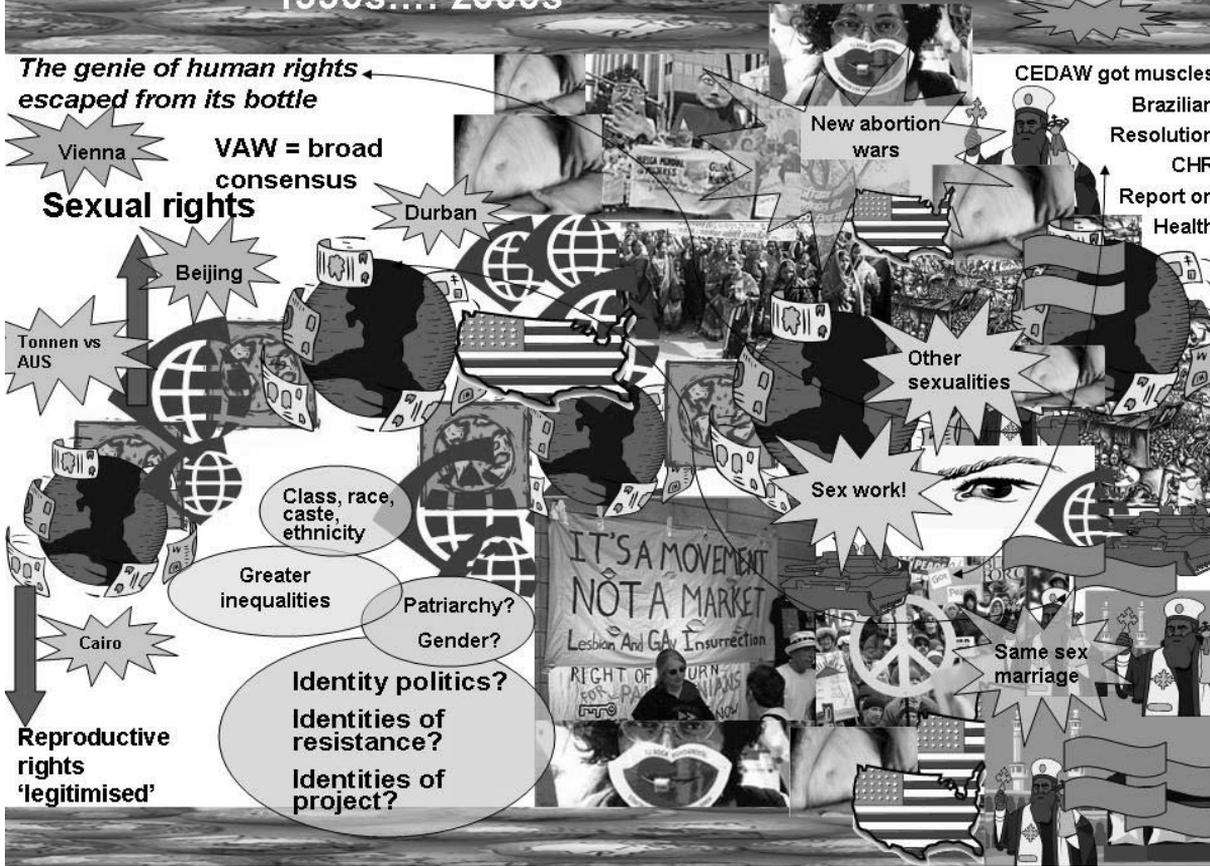


Then came the 1980s, a time of great transitions culminating in the fall of the Berlin Wall and Communist states in the former USSR in 1989. The gender and sexuality field took on broad new theoretical frames. This was also the time when we saw the emergence and rapid global expansion of HIV/AIDS. The Washington Consensus gained legitimacy and strength, while at

the same time, connections were made across boundaries in respect to gender equality, reproductive rights, and to a lesser extent, sexuality related agendas. The key examples of this were the initial implementation of CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), the Amsterdam Conference of 1984, in which a global feminist consensus was

achieved with regard to the concept of reproductive rights, and the United Nations Third World Conference on Women, held in Nairobi in 1985. This was also a time of democratisation south of the Equator. In some contexts, for example in Latin America, the democratic struggles of the 1980s created space for public debate on abortion and the rights of 'sexual minorities'.

