*UNITED NATIONS INTELLECTUAL HISTORY PROJECT*
*The Graduate School and University Center, City University of New York*
*365 Fifth Avenue*
*New York, NY 10016*

**TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW OF**

# NOELEEN HEYZER

**BY**

**THOMAS G. WEISS**

**New York, 21 February 2002**

Transcribed by Ron Nerio

THOMAS G. WEISS: This is the 21st of February, 2002, Tom Weiss with Noeleen Heyzer at 304 East 45th Street, the headquarters for UNIFEM (UN Development Fund for Women). I wanted to start at the beginning. Obviously from your name, you have mixed parentage. I just wondered to what extent these cultural influences you think ultimately—obviously they contributed to making you the person you are—but contributed to any kind of interest in international cooperation, international affairs, international exchanges. What, in that background, actually helped make you the person you are today?

NOELEEN HEYZER: The moving force in my life has been the coming together of two lineages. My father had a middle-class Dutch burgher background, from Holland, Sri Lanka, and Calcutta. He came down to Singapore with the British army during the colonial period. The Dutch burghers had a lot more power in Sri Lanka in the colonial era than they did after independence. My mother's lineage came out of the Straits Chinese population as well as the famine of southern China. So it was the coming together of different forces. This history did shape my life because of the way these forces intertwined and created family structures, relationships, processes of change in the context of Singapore as a colony. I was affected by the struggle against colonialism and what colonialism did to people as well as their livelihoods.

I was born in 1948, just after the World War, when Singapore was still under colonial rule. From very early on, I experienced how a middle-class household fell into poverty. It fell into poverty because of a redefinition of skills and the importance of having paper qualification to give value, recognition, and legitimacy to skills. My father came to Singapore from Calcutta with the British army. He was brought in because he knew homeopathic medicine and traditional massage. During the war, he was used by the army medical unit to provide alternative healing for stress and traumas.

But after that period, his skills were considered illegitimate because he did not have a degree. He could not find a livelihood. So, we lost a male income earner. And the society was not ready for women to play a very strong role in the economy. That created tremendous difficulties during my early life. My father was destroyed by his war experience and the devaluation of his knowledge; my mother's life ended when she was twenty-six.

For a long time, I found myself trying to understand the intertwining of peoples' everyday life with historical forces. After my mother's death, I landed in one of the poorest slum areas for migrants. But it was also a place with the largest resistance forces and organizing activity for overturning colonialism, for political independence. Here was where the main leaders at that time from China, from India, would visit to mobilize the migrant workforce. It was a highly creative, bubbling kind of community with its mutual-aid societies, clans, markets, street operas, and temples.

From there, I saw the creativity of human resistance. I saw the capacity of people to recreate new worlds. And I also experienced the way in which networks were being built by people to support one another. A sense of solidarity was there. But whilst I was in that space, I was also sent to a very elite catholic school in Singapore. So I experienced very different worlds. And the conversations were very different. In the elite school, people would create policies, would define what the world was. Their conversations did not capture the reality that I was experiencing or the kind of admiration I had for people in the community I was living in. And yet, there was a sense of power and righteousness.

So I knew about power relationships, about who had the right to define whose reality. These very complex forces captured my imagination as a child. By the time I was in my teens, the independence struggle in Singapore had already begun. So I knew about resistance. I knew

that people could create new worlds. I also experienced the processes of nation-building, of developing social institutions for stability.

The whole process of institution-building and of creating common good—managing for a common future—were of great interest to me. Development was not just a theoretical issue for me; it came from having lived it very deeply.

TGW: I don't think you're unusual in that respect.

NH: I'm so glad to hear that.

TGW: How did your parents choose a Roman Catholic school? How did they actually pay for it? And what kind of impact did Catholic education and training ultimately have on the way you framed issues, thought about issues, and interacted with people?

NH: It was interesting because until then I was almost never sent to school. I told you I was living in poverty. My grandmother was shocked that by the time I was eight I was still not in school. So she went to see the archbishop. I don't know how she did that, not knowing English, yet she managed to communicate with him. Through strength of personality, she got him to visit the family. When he saw me he thought I was intelligent and decided that the best place to put me was this elite catholic school. So I landed there.

My grandmother, actually my uncle and my aunt—her children—decided that they would pay for my education. That was how I got educated. I had an ambiguous relationship with the Catholic religion. I found the school imposing. I found that they were not in touch with reality, that they were isolated, and so on. Yet much later—and this shaped me in not thinking in black and white, or coming to quick stereotypical conclusions, because I saw the complexities of things—I realized that the people who were really instrumental in shaping my mental strength, and even my power of analysis, were the Jesuit priests.

It was the priests who somehow noticed me. There were at least five priests in my life, and each one of them gave me a different gift. One basically taught me what it meant to be a leader. He stressed that real leadership was service and doing the ordinary things extraordinarily well. Another taught me a new way of thinking about the world and myself so that we could get out of how society defines us. Singapore was still an identity-based society, so you had to fit into ethnic groups. You were either Chinese, Indian, or other. But he literally shifted my thinking out of the social construct of identity into another more universal and spiritual frame. The whole idea of transcendence, that you can actually transcend and recreate from that position of transcendence was very powerful and has always remained with me.

Another priest taught me social analysis. I was very much influenced by the theology of liberation at that time and definitely by the issue of social justice. So for me, this relationship—if it did anything to me, it developed a sense of moral commitment, of moral outrage about social injustice, as well as an understanding that development must have an ethical base.

So there were many things that I disliked about the Church. I found it very autocratic, unable to take in other peoples' experiences. I found so many things wrong with it, especially since I was living in a community that practiced Buddhism, Taoism, and Chinese religion. But at the same time, there were still things in it that strengthened me.

TGW: As a former Jesuit—

NH: Oh, my God!

TGW: During this period, I wonder if you have any recollections of something that happened next door, namely in Bandung, at the Afro-Asian summit that became, subsequently,

the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Was this something that popped up at the time, or that you became aware of afterwards?

NH: I will tell you what I was aware of. I was very aware of the decolonization movements that were taking place. I was very aware of socialism because in the community where I grew up people were mainly from China. If you look at Singapore's history, people call the area I grew up in the "hotbed of radicalism." I was also very aware of the Cold War, and the consequences of the Cold War, because that shaped the way that we had to behave. Whoever was interested in the issues of social justice or to enter into the dialogue on nation-building, if we moved out of a particular frame of reference, we immediately fell into a category where people could label us. And that became extremely dangerous because it was at a time when people were also being detained and tortured for certain beliefs.

The whole region was, at that time, in flux. I was very aware also of the Indonesian struggle, because it was during the Sukarno period, when our city centers were bombed because some Indonesians were very opposed to the setting up of what they saw as a neocolonial entity. My secondary school was by the seaside, nearest to some of the Indonesian islands. I remember putting the gum paper right across the windows so that when the bombs came the glass wouldn't spread everywhere.

There were also riots. There was a riot over a Dutch girl who was adopted by a Muslim family and became a Muslim. Later on her Christian family wanted her back. There was a huge riot—the Maria Hertogh riot, which was a racial riot. So there was a sense of instability, a sense of fermentation. I was not involved in political discussions at that time. It was much later in my teenage-adult years that I became very involved in discussions on nation-building and the consequences of the different development directions being taken by countries in the region.

TGW: Singapore became independent in 1965. This was relatively late for the entire wave that occurred. Were you surprised at how long it took? Was there a great amount of frustration, or did it just seem inevitable and it was taking a long time?

NH: Well, actually, it was a two-stage independence process. Singapore was first part of Malaysia, so it actually achieved independence from the British much earlier. Many people felt at that time that it was too small an entity to survive on its own, and therefore the issue was how should it be integrated. How should it be positioned? Southeast Asia was a region in crisis, where the old system had died but the new was yet to be born. There was fear. At that time, the fear was China and Indonesia where over one million people, mainly Chinese were killed by the military as suspected communists. The fear was that if Singapore remained outside of the Malay region, with the domino effect and what was happening in the country, it could be a next Vietnam. There was a lot of fear about that.

There was this whole discussion of where Singapore should be. Eventually, people felt that it should be within Malaysia. But the issue of ethnicity and the nature of nation-state and what kind of a future should we have—created major tensions. One group favored meritocracy, whereby people would have equal opportunities independent of their ethnic background. But there was another discussion that was very much rooted in the fact that most of the Malays were poor and living in the rural areas. They argued that you couldn't have a meritocracy when people came from very different positions, so what was needed was a Malay state that gave greater opportunities to the rural areas and to the Malays.

There was a major debate about poverty across ethnicity. Did poverty coincide with one ethnic line? Or did it also cover the Indian enclaves in the plantations, the indigenous groups in Sabah and Sarawak, or the Chinese population in Singapore that came from the slum areas that I

was talking about? So there was a major discussion. And it took a long time to find the right framework, one that would not set us up for the kind of fragmentation which we see many of nation-states currently experiencing.

Eventually, because Singapore insisted on a meritocracy, the tensions were far too high and there were fears of racial riots. When racial tensions rose, Singapore was pushed out of Malaysia and since it could not integrate with the Malay region, the politics of survival meant that it became more integrated with the international economic system.

TGW: When you got to the university, why sociology? Did you think about anything else, or did this seem like a building-block to understand this fascinating mosaic of a life you had already led?

NH: I was actually trained first in mathematics and the sciences. I enjoyed that as a discipline. I enjoyed learning all the chemical reactions and the formulas. But it didn't give me enough. There was so much in me that I needed to understand. I knew there was a world with human complexities, and I was fascinated by the interfacing of everyday human life with the context in which people lived and with the strong historical forces that were being played out. I saw how human lives were shaped by those forces, but also how human resistance and creativity shaped those forces themselves.

I needed to learn so much. And I needed time to understand. So sociology fascinated me, anthropology too, and political science. I was very lucky because I was too poor to be sent abroad, but at that time Singapore made some wise decisions. Among them, the decision to bring the best minds and the best teachers from different universities to the country so that more people could be exposed to them. When I was in the university, I thought I had some of the best

teachers. I had great teachers from Germany, from Cambridge, from Yale, from Cornell, from the Australian National University.

I enjoyed my university life in Singapore tremendously, especially growing out of the Singapore school system of rote learning. And that is why math and the sciences were relatively good for me in school, because they fitted into that mode of learning. But in university, when I did sociology, it was to have a new mind-set, a new way of thinking. My teachers brought me to new ways of understanding. Instead of using only materials from other countries, they encouraged us to be the creators of our own knowledge. That was what I found really exciting, because they legitimized our own knowing and they tried to help us to make sense of it. I spent a lot of time trying to reconstruct this old community that I came from. I tried to understand the migrant population. And sociology was extremely useful.

TGW: Which of these people made the biggest impression on you and why? Which books do you recall having read that were important? And perhaps, at least for me, what happened in the café or bar or wherever people hung out at the time? This was the period that coincided with my own university period. And this was a period of upheaval in North America and in Mexico and Europe. Did any of this get to Singapore, or did you have other problems?

NH: Well, it was interesting because it was like there was a two-stage reality. One was that many of our families came out of the Japanese war. They came out of the political struggle, out of poverty. They saw new opportunities. Many of them did not want to talk about any political issues in the household. The household was all about security, food. It was about having everyday rhythms when for very long time people didn't have everyday rhythms. It was trying to create security from that kind of everyday living.

But then there were those of us who were students. And we were ready to participate and understand our society more and deeply. At that time, there was the whole discussion about Vietnam. And also, about democracy, about socialism, the market economy, capitalism, what kind of a road do you take to build a viable future. So I joined this club, one of the political clubs in Singapore University, which was called the Democratic Socialist Club. And I became the international secretary.

I was lucky because, from there, I was sent to the Scandinavian countries at the age of about twenty or twenty-one to learn what they called the "third way." And this was about how could the market economy be used for socialist purposes, for social needs. And there was a big discussion about what kind of institutions were needed. How do you deal with the labor unions that were the engine of the anticolonial independence struggle? What do you do with a labor movement that was so radicalized, but then had to change to one that was more integrated with the nation-state? Nation states did not want old forms of resistance because now they were struggling with partnerships and coalitions of political parties to create new democracies.

That trip to Europe was very special because I went to the Nordic countries and had discussions with the youth, internationally as well, while looking at what else people were doing with labor unions and other democratic institutions. There I met Gunnar Myrdal, who discussed and gave me his book *Asian Drama*. It was very interesting for me to get a much larger perspective not just on Singapore but also on the whole region and what people thought about our experience.

