

MC as a social movement

TRANSCRIPTION OF AUDIOTAPE FOR: Harvard KSG Hauser Center DATE: 11/18/03

SRILATHA: So just to begin, today is Tuesday, November 18th and this is my interview with Monika Jaeckel of the Mothers Centers in Germany and she is currently in Amsterdam, right?

JAECKEL: Well, this is Arnhem. It's another city in Holland.

SRILATHA: Arnhem. OK. I'm doing this interview from home in Cambridge, Massachusetts. So, Monika, shall we start with the first question? Looking at your own involvement with grass roots women's movements in Europe and Germany and how the idea of the Mothers Centers came about and what were the sort of personal and political influences that led you to get involved in this movement?

JAECKEL: OK. Well, for me it actually came out of my background as a feminist. I was one of these feminists that started way back in the '70s after the '68 movement.

After the student movement, quite soon after, there was a feminist movement, which was basically also a student movement. After a while I was personally quite uncomfortable with the fact that I felt the women's movement was actually only representing a very small segment of women.

SRILATHA: Right.

JAECKEL: Meaning more or less academic women, professional women, women that usually did not have children or if they did they didn't make that part of the feminist issue. I remember distinctly when I was once on a demonstration against, the law against abortion, and I was marching down the streets like we did a lot in those days and I looked at the people on the sidelines and saw a lot of women's faces that were not really antagonistic but it was like there was a separation there that didn't have anything to do with we're against you but was more like, we don't have contact with you. That was the moment where I thought, something's wrong here. So for me it became actually quite interesting to try to get into a dialogue with the women that were doing their life choices all different from mine. So I was interested in housewives. I was interested in mothers. I was interested in heterosexual women and I was interested in women who stayed at home. Because those were the women that were not the ones in my circles and not the ones I found in the feminist movement. I mean we were saying we were expressing the interests of women, period. But I felt well, if at least half or more of the women don't feel they're represented by us, then this movement can never be really strong. That was very clear to me. So I thought we'd have to bridge that gap, so I was interested in first of all just basically meeting women that did make different life choices and seeing how they tick and what their interests were and where there would be maybe common ground. So that actually was my personal motivation, to look into the issues and the parts of life that were missing in the women's movement in Germany.. I think part of it of course was also getting into the parts of life that I didn't experience myself either. It's like I didn't have a child, I didn't want a child, but I thought it's interesting to see what that's like. So it was a way of complementing whatever fell out of my life choices by involving it in another way into my life.

So I think that was part of the personal motivation.

SRILATHA: Yeah. Yeah.

JAECKEL: And politically it was similar. It really was the case that the feminist movement had large blind spots, considering the lives of the majority of women. After I finished my studies, it sort of came together when I was looking for a job. Then I consciously applied for a job that was about investigating or studying the situation of young housewives and mothers in lower class neighborhoods. For me that was like OK, this is my chance to get into what I was interested in. So I connected my personal and political motivation to getting a job in that field and then the whole thing started. We did a research on the situation of young families. It was a research that was commissioned by the Family Ministry because they wanted to find out why parent educational programs didn't

work. They only reached a very small segment of middle class families. So they wanted us to find out why. But we didn't ask the families only or not even primarily about what they thought about parent education. We made it a more general thing. What would you actually consider support in your situation? From those interviews I really got to understand the situation of mothers in Germany, from this study. And having an activist student movement and feminist background, we put together what we found into a kind of movement model, something that could work as a self-help movement. I think that if I'd been just a traditional academic we would have just published a book, you know?

SRILATHA: Yeah.

JAECKEL: I had just come from a background of founding women's centers. We had founded the first women's center in Frankfurt and all that. So that background plus academic research came through as this model Mothers Center, which we then lobbied for with our ministry. Our Department of Family, in our government is the one that funds our institute, so we have of course had some good links there and we convinced them that we really had found something major that was not working in regular parent education programs and that we could only prove that, however, if we could actually try our model out and make it work. So that in itself was also something that I think came from my activist background. I mean we had all these big theories in the student movement about activating research. You know, how to do research and empower and activate people at the same time.

SRILATHA: Right, right. Yeah.

JAECKEL: This was the late '70s, so the ministry was also a little bit effected still by the student movement, so they could listen to things like that at that time. So they said OK, then you can try the model out and they funded it for the first initial three centers. I was not alone in this. I was doing this mainly with another colleague, who also had a similar background.

SRILATHA: Are you talking about Andrea?

JAECKEL: This was a woman called Greta, who was a colleague of mine at D.J.I. She had a child and for her the motivation came more out of her personal experience. Then what we did was that we didn't write the book ourselves only but we were into empowering the people from the ground. So we put a lot of effort into saying let's support and facilitate the process that they can write themselves. Because then they can own the things and then it's an empowering process, you know? So the book that came out was a book that the women wrote themselves. I mean, with a lot of help from us and with input and putting it together and all that, but basically the core of the book is really stories in a storytelling format of the women themselves. That was a very powerful tool, because that actually created the Mothers Center movement. After that it went by itself. Women would read the book. They'd talk to each other about it. They'd go visit the Mothers Center and they'd say, we can do that, too, and that's what it's about and that's what we all want ourselves. Then they'd start creating Mothers Centers. That's how it's been ever since. The women now just take the idea and run with it. So it's really become a self-help movement. But of course a lot of facilitation in the beginning and also still it was needed to open the doors. I don't think women would have been able to lobby that high to get that kind of political recognition without support from people like us. Academics in Germany have a high status. Anything that happens has to have a stamp scientifically proven, to get any kind of funding. In German we call this Wissenschaftliche Begleitung, that means scientific accompaniment. So everything has to be evaluated. Then it's something real.