1990s.... 2000s



This takes us to the paradoxes of the 1990s and 2000s. Globalisation has intensified and within it we witnessed the continuation of market-oriented policy prescriptions. There has also been rapid growth in moral conservatism and

fundamentalisms. However, optimistically, we have also experienced the positive expansion of transnational sexual politics. We have also seen the major policy breakthrough of the UN conferences (Vienna 1993; Cairo

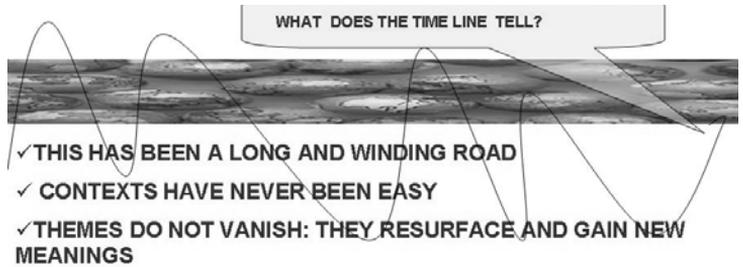
1994; Beijing 1995) and the proliferation of local and global level struggles in relation to abortion, HIV and AIDS, and sexuality itself.

## Sexuality and development

The figures took us on a quick tour through the contemporary history of sexuality and sexual rights. The next step is to explore the connections between sexuality and development. This immediately raises major questions: what do we mean by development? What do we mean by sexuality?

## Development

Is development the laundry list we can find in the 2006 Millennium Summit Document: investment, debt, trade, education, rural and agricultural development, employment, HIV and AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other health issues, gender equality, science and technology for development, migration. Or is it simply economic growth? Is it capitalism? Modernisation? Or should we say that development is the gradual expansion of modernity? Is it social progress (whatever this term may mean)? Or is it emancipation of self and of societies? Should development be the continuous effort to



## 1990s–2000s

- ✓ INTENSIFICATION AND ACCELERATION
- ✓ GREATER INEQUALITIES, UNCERTAINTIES, RISK
- ✓ NEW CONCEPTUAL FRAMES
- ✓ GREATER INTELLECTUAL AND POLITICAL CONNECTIVITY GLOBAL
- ✓ RELIGION >> FUNDAMENTALISM
- ✓ BOUNDED CULTURES >> MULTI-CULTURALISM. HYBRIDISM

construct societies and a global system based on democracy, social justice, human rights and expanding human capabilities?

## Sexuality

Is sexuality the same as sex? Is it about anatomical differences? Does sexuality = sex = fixed and unchangeable biological drives (an essentialist view)? Or, on the

contrary, do we understand sexuality as socially constructed by society, economics, politics and more (a constructivist view)? Is sexuality a universal feature of human experience? Or does it vary across history and culture?

## The time line

How does development deal with sexuality? We find that development language regarding sexuality is far from transparent. Sexuality is never directly spoken about, yet it is here all the time. This is sharply illustrated by the population–development discourse. Since Thomas Malthus (English demographer and political economist) in the late eighteenth century, the main focus of population discourse has been fertility. Malthus spoke directly, although negatively, about sex. However, the discourses of population and development policies, which were put in place after the Second World War, did not talk about sex.

