

Introduction: Gendering development, developing gender: The politics of contemporary gendered analysis of development

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What does the experience of women trash collectors in contemporary Dakar tell us about the gendered politics of the Senegalese neoliberalist era? How do female ballet dancers articulate Taiwanese cultural nationalism? And do well-intentioned Israeli city planners who design a new neighborhood at the edge of an Israeli-Palestinian town improve or inhibit gender equality among the new residents?

Although gender entered development discourses only in the late 1970s, it has since established itself as a critical category to be taken into account in the planning of most projects initiated by small NGOs, as well as by large international development institutions. “Women’s empowerment,” “gender mainstreaming” and “gender equality” became the rallying cry for liberal, feminist, well-wishing development practitioners and for development scholars. The papers in this issue of *Hagar* are inspired by the more recent critical re-evaluation of this liberal “gender and development” model. We adopt a critical perspective to the study of gender and development by problematizing both terms. Gender in this perspective is not a pre-defined, closed social category that distinguishes men from women, but rather one axis of social difference that is actively constituted in relation to other lines of social difference, such as race, religion, nationality or class. We hold that women are indeed critical agents of social change, but that their lives, and efforts to intervene in their lives, cannot be understood in simplified binary terms, such as “traditional” vs. “modern,” or in Western feminist blanket ideas of “patriarchy” and “gender equality.” Instead, we propose a context-specific, culturally sensitive model of analysis that takes into account the complexity of women’s positions in their societies. From this perspective, analysis of gendered division of labor in specific societies—for example, women who work as trash collectors in Senegal, or women’s role as primary domestic water providers in many rural dryland regions in the world—is explored as part of a larger analysis of the formation of social difference, of ongoing struggles over power and of the meaning of cultural norms that uphold social order.

Development is also problematized in this perspective. Rather than a benevolent/exploitative (depending on the discourse) process of directed social change, it is seen as a *political* process that draws in groups and interests on local,

regional and international scales. In Guatemala or Senegal, Israel or Africa, in the aftermath of a hurricane or during severe droughts, struggles over resources are always shaped by gender-based claims to resources and power. The papers in this volume explore *how* gender is articulated and is actively constituted in specific settings.

Analyzing the failure of international intervention development projects in Pakistan as her starting point, Masooda Bano argues that these projects are unable to transform women's lives in any meaningful way because they ignore the cultural context within which their work is carried out. Islamic madrassas, argues Bano, are more successful in bringing about women's empowerment than the women's-rights Western agents of development.

Kimberly Hart presents a similar argument about the limits of Western feminist ideals of female emancipation when they are introduced into a carpet cooperative in a small Turkish village. Hart shows how the villagers reinterpret such external ideals of female emancipation according to their own needs and understandings of gender.

A third paper in this opening group that seems to focus on the tensions between projects of "development" and the way these are locally received is brought by Esther Herzog. Herzog takes us to Nepal, where she was invited as a "gender specialist" for a foreign firm. Analyzing her own experience as a practicing "development expert," Herzog demonstrates that the professed goal of "women empowerment" is a fold for promoting economic organizational goals and the interests of local elites. Yet going beyond conventional analysis that posits aid gives vis-a-vis powerless victimized recipients, Herzog's ethnography draws attention to the complexity of the process and the active role played by the Nepalese rural women who pursue their own interests and aspirations within this unequal world.

The unresolved tensions between modernity and traditionalism are also at the heart of the next two essays, centered in Israel. Here, however, the scene is not one of direct encounter with foreign outsiders presenting themselves through a "development project" that is resisted, redefined and remade by local populations. Instead, we learn about how discourses of modernity and traditionalism, family mores and ideas of career mobility join and collide within the same socio-political national framework in the lives of female Bedouin students venturing out of their communities to the nearby university (Halevy) and in the experience of young Israeli-Palestinian families moving to a new neighborhood at the edge of their home town in the north of Israel (Levin and Kallus). Using ethnographic research methods to explore the inner turmoil experienced by Bedouin women students at Ben Gurion University, Ronnie Halevy depicts the complex and creative mix of behavior codes adopted and continuously rearticulated by these young women in the process of coming to terms with their position on the boundary of two worlds—the one they originate from and the one of higher education they enter. Levin and Kallus introduce the spatial perspective to an analysis that seeks to reveal insight into the gendered politics of housing choices in contemporary Israel among Israeli-

Palestinians. Despite the good intentions of planners and officials committed to modernist progress through planning, Levin and Kallus tell us, the form, design and position of the housing in the new suburban neighborhood reproduces not only political control over the Israeli-Palestinian population, but also patriarchal structures that entrap, instead of liberate, women.

