PANTEION UNIVERSITY Centre for Gender Studies
134 Sygrou Avenue,1st floor,GR 17671 ATHENS, Tel:+30- 210 9210177-8, fax:+30- 210 9210178
http://www.genderpanteion.gr, e-mail: gender@panteion.gr

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

'Changing Gender! Research, Theory and Policy for Gendered Realities of the 21st century'

June 2-3, 2005
Panteion University
Athens, Greece

PAPER PRESENTED BY

Antigone Lyberaki, Professor in the Department of Economic and Regional Development, Panteion University, Greece.

TITLE

Gender and Development: Multiple feminisms and revisionism in theory and policy

1. Introduction: changing subjects and actors- from women to gender relations

Gender and development intertwine in a difficult and fragile relationship, which is constantly under revision. The last 25 years have seen numerous distinct phases with different priorities, symbolisms and slogans of alternative representations of women in development. In spite of constant change, women have tended to be represented mainly as the poorest poor and as the most vulnerable group, which is simultaneously victim of both development and underdevelopment. Underlying this view is a notion of women as passive and silent victims of history as well as champions of hard work. Such straightforward, if simplistic, representations have had a number of successes in highlighting the issues and in mobilizing resources for policy intervention on behalf of international organizations involved in development financing. My objective in is paper is to present briefly the main stages in the relationship between gender and development in the last 25 years and to raise questions regarding the relevance of the received stereotypes in dealing with the contemporary complex realities.

The relationship between gender and development is a highly contested one for three reasons:

1. Partly because the meaning of development is far from clear (it means different things to different people). Development is a highly ideologically loaded concept involving social transformation, individual choice, equalization of opportunities and redistributive justice in different doses.
2. Partly also because the feminist project conceptualizes its focus in an ever changing way: from women (making them visible in theory and policy) to gender relations (embedded in a host of social relations which tend to be historically and spatially specific).
3. And last, but not least, because the key actors in the development field are numerous and have different priorities (international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, multilateral agencies as those belonging to the United Nations "family", NGOs based in donor countries such as OXFAM and Action Aid, and researchers and consultants in various private and public organizations across the world, helping to generate the necessary information which helps to shape how problems are identified and solutions framed.

The ***first wave of official feminism*** within the international development agencies framed the ***Women In Development (WID) approach***. Its objective was "to make women visible" as a category in development research and policy. It rested on the conviction that if only planners and policymakers could be made to see women's concrete and valuable contribution to the economy, women would become integrated in the development process.
This proved to be overoptimistic, and the inclusion of women's issues has often been achieved through a process of "pigeonholing": rhetorical appreciation and symbolic recognition, which however remained unsupported by material resources and political commitment. Indeed. As has been persuasively argued, the theoretical underpinnings of the WID perspective (methodological individualism and liberal-equilibrium world view) implied serious limitations as a politics of change [Kabeer, 1994:xiii].

Thus, the ***second wave of official feminism marked a shift from "women" to "gender relations"*** as the key focus of analysis. It reflected the conviction that in order to address the position of women one had to shed light to the picture of the power relations between women and men. It sought to overcome the problem of focusing on women in isolation from the rest of their lives and from the relationships through which inequalities were perpetuated.[1] Although it sought to address many of the problems raised by WID, it did so from a more structuralist perspective deriving from the Marxist approach. By applying Marxist tools of analysis, it raised a number of issues that were absent from earlier efforts (in particular the link between class and gender in framing conditions of oppression). In doing so, however, it also exposed the omissions, silences ands exclusions of many Marxist categories. In its most fruitful versions, gender analysis applied to the question of development encourages profound rethinking of all forms of exclusion. By prioritizing knowledge generated by excluded groups it enriches and transforms at the same time development thought. To achieve this, however, requires some painful adaptations of earlier mottos and clichés of western-based radical and feminist thought. The dilemmas surrounding numerous of the issues posed by contemporary globalisation (and the debate around labour standards in particular) testify to the difficulties and the controversies of the project.

[1] Obviously, gender analysis does not imply the symmetrical treatment of women and men. Just as class analysis can be used to understand and address the problems of the poor, so too can gender analysis be used to understand and address the problems of women's subordination.

2. From Modernisation to the NIDL.

The first contributions on women and development were firmly situated within the modernisation theory context. They were characterized by an overall optimistic attitude concerning the effect of modernisation on women (and everybody else, for that matter). This line of thought is best represented by Esther Boserup's book *Women's Role in Economic Development (1975)*. Modernisation theory in brief suggests that development is a process of transformation of a backward economy (that is, one based on traditional methods of production and distribution and on largely ascriptive social relations) to a modern economy (based on rationality and efficiency and achieved relations based on merit rather than birth). Modernisation process overcomes traditional attitudes and encourages the acceptance of new values in the realm of family (greater mutuality between men and women, and women –while still central to the maintenance of the family should be enabled to take up extra-domestic activities and to become "integrated into development"). Put in a rather simplistic way, the message is clear: modernisation is good for women if it manages to integrate them into the development process.