So at a young age I was brought out to a different level of being. This constant level of transcendence—pulled out of my immediate existence. I get soaked in a particular reality, and

then I get pulled out so that I am not crushed or trapped by a particular experience. And I am able to see various linkages.

When I came back, I got quite involved with changes in the labor movement. My future husband and I were actually very good friends at that time with the secretary-general of the labor movement, who later on became the president of Singapore and then had to leave in disgrace. This friendship really helped me to understand the labor movement from within.

By then I had already started some fieldwork. Singapore was undergoing industrialization, trying to define how to build a strong enough economic structure to shift itself from an *entrepôt* economy to a more industrialized base, whereby it could integrate more with the international economy. That was the route it chose instead of becoming integrated with its neighbors.

I was very interested in how all of these industries were being set up, who comprised the labor force, and what was happening to the emerging economy. I literally stumbled into the economic zones that were being set up and found that at the center were not your skilled male workers but a very young female workforce in the factories. And I felt that the labor movement, which I had known very well and respect so much, did not take into account the issues affecting these young female workers.

TGW: Did you come to that experience intellectually? My student, and your colleague, Sumie Nakaya, who helped prepare these questions, mentioned that you actually worked in one of these free-trade zones. Did you go there to find out what was going on, or did you go there after you decided that there were problems?

NH: I started off, actually, not so much with the female workforce. I was at the Jurong Industrial Site, the first industrial site in the country. I met my husband, or the person who was

going to be my husband, on my trip in Europe. He is a Malaysian. He used to go to Jurong to visit the Malaysian migrant workers, some of whom came from his constituency. He was the youngest and most outspoken member of Parliament in Malaysia and represented the interests of the poor, including a constituency of Malaysian Chinese migrant workers in Singapore, most of whom worked in the shipyards. I would go there with him and just hang out, as you say, in the coffee shops and listen to the conversation.

Those conversations were about the working conditions. There were endless shipyard fires because of poor working conditions. There were also migrant workers who, at that time, because Singapore was rebuilding very, very quickly, with the high-rise flats—were literally falling-off buildings. So the whole issue of worker security was a major concern for me and for him. And I did take it up with the secretary-general of the labor movement; because they were migrants, he didn't feel that it needed to be addressed.

Because I was in that kind of an environment I also noticed all these young girls in the coffee shops. So whilst the guys were talking, I slipped over and started my own conversation. Then I realized there was a whole world there that had been overlooked. After that, I took up a job as a factory worker, to know and understand an entirely new experience.

TGW: As well as the Jesuits, I actually worked four years during the summers at steel mills.

NH: Tom, we are going to find we have a similar history in different parts of the world. And so it is no accident that you are interviewing me.

TGW: So development studies was a sensible M.A.? What did you focus on in the development studies, and how did that lead you to Cambridge to do a Ph.D.?

NH: I was very interested in how economic growth was generated and what it brought about. Up to then, my focus was on the social fabric of communities—what kept communities together and human struggles for freedom and creativity. After political independence, we were in a new phase of development dialogue, and the question was, how do you create jobs? How do you create economic opportunity so that you can actually sustain a viable human future? And what kind of jobs will give people dignity? How do you generate growth? And how do you share that growth?

In Singapore, there was already a deep sense of social responsibility to provide basic needs because the Singapore struggle, although people wouldn't want to admit it today, came out of a very socialist background. Therefore, the first thing that they would look at with growth is investment in housing and education, and basic services—water and sanitation. I remember, as I was growing up, trucks that used to collect the night soil from our sanitation sites. There was a big change to better sanitation and health. We moved away from a society plagued by TB (tuberculosis) and all kinds of illnesses, and became a healthier society. In fact, there used to be all kinds of campaigns—public health campaigns, using media and imposing fines to make people change behavior and traditional practices.

Actually, the former prime minister Lee Kwan Yew would admit very openly that he was fascinated by socialism. But he wanted "a socialism that worked," as he put it. How to use a market economy to support social needs and development. But now, nobody wants to talk about that framework anymore.

So the creation of jobs, social responsibility and accountability, and what happened with economic growth were of great interest to me. But at the same time, I realized that when the country was rebuilding its economy, and whilst we were drawing the boundaries of nation-state,

we were simultaneously drawing labor from poorer neighboring countries. At that time, it was mainly from Malaysia. Later on it was Bangladesh and Indonesia. There were all these migrant workers supporting the creation of our new economy, yet, they were not the people who were benefiting from the investment in social development because they could always be pushed out. And the political choices based on citizenship and participation in the voting system were not dependent on them.

So we, as Singaporeans, really benefited from economic growth with social investment. We could grow very fast precisely because we had a smaller population to invest in. But I saw Singapore embedded in the region, pulling labor and also sending labor back when not needed. I couldn't see these people as laborers because I got to know them as people and I heard their stories. So there was a sense also of concern, of how wealth was generated and the people excluded from that wealth. And I wanted to understand whether this was the cost of development, and what kind of development could be more inclusive without the involvement of some and the impoverishment of others.

So at the end of the day, I had to go into development studies. I wanted to find out what was happening elsewhere. Is this part of the necessary cost, or was it an unnecessary cost? Is there another more inclusive development? Is it sustainable? There were all these questions that were plaguing me.

I did my Master's looking at the emergence of a new industrial workforce. I looked at the emerging stratification system with the "affluent worker." So you had a stratified worker system—indeed, the emergence of new hierarchies, basically, a new stratification system that institutionalized inequalities.

TGW: How did you get to Cambridge?

NH: Luck. My supervisors made me apply for a scholarship. I was the top student of sociology for my year, and they felt that I had the potential of going further. Actually, immediately after graduation, I went to work in a British bank because my family wanted me to work after the first degree.

But within six months, I knew it was not for me. I got a scholarship from Singapore University to do my Master's. Later on I got a scholarship to go to Cambridge. But Cambridge for me was a place of very deep, profound changes. Cambridge, in a way, made me who I am today. At least it was a big piece of how I evolved.

TGW: Could you be more specific? Was there some school of thought? Post-structuralism was very popular at the time. Where did you situate yourself in that? Universities are oftentimes great learning experiences, and one confronts new ideas and things. But rarely have I heard someone describe this as such an important part. So it would be great to hear some details.

NH: Actually, it was the library of Cambridge. I never had time nor space to be alone because of the closeness of the family structure. I never had my own room until the last year of university. I never had a place where I could actually think through things properly. Many things still didn't crystallize for me. I was still trying to read and trying to understand. Cambridge gave me space. It gave me time. And it gave me the chance to be alone. That was the best part because it was in that solitude that I found my own voice.

The first year was really hard because I found everyone living in their own head. The kind of vibrancy in the communities that I talked about where everybody lived in everybody else's space did not exist. Suddenly, to find a place of solitude, of quietness. Nobody needed to talk to anybody else. That you could live in your head and have things going on inside that

nobody knew was a new experience for me. Solitude was something that was very precious. And going to the library, literally just reading, reading all the archives and all those books—how did I know that what was said was true? I wanted the evidence. So I spent a lot of time in the library going through all kinds of materials. That was fascinating.

The other important experience was the kind of friendships which I made. More than the lectures were these friendships. People were actually willing to go deep into themselves to really understand and to create—in other words, whereas reflection in Singaporean society would be seen as a luxury that few people would have, it was a wonderful time of people reflecting and sharing. The other fascinating thing about Cambridge was that every other person you met was a specialist in something or of some historical period. I came from such a modern society, where people talked about current events and not events that go back to the fifteenth century, or whatever. Suddenly there were all these people whose thoughts went back to God-knows-when. They helped me develop a strong historical frame. I also enjoyed the diversity of thoughts in people whom you met. I wouldn't say that it was one person or one school of thought; it was the whole experience.

TGW: And when you finished, you then went to the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex. Were you actually thinking of becoming an academic, God forbid? Or was this more your interest in research? Did you think about becoming permanently a member of the scholarly world?

NH: I was interested in academic knowledge. I love discipline and knowledge. But I wanted to use that to move things. I like the interaction between knowledge and action. I like deep understanding and coherence. But I also like to have a role in the shaping of human futures and directions. So the Institute of Development Studies at that time was fascinating to me. I

have been extremely lucky—they had the best people in development practice and thinking. Richard Jolly was there. Dudley Seers was there. Manfred Bienefeld was there. These were wonderful people who were dealing with the postcolonial period, helping countries to shape new possibilities.

I was also at that time very much involved with the ILO (International Labour Organization). It was at the World Employment Programme (WEP) that I got some of my articles published first. They were at the forefront of looking at the informal economy, going beyond the normal way of looking at economics. The Institute for Development Studies was a place for me to do research, to work, to get exposure. It was also the place where I came in touch with western feminism in a very deep sense.

TGW: Who was there? Was there somebody teaching this, researching it, or were the ideas just floating around?

NH: Actually, it had already started towards the end of my time in Cambridge. The World Employment Programme of the International Labour Organization also had something to do with it because they were collecting case studies of work that women academics were doing. At that time, it was about the women's labor force. I worked on the plantation economy. Besides industry, I was looking at the evolution of economies within the region—the attempts to shift from a commodity-based economy, to an industrial economy, to a service economy, and eventually to a knowledge-based economy.

The World Employment Programme was allowing us to publish and to discuss. A group of women came together and found that no systematic analysis had been done on many of these topics. So we created a network of women scholars and activist. Diane Elson was there. There were so many other people who were supportive. Lourdes Benería was there. Zubi Ahmed was

there. Dharam Ghai was there. It was important to have that kind of a space in the UN to do that, to have partnership with people from the Institute of Development Studies. It basically pulled in a group of women academics with some UN policy advisors. I wouldn't call them development practitioners, but definitely they were people who were developing policy advice.

TGW: Could you generalize about whether it is better to be within the UN system, or outside of the UN system, or to have your feet in both worlds in terms of producing ideas? Some people would argue that it's impossible to do research within the UN because of certain kinds of political constraints—political correctness, or however you want to bill it. But there seem to be pockets where occasionally good work goes on. Is there a generalization you could make about that?

NH: What I found was that, in that particular case, the UN provided the space to pull the thinking together. It may not necessarily be the space where the research is taking place as such. But they valued that kind of research; they promoted certain sets of ideas and turned it into policy advice. I am not sure whether, if that didn't take place, we would all have come together in that way. At that time, they had the resources to identify people who were around and to pull us together. It is extremely difficult to make any generalizations. I would see it, actually, as having the right leadership.

So it is not the UN as such. The UN provides power that can be used in many different ways. You need a leader who knows how to use its potential to generate ideas and to use it; that leadership is extremely important. There was a very good example of that in my earlier experience with the UN system. After the Institute for Development Studies, I decided that I wanted to spend more time in the UN system, to work in the UN. I was inspired that after the Second World War, out of hopelessness, people thought of an institution that could build on

diversities and provide a space where people could build a common future based on consensus. That kind of an institution fascinated me.

So I took a job in Bangkok with the United Nations. I have to tell you that even though I had a permanent contract, I had to give it up because I was so saddened by what I found. I wouldn't say this of the whole organization, but of the space in which I was employed. It was a very corrupt space. I was shocked that it condoned and engaged in prostitution. Child prostitution was very prevalent in Bangkok at that time, and what I thought was a space that had standards just broke down. I was too young and angry at that time to differentiate between individual behaviors and the whole organization. I was shocked by how much the organization knew. When I was sure that the organization knew and did not act, I couldn't stay there.

But even with that, when I was in Bangkok, I was able to push two issues that were very sensitive at that time. One was on trafficking, on child prostitution. This was way back in 1981, before it was a big international issue. I brought it to the intergovernmental arena to be discussed by development ministers in the Asian context. That was quite a breakthrough. Even in that kind of a situation, when I was so angry with the institution, there were still things that I could do in the UN space. Even in the most difficult situation, there are things that can be done.

TGW: When you said that there was more space in Geneva, at the ILO, was this as a result of leadership at the top, of the director-general? Or was this as a result of leadership within the World Employment Programme? Or both? And the corruption, or the experience in ESCAP (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific)—where was the leadership vacuum?

NH: The space in the International Labour Organization was definitely the World Employment Programme. I didn't have to deal with the rest of the organization, so I am not in a

position to really know. The World Employment Programme had good leadership, and the kind of work the unit supported was extremely important.