SRILATHA: Yeah. Until then it's just a theory or a idea, but it's not an established fact.

JAECKEL: Exactly.

SRILATHA: Yeah.

JAECKEL: Exactly. So we used that, this credibility that we could give to things, a lot in the beginning. I think that is still my role, that I still open doors, that my whole professional background and the things that I have access to from being part of a research institute I can use to bridge that to people from the ground wouldn't get access that

easily to that. I think I stuck with it for all these years also because it was so fascinating to actually see that you can do that, you know, it's the researcher's ultimate dream to do a research and to find an answer and then have that answer go around the world. [LAUGHTER]

SRILATHA: Yeah, yeah. And to lead to action, that you research actually leads to action.

JAECKEL: Exactly.

SRILATHA: That's quite an unusual state of affairs, isn't it?

JAECKEL: Yeah. So in that sense I've always stuck to it and been interested in how it continues and a lot of things have developed since then that we didn't think of in our original design of the Mothers Center. Although amazingly enough a lot of the core things are still true. That's also interesting. It's developed a lot further, but also a lot of the core things are still true. So that's also interesting, that it hit the situation and is not just a trend for ten years or something like that.

SRILATHA: Right. But I think your response to this question leads very naturally to the second. What were the factors that then led you to take this local movement, if I may call it such, because it was focused on creating spaces for women in their own neighborhoods and location. What led you to link this movement up with a transnational movement or with the transnational? I'm using the word transnational, Monika, rather than international or global because right now, for the sake of accuracy, we think that that's the most appropriate word. So what led to that linkage with [OVERLAPPING VOICES]? What was the first linkage? I'm assuming it was with [Gruts?], but maybe you had linked up with other things.

JAECKEL: Well, I linked up actually before GROOTS, I think. I linked up with the National Congress of Neighborhood Women. That happened via contacts here in Holland. A woman called led Guinee who was organizing sort of neighborhood platforms in Holland, where housewives were saying how they wanted their neighborhoods to be built. So she was interested in all kinds of neighborhood-based movements and groups. And she linked up to me on that level and linked me up to the National Congress of Neighborhood Women. Our initial contact was very much linked also to their leadership support method that they've developed, that we started using very early on.

SRILATHA: How did you come across them?

JAECKEL: Through Q.E. [UNINTELLIGIBLE], a Dutch woman who knew them and who was organizing these Dutch neighborhood platforms.

SRILATHA: I see.

JAECKEL: I met her at a conference. Then she linked me up to both their whole movement, their whole Dutch neighborhood movement, and the New York people, the National Congress of Neighborhood Women and we became founding members of Groots. But I tell you what for us was important in that was that as the Mothers Centers movement we were not really recognized as a women's movement by the feminists nor by political mainstream.

SRILATHA: Sure, sure.

JAECKEL: — There was quite a clash around the Mothers Centers. We at one point even wrote something, kind of a battling paper called The Mothers Manifest, Mutter Manifest, yeah.

SRILATHA: Ah!

JAECKEL: Because it was really quite difficult. We were very much attacked. At one point we were even being attacked as fascists "for bringing in an idealization of motherhood". It was quite difficult for the feminists and the

traditional leftists to accept a mothers movement. It was quite a big deal. I think part of it is linked to the German history —

SRILATHA: Yeah.

JAECKEL: — and the Nazi period, where there was a misuse of motherhood. Just like in Germany you can't even sing traditional folk songs, because it was

SRILATHA: Associated with the.

JAECKEL: — Nazi period.

SRILATHA: Yes, yes.

JAECKEL: And just the word mother has a similar fate. It's like contaminated. People immediately think of getting a medal for birthing five blond children or such.

SRILATHA: Right, right.

JAECKEL: Because things like that had happened. Not that the Nazi regime did anything really positive for mothers, but there was this sort of ideological thing hanging around that makes it very difficult for people to relate to motherhood.

SRILATHA: Right. Oh, yeah.

JAECKEL: Yeah, just the word mother people are afraid of. It's really true. It's amazing.

SRILATHA: So did that in some way kind of fuel your linkage with groups outside the country?

JAECKEL: Yeah, exactly. [OVERLAPPING VOICES]

SRILATHA: Because it was hard to find acceptance within.

JAECKEL: Yeah. There's a non-acceptance within and we were basically looking for other kinds of movements that resembled the Mothers Center movement. You want to sort of not be the only one in the world, you know? The feminists at that period were not, would not mirror the Mothers Centers as a movement and were not allies, so when we realized that there were other movements out in the world that were much closer to the Mothers Centers than the feminist movement in our own country, that was a strong motivator to get in contact with them. But I have to tell you one thing. For us, the way we defined grassroots in the Mothers Center movement was not only as poor. Because the women in the Mothers Centers are not only poor. There are poor women, but there are also middle class women —

SRILATHA: Right.

JAECKEL: — and the definition of grassroots was much more around organizing around issues of everyday life and neighborhoods rather than about political parties and labor market involvement and such. So that was more, the type of community movement we were representing as Mothers Centers And I remember when the woman came back from the Groots founding conference in Jamaica she exactly had that experience, saying you know, there's women out there, they have a total different life and different country, but we can speak a common language because we are about raising our families and there's issues that are just totally similar, even if the level of socioeconomic or cultural background is very different. So she felt a much stronger bond immediately than if she had gone to a feminist conference in Germany.

SRILATHA: But are you saying, sorry to divert here a bit but this is a very fascinating issue you've raised about the class differences between what would normally be characterized as grassroots movements, grassroots organizations, in other developing country contexts or even in the U.S., with the Mothers Centers. How are these, have these class differences created problems for the Mothers Centers in terms of their participation in Gruts or any of the other [UNINTELLIGIBLE].

