

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Gendered State Rethinking Transnational Place Based Feminist Praxis

Nusrat Zahan*

[Abstract : The purpose of this article is twofold: to delineate a theory of Gendered States in light of Critical Discourse Analysis; and assess transnational feminist place-based praxis which sheds light on cross cultural deviances and broader social change. This article is both conceptual and empirical. The delineation of Gendered States theory is conceptual and draws on its historical roots. To investigate it methodologically, the author selected Fairclough's textual interpretational framework and Ruth Wodak's historical approach from a larger study and attempted to determine abductive reasoning of ideological persuasion. Visweswaran's (2004) theory on 'Gendered States' begins with questions of cultural aspects of women's right, gender persecution in the practice of asylum and then shifts to 'active state persecution' and state's failure to protect. It is argued that violence against women has interconnected relationships with 'failed state' and subject to in-depth scrutiny.]

1. Introduction

This paper attempts to analyse Visweswaran's (2004) theory on 'Gendered States' and discusses cultural aspects of women's right in the light of transnational place-based feminist praxis. The notion of 'Gendered State' is borrowed from Visweswaran's theory of South Asian cultural thoughts on human rights works. Visweswaran believes that universal feminist narratives are increasingly recreating patterns of cross-cultural deviance, which in fact fall disproportionately upon weak or poor nations and geographical regions; but not upon the powerful countries. She believes that human rights-related reporting on South Asia relies upon the patriarchal understanding of culture. This reporting is used as the basis of political intervention and advocacy by stronger states (Visweswaran, 2004). By raising questions on current South Asian asylum granting policy of the

* **Nusrat Zahan** : Professor, Department of International Relations, Jahangirnagar University

United States, it is argued that this practice leads South Asian women to divorce their rights to community and the state they belong. Hence, one of the challenges of 'gender persecution' in the practice of asylum is - it shifts 'active state persecution' to 'state failure to protect.' It is believed that there is a requirement to understand domestic violence, rape, female genital mutilation and their interconnected relationships with 'failed state' and patriarchal culture. These are subject to surveillance and scrutiny (Visweswaran, 2004).

In this context, the aim of this study is to examine how culture of a society (i.e. in South Asia), brings human rights issue into crisis. To attain the aim, this paper explores the patriarchal nature of culture, gendered nature of state and how do states utilize its own mechanism for international advocacy and intervention. This paper is divided into four sections. The present section includes background and aim of the study and organization of this paper. The second section essentially presents research questions and deals the methodology of analysis in the light of ideological frameworks of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), developed by Fairclough, N. (2013, 2011, 1995,1989) and Wodak, R. & Meyer, M. (2009, 2008, 2006,2001). The third section analyses the practical issues, i.e. the notion of gendered states, tools of political intervention and then incorporates range of arguments in the light of feminist approaches, i.e. Butler (1999), Spivak (1998) and Ciotti (2009). This section also explains the interconnected relationship of power and culture, highlighting how it constructs the ideological persuasion of any particular social group. The final section sheds light on transnational place-based feminist praxis so that an integrated approach may develop in future course of research.

2. Research Questions and Methodology

This paper addresses following questions to discuss:

- i. How do gendered states define violence against women and how do states influence the process that women become subject to exile?
- ii. How effectively do transnational feminist movements and human rights activism narrate or condemn the mode of subjectification?
- iii. How do gendered states influence international policy instruments as a tool of political intervention, without addressing the cultural aspects of violence?
- iv. How does the notion of greater transition for societal change reflect in transnational place-based feminist praxis within the peripheries of dominant neoliberal economic order?

The study first investigates Visweswaran's (2004) arguments on gendered states through Fairclough's three-dimensional framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, i.e.

- i. Critical analysis of the text
- ii. Analysis of the textual production and consumption
- iii. Analysis of discursive events that are integral components of cultural practice (Fairclough 2011).

This paper then demystifies the notion of gendered state in the light of transnational place-based feminist praxis. In this study, CDA techniques are applied because CDA is considered an effective tool for exploring the political meaning of texts. CDA framework offers researchers to investigate how a text can influence the beliefs and values of a society and can shape political ideology, homing in on social structure. It aims to critically investigate societal inequality as they are expressed, or constituted in texts, and legitimized by the use of language or in discourse (Wodak & Meyer 2009). CDA puts emphasis on 'a thorough description, explanation and critique of the textual strategies writers use to naturalize discourses' (Rahimi & Riasati 2011, p.108). By analyzing a text or discourse in CDA framework, the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias of the text can be revealed (Bukhari & Xiaoyang, 2013).