In ESCAP—this particular area, I later found out, had corrupted the whole hierarchy and the whole leadership. It had to be dismantled. And eventually it was, under the right kind of leadership of people like Rafee Ahmed. I am so pleased to say that it doesn't exist now. But at the time, the space and people were regarded as not problematic. I found that really a problem. I had just come out of a highly feminist space, from the Institute of Development Studies. You can imagine how jarring and painful that whole experience was for me.

TGW: Do you recall any strong preconceptions that existed about a female researcher at Sussex, Geneva, and then in Asia itself, in Bangkok at ESCAP? Do you recall any strong biases or expectations that you were going to do one thing versus another?

NH: Actually, I had a bit of a struggle in the Institute of Development Studies, but not so much with my male colleagues. It was interesting because it was more with a few leaders in the feminist group. They inspired me with their courage to emerge silent issues and women's analysis. They were also the people who first valued my work. But I also felt a kind of arrogance, which they had at that time, although it is so much better now. They felt that their interpretation of history and of their experience was universal. The whole struggle and dialogue on feminism at that time was the location of women's oppression. And the feminists' analysis in the West, at that time, was that it rested in the family. Yet, in my experience, it was more complex than that. To have a family was a luxury. I knew many migrant workers whom I lived with, worked with, who could never afford to have families. Both men and women were subordinated to other structures as well. The migrant women had an entirely different

experience from those described. Families and the power structures within them were more varied and often the community networks were the only social protection that women had.

There was a big discussion about women's biology, about motherhood, and children. I enjoyed motherhood and children when these were not fashionable in western feminist circles. I eventually felt that I had to go back to Asia because for me it was more than an intellectual discussion. I had to get out of "are you right," "are you wrong," and "are we clashing because of ideology?" I was not interested in rigid ideological positions in feminism, in politics, nor in religion. I was more interested in bringing about better ways of living and interrelating in this world, working from grounded reality. I felt I needed to get back to the reality of women's lives, the stories, the textures, and the silences. Knowing the lives of both women and men, I did not want to ascribe power to men as an undifferentiated whole. Rather, I wanted to understand the dynamics of power, different kinds of power, as well as patriarchal power that devalued and commoditized women. I felt that if I stayed on I would have lost my way. So I had to go back, and I had to re-emerge with peoples' stories and lives. That was, at the end of the day, my saving grace.

TGW: We now have a third point because I resigned a permanent contract as well because I was bored to tears and I couldn't stand it. But how long did you stay in ESCAP?

NH: Actually, much longer than I had wanted because by then I had children. I had twins. They were three and a half years old. I was the main income earner and I could not give up that job until I could find another job. So I was there for two and a half years. For the first time, I realized that I could develop psychosomatic illnesses. I had earaches. My ears were just in such pain. And I remembered my Burmese friend, Daw Aye, saying to me, "You better have

it checked." I said, "No, I know what it is. I cannot bear to hear the speeches and conversations because they are full of lies. There is no truth in what is being said, and I can't stand it."

So I was in pain. It was a really painful experience for me. The moment I was offered another job—I gave up my permanent contract for a one-year contract, which lasted for ten years. The earaches stopped the day I resigned and never appeared again in my new job, which gave me greater autonomy and power.

TGW: Where was that?

NH: What remained of another UN organization, which was created in Mexico at the first UN World Conference on the International Women's Year. The first world conference on women created several institutions. One was the Voluntary Fund, which eventually became the United Nations Development Fund for Women. The other one was APWDC (Asian Pacific Women's Development Center). This was based in Tehran, Iran, and was funded by the late Shah's sister. But in 1979, at the time of the Iranian revolution, this center was burnt down and all the books and documents that could be saved were shifted to ESCAP Bangkok.

During this period, it happened in the early 1980s, Southeast Asia was seen as relatively stable and attention was being shifted to Africa. Andrew Joseph**,** who was head of the Asia Bureau of UNDP (UN Development Programme), was trying to integrate what he felt were regional institutions that helped the region during the postcolonial period to establish their systems but were no longer needed. Instead, what was now needed was a think tank to guide the governments, not a UN structure, but something that the governments could themselves use. So he integrated four institutions. One was the women's center, APWDC, the other one was the statistical center in Tokyo, and another was the Social Development Center in the Philippines. There was also a Malaysian center on public administration, which helped the Malaysian

government establish its civil service. All these were integrated together into the Asian and Pacific Development Center (APDC). Soedjatmoko**,** who was at that time the rector of UNU (UN University), was brought in to conceptualize what this think tank was to be: a center that was close enough to governments to be heard, but far enough for it to be independent.

It started as a UN space. APDC was an ESCAP institution for several years. When it was losing its UN status, there was an exodus of staff because people didn't know whether it would survive or not. I took the job. I was offered the head of the women's program created because of APCWD in Iran. I managed to negotiate my terms of employment, which was full autonomy. APDC was in such bad shape, they were so desperate to take in "good" people. At that stage, they took in people who were frustrated with bureaucracies of different kinds and allowed us freedom to "save" an institution.

TGW: But this remained based in Bangkok, within ESCAP's building or next door?

NH: No, it was shifted to Kuala Lumpur, and it was isolated from many UN bureaucratic structures. It developed its own intergovernmental structure.

TGW: I am going to open a large parenthesis here. I thought I might ask this later, but it seems, before I lose the thought—what were the main rewards and punishments of trying to juggle raising two twins and running a center? I presume this hasn't ended, even though they're slightly older now. They have different problems.

NH: Yes. They're twenty-four years old now. I had them when I was in Cambridge, during my last years there. They were with me in Sussex. They gave me a lot of new hope, bringing a new dream for me. Although it was difficult, it was not a burden. Bringing up these two girls allowed me to dream of new possibilities for human life. If you give human life a lot of

love, a lot of care, and you try to create a new and safe environment, is it possible to create new human possibilities and capacities of care and responsibility, creativity, and flow?

I was constantly trying to create worlds of beauty and creativity. I didn't want them to know too much about the pain. I wanted them to know of what human giving can provide. I enjoy and love them tremendously. Juggling the two roles wasn't too difficult because I found so much pleasure in them. Motherhood sustained me during the ESCAP years. I don't think I would have put up with ESCAP if I didn't have them. They captured me so deeply.

In Malaysia it was harder because there was, by then, tension between their father and me because of our different political positions. That was much harder than actually bringing up kids. But the extended family helped tremendously. So I must say it wasn't such a problem.

Also unlike many other women in the world, I had household help. It would have been impossible if I did not have this woman from Indonesia, Iyah, who worked with me in Malaysia and with whom I eventually came to form a close friendship. And I also have an aunt. Whenever I traveled, she would come in, and she would compensate for me. So it was not like I did not have support.

TGW: It sounds like a very good support system, actually.

NH: Yes, it was an excellent support system.

TGW: Better than the one we had. Is there something congenitally wrong with ESCAP, in the sense that other regional commissions—in particular, the European one and the Latin American one—are seen by lots of people as having put forth big people, big ideas, done useful work, but nonetheless have their problems. ESCWA (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia) is kind of in a category by itself because it's moved five times and it's a mess and the region is in turmoil. Asia, which has lots of wonderful, not only ancient cultures, but new

economies booming in all sorts of ways, has a regional commission that I think most people say has generally not produced an idea or anything else. What explains this?

NH: When I was a student I drew from the work of the Latin American Commission. ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) was throwing up, as you say, big ideas. And even in Geneva, the World Employment Programme threw up ideas that influenced me, influenced our thinking, and also influenced development practice. In ESCAP it was important to analyze what went right and what went wrong. Certain people literally used it to store second-rate civil servants—it was a dumping ground. As long as member states use these UN structures as dumping grounds, without respecting these structures, they are going to create the problems that we had because these people are not motivated.

There is no commitment. There is no motivation. They are not there to do development work or even to understand the mandate of these spaces. They do not see themselves as custodians of something that is valuable. It becomes a very selfish, self-interested thing of "what can I get out of this?" Most of them are there for something else. That is the culture that prevents the birthing of new possibilities.

Having said that—there were two women who came to the division that I was working in and they made such a tremendous difference. I was able to push two issues through them at that time. The first person, who headed the social development division of ESCAP for a couple of months in 1982, was Elizabeth Reid. She recognized immediately that I was trying to do serious work on the issue of trafficking, especially child prostitution. Although the culture of the place found it problematic—she approved the position paper I prepared for the ministerial intergovernmental agenda, having the governments of the region address it in a serious way. Eventually, the work on trafficking is what ESCAP is known for today.

After Elizabeth left, another woman came and her name was Nancy Viviani. She was there when ESCAP was asked to do the regional preparation for the Third UN World Conference on Women. This was 1984. I was asked to do the preparatory background work on that. That time—it was just after the Iranian Revolution—I felt that we had to look at how culture and development were linked to women's progress. When that agenda emerged in Tokyo during the preparatory meeting and the Iranians protested, Nancy Viviani was shocked. She said, "People call you the 'young Turks.' How did you ever slip such an agenda into an intergovernmental discussion? ESCAP has never, ever handled the issue of culture."

Despite that, she supported me. So, I was highly appreciated. By that time, there was already a change of leadership in ESCAP. They were trying to find a useful role for themselves, but I don't think it was easy.

TGW: Do the famous, or infamous, "Asian values" have anything to explain in this whole situation? It might be more difficult in the Middle East to get some of the issues that preoccupy you on an agenda, but Asia comes sort of a close second here. How did you deal with this as a person within that structure?

NH: I am not from the school of the "Asian values" or an "Asian culture." I find diversities, and I find flexibility, and I find interpretation. There are layers and layers of cultural realities. It is as much about power relationships which push a certain interpretation of culture and then superimpose that on a whole society. And there are losers and winners in that kind of an interpretation. I am more interested in the dynamics and the interplay of power and cultural interpretations.

Where do you get legitimacy? Some people get legitimacy from looking to God. Others get it from history. Others get it from culture. The interplay of power, culture, and legitimacy and their consequences were what fascinated me.

TGW: Do you recall—this period must be just about the beginning of the "Asian Miracle," or whatever you want to call the take-off in many economies, Singapore amongst them. When you saw, in your university career, or beginning fifteen years before, certain kinds of peculiar problems in the textile factory, what kinds of new problems did you see arising within the context of a rapid growth and a rapid industrialization within Asia?

NH: Wealth in Singapore was generated through rapid growth invested in social development. In fact, a lot of people in my age group became rich because we were the ones who benefited from the education, from the new opportunities. When a new high growth economy is developed, there is always the first emergence of occupations that nobody has ever occupied, and therefore the upward mobility was extremely fast especially for the skilled and the educated. Therefore, the dramatic change in our lives, the lives of my generation, those with education who could take advantage of new opportunities—in terms of wealth, prestige, and status—were tremendous. The difference between the lives of our parents and our own lives was tremendous—tremendous wealth and tremendous buying power. There is now a huge educated middle class.

It was a tremendous miracle because of accountability and socially responsible leadership even though it was top-down and unforgiving and harsh with those it marginalizes. The society and leadership was stable enough to allow an economic and social miracle to happen. But in the Singapore context—we will talk about different contexts later—it was a small society and we threw out the migrants. They did not benefit like us from the miracle. Singapore shifted first to

a labor-intensive industrialization and then to a capital-intensive, or knowledge-intensive industrialization, with more high-skill industry and knowledge-based economy, and into an international financial service center. So increasingly, it got cleaner and cleaner. Therefore, the kind of pain and suffering which I saw with the migrant workers later got thrown out while highly skilled foreigners were brought in and given citizenship.

Singapore society eventually became very stratified because the upward mobility did not repeat itself. Once people like us occupied positions, the hierarchies then developed. The kind of mobility we experienced stopped. Singapore became more of a stratified society using education to channel people into different jobs and into different futures. But because it was small, and because there was coherence in society in terms of caring, in terms of stability, there was reinvestment in housing, so that you see the upgrading of all public housing, the upgrading of public infrastructure. The bus systems are good, the transportation systems are good, as also the water system. There is a good healthcare system. Peoples' basic needs were taken care of, although for some in the minority ethnic groups life remained a struggle in terms of access to power, to high value employment, and having to fit into predefined realities with a strong Chinese orientation.

In the Malaysian context, there was also high growth. I would differentiate the peninsula of Malaysia from eastern Malaysia—Sabah and Sarawak. In the peninsula, you saw the emergence of a "new rich" among the Malays. There was a huge growth of wealth. A patronage system also developed among the Malays and those in high government positions. The Chinese entrepreneurs also have economic wealth. Because there was this wealth, the potential ethnic tension remained latent. The Chinese were able to send their children overseas to universities

and therefore did not rely on the government systems to generate possibilities of economic security and status-production, if you like.