JAECKEL: Well, it's been —

SRILATHA: Is it a tension point or is it something that people have learned to cope with?

JAECKEL: — we've discussed about it often and it was never really totally resolved, I think. I think that it never really, let's say it never really got into a really good theoretical debate. I don't think it's a tension point, It has come up with the American Mothers Center movement more than with ours. There it actually has come up. They are in a way more middle class in their whole movement than our movement ever was. Since we're not only middle class it has never gotten this kind of homogeneous lifestyle. That's the interesting part of it that motherhood actually cuts across class issues. So that creates a very interesting kind of bonding in the Mothers Centers between women from different classes. Then it just doesn't become a middle class movement. It becomes something else, you know? But the Mothers Center movement in the States actually is quite middle class, that does show limitations., mainly in the way that they fear to get political.

SRILATHA: Ah.

JAECKEL: They're very much more oriented around psychological issues. I mean, they're moving also, but it's been much more visible there, But I think with the German Mothers Centers movements and the other Mothers Centers in the other countries and Goots I don't think it's really been a tension point. But it is something I would say would still be interesting to still explore and spell out some more. I think there's a lot of theory behind this that hasn't really been totally laid out.

SRILATHA: Interesting.

JAECKEL: Yeah.

SRILATHA: So do you feel you've covered this question —

JAECKEL: Yeah, I think so.

SRILATHA: — of what are the factors that led to its becoming part of a transnational movement? I think you've summarized quite well. Would you say a little bit, too, Monika, about what are the main issues and struggles? This is kind of linked to your last point that you just made about the movement there being much more political.

JAECKEL: Yeah.

SRILATHA: So what is the way in which they define the key issues or?

JAECKEL: Yeah. Well, you know there's actually a sort of more theoretical definition and a more practical one and they link, of course. I think the basic issue is the marginalization of motherhood, and actually the devaluation of care work, in post-industrial societies. So the whole split between public and private, this whole schism. And between productive and reproductive work and how the roles of care work or also the culture of care is actually split off from public life and also public policy. And that creates a kind of schizophrenic situation in society generally and for women especially, because they are the ones that take care of all this part of life that never gets public attention but is just considered private. And of course it's not private. Many women have this feeling as mothers that their part in society and their contribution to society is simply not acknowledged and not validated. That is a very strong feeling of disempowerment that women have as mothers. Most German women are at home

for three years because they have parental leave .It is this time they feel it the strongest because then they are also excluded from all public venues. So that is a strong motivation . The practical issues they organise around are the situation of mothers, children and families, conditions of family life, of socialization, of family relations, family-friendly infrastructure in the cities, issues of child care, of elder care, of how to balance out labor market involvement and family responsibilities, the whole issue of support services, how to create time and resources to spend time at home to raise children, recognition of what mothers do as work, having a say and influence as mothers on the school system. Then of course also the economic empowerment of mothers, because when you leave the labor market to take care of a child you get into a disadvantage by many factors so your whole career is quite tampered with. That's the economic aspect of it. But also things like conditions around birth giving. How are women treated when they give birth to children? How is that whole situation treated in the whole health system? Health of women, health of children, all these sort of issues around raising a family, raising children, are very big practical issues where women have a lot to say on how things could improve to have the lives of children have a higher quality, and the lives of women and families have a higher quality. Identifying what makes life hard as a parent and what also hampers the healthy development of children. All those are issues that the Mothers Centers organizes around.

SRILATHA: Right. And what are the strategies of organizing that they've been using? [OVERLAPPING VOICES] You understand I want you to say this for the record. I don't want to put my assumptions about it in the study.

JAECKEL: Yeah, yeah, sure.

SRILATHA: I'm just going to ask you questions for which you'll think but [UNINTELLIGIBLE] knows this stuff, right?

JAECKEL: No, I understand, no problem. Well, just before I go to that, I just have one more point —

SRILATHA: Sure.

JAECKEL: — because the interesting thing is that the Mothers Centers have gone beyond Germany, you know?

SRILATHA: Yeah.

JAECKEL: And I've looked a little into that. Why was that possible actually? Because originally we really thought this was a model for the German housewife. This was a group that was not in the feminist movement, so we were looking at OK, what, how can they be empowered and that was what we came up with. But it actually became something that went across the borders. So what I've seen is that what happens through the Mothers Centers and what they're actually addressing maybe as a hidden agenda, you know, it's not something that is put up front, but it happens and it's sort of a motivating factor as a hidden agenda, is actually community cohesion and creating a lively and alive neighborhood and a neighborhood network. So it's counteracting the alienating structures and isolation of human settlements. That's why we also had the strong focus with Habitat. It made a lot of sense. This whole Habitat thing. For our women's issues as a Mothers Center it made a lot more sense than a lot of the feminist issues. So I think what we can say is that through a lot of things happening in the world today, and I think that is in a way also what's happening through globalization, is that family and kin and neighborhood networks are being destroyed or drying up . In Germany or in the States it's modernization, because nobody lives at home anymore. You know, everybody's out in their cars and nobody's at home. Or in places like Bosnia it's the war that has completely destroyed any kind of social fabric in the society, neighborhoods and family networks were just totally torn apart. Socialism, all the former socialist countries like Hungary and Czech Republic and all that, they were not allowed to have neighborhood networks during socialism. So that whole culture and tradition was broken down by socialism. Then the whole AIDS issue has also actually broken down kin networks because the load of dealing with this in your family has just gotten too big. The families can't,

SRILATHA: Can't cope with it anymore.