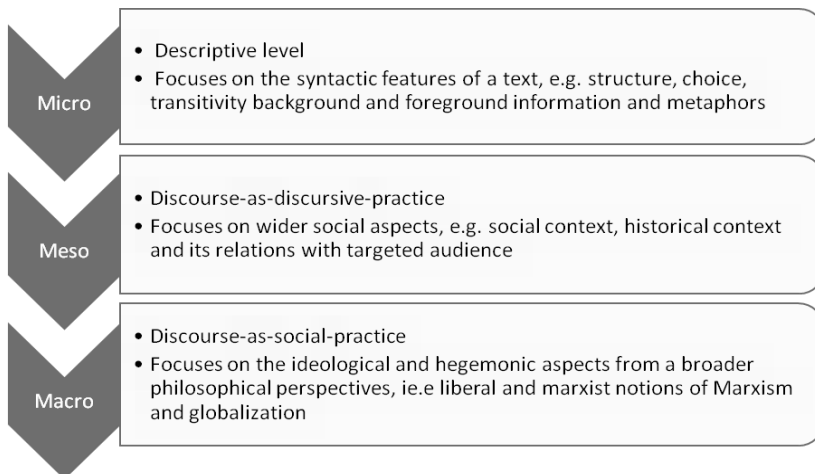
Focusing on larger socio-political context, in which discourses are circulated, CDA contains following principles:

- i. Language can be used as a particular form of social practice for representing world;
- ii. Discourse not only signifies but also constitutes social practices such as power, domination, prejudice, resistance, etc.
- iii. The dialectical relationship between texts and subjects of society may vary by the degree of choice and means of interpretation.
- iv. Structural features of language are not arbitrary but purposeful; irrespective of the choices, whether determined consciously or unconsciously.
- v. Power is exercised through the production or reproduction of discourse.
- vi. Specific discursive practice can be used to fulfil special interests, involving inclusions or exclusions.
- vii. Discourse is always historical in a sense that it contains specific social, cultural and ideological context along with specific time and space.
- viii. CDA does not only interpret the texts but also provides framework to explain them (Sheyholslami 2001, p. 12).

To analyze Visweswaran's (2004) theory of gendered states and its cultural aspects of women's rights issues in the light of transnational place-based feminist praxis, Fairclough's three levels of textual interpretational framework and Ruth Wodak's historical approach are utilized. As diagram

1 shows, Fairclough's model incorporates textual analysis, analysis of consumption of the discourse; and discursive events as cultural practice (Fairclough 2011). Hence, Fairclough combined three levels of interpretation in his framework i.e. Micro, Meso and Macro in explaining the syntactic features, social aspects and ideological-hegemonic aspects of analyzing a particular discourse (Fairclough 1989).

Diagram 1: Fairclough's three levels of textual interpretation



Source : Fairclough,1989

The analytical framework of this paper also considers Ruth Wodak's *Discourse Historical Approach*. According to Ruth Wodak, CDA is 'fundamentally interested in analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as they are manifested in language' (Wodak 2008, p. 297). It is known as 'critical' because it deconstructs textual features that focus on socio-political aspects. In this approach, CDA researcher explores the context as scrupulously as possible since it is deemed that discourse can only be interpreted accurately in its specific situational context (Wodak 2001).

In this approach, discourse linguistic analysis takes place through the process of perspectivation, self-representation, argumentation and mitigation strategies. Wodak's discourse-historical approach accentuates several procedural features, i.e.

- i. gathering relevant information about the social, political and historical context within which the text is produced;

- ii. categorizing the genres and discourse to which the text belongs; CDA researcher should prepare the list of contents on similar topics, common arguments, macro-topics and the genres;
- iii. making a list of research questions and review all relevant theories and aspects of analysis;
- iv. making research questions operationalize into a researchable linguistic category;
- v. critically analyzing the texts by applying theoretical approaches and interpret the findings relevant with research questions;
- vi. drawing up contexts of specific texts and actions that are required;
- vii. finally, preparing a comprehensive analysis of data, in the light of research questions and investigation (Wodak, 2001).