But was it really a problem of lack of integration? Women have always been integrated but the problem is that their work goes unrecognized, their contribution is undervalued [Papanek, Nash…] partly due to the male-centered views of the colonizing powers (androcentric blindness). In their effort to refute the most naïve and mechanistic versions of modernisation, some feminists went as far as to argue that modernisation in the shape of colonialism actually deteriorated the position of women in colonized societies.

In a sense, colonialism was seen as distorting the traditional economy and undermining traditional political organizations and as a result worsening the balance between men and women in favour of men [Van Allen, 1976]. This view, in turn, has been contested by researchers, arguing that many pre-colonial traditional societies were characterized by persistent inequalities between men and women and between the old and the young [Molyneux, 1977].

The argument has not been convincingly won for either side. Since no consensus emerged at the level of abstract theorizing (whether "progress" and capitalism were good for women) many feminists felt that the reasonable path forward was by studying concrete situations rather than fitting them in pre-conceived abstract theorizations. What followed was an approach of investigating the bases of women's power or independence and how they relate to the organization of production and distribution. Much of the earlier literature on rural women focused on women who work within a family enterprise either as subsistence producers or as helpers to cash crop producing small holders. Later studies focused on the ***situation of women who are rural proletarians*** (who sell their labour to capitalist agribusiness enterprises) on a seasonal or permanent basis for exports. This is the reverse side of Boserup's picture: no longer it the men who are employed in the export oriented plantation sector while the women sit at home producing subsistence (and thereby lowering the wages paid to men). By now it is the women who are directly being exploited by capitalist employers who search for ways to lower labour costs.

The process of explosive urbanization since the late 1960s combined with little full time formal employment possibilities in the cities gave rise to the so called ***"informal sector debate"*** and the variety of informal employment arrangements both in the LDCs but also, increasingly, in the context of advanced economies (casualisation, domestic outwork and precarious work status). These work arrangements notwithstanding, a new type of work, namely factory work, soon attracted researchers' attention. ***Factory work for exports*** linked to a powerful tendency in the world economy: the relocation of factories away from the traditional industrial loci of the west in search of lower wages. This has been called "the New International Division of Labour".

3. From the New International Division of Labour (NIDL) to Globalisation

New manufacturing exporters, challenging the "Old" IDL (whereby the advanced industrialized countries specialized in the production and export of manufacturing goods, while poorer developing countries produced and exported primary commodities). A number of industries have tended to relocate all or part of their production processes from the high wage economies of the advanced industrialized countries to new locations in the South (mainly labour-intensive, mature as well as new industries such as clothing and micro-electronics assembly).

One of the features of the rise of export-oriented manufacturing industry in the developing countries, which began to draw international attention in the 1980s, was the ***female-intensiveness of its work force***. Women in low-income countries who had hitherto worked as family labour in traditional agriculture were now being drawn into modern industry as waged workers. This process lends itself to both optimistic and pessimistic readings and interpretations.

Optimistic views appealed to a wide spectrum from World Bank practitioners to traditional Marxist scholars: the idea that paid employment held the key to ending women's subordinate position via the operation of gender-neutral market forces.

A great deal of critical feminist scholarship at the time was dedicated at countering this optimistic orthodoxy (seasonality of demand, exposure to international competition causing employment insecurity and vulnerability, reinforcement of traditional gender stereotypes related with docility, hazardous working conditions, to mention but a few). In the vigour of the arguments some aspects of the new reality were clearly lost. Notwithstanding the problems of working conditions, discipline and insecurity, the possibility that access to such employment might have any positive implications tended to be ruled out a priori. Such questions would include examining the impact of women's earnings on intra-household income distribution and decision-making, whether women became empowered by getting a job and whether women's choices concerning education and marriage were broadened by employment.