JAECKEL: Yeah. Especially also with the rural/urban migration, it just doesn't work. So rural/urban migration is also something that's been destroying family and kin networks. So basically what made society stick together on the level of care work and everyday life has been torn apart through all these factors and that is what Mother Centers actually answer to, so that's why we called it globalization from the ground because it really does answer to that. It creates the means to recreate and reweave those kind of social networks in another way than the traditional family and kin networks have been, you know? Making new forms of families and new forms of neighborhood networks.

And the strategies to do that are basically very clear. It's claiming public space in the neighborhood. And this public space has a couple of major factors linked to it, for instance self managed so it's not a social work model where you have social workers offering any kind of programs but it's a space for community women to self manage and use public space as they see fit. It's a place where children are always welcome and the whole space is organized in a way that takes account that children are part of life which does not mean that they're the center of attention in the center. That's also an important point. It's not a children's center but it's a mothers' center so the focus is on the mothers but the children are a kind of obvious part of mothers' life and that's written into the whole structure of the center. From the rooms, from the way everybody in the center knows how to deal with children. It's just something that is part of it. And then another really important thing was that it's not a place that basically organizes courses and such. I mean, they do that, too. But the core is actually what we call the drop in café, an open door café so that at any given time when somebody walks in there's always a core group and community happening there that you can just link onto.. It's a very important part of it and then, also an important part is that we always said this work should not be totally voluntary but it should also be remunerated. So that's also been a very important part. In a way, all these points are ways to try to bridge this schism between public and private life. Because what makes women feel marginalized when they sit at home is because their work is not recognized in the form that it's not paid. Also because they don't have contacts with colleagues because their work doesn't have public recognition and because the fact that they're living with children is seen as more of a burden and something to get rid of if you want to keep up with the pace of public life. Those are all the points that create this being split off from public life. So in the Mother's Center we created all the conditions that we could think of to bridge this split so that it's possible for women with their children to organize their every day life with children and still be part of public life which includes getting access to money, getting access to contacts, getting access to some kind of public influence and public recognition. So that's basically the strategy, the core strategy.

SRILATHA: It's very interesting to me because so I'd like you to respond to this idea that way you're describing the analysis and how women felt. It goes to this idea of how in a way the basic sort of citizenship of these women was kind of denied. Right? So it's kind of like they're not really citizens, you know. They're some sort of half citizens or dormant citizens because they happen to be mothers. So it's almost like the idea of that they cannot actually be full citizens and full participants in the kind of process.

JAECKEL: Right. Second class.

SRILATHA: Right, because they are —

JAECKEL: Handicapped.

SRILATHA: At the moment, this role that kind of makes them like they're handicapped. That's quite a, that makes it a much larger issue than simply, are they participating or not participating because it's like saying that if you reproduce, while you're reproducing and rearing you can't actually be a full citizen.

JAECKEL: Exactly.

SRILATHA: So would you agree, if I said that in writing that this was a process that tried to regain or reclaim, where women tried to reclaim their citizenship because of the way society reduces it when you're reproducing.

JAECKEL: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. That's the key of it.

SRILATHA: Yeah.

JAECKEL: And actually it should be the contrary. Because when women are reproducing and raising children they have access to parts of learning and gaining wisdom that would really be needed in thinking of how to create society. It's care work, you know, and it involves basically extending your limits of always only thinking of yourself.

And that's a major part of any kind of civil society or democratic society is that you're capable of thinking of more than just yourself. That's something that women, when they have children, learn so you have a part of the population that are learning very important parts of creating social cohesion in society and they're excluded. I mean, you're not only missing out on almost half the population; you're missing out on specific competencies that come from taking on this responsibility. The native Indians say, let the grandmothers decide because they will always think ahead for seven generations. They have taken this into their way of decision making. They see that as a resource and as a competency. And in our society, it's completely excluded, and I think that shows. That's why we always said, Mother Centers are about reintegrating the culture of care to public life and public policy. I think it shows that this whole part is missing in the way decisions and our politics are being made in our society. You can see that, you know? In the way decisions are made.

SRILATHA: Tell me something, Monika, has the attitude of the women's movement changed at all?

JAECKEL: Yes, it's changed a little bit. I think it's still a difficult issue. Even in groups like the Huairou Commission, it's not been that easy; it's not been taken up really to say that motherhood is also really a major theme. Our whole movement is basically subsumed under local governance or governance issues. And of course, we have a lot to do with that but it's a much larger issue. But that never gets into the structure of the work, you know. And indeed, it's very difficult to sell this aspect of the work to any kind of progressive funders. They always shy away from it. I realized that when at one point the political right was mobilizing their groups to come to the UN and they had buses full of women that came and they had buttons on simply saying, I Am a Mother. And I realized that this whole issue of motherhood is totally left open for the right to claim as theirs, you know?

SRILATHA: Exactly.

JAECKEL: And that has to do with the hesitancy of the whole progressive movement to address this issue the Mother Center movement I think are one of the few. There's more but not that many who have actually said, this is really also a theme and an issue and quite a fundamental one. The parts of our work that sort of fit better to the mainstream themes have been much easier to get into and get mirrored and supported than actually the part that we really bring as an addition to what the other groups are doing and that the focus we have on what it means in women's lives to be a mother. Or in society to be doing care work, you know? So I would say, yes, it's changed in that we're not called fascists anymore. [LAUGHTER] And that there's some more space and interest—

SRILATHA: What a big change!

JAECKEL: Yeah, well I tell you, that was quite shocking. I mean, this was done in print, you know. For a while we were like really outcasts, you know. We're not that anymore. And there's been more and more recognition from different parts, especially since the mother center movement is much more alive than the feminist movement. It's one of the movements that really keeps going and is really there in the community. So while there's recognition basically on that level still on the political level or on the level of visibility, I think that the fact that we really have a lot of success on the ground does not get a matching level of political visibility.