On the whole, people benefit from high growth if this generates new employment structures, is invested in social development, and if there is accountable economic management. But the issue is how the high growth is generated and shared. Those who generate this growth need not be the same people who benefit the most. The enrichment of some and the impoverishment of others may be two sides of the same coin. The migrant workers in Singapore were pushed out, for example. In the Malaysian context, there were people who were impoverished because their communities were dislocated, especially in East Malaysia. Logging was taking place and their livelihood system was destroyed and they became the "new poor." There was a huge resistance from the indigenous population, especially in Sarawak with the Penans, over the whole logging issue because communities were disintegrating. The indigenous people were being displaced, and they were becoming Malays to gain access to new opportunities.

So there were all of those complexities. The lesson is that definitely with wealth there are new opportunities. However, the distributional structures along gender, class, and ethnicity affect access to this wealth and opportunities. In the peninsula of Malaysia, the people who really did not benefit at all were women in Tamil enclaves of the plantations. They were mainly used as a reserve workforce and were quickly replaced by illegal male migrants when childcare had to be provided in times of labor shortage. The plantations did not want to pay for social reproduction.

If I look at Thailand, again there were uneven economic growth patterns. The central plain in Bangkok had high growth, but the northeastern areas had very low growth and high

poverty levels. Therefore, you had rural-urban migration especially of young women working in the informal sector, in domestic services and in prostitution. In Indonesia, again you find uneven patterns of growth characteristic of Southeast Asia.

When I take the whole region, high growth and low growth exist side by side creating all kinds of migration patterns, not as temporary phenomena but embedded into high growth strategies. For example, if you look at Malaysia as a high-growth area, the number of illegal Indonesian migrants is about 1.5 million. And the story of how they come in and what happens to them is a problem that has not been fully addressed by policymakers on both sides. The export of labor, the international migrations of both women and men has in fact become big business that needs attention by both sending and receiving countries.

TGW: I wondered if we could think about—you mentioned the first conference, and the third conference (Third UN World Conference on Women), and the middle conference (World Conference on the UN Decade for Women), and we'll get to Beijing (Fourth World Conference on Women) later on. But how do you recall that those conferences looked to you at the time? If you can separate yourself out as somebody who studies the issues, or rather the discussion, did they play a useful part in pushing out ideas? In the project, we're trying to figure out when an idea is ripe, what kinds of transmission belts for ideas make sense. So I am just curious about your own reflection back on that Mexico conference, et cetera. Were these seminal events? How did they contribute to framing women and development? How did they influence governments, if at all?

NH: I wasn't very involved with the first conference. I heard it in Singapore over a taxi radio and remembered saying, "What is it about?" It fascinated me that something like that was happening. But it was only much later that I realized that the conference had thrown up

institutions. The Mexico conference threw up institutions like UNIFEM, institutions like the Asian Pacific Center for Women. I was more involved in the preparation of the third world conference. Many issues came up. The idea that governments need policies to support women, the idea that governments need structures within their ministries to address issues affecting women—these were some of the ideas that came up. And governments actually incorporated them.

I was extremely involved with the fourth world conference. That was really groundbreaking. Let me explain why. Do you want to go to the fourth world conference now?

TGW: Why not? We can come back to these other things later.

NH: There were two parts to it. It started with UNIFEM contacting me sometime in 1993 to see whether I could start the preparatory process in the Asian region to prepare for the Fourth World Conference on Women. I said yes, because by that time I had worked almost ten years in the Asian Pacific Development Center, and I had built up, supported, or collaborated with most of the women's networks. I had the trust of most, although some were not in dialogue with one another.

I said, "Alright, but if you want me to prepare it,"—because I was involved with the third world conference—"I do not want that kind of preparation, where ESCAP took the lead and we just produced one or two papers that got discussed." Certain parts of the UN are very receptive to new ideas. The fourth world conference had to be different. Insights and strategies needed to come from women, from the ground.

I felt that what was important was a process to generate change that could get embedded in the social fabric to improve women's lives. I had had enough of seeing conferences as an event. How do you use the legitimacy of the UN to build processes and structures that can live

after those events? We funded consultations in villages and communities so that it was not just national-level consultation. Up to then, preparation for world conferences on women involved mainly governments and some NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) with some "grass-roots" groups. But it never reached out to many at the village level. It never valued their voices or their strategies.

So this time around, we engaged in discussions in communities and then brought issues to the policy level. Different people participated. We managed to get a process going that eventually pulled together the first NGO plan of action for the Asian-Pacific region. And it involved almost 1,000 organizations consulting within their own context and then bringing everything together. So that was really exciting. Groups had to respond to the suspicion and lack of trust, they had to learn how to create social trust and make collective decisions.

As I was doing that, I was offered this job of the executive director of UNIFEM. In this job, I felt that we had to break away from the way we had traditionally addressed women's issues. So it was again a test whether the UN was ready for that. And I found that it was. It allowed you to push ideas. This time around, I became the UN—and I could incorporate some of the ideas which came out of the women's movement. The shift was to see women not just as vulnerable groups but as agents of change, not just of their own lives, but people able to establish agendas for development that will have consequences on the lives of women, men, and communities. Therefore, I developed the *Women's Development Agenda for the 21st Century* to look at the intersection of poverty, economic growth, the ecological crisis, and conflict, and what women wanted as commitments from governments attending the Fourth World Conference on Women.

We brought several of these issues to Beijing. One was the issue of economic security and rights in the context of globalization. It was a new phenomenon. The issue of trade was also brought up. Then there was the issue of violence against women. Here was a big breakthrough from the human rights conference where violence against women, usually regarded as a cultural issue, for the very first time was seen as a rights issue. There was a revitalization of the "legal basis" of these rights, and this was the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) signed by 161 countries. The other key issue was war and peace, and women's role in peace and security. We pushed for the empowerment and rights approach to be the basis of the Beijing agenda.

TGW: Is it the power of the idea? Is it the timing of the discussion of the idea? Or is it, as you seem to suggest here, the mechanics of how you discuss an idea, whatever the timing, that ultimately makes a difference?

NH: The ideas have got to be crystallized. They have to be clear. But also, it doesn't have to be an individual's idea. How do you create solidarity for the idea? How does it emerge? If I use the experience of the women's conferences, it was trying to birth an idea out of collective discussion so that it is alive, and when it finally emerges everybody recognizes it as their own. It is creating a space; it is valuing different perspectives and creative discussion for the emergence of that idea.

And then it is also the timing linked to the UN conferences. But it is more a site, a space issue, and also a legitimacy issue. The UN system provides legitimacy for marginalized groups to have a powerful space for the articulation of their ideas. Most of the groups were weak at the national level. The UN became the place where women could bring issues ignored at the national level into the international spotlight to be addressed by national governments. If it had

been discussed in any other forum, governments would dismiss women as people at the margins. The fact that it was brought into a site where the governments were discussing issues which affected human futures made the difference for women. The interaction with and the capacity of the UN to intervene and to convene different voices, to reveal silent voices, to bring the marginalized and legitimize them, to allow diverse groups to interact—that was extremely powerful.

It created a new sense of power for many of the women who participated. This was during the 1990s, because there is a problem now of too many parallel conferences. People feel that there is a sliding back. But at least up to the 1990s, the new sense—just after the collapse of the Socialist bloc—was the need for the emergence of an agenda of development for the twenty-first century. People felt that they were included, and that the UN was the place to shape these agendas.

TGW: What is your impression of similar conferences, of the big waves in the 1970s and the 1990s? Were there others that managed to be a process rather than an event, whether it is the environment or population or food or development and then human development, and the Conference on Social Development in The Hague? From your description, it would seem that certainly the process of going down to the village was more developed for the women's issues. But were there others of these conferences that—

NH: Yes. I think the environment conference really did it too. The environment conference managed to get people from the grassroots to talk about the way the environmental erosion and the ecological crisis affected them. And it definitely changed the whole dialogue. The population conferences, until the Cairo conference (International Conference on Population and Development), unfortunately included mainly demographers. Population was not seen as

involving women, but was regarded more in terms of demography and numbers. The Cairo conference changed that because women became involved. A process had started and that process caught fire. So it was not only the women's conference; it happened with the environment, with the population issue. But it also happened with the human rights conference. People were organizing—there was the interaction of different peoples' movements at that time, so that you found the women's movement interacting with the human rights movement.

Women changed the human rights agenda. Up to then, it was about political liberties. It was about political prisoners. It didn't take into account the divide between the public and the private. Women insisted on the discussion of violence against women within the household, violence in traditional practices, the issue of sexual violence, and made it into a big issue. The whole human rights dialogue changed. It had a major consequence and was immediately picked up. One major change was how rape was regarded in situations of conflict. In the Rwanda case, and even in the Bosnia case when rape was used as a weapon of war, there was a decision that rape was a war crime. It took ideas, discussion and strategies by women to show that it was possible to change women's lives. It took a lot of courage to open up spaces and discuss painful silent issues and get policies and practices changed.

When the ideas took a powerful form, they got recognized and accepted because it spoke about women's lives. And they were established as norms, as international norms. With these international norms, women pressured for the revisions of national norms and policies based on international standards. We worked so hard to ensure that decision-making in the courts and in the criminal justice system also changed because of new legal standards and norms. So ideas became action, which changed people's lives.

TGW: Can there be too much of a good thing? You mentioned that women's issues actually had more of these global ad hoc conferences than others. There was one every five years, and some people don't look fondly on Beijing plus five. Should these be spread out? Is it a good idea to have a regular way to harass people?

NH: No. The conferences of the 1990s did a great job. But I also belong to the school that the "plus fives" have been a disaster because after working so hard to have strong agendas the concentration should be on implementation. The time should be used to share good practices that emerge, rather than negotiating documents. It has become a ritual whereby a lot of energy is focused on the negotiation of words. I don't find that exciting at all. So much energy is used to just maintain the gains that people have made. New players have come in and now the whole agenda is being reopened again and again. It has become a fight over words and a waste of so much energy.

But the other issue is the UN's weakness in setting up compartmentalized structures. You have parallel processes and streams taking place because of all these conferences, without them actually inter-phasing unless people's movements intersect with them. You have a parallel process for the environment, a parallel process for women, a parallel process for population. There is nothing that really brings all of these discussions or builds on many of these issues. Different people come from different parts of governments and enter into these discussions differently. There is no coherence.

You have the same government taking different positions on similar issues in different conferences. You have what I call a "policy cocktail" approach, with no coherence. This is a real problem.

TGW: Speaking of words, which some people would argue was an important change, when did we shift from the International Women's Decade to gender as a way of organizing or framing UN discussions?

NH: This is really interesting. The word "gender relations" grew out of the discussion by women who believed that you cannot just look at women's lives in isolation from the relationship between women and men. This relationship is culturally and socially constructed. Therefore, one needs to look at the social construction of this relationship.

This complex idea, in a sense, got incorporated into the work of development agencies, including the bilateral donors. They wanted a way of doing development work that would bring women in. They developed what was called "gender analysis." And I am going to go back there, but let me now touch on how this whole debate about women and development emerged.

The Mexico meeting looked at women and their roles. For the first time, Esther Boserup talked about women's role in the economy and women's participation. The debate focused initially on the lack of women's participation in the economic systems. Many people said, "But women have always been participating." The issue is not the integration of women into development or the economy. Women were already integrated, but they were undervalued. Their work was not recognized; they were not supported.

The issue became one of equal access: how do you make sure that women have equal access to the opportunities and the rewards of development? The focus then shifted to access over resources and benefits. There was the existence of women's very specific disadvantage and the need for specific members to address this, especially for women in poverty. There was concern, however, that we were approaching women as a vulnerable group and kept using the charity concept to help women get access to resources. The focus should be on women's agency,

as they were already engaged but needed support for their empowerment. How do you empower women to have greater agency in the shaping of their own future?

The Fourth World Conference on Women focused on the idea of mainstreaming. This reflected the failure of the women's machineries to achieve significant results or influence policies. The creation of these machineries came out of the third world conference in Nairobi. Mainstreaming signifies a push towards a more systematic way of incorporating gender perspectives at all stages of policymaking and development practice. It is not just getting women's participation; you wanted women's realities and perspectives to influence development. But there was concern that women's perspectives basically can flow—in the words of Bella Abzug—into the "polluted stream." What you want is not to mainstream into the pollution; you want a clean stream.