As a result, the prevailing mode of feminist analysis of the situation of Third World women workers gave rise to the "politics of selective visibility of exploitation" in the global division of labour: the politics of quotas and the "fair trade versus free trade" campaigns [Kabeer, 2000: 9]. These were restrictions on imports (a hidden version of protectionism) on the grounds that the extremely exploitative conditions prevailing in Third World factories gave employers from these countries an unfair advantage in the international market. Furthermore, cheap imports from poor countries were frequently cited as the major cause of job losses in the advanced economies. In the course of the argument there has been a clear stigmatization of Third World women as "cheap labour". As Ruth Pearson aptly put it "there is often a feeling that Third World women are at fault; that they won´t stand up for their rights, and thus jeopardize any attempt by women in the First World to stand up for theirs. Tighter restrictions on imports of garments and textiles are often seen as the only strategy for women in the First World to protect themselves against the supposed menace of "cheap labour" founded on "oriental submissiveness". … [Furthermore] the term "cheap labour" carries with it a condemnation of the workers themselves…[as] lacking self-respect … because they are culturally backward" implying a combination of sexism and racism [Elson, 1983: 6].

What is really the impact of women's access to paid work? Both individualist and structuralist perspectives attach little (if any) transformatory potential to women's

earnings, for different reasons. For the former type of approach (say, for Beckerian economists) power is not a factor in household dynamics and relations, so the identity of the earner is irrelevant to decision making. For the structuralist approaches women's earning capacity becomes irrelevant because the earnings are likely to be appropriated by the male patriarch pursuing his own self-interest.

Other approaches attach some degree of transformatory potential to women's earning capacity: sufficient condition [Joekes, 1987], necessary but not sufficient condition [Standing, 1991; Sen, 1990; Beneria & Roldan, 1987]. One way to settle this ambiguity is to ***listen to the voices of women themselves***. The idea of asking people for their own accounts of why they did what they did and what it means to them may appear an obvious way of proceeding in research, but may prove slippery and controversial. This may be so because ***institutions "work behind the backs" of social actors*** who have little understanding of their environment or the circumstances of their actions, or because the stated perceptions of subordinate groups may have internalized the dominant values [Giddens, 1979; Sen´s "adapted perceptions", 1990]. One then needs to move beyond personal accounts in order to examine the "explanation for their explanations"; in other words, ***one needs to ground "voices" in their wider context*** [Kabeer, 2000].

Mainstream economics casts a powerful light on the importance of choice in explaining patterns of human behaviour, but has little to say about power and how it may create inequalities in people's ability to choose. Structuralist theories have emphasized the importance of social constraints and barriers in limiting the scope for individual choice, but fail to acknowledge how individuals seek to maneuver within these constraints and how they manage to transform them occasionally. While economists locate their explanations at the immediate and observable level of experience, structuralists deal with deeper and hidden forces. A more promising analytical approach locates itself at the middle level, acknowledging structure without denying agency: women are seen as neither the free-floating, atomized individuals of neo-classical analysis, nor the "structural dopes" or passive victims. Rather they are seen as "persons-in-relations", "individuals whose preferences and priorities reflect their own unique histories and subjectivities, but also bear the imprint of the complex social relationships to which they belong and which determine their place in society [Kabeer, 2000: 327].

So, on the issue of globalisation feminists appear divided…. Deterioration prevails in feminist analyses (due to the hegemony of structuralist approaches) but other positions have been put forward emphasizing the double face of the globalising tendencies, some of which may open up new opportunities for women in specific contexts. The pioneering work of Naila Kabeer is a case in point. She examines Bangladeshi women's labour market decisions in the UK (London) and Bangladesh (Dhaka) in the garment sector and highlights the determinants of different decisions leading to different outcomes [Kabeer, 2000].

4. A feminist theory of gender and development?

The effort to understand and influence the position of women in the Less Developed Countries (LDCs) has triggered serious rethinking and enrichment of the meaning of development and progress. The wide variety of different (and at times conflicting) accounts share a number of common elements:

1. Despite differences in family form, kinship structure, marital arrangements, political and economic structures, women are everywhere charged with producing and raising children up to the socially designated end of childhood. They are also charged with the daily upkeep of the household, the care of husbands, of family members and of kin, the maintenance of networks. *Women on the whole are people rather than things oriented* [Young, 1989: xix].

2. These activities are nowhere recognized as being of the same order of importance as those directed to the production of things or their distribution. They tend to escape statistical recording, they are socially invisible and accorded less value.

So one starting point for a feminist critique of development is that the production and maintenance of things in no way should take precedence over the production or maintenance of people. Thus, planning for economic growth must give equal weight to human beings and social relationships. Production and distribution must be oriented to meeting the needs of the entire population, to the enhancement of human capacities and to the refinement of the most people oriented values of society. To opt for sustainable growth in the longer run rather than short-term results. Such an approach questions the individualistic strategies of social change based on competitive and self-interested behaviour.