However, due to space limitation, the application of CDA tools in this paper is limited to selected range of issues only, i.e. cultural challenges and gender persecution in the social structural concepts of South Asia.

3. Major Arguments

By using CDA tools, major arguments of this paper are presented into four broad spectrums in this section. These include defining violence against women in gendered state mechanism, the mode of subjectification of violence, policy instruments as a tool of political intervention and searching for a new alternative praxis. A detail analysis of each of these spectrums are given below:

Firstly, by addressing empirical evidences of cultural violence in USA, Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Visweswaran (2004) argues that political texts modifies the shape of cultural deviance both in the North (i.e. the developed countries) and the South (i.e. developing world); and these in turn are politically utilized disproportionately to some economically weak states but not for politically stronger states. Visweswaran (2004) argues that perceived failures in the effectiveness of customary laws of South Asian states make solid ground of cultural violence. It critically affects women's rights and made them subject to exile. Hence, culture that dictates gender-based violence often remains unexplored at institutional policy levels. State's failure to address cultural violence under clearly defined criteria makes international treaties, like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), unenforceable. This mechanism in turn puts pressure upon refugee related laws to 'open up' so that the laws on refugee, as a subset of the immigration rules of particular countries, can be used as a political weapon for assessing human rights conditions of states precisely.

Most internationally signed conventions, as it is believed, cannot be enforced due to such realities (Visweswaran, 2004). Visweswaran's

position in this respect, is found aligned with the metaphors described in Ciotti *et al* (2009). The range of South Asian feminist challenges, that have been described in this book evident how politics and religious issues impact women's lives in the region. The metaphors effectively addressed the fact that political intersection of feminism, ethics and violence in South Asia are related with critical range of interests. These also affect negotiations of modernity in terms of defining violence.

The background and foreground information that Viweswaswarn (2004) presented in her paper at this descriptive level, to blame American government's existing asylum cases, indicates it clearly that most of the successful asylum cases regarding South Asian women are granted on the basis of racial, political or religious ground. But the asylums' status are not granted based on the membership of a social group which are structured by culture. These strategies of powerful states are in fact, influenced by respective ideology (Visweswaran, 2004). *Discourse as- social practice level* tool of CDA hence, finds that Visweswaran's text offers the readers better scope to know how hyper visibility of 'politically' constructed violence, can critically analyzed; how it can be linked with culturally invisible violence that women (as a member of social groups) face in state mechanisms.

Secondly, to analyze the mode of subjectification, through the lenses of CDA, Viswaswaran's arguments in this point, have been analyzed in the light of Wodak's framework of opaque and transparent structural relationships, i.e. dominance, discrimination, power and control as they are manifested in language (Wodak, 2008). By deconstructing, gendered nature of state, Visweswaran (2004) opines that Declaration of human rights is the only universally ratified mechanism that validates women's rights against the oppression they face in patriarchal societies. To Visweswarn, human rights activism enables a person to perceive herself as moral agent and to act against violent practices on sexuality (e.g. arranged marriage, genital mutilation, domestic slavery) that are also ratified by the United Nations' signatory states (Visweswaran 2004). However, human rights activism or transnational feminist movements have not paid enough attention to the discriminatory nature of customary laws that are closely related to these treaties.

In this respect, Judith Butler (1999), while discussing on language, power and strategies of displacement contrarily argues that power, rather than the laws, encompasses both the juridical and the productive functions of differential relations. Hence, sexuality that 'emerges within the matrix of power relations is not a simple replication or copy of the law itself, a uniform repetition of a masculinist economy of identity' (Butler 1990,

p.39). She believes that 'sexuality' is culturally constructed within existing state of power relations. This 'critical task presumes, of course, that to operate within the matrix of power is not the same as to replicate uncritically relations of domination' (Butler, 1990, p.40).

In the light of Wodak's CDA approach, these varieties of genres about the mode of subjectification can be marked as 'contextual' where the particular text belongs. For instance, more than two million girls and women alive today, underwent to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and about three million girls are at risk every year (WHO, 2013). Current global state of FGM practice presumes the fact that Africa led movements like *Equality Now*, the *Girl Generation* leading to end FGM within the generation; but notably women sometimes also choose to get circumcised in the same region (*The Atlantic*, 2015). So, it is an undeniable fact that factors that are affecting the components of subjectification, never remain constant.