People started talking about transformation, about structures of transformation. How do you transform development to be more empowering of women? For example, if you want women to have equal access to employment benefits, the way that structures of employment are organized must change as they assumes that there is a homemaker that provides domestic services to the worker.

The worker has always been the male head of a household with a wife who can take care of all the servicing. Therefore in the formal employment structure, women, even if they had access, would never be able to succeed equally because of policy and structural biases. Many women have succeeded because of maids. Therefore, you need to rearrange those structures and transform them to take into account an entirely different set of people who did not have a male-centered experience. Similarly, families were seen always as having a male head of household

with dependents; female-headed households were seldom part of the picture when one talked of families.

In the discussions of transformation there emerged the issue of gender relations—that you can't look at women's lives without looking at the whole context within which the male–female relationship gets played out. There was a fascination with gender analysis by donor agencies and by the UN system. It went on even beyond the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. The Beijing agenda talked about the empowerment approach, but still within the context of gender analysis.

Personally, I have a problem with the way that gender analysis has developed. I find it very static. Basically it is a quick fix. And this is a real problem. You generate an analysis and you train people in it—the tools of gender analysis. In every project you did your gender analysis. You mapped out access, the politics of access—who gets what, who did what, and so on. You keep in your head that there is a group "men" and there is a group "women." And you are always looking at these two groups as though they were undifferentiated. You also set yourself up for dualistic confrontational categories—not all men oppress women and not all women are supportive of each other. The relationships between men and women are more complex.

Women themselves are differentiated and so are men. Complexity and diversity are not captured. The dynamics of power is not really understood. I constantly try to go back and say, "Let's try to capture the complexity and the dynamics of different kinds of power." Also of human tendencies like jealousy and competition. In some cases, gender analysis is useful; but in other cases you need to use other analysis to capture how patterns of social and gender subordination and emancipation are reproduced.

For example, in the same way as we look at what is happening to women and the context within which their lives are being shaped, we also need to look at what is happening to men, and the relationship of men to other men. This is as important to understand as part of gender relations, as is the social and cultural construct of male-female relationships. I have tried to go beyond gender analysis to a rights-based approach.

TGW: So ironically, one of the results of the conference on women in the international women's decade was the creation of a gender analysis. Now the result of gender analysis is probably to go beyond. It seems to me that this actually is the way our minds work and human beings work.

We are going to pause here because this is almost the end of tape one.

TGW: This is the beginning of tape number two, the 21st of February, Tom Weiss and Noeleen Heyzer at UNIFEM headquarters. Before we move to New York, you were involved in starting a couple of organizations: the Development Alternatives for Women in a New Era (DAWN)—boy, that's a mouthful—and the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law, and Development (APWLD). What purposes did these serve? Earlier, you had mentioned the importance of NGOs in one way or another. So I would like you to speak about these in particular, but perhaps use them as a springboard to discussing what NGOs bring to the table and what kinds of ideas they put in front of the secretariat and governments, and how useful they are in this intellectual history.

NH: I used my time at APDC to bring three groups together. I wanted to bring academic rigor to the activism that was developing from the ground. At one stage, there was a big divide between research and activism, and I wanted to bridge that gap. I felt that it was important to have very solid analysis to influence activism. Activism without knowledge and without

analysis can go astray. But at the same time, research without the kind of activism and commitment that I saw on the ground could not bring about the transformation needed to improve the lives of people marginalized by development.

At the same time, I wanted to bring a third player in, governments, to talk about their accountabilities, to look at what governments can do, but also to help governments come up with better programs and systems that would take into account the wellbeing of groups that I was working with. Having these networks brought precisely that. They were not NGO networks as such. They were networks of mixed groups consisting of activists, of women academics, and of decision-makers.

It was an experiment—I was trying to see whether we could convert this kind of women's practice into development practice. Let me explain. These networks provided the site and space whereby discussions could take place in a way that valued different voices. The activists brought in certain sets of thinking, certain kinds of voices. So did the academics. So did the decision-makers. Could we, from that diversity, build respect and commonality, and also respect for differences, but at the same time develop enough solidarity to bring about social change and progress for the communities we were working with? From solidarity one also develops trust. We wanted to see if we could create communities of trust and find new ways of creating community across regions because these people came from many different countries, they came from many different backgrounds. We wanted to see whether it was possible to create communities of support, to develop friendships across ethnicity, friendships across class. So all that was very exciting because we wanted to engage in development work that valued transformation.

We came together for a common purpose—and the common purpose, in the case of DAWN, was to understand what was happening to development in the 1980s and early 1990s and to develop a new framework of thinking and articulation. There was a major development crisis over debt and structural adjustment. There was the whole issue also of population. DAWN did manage to develop a new kind of thinking and analysis that pulled in the experience of women and of activism, and then converted that into policy changes. DAWN played a big role in the third world conference on women. DAWN also played a big role through Gita Sen's participation in the Cairo population conference. And the kind of analysis we did managed to change paradigms of thinking.

With the women lawyers, I was trying to develop a network to address women's human rights. We brought together lawyers, judges, and people who knew how to interpret the various laws affecting women's lives. We trained women in legal literacy. Even when there were laws to protect people, they didn't know that they could use these laws in a serious way. Therefore, our concern was to make ordinary people, ordinary women, understand that they had rights. They had legal rights, and they could use these rights; there were lawyers to support them, to help them understand the legal bureaucracy.

To get embroiled in a legal case is not something that ordinary women have the time, energy, or understanding to be engaged in. To make these rights come alive, women have to understand that there is a legal framework they can use, but they need to understand this legal framework and the support systems available when they decide to act. There are judges in place to track landmark cases and to understand international law and standards if domestic laws are inadequate. Especially in the case of CEDAW, there was a group of judges that began to use international UN conventions to make legal decisions, even when national laws were not in

place. Women lawyers in the network were able to take on issues that other lawyers were unwilling to take on—issues of dowry deaths, issues of honor killings, issues of acid attacks. This was violence that affected women's lives. There also were issues of rape, of incest. Violence against women was shrouded in silence and shame, and there was a need to remove that shroud. There were all kinds of discussions as women lawyers engaged with the communities and talked with people.

They addressed issues of hierarchies and boundaries as well, because the lawyers and the judges and the courts were way beyond the reach and the understanding of ordinary women. To bring these people to the community of women, and to help the community understand that there were women lawyers who were supportive and wanted to improve the quality of life of as many women as possible, all that was very exciting.

These two were not the only networks. I established less formal networks that didn't have names. They were established and were dismantled when their work was done. There was a network of media professionals because I felt that media was a powerful tool in the shaping of public opinion. Women in media who could tell a particular kind of story worth transmitting to others. So we established a women's media network in the Asia-Pacific region.

There was also a network on the international migration of domestic workers. It created spaces for the migrant workers and ensured that services could be provided to migrant workers. This network also brought together decision-makers from the sending and receiving countries.

Cory Aquino was influenced by this network, which I established. A strong part of this network was in the Philippines because they were one of the largest senders of migrant workers. At that time, they were sending their highly-skilled women to work as domestic workers. These were college and university-trained women who were migrating and being de-skilled in the

domestic sector. With the discussions that took place, and bringing in of different people involved with the migration process, Mrs. Aquino understood that it was important for her to renegotiate the conditions of work for her people because it was not a short-term problem requiring a short-term solution. In the first year of her presidency, she called a ban. For a year, there was a ban on the migration of all migrant workers until she could send her envoy to renegotiate the terms of work as well as salaries. In Hong Kong today, for example, Filipino maids have the highest salary and much better conditions of work than before. A data bank to track migrant workers was set up by the network and was eventually supported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

Later, other countries followed suit. In each of the embassies of the sending countries, there were desks and programs for their migrant workers. This was one result of the network. There were also attempts to bring the banks in because remittances were a major problem. Many of the workers brought in foreign exchange for their countries, but they didn't know how to use the banking system. They were sending money home through informal courier and the money frequently got lost. We were trying to establish mechanisms whereby the remittances could reach wherever they wanted it to go. These networks were generated for particular purposes and were dismantled when these purposes were served. They are advocacy groups that provide technical support. They were also development resources for governments and those interested in making a difference. For me, they became a methodology of doing development work more effectively.

TGW: Because like you, I believe that processes are oftentimes much more important than a discrete event—how can you institutionalize this sort of meeting of voices, this mixing of voices, within the UN system? Have you been able to do this here at UNIFEM? I say this

because usually the only way we can think of is to put governments and NGOs together, and already that creates a huge amount of problems for governments who don't often want to be in the same room with these guys. How do you institutionalize a discussion that has multiple voices—sort of pluralize?

NH: It is a real challenge in the UN system in New York because of the way the intergovernmental process has been structured. It is only now that some changes are taking place. Among the governments—we don't need to bring in other actors, just among the governments themselves, they don't even talk to one another in a formal context. Most of the real talk happens along the corridors. In the formal context, people prepare country statements and then deliver these five-minute statements to half-empty rooms. And you bring in heads of state to do that.

If the UN is to play the role that it has been set up to do, then we have to find other ways of doing work. How do you generate real conversations and real dialogue? If we don't do that, then other people will take that space because real dialogue is needed especially today. If we don't do that, you will have the emergence of say, the World Economic Forum. It is a space that doesn't have the kind of legitimacy as the UN system, but it allows people to talk.

There is a need for real dialogue and common understanding. But the UN is learning. Now we have roundtables where governments participate without country statements but talk to the substance of the actual debate. There are also high-level segments whereby expertise from various places are brought in to discuss the state of the art of thinking. To bring in different voices in the UN context is not very easy because there are certain structures. There are formal structures that are harder, and there are the informal structures that are much easier. Let me give you one example of how one needs to learn to go around these structures as they are being

transformed. We worked extremely hard to put the whole issue of women, peace, and security onto the Security Council agenda. The Security Council is an extreme case of a highly-controlled arena and it is very difficult to put various issues on their agenda. To change the dialogue and to put in new issues that change people's thinking is not easy.

We used what is called the Arias formula. This was a formula developed by President [Oscar] Arias, which tries to overcome the kind of problems we are talking about: how do you ensure that various voices come together, mix together, so that real dialogue takes place? You create a system that is outside of the formal system, to allow real consultation.

We brought women—the nongovernmental groups and women themselves who were affected by conflict—to talk to the members of the Security Council to prepare for the Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security. UNIFEM's role was to get the space and to help women clarify their messages. We became the mediator of different worlds. It is not easy for different worlds to understand one another, I've learned. Therefore, we try to prepare the ground, help the women to crystallize their voice, make sure that their message is heard by members of the Security Council, and determine what the Security Council needs to hear before they can make certain kinds of decisions.

When that happened, a synergy took place. I was pleased at the Arias formula when we brought people together. Members of the Security Council after that said, "We will change our statement." Up to that time, they were not even willing to come up with a short resolution. They were willing to come up with a presidential statement rather than a Security Council resolution. But after that kind of consultation, they understood the issues and they saw the urgency of certain action. Because of that they came up with one of the strongest resolutions, which we

supported in developing. They came up with what is now called the landmark resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security.

The UN is changing—changing a little bit too slowly for me. Within formal structures we need to find spaces whereby other voices could come in to interface. At the same time, we don't need to wait for the intergovernmental arenas and structures to change, because as an organization like UNIFEM, we have the power, as a UN agency, to convene various voices outside of these formal structures. That precisely is what we have been doing.

TGW: In this work with the Security Council, does the notion of "human security" help or hinder you in trying to reframe the agenda to include women and gender?

NH: You know, we used "human security" by saying that the level of violence and the security of women is a good indicator of human security. We try to build into existing mindsets by using familiar concepts. The issue here is not to transform mindsets because that is a long-term process. The work was to understand the way Security Council members were thinking and then articulate new ideas whereby they could make linkages quickly and absorb that which is new.

TGW: This resolution—it was in late 2000, as I recall—you were, I presume, along with some of your other male and female colleagues, trying to figure out what to do with Afghanistan at that juncture during the Taliban. I am curious about how you confronted the issues globally, within the UN, and also what kinds of debates actually occurred on this floor or in this house? So a two-part question.

NH: During the time of the Security Council?

TGW: In and around there, just about that time. That is, while the Taliban were still in power and when they clearly did not make too much room for girls in schools or women

anyplace else. What kind of debates did you have internally? And what kinds of issues across the UN system came up in trying to confront what seems aberrant under the surface but is more complex?