SRILATHA: Or respect.

JAECKEL: Or respect. And I think that still has to do with this whole uneasiness, hesitancy. In German we say, Beruehrungsangst meaning literally, afraid to touch.

[LAUGHTER] Afraid to really touch and embrace the issue. I think that still, there's still some of that around that hampers our political impact. I'd say so.

SRILATHA: It's really quite ironic, huh?

JAECKEL: Yeah. It is, I know.

SRILATHA: The feminist movement that started with trying to get recognition for the work women do in society and to fight its devaluation, end up devaluing it themselves in a certain way that they don't see its potential as a political movement.

JAECKEL: I like the way you framed it as sort of second class citizens because that is a stigma, that women feel, you know? And it is related to motherhood, more than anything else. The women want to get out of that status so they will do anything to not be reminded of anything that could pull them back into that hole, you know? I think it's really a strong effect of internalized oppression.

SRILATHA: Oppression, yeah.

JAECKEL: Yeah, I really think so.

SRILATHA: I think that's absolutely right. I mean, I would agree with you 100% that this is very much a manifestation of that, you know, more than anything else. Monika, say a little bit more about what you think the gains of being part of an international movement have been for the Mother Centers. What's the benefit, why does it stay in that? I mean you've alluded to it that one is [UNINTELLIGIBLE] of the recognition.

JAECKEL: First of all, peer recognition so it's given the women an extremely strong motivation to really be mirrored by other groups and movements in other parts of the world. —

[END OF SIDE A]

[BEGINNING OF SIDE B]

JAECKEL: — It has given them self confidence and validation to meet women that they considered like sisters in different parts of the world. Every time it happens women just are awed, you know? It gives a feeling that you are part of something bigger. But also I would say it has given political visibility at home. The fact that we could say we're in these international conferences, we've gotten recognition at UN Habitat and so on that has helped the Mother Centers women at home to negotiate their own political turf. So it's given recognition to the work by having it recognized outside of your own country. So it's motivating and also really giving some political negotiating power, you know? But Also through these transnational connections the transfers and replicates of the Mother Centers have really happened. The first time a bigger group of women from the German Mother Centers went to one of the conferences was in Beijing in '95. And it was just incredible how much interest they felt from the other women's groups there, I mean they were just totally surprised and you know, how do you say, swayed away or what do you call it?

SRILATHA: Overwhelmed.

JAECKEL: And I mean everybody was really fascinated with the Mother Centers and that just gave a huge boost and women felt, well, if this is not just our little German model but something that actually relates to other parts of the world, you know, of course that makes you grow yourself, you know?

And that we designed the Grassroots Women's International Academy, I think we would never have had the confidence to do that if we hadn't had that experience, you know, that women in different parts of the world were genuinely interested in the Mother Centers. So we, when the Expo happened in Germany we could, negotiate with our government to say hey, we're having the world come to Germany. We have something here which is a model which the world is interested in. Why don't we use this to host as part of the Expo a grass roots event.

SRILATHA: The Expo was the Hanover Expo 2000?

JAECKEL: Yeah. Where you were, too.

SRILATHA: Yes.

JAECKEL: When we took our quilt to China we had put white sheets next to the quilt and asked women to just write whatever they wanted as greetings to the women in Germany. And we got these incredibly interesting quotes from all kinds of people that were talking about what they liked about the Mother Centers. It became like this German Export article, you know? I mean there are not that many things you can say, made in Germany and have made sense to other parts of the world. It's usually the other way around. Things come from America or whatever so this was something, I think, that gave a lot of confidence to women but also created interest in the country for the whole thing.

Even understanding our own work. When you see how it's explained in another context you understand much more, much deeper what it means than if you only always see it only in your own context. If it all of a sudden makes sense in a total different situation then you really see what it really is, that it is larger than, you know, your own specific situation. So it has broadened our own minds and of course, we've also imported a lot of stuff. I mean, we haven't only exported our experiences of Mother Centers but we also imported a lot of things through these networks into the Mother Center work, too. I mean, the leadership support method was something that right from the beginning was a strong boost for our Centers that we're still working with and then, of course, lately the saving and credit groups that started at Stuttgart and that are now also happening in Bosnia and the Mother Centers are a part of, it strengthens the Mother Centers a lot to have groups like that a part of the work. So you know, we've profited a lot from learning also from the other groups.

SRILATHA: But do the members, do the Women Centers members, participants have a sense? Is there any kind of policy focus at the transnational level? Is there any kind of larger advocacy focus at the transnational level? I'm asking this question for a specific reason, Monika, because you know, much of the thinking right now about transnational movements is that you know, they have grown up as to deal with some kind of policy issue at the global level. You know, usually it leads to do some advocacy with the World Bank or it's to try and go and protest and some WTO meeting or you know, whatever, to affect some sort of trade policy or some human rights issues or that kind of thing? So the literature sort of makes a, I think creates a very strong assumption that transnational linkages and activism is in order to change some kind of larger global policy. Now in your case, and if you see yourself as a link through groups or a wider commission. You mentioned UN Habitat. What is the policy focus, if at all, or is that not an important focus? Is the focus really on creating these learning networks and these learning linkages and kind of mutual solidarity? Is that what it's really about? How would you?

JAECKEL: Well, I don't think it's connected to any sort of given political agenda. I mean, it's definitely not linked to world trade, the WTO and all that kind of stuff. That goes above the heads, actually, of most of the Mother Centers' women. But what I think it's linked to is what I was saying a little bit before, that there is a feeling that the fact that neighborhoods are drying up or deteriorating is something that is not just a local issue and not just a national issue but a larger issue that has to do with some larger developments and larger effects of the way society is going. Yeah?