Thirdly, by reviewing the position of Visweswaran (2004) through the lenses of Wodak's historical approaches, more specifically *discourse-as-discursive practice*, it cannot be denied that Visweswaran strongly argues the point that global human rights reporting system, commonly used for advocacy or political intervention and asylum, fills with patriarchal nature of narratives. In the light of Wodak's *Discourse Historical approach*, the narratives reveal the feature of transparent structural relationships of dominance and discrimination (Wodak 2008). It is therefore reasonably claimed by Visweswaran (2004) that gendered states influence international policy instruments as a tool of political intervention, without addressing the cultural aspects of violence. Global institution like the United Nations, paid least attention in examining the political nature of such policy narratives that are heavily relied upon ideological persuasion. Hence, Spivak's view on ideology can add a new sense in this discussion. She believes that, 'ideology in action is what a group takes to be natural and self evident, that of which the group, as a group, must deny any historical sedimentation. It is both the condition and the effect of the constitution of the subject (of ideology) as freely willing and consciously choosing in a world that's seen as background... The subject (s) of ideology are the conditions and effects of the self-identity of the group as a group. It is impossible, of course, to mark off a group as an entity without sharing complicity with its ideological definition' (Spivak 1998, p.118). Regarding this genre of text, Visweswaran's (2004) point hence, can be reminded as she believes - the gap between existing laws and the state's will are inevitably filled by culture. In other words, the state mechanism's failure for drafting a legislation to protect women, or failure to enforce existing laws to protect women, are related to the force of culture. But there is also strong role of ideology and lack of political will.

The challenging issues that emerged in this critical analysis are, i.e. institutional policy, state will and ideology. These can be marked as 'critical' in the light of Wodak's (2001) framework of historical approach because in current state of political institutions, as Spivak (1998) argues, it is never an easy task to speak of a politics of interpretation without having any working notion of ideology. The concepts are related to individual consciousness and will. In real world, the chances of bringing changes in policy is very low since there is a huge demand of getting the status of asylum among vulnerable social groups, no matter what the syntactic features of the policy got at the descriptive level. Spivak therefore, rightly noted 'a persistent critique of ideology is thus forever incomplete. In the shifting spectrum between subject-constitution and group-constitution are the ideological apparatuses that share the condition/effect oscillation.... One cannot of course choose to step out of ideology. The most responsible choice seems to be to know it as best one can, recognize it as best one can, and, through one's necessarily inadequate interpretation, to work to change it ... (Spivak 1998, p.118).

Fourthly, the final issue that CDA deals in this course of analysis is looking for a new alternatives of feminist praxis. Praxis is commonly known as the process by which a theory, skill or piece of knowledge is enacted or practiced. Feminist theories are also known as tools of praxis as they fundamentally reshape conceptual definitions of gender, sex, oppression and identity. These are always ongoing, continued process, and have never-ending discussion (Parisi 2002). In this respect, feminist movement and theory can be seen to consist together a feminist praxis (Parisi 2002).

It is important to note that there is a debate on global feminist movements since there is no clearly organized global women's movement or global feminism. This state is made by time and again by theories about feminism and women's movements today (Harcourt 2006). For instance, while discussing about Global Women's Movement, as Peggy Antrobus states, a movement 'formed out of many movements shaped in local struggles and brought together in the context of global opportunities and challenges ... as women discover commonalities and come to a better understanding of how the social relations of gender are implicated in the systemic crises' (Antrobus, 2004, p. 68). Amita Basu, on the other hand claims, there is an existence of movement, known as a global feminism; these are reflecting the lessons learnt from the knowledge and practices that have been flourished in women's movement in all the regions of the world (Basu, 1995). She believes that these women's movements differ

radically; diverged among women activists, and with each other on what feminism is (Basu, 1995).