NH: It was actually very complex, because even to get the issue into the Security Council required so much work. It required people going around to each of the ambassadors to prepare them for it so that it did not come as a surprise. You had to prepare the ground. It wasn't just substantive leadership; it was a political leadership. How do you get the substance on the table? How do you manage the politics of the whole situation? And how do you move it in a strategic way that it produces a strong outcome?

Because the UN is such a compartmentalized structure, there is still a divide between the normative side of the house and the operational side. The links for me are not strong enough and this is a disadvantage to countries. It is extremely important that what happens on the ground—which is some of the best work of the UN system—gets reflected in the debates at the intergovernmental level, and that the recommendations and the norms that are created there get brought back to the local level. This kind of feedback process and linkages are still not strong enough.

This particular issue actually revealed some of those tensions. But I don't want to go too much into that. Definitely, the success was the landmark resolution. But then the problem was how it should be implemented. Of course, the idea, even for the Beijing platform of action, was that it should not just be UNIFEM. Although we are the UN women's fund, the idea was that the whole UN system should take responsibility for implementing various aspects.

When we were discussing this particular resolution, Afghanistan was not an area in which we were working because the Secretariat wanted to be in charge there. We were pushed out and

were not so involved during the Taliban period. But we did not complain too much at that time because there were so many other areas in which we were working. The Great Lakes area—Rwanda, Somalia, the Central African experiences, the Congo, all these places took a lot of our attention. So did East Timor, Cambodia, Colombia, Guatemala. There were all these countries that were in conflict or in post-conflict which we were engaged in.

It was a long-term process. What was so special was the whole relationship that UNIFEM developed with Security Council members. At that time, when we first got this issue addressed, Bangladesh was heading the Security Council; Ambassador [Anwarul Karim] Chowdhury was the president of the Security Council. I asked him whether he could make a speech to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) on International Women's Day, and he did. Now that has been institutionalized.

At the same time, I had also come out of the Middle East. I was asked by the Dutch government to head a delegation to see whether the peace process could be engendered before the Camp David discussions, by bringing together the Israeli and the Palestinian women. It was fascinating for me to see on the ground how women's leadership in the peace process, in holding communities together, and trying to even go beyond what was discussed in the formal agenda, was so important. At the end of the day, true peace or sustainable peace is highly dependent on whether the communities hold together or not. And women's role in holding communities together is extremely important. Israeli and Palestinian women were already working together. Our role was to support this leadership internationally.

All of that was fed into this area of work. So did our experience in East Timor. In the post-conflict phase, there was a possibility of ensuring that the new constitution that was being developed included a gender justice component in terms of right to land, in terms of inheritance,

in terms of marriage, and so on, that could be incorporated using CEDAW as a basis. We had people who were constitutional lawyers going in to help. At the same time, we were also training women to run for elections. As a result, 23 percent of the local assembly are now women. Most of them were trained through this process.

So there are four parts to the resolution. There is one that looks at the impact of armed conflict on women. Another looks at the protection and assistance systems that need to be put in place to protect women and girls. The third area looks at women's role in peace-building and conflict resolution, playing up their leadership, and trying to get them to the peace table. The fourth looks at post-crisis situations to make sure that women benefit from what comes out of post-crisis situations.

TGW: In your work here, I would like to just go back for a minute to one member of your constellation. You mentioned, in your networks, academics. I am curious whether you call upon outside analysts, academics, from time to time. And if you do, what kinds of them do you find most useful in trying to push out the envelope, expand the Security Council's awareness, move ideas around, come up with new policies? Which ones tend to be more useful?

NH: It is interesting because I have tried to upgrade some of my staff in terms of the level of substantive understanding. Therefore, we try first of all to make sure that our staff have a strong academic background, as much as an activist background, and are people who know how to move agendas. When I find extremely good people, then I bring them in. But I would bring them in different ways. For example, Diane Elson—I brought her here for two years. I wanted her to look at the issue of accountability and to approach that issue in terms of budget allocations—the issue of gender budgets in relation to development goals and targets created at UN conferences.

You have in all of these conferences the goodwill of governments, the political will of governments. They make wonderful resolutions, and they have policies and plans. But it stops there. The one thing I have learned is to follow the money. In the Philippines, for example—they had the best plans, the best women's ministries, and then when I asked them, "What is happening? Has the plan been implemented?" They said, "No, we do not have resources." So the final test is how much resources get allocated to promises made.

Diane was brought in for two years to look at what kind of targets have been set, to look at accountability, to look at gender budgets, and also to support the work on indicators as the UN itself was undergoing a reform process. The UN developed what was called the UN Development Assistance Framework, or the UNDAF, and the CCA work, or the Common Country Assessments. They had all these indicators but they were not gender-sensitive. So what kind of indicators should they be looking at? They had a minimal set of indicators. They have also developed the millennium development targets and goals, and they want to track that.

Diane helped me with the gender budgets and helped come up with an analysis to look at progress of the world's women, tracking some of those targets and goals that had been agreed to at all these UN conferences. It is one thing for governments to set all these targets and make all kinds of promises, but the challenge is to track them through achievements of targets, and through accountability in resource allocation. That is one way of using someone from a university.

Another example is Lourdes Benería from Cornell University, who was with the World Employment Programme many years ago. I brought her into UNIFEM because I wanted a good analysis of gender and trade in the context of globalization. It is very easy to say, "globalization has produced uneven benefits." But I wanted a more complex analysis. Who are the winners?

Who are the other losers? What is the actual impact of trade on different sectors? So she has come in to help us with that work.

We have tried to use, at the local level, many Latin American leaders. In our study on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), for example, we have pulled in Latin American scholars to help with the work. We have used scholars and activists in India on issues of trafficking, on issues of violence against women. I wanted to develop what I call the End-Violence Index. We wanted to rank countries according to whether they are actually decreasing violence in women's lives. The problem with using that approach is that the countries with the best data will come out the worst, and those who create the worst violence will not even register for lack of data. In Afghanistan, we would not get any data on violence against women at all, for example. So my idea is to develop an End-Violence Index, which means ranking countries that have policies on domestic violence and rape, that have shelters, have trained their police force, and to get a group of academics to start thinking and advising me on how to get the index done. So there are different ways of using academics. It is a knowledge-network that I keep pulling in to help the work of the organization.

TGW: Well, we are clearly now in New York. I just wanted to go back to 1994 for a minute. Did you have any second thoughts about leaving Kuala Lumpur? You mentioned that you went there for a particular set of reasons—you had a family and other kinds of infrastructure. You decided to bring your daughters with you. Did you have any second thoughts about that, any apprehensions about it? Or did it seem like that was the time to do it? Obviously there was a job promotion, but in these personal terms, were there any second thoughts?

NH: Actually, I didn't want to come here. I was asked to formally apply for the job sometime in January or February of 1994. I resisted and I thought, "I am not going to go back to

that huge bureaucracy that I ran away from." I know that I am not great working in huge bureaucracies, and I didn't want to spend my life trying to find the soft spots in bureaucracies from which I could work. And I thought, "What am I going to do in New York?" Furthermore, in terms of quality of living, I had a good support system and a good house. So what could New York offer me that I didn't have?

Many women's groups approached me and argued that I had done enough in the Asia-Pacific and it was really important to move the agenda to another level, especially at the time of the Beijing conference. There was a lot of lobbying. Towards the end what pushed me, and pulled me, if you like, was a sense of responsibility to various groups; also, I began to see, as the conversation went on, new possibilities of what I could do. This excited me. I was still not sure whether I could handle the bureaucracy. That was something I was fearful about.

There was a push factor as well because there was more tension in my household between my husband and the children. My daughters were growing up, and I felt that it would be good for them to leave. At that time, they were in a Malaysian government school, and it was conducted with some moderate Islamic values. They were already at puberty, and were having difficulties in that structure. So a number of things came together and I felt that maybe it was worth a risk.

TGW: Where did they go to school when they got here?

NH: They went to UN International School (UNIS). That was very good. But they came out of a relatively multiracial Islamic schooling context.

TGW: You mentioned the bureaucracy. Were there other things that surprised you about running a UN organization? What were the most daunting challenges when you arrived here

besides the size of it? Anything about the culture, the staff, what had been left over that you found that you had to change quickly, or slowly?

NH: Actually, I have to say that of all the UN organizations, I felt at that time, I could best handle UNIFEM. I had dealings with UNDP country offices. But UNDP was a little bit too big for me then. UNIFEM was something that I could understand. And I felt that I could shape it into an organization with influence.

I came with the women's development agenda in preparation for the Beijing conference. I got everybody excited. But within two weeks, I was surprised to find the fund in potential deficit and its operational reserves totally depleted. It had over-programmed by $20 million because of the allocations of obliged funds over a period of time. It also had $4 million missing advances. It had been in deficit for three years and there was a threat of a large potential deficit. I found myself cleaning the financial and operational management system for the next two years. I was not quite prepared for that. If I had known that, I probably would not have come because I came to do something else. So, I had to postpone most plans and attend to all the urgent ones simultaneously. I had to prepare the organization for the Fourth World Conference on Women and make sure, at the same time, that the fund quickly got out of this deficit as well as establish new management systems. I began to get involved in organizational development, organizational structures and culture in a very deep way—more than I would have otherwise.

At the same time, I had to maintain staff morale when there were really deep cuts. I had to retrench staff. It was a terrible situation of trying to hold staff morale at a time when I had to let so many staff go and to freeze posts. Many projects were closed and we collected all unspent resources. There was no new programming for the next two years (1994 core and non-core budget). It was also a very difficult context—it was the worst time to have a deficit because it

was the time of UN reforms, with pressure from the donor community to merge small entities into larger ones. There was so much pressure on UNIFEM to be integrated. It was done in the context of "mainstreaming." Why do you need a small women's fund of $13.4 million when there were gender units and possibilities of integration into other larger structures with more resources.

So the donors were not with me. But neither was the system initially because they were embarrassed that they did not see this deficit. It was very hard to maintain staff morale and give them a vision that would charge them so that they would keep Beijing in sight. Throughout, I insisted that there was no fraud involved and if there was a crisis, it was a crisis of demand. All that was needed was good management system to track budgets and expenditure, and staff discipline to make it happen.

TGW: Do you have any impressions about the quality of the staff or the international civil service in general? You mentioned—I supposed there is diversity here as there is everywhere else—these two wildly different experiences in the ILO and in ESCAP. Now that you have been in New York for six or seven years, what is your impression about the quality of people who work for the world organization in New York?

NH: Again, there is a big diversity. But I can tell you about the staff in UNIFEM, and some in UNDP, and some of the people whom I see within the secretariat. The top quality staff are truly of the highest level. People work long hours; they put in so much work that it is unbelievable. Their level of commitment is extremely high. Then there are those that basically don't do the work. Like every other organization, those who carry the burden carry more than they should and others do not come to mark. But the rules and regulations are such that it is difficult to move those who do not meet expectations. They are there precisely because they

have been there for such a long time and have developed their own power networks to protect them. It is extremely difficult to break through.

You have some people who are not there because of their skills and their commitments. Others are there precisely because of their skills, commitment, and creativity. I did change a lot of my staff, but also tried to work with what was already here. There were people here who were at the margins but were very good and I brought them to the center. For example, my deputy-director of programs now, Joanne Sandler, was a consultant at the margins, but I found her to be one of the most creative people and slowly brought her in. Now she is literally my right-hand person. The same can be said of my former executive assistant who was on several short-term contracts and is now our regional program director in Eastern Europe. There are many such examples. The other excellent person in UNIFEM is somebody who works on the issue of peace and security. I find that she has a tremendous political sense of all the complexities in the intergovernmental process and is able to work through issues.

So there are good people—some of them are good with substance, others are good with political mapping, others are very good with management. Therefore, for me, it was building up a team of people, a team of players who had strengths and who complemented one another. I tried to change a deep organizational structure. When I came in, the organization was very compartmentalized with little kingdoms. As people said, there were many faces of UNIFEM even though we were small. I broke up these kingdoms but without people losing a sense of security. These kingdoms were replaced with loose clusters. People could come together and work as interactive teams to achieve a particular result. There was a unified identity. People got their strength from the whole rather than from the fragments. Information and directions flowed better. Knowledge sharing improved. Originally, there was resistance. The crisis helped me

because I was able to say that we didn't have a choice. If we didn't deliver on certain things, and we didn't make these deep organizational changes, we would not be able to survive as an organization in a highly competitive environment. People saw the results we were able to achieve within a year—first of all, although the Executive Board gave us three years to bring our accounts to zero balance, we did it in eight months. That got people sitting up. Because we were in a crisis, people thought we would not be able to play a leadership role in Beijing. But we did play a big role in Beijing. So again, people took notice of the organization. Today, the budget of UNIFEM is $35 million and with it we have been able to make strategic difference in the areas of violence against women, CEDAW, gender and HIV/AIDS, women, peace and security. We have also made a difference in Afghanistan and other crisis or post-conflict countries.