SRILATHA: Larger forces.

JAECKEL: Yeah, larger forces something that is decided in places that go beyond the German government, you know? There is some realization that this has to do with the way that money is valued over social qualities. There is a feeling, at some point that the bottom line is money that makes us use up all the natural resources in the environment and the same sort of logic makes us use up all the social resources, you know, in society. Motherliness is a resource that society thinks is endless just like nature is thought of as endless. You can exploit it to the utmost and it will keep recharging itself and that's simply not true. That if you don't think about what conditions are needed to have the creative force of motherliness to happen then it will die out, you know. A part of what's happening when neighborhoods are dying out is that this sort of care attitude and motherliness not just toward your own child but towards the environment and the community around it, too. That that will die out if conditions are not made for it to thrive, you know? So there is a general link like that but not specifically towards,

the exact things that are happening on the level of these World Bank decisions. There is not a lot of focus on that kind of a political analysis in the Centers.

SRILATHA: But that's because they don't feel it's necessary, right? It doesn't stop there?

JAECKEL: Well, no, I don't think so. Because it's too hard to understand easily. It's not easy to get it, you know?

SRILATHA: So are you saying it is relevant but it's just very hard to take it up so —

JAECKEL: It's relevant, I would say, yeah, it's relevant but it's not easy to decline it down to the everyday life level. —

SRILATHA: Demystify it.

JAECKEL: Yeah. What did you say?

SRILATHA: They use this word, [UNINTELLIGIBLE] use this word, demystify, make it less mysterious, you know?

JAECKEL: Yeah, right.

SRILATHA: Make it simpler to understand.

JAECKEL: It's very abstract and yeah, I think that would be part of it.

SRILATHA: And make it seem like it's something that's actually connected to you and sometimes quite difficult. It tends to be seen as very distant or disconnected from people.

JAECKEL: The people that are mobilized around those issues are sort of another sub-scene. They're much more the type of radical left. More a youth culture, too, with all these sort of violent demonstrations and things like that and that doesn't really make much of a link to the Mother Centers women.

SRILATHA: Makes that —

SRILATHA: The session on the global forces.

JAECKEL: The level of Habitat is much closer you know, saying what does a human settlement need to look like that our children can grow with all their potential and that we don't become second class citizens. You don't have to do a lot of explaining around that but how it relates to the economy I think there's a gap there, yeah. I would say so.

SRILATHA: OK. So you're saying that Habitat is a more meaningful space for them where they can actually sort of feel linked to the issues it's dealing with or whatever? They don't feel as united. They don't feel it's all going above their heads in the case of Habitat?

JAECKEL: That was something that was quite easy to link to. In a way, they felt much more at home there than in a lot of other political contexts. So that really is what they're about.

SRILATHA: I see your point. I want to move on to the sort of key question of the whole interview, in a sense. I think you've kind of referred to some aspects of this earlier. I just want to give you a chance to say anything additional, that is, what do you see as the real difference between this kind of very grass roots space, transnational movement that the Mother Centers are a part of through Groots and through the Haurou

Commission and other groups that are a part of other transnational movements and in your case you've given several very concrete examples to contrast with the women's groups and feminist groups and feminist movement. So is there anything more you'd like to add in terms of what you see is real fundamental differences of priorities, of strategies, of thinking?

JAECKEL: Yeah, I see a couple of things. We are addressing more the not public part of women's lives, and seeing that as being the key to both their exclusion but also the key to their mobilization also. I sometimes call it the dark side of the moon, you know, the part that public life never shines light on. But that is still there, And I think that's a major difference and that's also why we call that more the grass roots aspect of our work, that it's really more about the care giving roles of women, the roles at home in the family and in the community and not the public roles, the upward mobility you know. And so this has been, like I said, we've had conflict with the feminists and the progressive left aplenty around this. They basically say if we address women in this role then we will keep them in their traditional role and women should get out of that role, going basically to a vision of society that has state provision of all the care work so that women and men are freed of it. But whereas we say not necessarily getting out of the traditional role but creating other conditions and validations for this work. And so we don't think that's keeping them in the traditional role but that's changing the conditions. But we don't say they have to get away from care work in order to be freed, yeah?

This whole concept of equality, for instance, what's come out of the feminist view often has been that equality has been kind of competing with men on their own terms and their terms being, excluding this whole part of care work from their life, so if you want to be equal to many of the feminists or the trade union concepts have as their measuring stick actually a male lifestyle and male model that already has excluded care work from their life, delegating it to others We say, no, we don't see equality as competing with men on this kind of lifestyle but more taking women's lives as a measuring stick and then saying, well, then how does the world need to look like? And then it's a totally different question, you know. And then you say that flexible hours, working part time, child care provisions, elder care provisions, all that becomes part of what the labor market also has to deal with. But then it's a different measuring stick. Then if the whole world is organized around the way women have organized their lives then you can include men in this larger picture and not take the small picture that men have created in their lifestyle and model and try to fit women into that to compete with that. Am I making myself clear?

SRILATHA: Absolutely clear, extremely clear.

JAECKEL: So we have a totally different concept of equality anyway and that's been something that's been often debated and where we had a different approach.

SRILATHA: Yeah, because you're basically not equating care giving as oppressive work.

JAECKEL: Exactly, yeah.