The analysis of gender as one factor among several other axes of social inequality is central to the closing three essays of the volume. Exploring the politics of garbage in Senegal's capital city, Rosalind Fredericks traces the politics of trash in Senegal's neoliberal era by examining the dynamic gendered geographies of garbage on household, neighborhood and city scales. Fredericks shows that gendered spaces and roles are renegotiated in contemporary Dakar through discourses of cleanliness, responsibility and work. These negotiations turn, in particular, on key reference points, including Islam and autochthony, and the gendered politics of home and street in Dakar.

Gendered articulation as part of an emerging cultural nationalism in Taiwan stands at the core of George Wei and Yunyu Wang's essay. A new generation of female dancers at the Cloud Gate Dance Theater, the first professional modern dance company in Taiwan, use their performing arts as a tool for redefining Taiwan's cultural identity. When studied as part of the larger process of the emergence of civil society in Taiwan since the 1970s, these female dancers seem to articulate "individual affirmations and accomplishments" critical in the evolution of Taiwanese cultural nationalism.

Anne Coles closes this issue with a discussion of the critical links between water politics and gendered relations. She examines gender roles in the provision of water for domestic use in arid and ill-served rural areas in relation to local cultural norms and the accessibility and seasonality of available water resources. Coles claims that many well-meaning attempts to improve rural water supplies are less than successful because of failure by implementing agencies to take into account gender roles and responsibilities with regard to water management and use. Reviewing a range of case studies, many of which she acted in as a consultant herself, Coles argues that the recognition of women's key involvement in the sector enables water supplies to be more effective and that women's participation in planning processes challenges the status quo and raises their status and public voice.

In the segment we call "Voices from the field," we present two clear and articulate women—Amal Elsana Alhjooj and Mirit Sidi—who speak about their respective experiences of initiating and maintaining two local projects that place disempowered women at the center. The vision each of these women articulate is inspiring on many levels. It allows us to hear direct reports about how creative projects that actively seek to dissolve the binary division of "developers" versus "recipients" work. We are able to hear from these two women who initiated projects and lived the daily struggles of applying visions on the ground. In non-academic language, they speak about the challenges, frustration and joy of carrying out the kind of political work one believes in. Allowing these two women to speak for

themselves and to depict their own visions of how “development” should be carried out, we hope to present another perspective that goes beyond the analytical essays presented in the rest of this volume, a perspective that blurs the lines that divide observer from observed, social analysis from social activism.

Three works are critiqued in our Book Reviews section. The first, published in Hebrew by Haifa University professor Deborah Bernstein and reviewed by Shani Bar-On, provides a detailed social history of the formation of gender, class and national identities in pre-state Israel. The other two reviewed books, by Shirin Rai and Lila Mehta, bring the most recent work on gender and the politics of development to the fore. It might be indicative of our era, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, that Ibtisam Ibrahim chooses to speak about hope and despair and Catherine Lloyd about displacement, marginalization, and injustice as key to their analysis of contemporary development processes.

Five of the eight essays included in this volume were first presented at the Second Conference on Drylands, Deserts and Desertification, held at the Jacob Blaustein Institutes of Desert Research at the Sede Boqer campus of Ben Gurion University. We gratefully acknowledge the support of the organizers of the conference, especially Professor Alon Tal, in the production of this special volume. We are glad to take this opportunity to invite new submissions dealing with gender and the politics of development in dryland regions for the Third Conference on Drylands, Deserts and Desertification to be held at the Sede Boqer campus, November 7–10, 2010 (see www.desertification.ac.il).