The strength of the organization comes from a mixture of people with diverse experiences and skills; people who are involved with the women's movement and activism; people involved with substantive issues; people involved with the political and management issues.

TGW: I had meant to ask earlier, when we were speaking about Beijing, how you have grown in international diplomatic terms in relationship to gender and religion. I don't know whether your Marymount experience helped you in dealing with the Vatican, or whether the Islamic schools in Malaysia helped you in dealing with Libya. How do you feel in such contexts? How do you deal with what seems to me probably one of the biggest obstacles to overcome—conceptually, culturally—religion and gender? How do you deal with this?

NH: I work with women in religion networks. Within the Muslim world there is a group called Women Living Under Muslim Law. There are lots of people who are trying to reinterpret various religious texts. There are women who have tried to redefine ideas and spaces

in the religious hierarchy. You find this in Buddhism, in Christianity. There is also new sense of spirituality. Many women now look at religion as the institutionalized part of spirituality; religion and spirituality are not the same. There are texts and institutions that allow themselves to undergo human interpretation and are shaped out of a particular context. So if you have patriarchy shaping religious consciousness, it becomes a hierarchy and structures are of a particular form.

There is a continuum of religious institutions. In the various Islamic societies, you have on the one hand Islam as practiced by the Taliban. On the other hand, you have Islam as practiced in Indonesia or Malaysia. There is so much diversity, so many differences in practice, so that you can't talk about one Islam. It is the same with Christianity, with Hinduism, with Buddhism. That diversity has been extremely useful for women.

At the same time, there are women who have said that, at the end of the day, what has sustained them at the deepest level is their spirituality. The discussion of spirituality is coming back. At a time when people are searching for values, and a time when many relationships are breaking down, and many societies are in crisis, what has sustained many people is an inner spirituality. From where do we draw the ethics for human living as we forge forward?

There is another interesting component. Let's look at the Afghanistan situation and what happened on September 11th. The kind of leaders that we had before and during the time of the Cold War, during the socialist period, the colonial periods—these were political leaders. The politics of the time shaped leaders who were able to influence people to improve their national condition. What is emerging today are spiritual leaders who can actually inspire people at much deeper human spaces, if you like. So it is really the Falun Gong, for example—those kinds of networks that promise healing, spiritual strength, and community—that threatens the Chinese

government. It is the Osama bin Ladens who are able to inspire a whole group of men to undertake suicide missions of this sort to shake the powers of what they see as "evil." It is the Dalai Lamas of the world who inspire people to live a balanced life.

So a new kind of leadership has emerged. You are not going to get the Mao Tse-Tungs, the [Fidel] Castros, and the Ho Chi Minhs. The leadership that is emerging draws from a very deep need of reconnection within. This is an issue that we have not addressed in development.

TGW: As part of the changing of UNIFEM, one of the things that happened, as I understand it, is that UNIFEM became an executing agency for projects. And earlier, you had said there is an obvious link between norms and operations. But do you see a downside to becoming an operational agency? I am thinking here that sometimes household tasks expand to fill the time available, according to our good friend Betty Friedan. I am wondering whether technical operations, or operations per se, become an end in themselves, and the kind of more creative, normative role disappears, because all of these other things are funded, and more concrete, and donors like them, et cetera. Are you worried about that?

NH: This is interesting. Let's talk first about the evolution of UNIFEM. It is a fascinating story because it takes place with the evolution of the women's movement and the thinking about women and development. UNIFEM started off as a voluntary fund, and resources went to revolving funds to establish small income-generating work for women like the tailor shops and cottage industries. That was the vision of the first executive-director. She argued, "Until you can change where the larger development money goes, you need to quickly put money directly in the hands of women at the community level."

The second executive-director felt that UNIFEM should move away from these community-projects and become a funding agency to support women's organizing. That was really important.

By the time I came in, the world had shifted. There were already several donors who were supporting women's groups, so I felt we couldn't simply be a grant-giver that responded to projects that came in. If we were to survive in this very complex bureaucracy, we needed to be a very strategic and focused organization. We couldn't fund everything, we couldn't fund women's organizing in all areas. So I focused UNIFEM on three issues that came out of all the world conferences.

I picked three critical areas. One was women's economic security and rights, especially in the context of globalization. That was an important area to work on because it could feed into the dialogue on the Millennium Development Goals, in discussions on poverty reduction, and on trade, finance, and technology. Beyond that, economic security is essential if women are to transform their own lives.

The other area of work the organization focused on was reducing violence in women's lives. Violence against women was addressed in many UN conferences. I wanted to use Kofi Annan's agenda of UN reform, and the potential of the UN as a system, to deliver on eliminating violence against women. We used CEDAW as a basis so that violence against women would not be discussed as a cultural phenomenon, but as a violation of basic rights. The universal standards of human rights are often denied full operation when it comes to women and girls. CEDAW, agreed to and signed by 161 countries, was promoted as a bill of rights for women. So, violence against women and CEDAW, in the context of promoting women's human rights, became a second pillar of work within the organization.

Our third pillar of work was on governance, peace, and security because so many countries, especially after the 1990s, broke down in internal conflict. An important cross-cutting issue was leadership. What kind of leadership and institutions do we need to promote progress of women? And how do we bring that about? This was the major work of the organization. I also felt that, because the organization was small, we had to be very strategic. When I inherited the organization it had an annual budget—core and non-core—of $13.4 million, which was very, very small. So how do you use limited resources in a strategic way to make a major difference?

We were too small to be a grant-giver of any significant sort. So, how do you use your money, your personal resources (time, energy, quality) and your networks and your partnerships to deliver a particular kind of change? The change which we wanted to deliver was improving the quality of women's lives—increasing their options, increasing their opportunities, building their leadership, and reducing poverty and violence in women's lives..

I developed the three thematic areas and five strategies for UNIFEM. The five strategies were: first, to invest in women's strategic organizing in the areas of our focus and comparative advantage. It was necessary for women to have the space to develop their leadership, strategies, and strength so that women could change their own situation within their own community and country on their own terms. Second, we should use our limited resources to leverage other larger resources, so that we should be able to use UNIFEM money to attract other resources—UNDP's resources or the Bank's resources or other donor resources—to move various agendas to benefit women. But it is not just the leveraging of financial resources, but also the leveraging of political will. How do you generate political will so that governments will use their own resources to move agendas forward affecting women?

The third strategy is partnerships. How do you use resources to build very deep partnerships? And it's not just with the academics, the activists, and decision-makers, but also with the donors. How do you bring the donors in as a major stakeholder, so that they will invest more in women's lives? I developed strong relationships with donors so they knew what we were doing. This was true also with program countries. What eventually emerged were different kinds of partnerships, including the building of common grounds between governments and women's groups. We were able to bring NGOs and governments together to ensure state compliance with international norms and standards, and in the implementation of the platform that came out of Beijing conference. We were able to make sure the UN system came together on the violence campaigns we launched in Latin America. The results of these strategic partnerships were not just in UNIFEM's work; instead, we created a larger constituency for change that was rooted in the country and community.

The fourth area of investment was not to go into big operation, but to do pilots, to do what I called the "experimentation." If we see ourselves as an innovative fund, it means that we should not fund all the operations and get involved in precisely the kind of things you were talking about earlier, but that we should choose areas of our comparative advantage and areas that could deliver cutting-edge thinking and approaches. From these experimentations we could generate lessons learned that can then be used in advocacy in terms of changing policies or practices, in terms of developing partnerships. This approach means that our advocacy work, our advice, our learning are at the same time well-grounded enough. As we were strengthening UNIFEM, we discussed several approaches to our work—the leveraging of political will, changing policies. All that was still for me very much at the top. Even developing partnerships was not concrete enough. I went for a strategy of getting to the ground in a way as not to burden

the organization with labor intensity in operations. We need to be strategic and clever in piloting and generate enough learning to do the advocacy that is necessary. How we pilot the kind of experimentation we do is extremely important. We execute UNDP's project only when there is synergy and only in the areas of our comparative advantage.

The fifth part of our strategy was the use of information technology. How can we use information technology to build an operational knowledge base that can be shared? How do we develop knowledge networks and communities through the new technology that could cut across national boundaries and across different sectors?

The five approaches used simultaneously became the strategy of the organization. If you like, I could share with you how one of our thematic areas works, using these strategies.

TGW: That's helpful. I actually would like to ask about something you said earlier, which was the women's development agenda for the twenty-first century. As I read it, or at least as I think I understand it, this is more comprehensive, more holistic than the alternative previous orthodoxy, being women in development. At the same time, many of the things you've said—violence against women, HIV/AIDS exposure, justice, globalization and poverty, the feminization of poverty, and these kinds of issues—seem to require special emphases, or special efforts. Is there a contradiction between what you see as the main problems and this more holistic approach, which some people would describe as the "rising tide lifts all boats," so why not women?

NH: I started off with a much larger agenda by saying that all development is a women's agenda. How do you make sure that development takes into account women's realities? If women's realities are going to be addressed, you need to change the nature of the development

agenda. You cannot have a development agenda without taking into account women's realities. Let me explain. For example, look at the HIV/AIDS crisis.

Let me step back a little bit by saying that if I look at the challenges that face us in the twenty-first century, there are three types of forces at work that we need to take into account. One deals with globalization. There is no way of turning the clock back. But side by side with globalization is fragmentation in terms of the breakdowns of nation-states and wars at the community level. There were more breakdowns in nation-states and communities after the Cold War as the crisis of leadership and legitimacy spread. But side by side with that has been the growth of "problems without borders"—the fact that there are transnational criminalized networks which operate in drugs, in arms, in the trafficking of women and girls.

At the same time, other problems without borders have been transnational diseases and ecological crises. HIV/AIDS as a problem without borders must be addressed as part of international and national development. So if we are developing an agenda for development, we need to take all three sets of issues simultaneously. We need to take into account that as we are globalizing, we have transnational crimes and fragmentation. We have diseases. We have ecological crises that no nation and no community can handle on their own.

In this context, the UN reemerges as a very important player. But, the way you deal with any part of this challenge cannot leave out women's realities and perspectives. In fact, these perspectives may be the key to handling the situation. The HIV/AIDS crisis is a very good example. I have said many times in my speeches that HIV/AIDS as a disease is a health crisis, but the epidemic is a gender issue. Unless we address the whole issue of women's status—the power of women to say no, the reduction of sexual violence in women's lives, the unequal power relationships—unless all these are addressed, we are not going to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Younger and younger girls are getting infected by older men. The rate of infection among girls is five to six times higher than the rate of infection of boys in Sub-Saharan Africa. Until you address the issue of gender, you are not going to stop the spread of this epidemic. Gender inequality in this particular case is not just a moral issue. It is fatal.

The other concern is that you have the spread of this disease when there is a cutback in basic services and a debt crisis in many of these countries, especially within Africa. You have a cutback in your health systems. You have a cutback in your infrastructure. The care of the dying and the sick falls into "home care." It sounds wonderful—home care. But it falls on the backs of women and girls. Girls are brought out of school. Women are brought out of the workforce to care for the dying. And very often, they get infected and they die. And nobody cares for them.

But there is a cost to this care, to what is called the care economy. There is a terrible cost. Firstly, a generation of girls is not going to be educated. A generation of women is being brought out of the workforce. And basically, there is no support for the kind of care that usually the state would take responsibility for but has now fallen totally on the hands and backs of women—and older and older women because the younger women are dying. You have to address this as a life-cycle issue as well as a gender issue. So it is extremely important that those who are concerned with development look at the women's development agenda as putting back on the agenda many of these kinds of issues that otherwise would not be addressed.

TGW: That's very useful, actually. You mentioned that in your view the twenty-first century has these three issues—globalization, fragmentation, and problems without borders. What would you see as the twenty-first century's—or at least the next ten or fifteen years—main intellectual challenge?