SRILATHA: That's the sort of central assumption in the left opposition. [OVERLAPPING VOICES]

JAECKEL: And then the whole concept of female participation .This 50/50 campaign thing. It's the same thing. They want women to get into political politics which is organized, again, around the male model of not including all the issues of care work and so you want women to let go of this whole part of their lives in order to be able to compete and perform in public. It's the same thing as the labor market. Women in public life actually have to leave their involvement with care responsibilities or delegate them and also in that sense, leave a community connection to go into politics. If you take a woman's life style and would organize politics around a woman's lifestyle you wouldn't come up with representative parliamentarianism. You'd come up with something that's much more rooted locally and much more close to and inclusive of taking care of your immediate environment while you're doing politics. It wouldn't be that disconnected and so we've always said, if you organize women around the tasks they're doing for their family and their community and then from there see what kind of political voice they want, then you come to different forms of politics, too. You create different channels of influence, not just having women voted into some kind of institution but having places like Mothers' Centers or other kinds of platforms you create in the community as places where women can raise their voices and make their impact. So with the whole concept of female participation, if you take it where you don't split it off from women's care giving

tasks then you come to a totally different sort of policy around mobilizing women and how they will participate, and in what forms. So also there, I think we've always had differences in strategies as well as analysis. We've always said if women are not keen to be voted into parliament there is a reason for it. It's not because they're backward but there's a reason to it because this kind of governance, this kind of doing politics just doesn't appeal to them. And if you look behind why it doesn't appeal to them you'll find lots of reasons why this may not be the best way to do politics in the first place. So making the issue broader than just saying, let women compete with what men are doing. And have more women doing the same things as men are doing. I'm bringing it a little bit [LAUGHTER].

SRILATHA: Yes, I understand.

JAECKEL: — flat. But anyway, I think that that's sort of the basic difference. So —

SRILATHA: Shall we move on to talking a little bit about how you organize your decision making structure and but you know, maybe we should just hold that question. Maybe because of the time factor I want to make sure that I hear your thinking on what you see as the main achievements of the movement locally but also trans-nationally and what you see as the future challenges and opportunities. Then maybe what I can do is come back to you for a brief discussion in the next ten days or so on this governance question. But I want to make sure I get your view on this.

JAECKEL: OK. So where are we now then?

SRILATHA: I want you talk about what you see as the main achievements of the your movement, what you feel you've accomplished.

JAECKEL: I think what we've mainly achieved is that we actually have created a thematic addition to women's movements. in the sense that we've created a mother's voice as part of the woman's voice. This has created more of a grass roots involvement but it's more than that. I think we're addressing a part that is very necessary for a women's movement to become a really holistic one. I would say that would be our major accomplishment, that is what we're standing for, I think. And that we have spelled out the issues of Human Settlements, the Habitat Agenda in a woman's perspective, that we have contributed to engendering the Habitat Agenda, that it becomes clear what sustainable human settlements look like from the point of view of a woman with a child at her hand, and that we make visible what women contribute to human settlements.

SRILATHA: What do you see as challenges coming up in the next four to five years? What do you see as the main?

It's really the last question was on what you think are the main challenges and opportunities. It's not just the negative stuff but maybe also see —

JAECKEL: Well, I think it's the same thing, I think the challenge still is to overcome the internalized oppression around motherhood. And really seeing how we can integrate, this whole theme of motherhood into a global movement. The right wing, the American right wing, they talk about family and traditional values and all that. If you look at Islamic right wing or whatever, they basically all are addressing an uneasiness that people have about the core values of living together which have to do with caring for each other that has been alienated by a kind of modern progressive way of life and this uneasiness which I think in a way is a kind of core human reaction is being used by the fundamentalists and they get a lot of their power from that. That they're addressing a sort of dark spot that a lot of the progressive movements are not addressing. They are using the resentment and unease generated through the underevaluation of motherhood to emotionally mobilise, but not to structurally change. I think it's an opportunity as well as a challenge what we are doing to adress care in a way that is empowering and not disempowering because what the right then does is they use these values but keep them in disempowering conditions. And to break that link, to say that we don't go against those values. We actually have them ourselves but we're linking them to conditions that actually are more in line with these values. If we would actually collectively formulate that I would think that's a big opportunity to break the power of a lot of the fundamentalist movements. So I think that's kind of a challenge and opportunity we as the Mother's Centers movement can really bring in. I remember the fundamental Catholics, their mouths fell open when the Mother's Centers went on an

abortion demonstration saying we as mothers want to have the right to make responsible decisions on this, you know? Because that's what they didn't reckon with. They always think it's the childless Lesbians they are up against. They get totally disoriented when they encounter mothers organising themselves on the same issues, but with other answers. When they get competition on their own turf. But we need some support on that, too. It's very difficult if you don't get the linkages and the partnerships with other groups around this. — In the Book Challenging Development in the introduction and the conclusion I spelled out some of this so that can be something just to refer to.

SRILATHA: Yes, absolutely. OK, so if you have a few minutes can you say a little bit about how your governance structure is set up. I'm just trying to contrast and compare that with other international networks, how do these networks set themselves up as transnational?

JAECKEL: Yeah, well, I'd say basically, so far the structure of the international mother movement is pretty weak, basically what we have so far is just the skeleton that really needs to be filled. We have, it's legally incorporated in Germany. We've got a board of three people Rut from the Czech Republic, Andrea, and myself. We don't see mine as a membership based organization but a participation based organization. That means, we don't want to have formal memberships and then formally speak for I don't know how many people we formally represent. But we want to create opportunities for Mother's Centers and other groups around these issues linking together and doing something together. And then whoever participates is who gets represented. We would like, for instance, if we had a peace letter which we had against or to Bush then we as mine organization would send it out but then whoever signed it would sign it, and we would sign it as mine but not saying, as mine we represent now over a million mothers in the world

SRILATHA: Why is that? Why do you hesitate to claim that? It's true.