Visweswaran (2004) in this respect refers feminist universalism movement - as promoting the idea that women share something in common irrespective of race, sexuality, class or origin. But she also refers the critics of Gender Essentialism, who believe that women share nothing in common regardless of race, sexuality, class or origin. Feminist universalism masks global structural contradictions in gender oppression. In her theory on gendered state, Visweswaran aptly illustrated that, 'in some countries, even when laws defending the right of men to use violence against women are repealed, the culture that created them continues to exert a tremendous influence over behaviour. The situation is worst across a swath of countries stretching from the Mediterranean to the edge of South Asia, especially Pakistan, India and Bangladesh' (Visweswaran, 2004, p.486). She also opines that there are no direct relations between domestic violence and globalization; but as per the economic productivity of women, according to global financial statistics, domestic violence can never be structured only as a familial matter. Its interconnected relationships with society, state policy and global political instruments must be well addressed (Visweswaran 2004).

Having such a range of challenges, this paper looked for a transnational place-based praxis which focuses on the major three domains of feminism, i.e. body, societal environment and economy. In this praxis, the term 'place' refers grounds where women are mobilizing for change and a greater transition (Harcourt 2006). In this field of discourse, greater transition of societal change aims to raise consciousness in five major areas, i.e.,

1. identifying different roles of man and women and how do they relate in environmental, peace, and social movements
2. building vast literature on women's experience both in the North and South. Especially in terms of shared decisions making level.
3. Marking the extent that masculine and feminine roles are translated and changed in political processes of a state.
4. Addressing the questions of racism, ethnicity, sexuality, sexual orientation, and complex gender identities and how they enter into legal and human rights instrument.
5. building greater feminists' engagement in ecological, sustainable economic development debates, struggles over natural resources, land rights, and the politics of peace and security (Harcourt 2006).

Currently, one half of humanity suffers oppression all over the world but there is a vacuum in building theories on international legal instruments as to how these are affecting women's rights and women's interest in the South (Visweswaran, 2004). This praxis therefore, would provide an

alternative way as it emphasizes to build counter discourses of globalization, counter discourse about women's body and her relations with social environment. It also represents 'alternative strands of thinking and practice in the feminist, socialist, cooperative, and local sustainability movements around the world' (Harcourt, 2006, p.13) as it is believed that there is a serious lack on the theories of international sisterhood. The unique strength of this praxis, that can challenge gendered state mechanism, lies in its urge to reduce the gap about the rights of women and the rights as a human being. This praxis promotes the idea of unmasking the universal feminism that does not adequately address global structural contradiction especially in human rights mechanism. It also urges that cultural differentiation between North and South must be well addressed in global feminist movement so that the dominant economic neo-liberal system can be demystified (Visweswaran, 2004; Harcourt, 2006).

4. The way forward

By bringing the notion of transnational place-based feminist praxis in this analysis, arguments are drawn that there is an urgent need to run a dual movement both in universal and local cultural peripheries. Women's rights are never separable from her cultural and community rights. Her civil rights are embedded in customary laws. International instruments like asylum cannot be a tool to protect the actual rights of women. It in fact, uproots woman from her own social rights. Ironically, international law will never facilitate sustainable protective measures unless cultural stereotype factors are addressed in the policy instruments of state mechanism. Major implication of feminist praxis, therefore, lies in its vision of ending all forms of discrimination against women; forging holistic analysis of multiple struggles of women in social and economic arenas.

In feminist transnational place-based praxis, it is acknowledged that a variety of feminist praxis are coming from the global South, and the aims are to move towards to a greater transitions of societal change both in the developed and developing worlds; so that patriarchal narratives of neo-liberal globalization can be challenged (Harcourt, 2006). So, demystifying the notion of gendered state is now timely demand to build our knowledge concerning failed state mechanism. It will guide readers to define multidimensional directions of power relations as well. The significance of this field of research undoubtedly lies in its engagement with South's concerns to women's right and developing narratives on greater transition of societal change.

There are great interests and enormous challenges in establishing integrated feminist voice to the path of this greater transition. Current state

of international affairs needs to adopt a sustainable approach so that multidimensional oppressions can effectively be addressed both at domestic and international level. Transnational place based feminist praxis, in this respect, can play a leading strategic role to uproot politically gender biased instruments of state mechanism. This will ultimately lead the path to establish an effective framework of gender-neutral orientation and identities between global South and the North.