NH: It is about the battleground in the twenty-first century. The battlegrounds have shifted: at one stage, there were ethics of warfare; there were ethics of how we deal with our differences, with conflicts. There is now a breakdown of all ethics. Now, if you look at any situation of conflict, it has gone into our homes, it has gone into our schools, and it has gone into our communities. And the largest victims of any war are the civilians. But increasingly, it is not just about our communities. The battlefield is actually the human soul, and this is now the fight—this whole area of religion and spirituality. I think there needs to be a deeper understanding that as we are globalizing, as we are generating wealth, as we are developing all these development alternatives, there is an area that we still do not understand. And this is the very deep, spiritual nature of the human experience as well.

How do you touch a human being in such a deep way that dying becomes a sign of pride? To go beyond even the human instinct for survival, for a cause that they feel gives them dignity? How do you provide human dignity and human respect at a time when there are all these devaluations that are taking place? Current legitimacy has been broken and people are going back to their "roots," to their "gods," to create more secure futures, even their past. People are questioning the whole framework of meaning and human existence. This is going to be a huge challenge intellectually.

TGW: Actually, that is the best answer anyone has given me to that question, I would have to say. Usually it stops people in their track.

NH: It did.

TGW: As you look back, to age eight when grandmother and aunts and uncles plopped you into school, how would you describe the changes in your own thinking, your own intellectual approach to issues? Have there been some sea-changes which you threw out, which

you used to think and exchanged with something else? Or has there been a growth and evolution? How would you describe your own path over the last forty years?

NH: If somebody had told me at age eight that I was going to become the executive-director of UNIFEM, I wouldn't have believed it. That I will be able to change, or understand my life situation in such a way that I could develop enough knowledge to help create a better and more secure world for women, I wouldn't have believed it. I've evolved. I have evolved a very deep understanding, and I work from a deep space. I have thrown out what is not real. I weed out what is dead so that what is alive can thrive. So I try to get away from ritualized talk or ritualized writing. And I try to get to what people are really feeling and thinking, and try to emerge that as valuable.

I give a lot of respect to where people have come from. The experience of my aunt for example is very different from mine. She understands the world that she has lived through. When I am with her, I legitimize every single experience of hers. When I enter her world, I leave mine behind. I enter into her world completely. I have taught my children this. It is not necessary to be right and to show that you know and understand everything. You leave all that behind, and you go in with respect because people have lived. How they have lived and struggle to help humanity is what you respect them for.

It is not always easy. I have tried to build some common understanding so that my children understand their history and who they are and have a story. Unless they understand where they come from, it is extremely difficult to create a new tapestry of life that is multilayered. I believe we are all creators of the human experience—of a human future.

TGW: I loved this image earlier of Bella Abzug's "polluted stream." But I am actually honestly interested in your views about the importance of separate efforts versus mainstreaming

efforts within existing agencies. The easy answer is we have to do both. But if you had to bet on one or the other, which one would you see as more important?

NH: It is not easy to mainstream. I don't think people even understand what is actually meant or required by that. People are so busy. These institutions are just amazing in the way they are able to create work—not necessarily productive work. Just to maintain organizations, to get things going, require people to spend their time on so many things. So if some of these issues are not natural to them, they don't automatically think of it. Therefore, what is extremely important is to have what I call the "heart" in the whole system—somebody literally pumping.

So I wouldn't see it as doing separate women's work. I see it as a space that gathers knowledge, that knows how to move these issues, that is up-to-date with what is happening on the ground and is able to pull that together, and then able to pump it into the various systems, to make people aware, to keep all these issues alive and high up on peoples' agenda. People have been really grateful that we played the kind of role. We played that role for the HIV/AIDS discussion in the General Assembly, with the peace and security agenda of the Security Council, and even now with Afghanistan. I have played a major role by really making sure that the UN system, in responding to the Afghan situation, doesn't just go off without taking into account Afghan women, and they almost did.

The way we did it was to say that the agenda has to come from the reality of the Afghan women. So we organized a meeting in Brussels—a roundtable that brought together women from within the country and outside the country to forge an agenda—the Brussels action plan. Out of this action plan, we then mainstream, if you like, into the World Bank, the UNDP, the Asian Development Bank, and the Islamic Bank's needs assessment. But at the same time, we

also put it, or mainstream it, into the UN interim program for the rebuilding of Afghanistan. This interim program brought together the humanitarian and development sides of the UN's work.

I was there in Tokyo for the donor's pledging conference precisely to make sure that these issues were again very high up on various agendas. And now the issue has been incorporated, or mainstreamed. So if we were not there doing all this work, I doubt that it would have happened naturally. Now there is a woman minister in Afghanistan, and she is struggling to create a constituency and her plans for the next phase. So now, actually next week, I will be going there, helping her to develop a constituency from the different communities through various consultations. A lot of this work has not even taken place on the ground, especially outside of Kabul. We will bring together women from different communities for a national consultation, to develop an Afghan women's agenda, which will be declared on International Women's Day on the 8th of March.

Once she has this, she can then negotiate with other ministries. And she can negotiate with the UN to make sure that different parts of this agenda get supported and mainstreamed.

TGW: Actually, using your earlier image—rather than the heart, we are talking about a conscience in this battlefield for the human soul. You have mentioned the World Bank and you've mentioned a lot of other agencies. I am curious as to the extent to which you think the tensions—I'm talking about turf, and tensions, and overlapping mandates and budgets. To what extent do you see this as basically healthy and normal within the UN system? Or do you see it as out of control at times? And in terms of the competition for good ideas, or spawning good ideas, does this help or hinder?

NH: Let me talk about the turf in the UN, and after that the UN and the Bank. The turf fight in the UN is a very short-sighted one, because in an era of decreasing resources and

decreasing levels of influence, people are fighting for whatever turf remains, rather than trying to increase it. There is so much work to be done. Unfortunately, the concept of turf and the compartmentalization is very real in the UN. It has taken away an unnecessary amount of time, and there has been a terrible cost. This is something that needs to be addressed seriously because it is such a waste of productive time. It also wears the morale of staff out, especially staff that are really here to do work. People just leave feeling disgusted with the turf battles. So this is something that has to be addressed seriously and soon by the highest level of the system. New ways of working have to be found, but also new areas, and clearer definitions of mandates and effectiveness.

Some of the problems are due to the fact that the UN in the Cold War had an entirely different role than what it has now, and some of the staff don't understand the role that they have to play now. Therefore, the old skills in the organization that were required to do particular kinds of work are no longer needed and new skills are needed. This had led to insecurity within the system. Therefore, what appears as turf battles are sometimes not so much turf battles as people not wanting others to do certain kinds of work. Tensions appear because the effectiveness of some shows up the ineffectiveness of others. It is a rather complex issue which is being addressed because the UN is trying to renew itself.

Regarding the UN and the World Bank, I think the Bank has not had such a great history in terms of development and the advice it has given to developing countries. There is arrogance in it as well. And this is true not just of the Bank but also of the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and, increasingly, the WTO (World Trade Organization) secretariat. Many developing countries still feel that whatever the faults of the UN are, it is still a space whereby they can at least talk. They are not so naïve to think that power relationships don't exist here, and as we

emerge in a unipolar world, you can see that it does have a major influence. But at the same time, at least there are still spaces here whereby conversations and trust can be built.

The Bank has greater resources, and therefore they can invest a lot more in academic ideas and the best expertise. The problem with the UN is that it doesn't invest enough in that. This is such a weakness. The level of professionalism for all staff has to increase, as well as the level of substantive involvement. There needs to be investment in human capacity in the UN, in the way the Bank invests in its own staff. The Bank has conditionalities. It has its way of working with developing countries. But as long as it has money power that is much larger than what the UN has, you find that the countries will develop a particular kind of relationship with the Bank.

Increasingly, the conversation that is taking place in the UN system is that, "Alright, our resources are declining, but we have the trust of governments, and we have the advice and expertise to give." But that's not good enough, precisely because governments can get advice elsewhere. And if you can't help governments build the necessary capacities to even deal with some of these institutions, the trust that they have will also break down. So in the long run, we need to reinvest in the UN, and the UN has to reinvest in its staff if it wants to develop a strong relationship of equal partners with the Bank. At the present moment, a lot of work has gone on in terms of developing the partnership. But I don't think it's an equal partnership.

TGW: You've been very kind. I think before your staff comes in and whisks you away, maybe we should stop. But I did want to ask one more question, which is where do you think you'd like to be in five or ten years? Do you see yourself still within the UN system or somewhere else?

NH: I would like to retire. I would like to start writing again and doing something else. I need to get back into a reflective mode. I would like to invest at least another five years of my life building up the women's fund. Now we are about $35 million a year. But I would like to really develop it so that it becomes a strong enough organization with the UN and then leave it and go back to some writing, reflecting, and doing more creative work—the other side of my life that I have not taken care of.

TGW: It sounds as if you have been fairly creative within the bounds that we all know within the UN system. Is there a question I should have asked you that I didn't?

NH: I think you have touched most of it, unless you would like me to discuss the transformations we have made in our work on violence against women that's really exciting.

TGW: Why don't you do that? You've mentioned violence against women, and it seems to me that that cropped up both in relationship to the Security Council and in relationship to prevention. But what's exciting in your programs about violence against women?

NH: Actually, it is an issue that touched me a lot because it was seen as a very difficult cultural issue that would be very difficult to solve and also to address. But what has been fascinating was the way in which we addressed some of these very sensitive cultural issues that live in deep personal spaces. We started off with these regional campaigns using media. Media began to cover some of these stories. But the other challenge was to actually create spaces whereby women were able to tell their stories and get out of a situation of shame, but also to develop new strategies for their lives.

We ran major campaigns that brought together new constituencies and partnerships, for example, bringing the police in partnership with women's crisis centers. Violence Against Women (VAW) was an issue that was only addressed by the women's movement for a long

time, but we got the police force involved and retrained them in many countries. We managed to get networks of judges supporting each other in making decisions about violence against women, getting governments to review archaic laws on domestic violence, including that of rape. I am so pleased that twenty-one countries in Latin America have now revised their national laws, including laws on rape that say that if a rapist agrees to marry his victim, it is no longer a crime. Many of these laws have been changed.

We have promoted work that takes into account the policy framework, the legal framework, the criminal justice systems, together with the community support systems. So there is a more holistic frame to the whole issue. Equally ground breaking is the fact that we have addressed four different kinds of violence in women's life. We have looked not only at home-based violence, but also at violence because of cultural practices. The campaign addressed issues of honor killing, of dowry deaths in Asia, of female genital cuttings in Africa. The third area was violence in war situations and in crisis situations. The fourth issue was that of violence because of the criminalization of the economy, like the trafficking of women and girls.

We have been able to use the internet to create a knowledge network around this issue. There was the end violence discussion list whereby people could share strategies of how they overturned decisions and worked with parliament to create new laws. How do you set up model shelters, how do you develop certain laws in an Islamic context? In Turkey for example, there was a situation where the discussion of domestic violence came up. The extremist group refused to accept that as an issue in parliament. Women in the country used our knowledge network to get in touch with women's groups in Malaysia and found that Malaysia, as a Muslim country, had protective laws. The women in Turkey were able to bring back the discussions in

parliament. There were all these wonderful exchanges taking place using the internet, which was really exciting.

Equally exciting was what happened in Jordan. Here, Princess Basma, the late King Hussein's sister—our goodwill ambassador—said, "When you started these campaigns at the national level, because the UN came in, it was much easier for the royal household to support these issues without backlash from the fundamentalist groups. We raised the honor killing issues. These campaigns had very concrete results. Before the girls who were exposed to these threats were put in prison. After the campaign, shelters were built for these girls so that they had places to go. From the UN side, we brought all the UN agencies together, and the outcome was that more UN programs at the country level started investing in this kind of work, whereas before they were not investing at all. Some of the strategies that have worked were featured in our video-conference in the General Assembly in 8 March 1999 linking five sites around the world on "A Life Free of Violence: It's Our Right."

I saw a change in UN system at headquarters, but also in country programming. The level of resources now invested to address the issue of violence in women's lives has definitely increased, even at the national level. Equally exciting is the involvement of men's groups. There has been a huge mobilization of men at the community level, church groups and so on, to deal with this issue. I have found this work very exciting because it literally used all the different strategies I outlined earlier—using it in a coherent way, a powerful way of creating concrete results and transforming in women's lives. It is how I would like to see the UN work.

TGW: Well, I hope you have enjoyed this as much as I have.

NH: Tom, I have enjoyed it tremendously. Thank you so much.

# INDEX