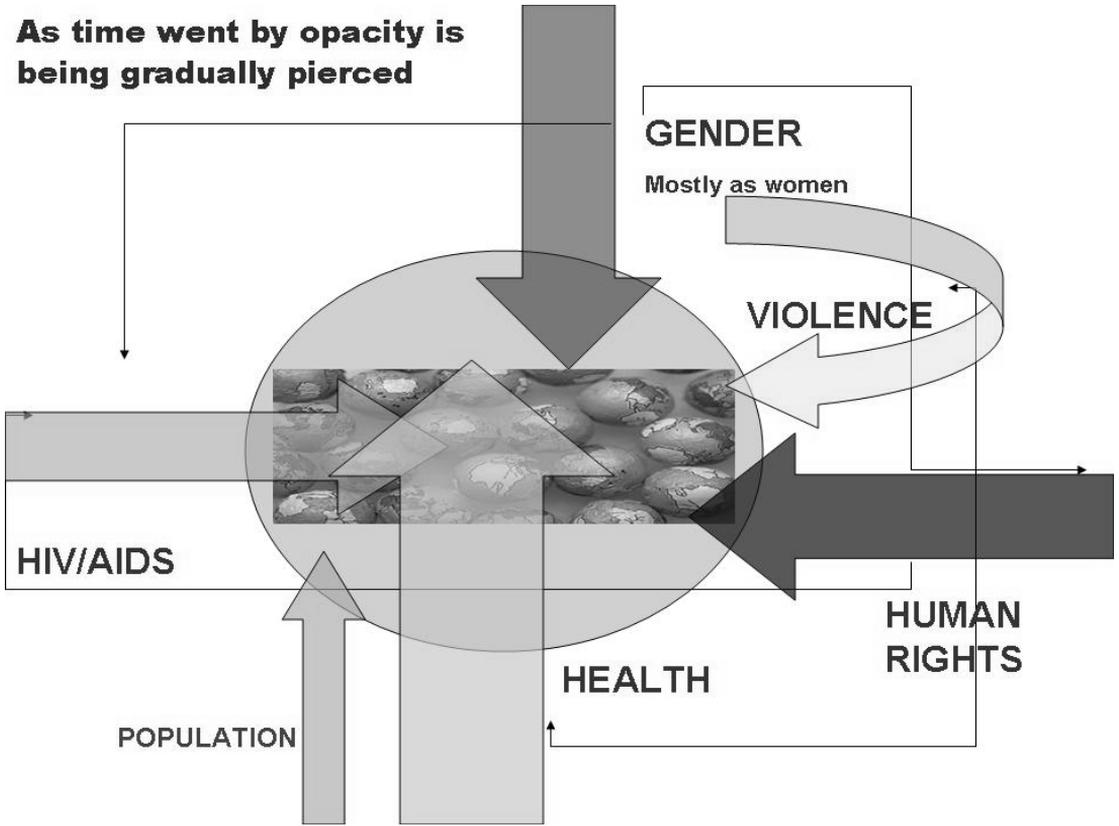


## Postwar development discourses:

- ✓ ECONOMICIST (MODERNISATION AND TRICKLE DOWN EFFECTS)
- ✓ GENDER BLIND, GENDER NEUTRAL, GENDER BIASED
- ✓ OPAQUE IN REGARD TO SEXUALITY
- ✓ THE BEST EXAMPLE BEING 'POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE'

## WHAT EXPLAINS THAT?

**As time went by opacity is being gradually pierced**



**Piercing the opacity**

Since the 1970s, we have gradually broken through these walls of silence, or opacity, around sexuality. This has occurred not so much at the level of theoretical frames, but in the more concrete

area of policy, as an effect of both the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the 1990s UN negotiations concerning gender, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. In the complex and paradoxical scenario of the 1990s to 2000s,

development has begun to recognise the significance of sexuality. This has also provoked a reaction by regressive forces, which aims to push sexuality back either out of sight or to the criminal margins.

One obstacle to making a positive connection between sexuality and development is that often development thinking – both mainstream and progressive – takes for granted conceptions that contemporary sexuality thinking would challenge. In particular, sex essentialism, i.e. the idea that sex is a given biological drive directed toward the reproduction of the species, remains an underlying assumption of conceptual frames and policy guidelines across development work. This contrasts sharply with the idea of sex as constructed which informs progressive contemporary sexuality thinking, research and advocacy.

One example of this is the radically different vision expressed by the development and sexuality fields with regard to 'health'. The field of development by and large regards public health interventions as positive elements of human development. However, critical theory on sexuality has looked at the ways the biomedical approach disciplines and regulates gender and sexuality, and both derives from and leads to discrimination, exclusion, stigma and even criminalisation.

The challenge is therefore to open up development discourse to more fully incorporate sexuality. At the same time, we must also recognise challenges in the area of sexuality itself, among them the need to consistently and persistently redefine, and refine, what we mean by sexual rights.

## PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE

**BUT YET...**

**THE HARDCORE OF DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE REMAINS UNTOUCHED**

✓ **SEXUALITY IS VIEWED AS AN EXTERNALITY**

✓ **ESSENTIALIST VIEW PREVAILS. SEXUALITY STILL SEEN AS A BIOLOGICAL DRIVE (NOT AS CONSTRUCTED BY SOCIETY, ECONOMICS, ETC.)**

✓ **SEXUALITY IS: HETEROSEXUAL ADULTS HAVING SEX IN A NICE COUPLE'S BEDROOM... (OR TRANSGRESSION)**

## THE CHALLENGE OF REFINING SEXUAL RIGHTS

### DISTINGUISH AND ARTICULATE

✓ **GENDER AND SEXUALITY**

✓ **HEALTH AND RIGHTS**

✓ **REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL**

### TO AVOID

✓ **FUSIONS AND CONFUSIONS**

✓ **THE TENDENCY TO EMPHASISE THE NEGATIVE SIDES OF SEXUALITY (DISEASE, VIOLENCE AND ABUSE)**

### PURSUE FURTHER CLARITY IN RESPECT OF:

✓ **THE LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES OF HUMAN RIGHTS DISCURSIVE REGIMES**

✓ **BALANCE WITH RESPECT TO PROTECTION AND FREEDOM, STATE RESTRAINT AND/OR INTERVENTION**

✓ **THE CROSS IMPLICATIONS OF SEXUALITY AND CRIMINAL LAW**

✓ **THE ARTICULATION OF SEXUALITY, POVERTY, INEQUALITY**

### PRINCIPALLY, EXPOSE SEXUAL RIGHTS DISCOURSE TO THE TEST OF CONTEXTUALISATIONS:

**CULTURE AND RELIGION**

**KINSHIP**

**CLASS, RACE, CASTE, ETHNICITY**

## Looking forward

### Re-inventing social contracts

The DAWN feminist network (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) looks at how social values, norms, institutions, structures and practices determine the evolution of different dimensions of human rights. These dimensions include the economic, political and secular, as well as personal, in respect to sexuality and reproduction. So, how do we re-invent social contracts in order to realise sexual rights?

Struggle plays a central part in re-inventing social contracts. However, moments of collective agreement are equally important. We can regard these points of agreement as the defining moments of social contracts, which may be specific to a point in time, for example the birth of a nation state, the creation of its Constitution. But they can also be more diffuse, for example when social practices, such as gender

equality and sexual autonomy, are recognised as legitimate dimensions of rights and justice. The making of agreements requires participation by different groups, to whom values, norms and roles within structures are assigned.<sup>1</sup>

### Crafting a political economy of sexuality

Richard Parker (2001), writing about the HIV/AIDS epidemic, emphasises the role of structural violence – whether coming from globalisation trends, class, gender, race or ethnicity – in creating vulnerability. These factors must be systematically integrated into all discussions about sexuality. Altman (2001) speaks more directly of a political economy perspective that ‘recognises the role of the state alongside concern for cleavages of class, gender, race: we need to think in terms of structures rather than specific issues or identities of sexuality’. Altman identifies four structural clusters which will

determine the transformation of the current “sexscape” (landscape of human sexuality):

- 1 The economic
- 2 The cultural
- 3 The political (with emphasis on state regulation)
- 4 The epistemological (particular ways of understanding sexualities, human beings and the worlds they make).

He also praises the conceptual frame developed by Nancy Fraser (1997). This identifies three ways of connecting cultural meaning with an analysis of structures:

- 1 Recognition (of identities and difference)
- 2 Redistribution (of resources and power) and
- 3 Situatedness (retaining an idea of context).

These three principles can guide our frame for action.

## LOOKING FORWARD

✓RE-INVENTING SOCIAL CONTRACTS IN WAYS THAT WILL ENSURE THAT SEXUALITY IS RECOGNISED AS A SOURCE OF WELL-BEING, ENTITLEMENTS AND FULFILMENT (DAWN)

OR, IF WE WANT

✓TO CRAFT A POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SEXUALITY THAT INCORPORATES HUMAN RIGHTS, ACKNOWLEDGES THE FLUIDITY AND INSTABILITY IN SEXUALITIES AND IS GUIDED BY POLITICS OF REDISTRIBUTION AND RECOGNITION (ALONG THE LINES DEVELOPED BY FRASER)

THANK YOU!

## Notes

- \* Based on a presentation delivered at the 'Realising Sexual Rights' workshop, held at IDS, 28–30 September 2005.

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- 1 Revised excerpt from *Re-inventing Social Contracts: The Promise of Human Rights – A Book Outline*, by Gita Sen and Sonia Corrêa, mimeo, 2005.

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