References

- Antrobus, P. (2004). *Global Women's Movement*. London: Zed Books.
- Basu, A. ed. (1995). *The Challenge of Local Feminisms: Women's Movements in Global Perspective*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Bukhari, N. & Xiaoyang, W. (2013). Critical discourse analysis and educational research. *IOSR Journal of Research and Method in Education*. 3(1), 9-17.
- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. USA: Routledge.
- Ciotti, M., Roy, S. (2009). *South Asian Feminisms: Negotiating New Terrains*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Equality Now, Retrieved from https://www.equalitynow.org/end_fgm?locale=en
- Fairclough, N. (2013). *Language and Power*, London: New York: Routledge.
- Fairclough, N. (2011). 'Critical discourse analysis: the critical study of language,' IgnasiCapdevila, HEC Montreal, Retrieved from https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uA8M46-QyB4UMnIF4VdFQyvTcBgd2LxR2ypb7LRGXD0/edit?hl=en_US
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- Fairclough, N. (1989). Language and Power. *Human Relations*. 53(9).1125–1149.
- Harcourt, W. (2006). *Feminist Praxis: Women's Transnational and Place Based Struggles for Chance*. Boston: Tellus Institute.
- Parisi, L. (2002). Feminist praxis and women's human rights. *Journal of Human Rights*, 1(4), 571-585.
- Rahimi, F. & Riasati, M. J. (2011). 'Critical discourse analysis: scrutinizing ideologically driven discourses.' *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*. 1(6), 107-112.
- Sheyholislami, J. (2001). 'Critical discourse analysis' Retrieved from <http://www.carleton.ca/~jsheyhol/cda.htm>
- Spivak, G.C. (1998). *In other words: Essays in cultural politics*. London: Routledge.
- The Atlantic (2015). Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/04/female-genital-mutilation-cutting-anthropologist/389640/>

- Visweswaran, K. (2004). Gendered States: Rethinking Culture as a Site of South Asian Human Rights Works. *Human Rights Quarterly*. 26 (2). 483-511. DOI:10.1353/hrq.2004.0027
- WHO (2013). Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/fgm/prevalence/en/>
- Wodak, R. & Meyer, M. eds. (2009). *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, Los Angeles: Sage.
- Wodak, R. 2008. The contribution of critical linguistics to the analysis of discriminatory prejudices and stereotypes in the language of politics. in Wodak, R., Koller, V., Gruyter, W (eds.), *Handbook of Communication in the Public Sphere*. Berlin: GmbH & Co.
- Wodak, R. 2006, Linguistics analyses in language policies in Ricento, T (ed.) *An Introduction to Language Policy : Theory and Method*, USA: Blackwell publishing.
- Wodak, R. 2001, The discourse historical approach in Wodak, R. & Meyer, M (eds.) *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, London : Sage.

[সার-সংক্ষেপ : আলোচ্য প্রবন্ধের উদ্দেশ্য দুটি : Critical discourse Analysis-এর আলোকে ‘Gendered states’ তত্ত্বটি ব্যাখ্যা করা এবং Transnational Feminist-based Praxis মূল্যায়ন করা, যা কিনা সাংস্কৃতিক বহুমাত্রিকতা নির্ণয় ও বৃহত্তর সামাজিক পরিবর্তনের দিক নির্দেশ করে। Gendered States তত্ত্বটি এখানে ধারণাগত পর্যায়ে এবং ঐতিহাসিক উৎসের প্রেক্ষিতে ব্যাখ্যা করা হয়েছে। পদ্ধতিগত নিরীক্ষণে, লেখক বৃহত্তর আঙ্গিক হতে Fairclough’s এর Textual Interpretation framework এবং Ruth Wodak-এর Historical approach নির্বাচন করেছে এবং মতাদর্শ গত ধারণায় Abductive Reasoning ব্যবহার করেছে। বিশ্বে এ-ধরনের Gendered states তত্ত্বটির আলোচনা শুরু হয়েছে নারীর সাংস্কৃতিক অধিকার সংক্রান্ত বিতর্কের প্রতি আলোকপাতের মাধ্যমে এবং তা ‘Active State Pursuation’ এবং ‘State failure to Protect’ ধারণাকে নির্দেশ করেছে। আলোচ্য প্রবন্ধে এই যুক্তি প্রদর্শন করা হয়েছে যে, নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতার ধারণাটি ব্যর্থ রাষ্ট্রের (failed State) ধারণার সাথে যুক্ত এবং তা অধিকতর বিশ্লেষণের দাবী রাখে।]