JAECKEL: Well, because, we don't feel that we actually have that kind of a structure yet where formal membership would be reflected in actual participation. We haven't even had a meeting with all the Mother's Centers that exist in the different countries. It is what we'd like to happen what we call the 15 country Mother's Centers conference where for the first time they would all see and experience each other as a global movement. That hasn't happened yet. There's been meetings between two or three countries or so on but there hasn't really been a conscious collective ownership of the fact that there are Mother's Centers in 15 countries. So in that sense, we're a skeleton structure and we basically do service functions, like helping groups start and helping them get funding and getting documented and so on But I wouldn't say we actually have made it really an expression of a global movement yet. I mean, it's global in the fact that it has spread but it's not global in the sense that the women are actually networking with each other already. And that's one of the challenges I would say we have, too, because the fact is that's hard to make happen if you don't have funds. Just getting women from 15 countries together, you have to have some kind of core support for an event like that. And that's hard to get. Especially as a Northern based organisation. That's sort of what we're struggling with. In a way, why we actually said we will make MINE is that we said that the fact that it has spread to different countries in different contexts means something. And we have to try to harvest that and we have to try to say, hey, what does it actually mean that the Mother's Centers have really spread into 15 different countries. An expression of what is that, you know. You have to find some kind of way to explore that. And that's why we created MINE It's a reflection of something that happened on the ground but it's not a structure yet that is being filled from the ground. So that's where we're at right now with this thing and to tell you the truth, I'm very unclear about it myself because I don't really know if it can work that way. But I don't really see another way, either. It's not just going to happen by itself, either, if you just say, well, you know, all the movements in a national context will get strong enough at some point and then the international will just happen. I don't think it happens like that either. I don't think a woman in Nairobi in the Mother's Center really knows there's Mother's Centers in 15 countries. And if she knows, she doesn't know in a way that means something to her. She can't connect it to her own experience. And just the fact that then GROOTS Kenya comes and talks about it I don't think really creates this feeling of, we're really a global movement.

SRILATHA: So that was going to be my question, actually. You anticipated it beautifully. What is the sense of identity within? Do you think it is a trans-national, a sense of a trans-national identity of any kind or not? Is that just kind of a coincidental dimension?

JAECKEL: I don't think it's coincidental. I don't think so but I don't think it's owned yet, as a trans-national identity. I think it would need to be experienced, explored, and spelled out first and that hasn't happened yet.

SRILATHA: You don't feel that's happened yet?

JAECKEL: No, that hasn't happened yet. In Europe it's very clear. All the women know that there's Mother's Centers, not only in Germany but in Holland and Austria and so on. And I think there's also an identity that it's something that's not just in Western Europe but also in Eastern Europe. So I think on the level of Europe I would say, yes, there is a trans-national identity that women are aware that there are Mother's Centers in all these countries, these European countries. The Mother's Centers in Canada. I think there's some awareness there that they do know it came from Germany and they do know that there's something interesting going on there but I wouldn't say that they really have an identity with it. Because we just haven't had these exchanges and the meetings necessary for that yet. I think there's a potential of it there. But it hasn't been experienced So that's what we're trying to make actually happen .

SRILATHA: It's going to take time.

JAECKEL: It's going to take time and our major problem is really fund raising, you know. I just with a woman that we've hired to do fund raising who spent nine months on it with absolutely no results. And I just don't know how to go about this, you know? So that's a little bit our dilemma. On the level of just the actual models spreading and happening that women will take it up and that they'll get their own center on the ground. You don't need any kind of program or funding or anything for that to happen. That happens by itself. But then drawing that together and harvesting that collectively that doesn't happen by itself. And that's what we're struggling with.

SRILATHA: Well, lots of luck and lots of strength for that process. OK? Monika, it's been absolutely fabulous and I will, you know, unfortunately there seems to be some work going on upstairs. I didn't anticipate that so I did it at home because I thought it would be quieter but there's been a lot of noise. But I will send this to you as soon as possible, as soon as they transcribe it and send it back, I will send it across and you can look at it and see if you, what you want to change or add. And if I have any additional questions, with your permission, I will raise them.

Question 7: Structural relationship with GROOTS and HC

mine brings a thematic addition. Many grassroots groups internationally organise and mobilise around the daily concerns of communities and the everyday lives of women, but very rarely are women approached and empowered in these movements as mothers. Creating validation, acknowledgement, recognition and power to women as mothers is lacking. We bring in this element. That the conditions of mothering are an important part of what needs to be looked at and lobbied for. So for GROOTS we are a thematic kind of grassroots movement, bringing out an important theme into the debate. Although this has been discussed and welcomed it has not really been structurally incorporated yet as one of the thematic areas to structure the work of GROOTS around. It is difficult still also in the grassroots context to create political space for motherhood as a theme. For the Huairou Commission it is basically the same thing. We are a member also of the Huairou Commission, because we are emerging as a global network. Also here it is about creating more structural space and visibility around the issues of empowerment of women as mothers.

UNINTELLIGIBLE

JAECKEL: You're doing a fascinating piece of work, aren't you?

SRILATHA: I think so. I think it is but who knows, you know? It's not me. But I just feel, if nothing else, this is territory that's never been looked at with any kind of analytical legs. And so I just feel it's so important to create visibility for these movements and see if [UNINTELLIGIBLE] they're out there, you know? Everybody who works trans-nationally is not out in the streets protesting globalization. There are people who are doing very different things with this kind of a space and we need to pay attention to that process.

JAECKEL: Yeah. So, I'm looking forward to how it progresses.

- **Comments [0]**

NO COMMENTS

Start the ball rolling by posting a comment!

LEAVE A COMMENT

Name (required)

E-Mail (will not be published) (required)