Five major contributions: moderation of the pace of growth, new forms of social organization (no subordination, no exploitation), differences and inequalities between women and policies for tactical improvement versus strategic change.

a. Because human nature is complex and far from unimodal, it is possible that stressing the cooperative and social aspects of human behaviour may diminish the individualistic and the entrepreneurial and may slow somewhat the pace of growth and technological invention.
b. The continuing work on women and development has its greatest contribution to make in searching "for forms of social organization which will ensure that women's subordination to men disappears with the subordination of women and men alike to oppressive and exploitative institutions and classes whether at home or abroad" [Young, 1989: xxi]. Obviously, theory alone is insufficient. It requires mobilization and politicization at all levels.
c. Beware of facile homogenization of "women" into a single category. This is a very significant insight: Women's interests, while central to feminist evaluations of social and development policy, constitute a dubious concept. It assumes that "women's interests" constitute a given entity that can be clearly defined. Moulyneux's critique is very succinct: "Although it is true that at some level of abstraction women can be said to have some interests in common, there is no consensus over what these interests are or how they are to be formulated. This is in part because there is no theoretically adequate and universally applicable causal explanation of women's subordination from which a general account of women's interests can be derived…A [feminist] theory of interests… must begin by recognizing difference rather than assuming homogeneity [Moulyneux, 1985: 231-2].
d. The above carries important implications in the analysis of the origins of women's subordination. In a similar vain, Young argues against highly abstract theorizations leading to empirically ungrounded generalizations: "The form that gender relations take in any historical situation is specific to that situation and has to be constructed inductively; it *cannot be read off from other social relations nor from the gender relations of other societies*" [Young, 1981: vii, emphasis added].
e. Policies can be usefully distinguished into two main categories: they may be tactical or they may be strategic. There exist policies that address the concrete conditions of women's daily lives and policies seeking to transform women's position within a structurally unequal set of social relations…. Practical interests are usually a response to immediate perceived need and do not entail a strategic goal such as women's emancipation or gender equality. By contrast, strategic gender interests are derived "from the analysis of [women's] subordination and from the formulation of an alternative, more satisfactory set of arrangements from those which exist" [Moulineux, 1985: 232]. Such strategic measures include the abolition of the gender

division of labour, alleviation of the burden of childcare and domestic labour on women, removal of institutionalized forms of discrimination etc

5. Conclusions

The relationship between feminism and development is a highly contested one theoretically, while there exists a variety of views concerning how best to reassert feminist engagement with development as a political project (practically).
Taking stock of the rich experience of a quarter of a century, a number of key issues could be tentatively raised in the form of three hypotheses.

First, it appears that the continuing efforts to develop new concepts and languages in order to understand women's position in developing societies has had a double effect: while on the one hand "feminist phrases" have to a large extent become part of the core of development analysis and planning, on the other this very success has altered the content of these phrases. In other words, the more successful the "feminist" slogans became in development policy and practice, the more their initial meaning changed (the feminist concepts became gradually filled with new meanings). This need not be a problem in its own right, but it may pose difficulties if it is based on simplistic notions portraying women in a catchy but imprecise way (passive victims for instance). Albeit powerful, some lessons from specific places have tended to become generalized representations of a sloganised nature "women are the poorest of poor", "women do most of the work in agriculture", "educating girls leads to economic development". "Women appear in these representations as abject victims, the passive subject of development's rescue, and splendid heroines, whose unsung virtues and whose contributions to development need to be heeded" [Cornwall, Harrison & Whitehead, 2004: 1]. Lesson to be learnt: differences among women are very important and clashing interests are part of the reality rather than "facile sisterhood".
In short, feminist concepts and analytical categories are neither eternal nor fixed in content. Their strength may lie in their constant renegotiation.

Second, and notwithstanding the success of gender categories in development rhetoric, the extent of change in women's lives "does not match this discursive landslide" [ibid: 1]. For many gender and development advocates there has been an actual deterioration of women's conditions while "gender" turns into a depoliticised and diluted concept neutralized of political intent. As Maxine Moulyneux argues, we are trapped in a "chimera of success". The view that gender awareness has become part of the common sense of development policy is now so widespread that NGOs report a "growing ennuie, a gender fatigue with women's programmes increasingly being seen as passé" [Moulyneux, 2004: 112]. Much ado about nothing?
This however is a rather unfair verdict. Progress and improvement of women's situation worldwide is plain to see, although it is a far from unilinear process. What captures more accurately the reality is the recognition that there exists an enormous gap between feminists' aspirations for social transformation and the limited, although important, gains that have been made. Gender inequality has proved to be much more intractable and resistance to change more vigorous than anticipated. Nevertheless, as Hilary Standing suggests, we need to understand the mandates of different kinds of development institutions and actors in order to assess whether they should be responsible for the social transformatory objectives of feminism [2004: 82-88]. It is impossible to offer technical solutions to political problems. Gender mainstreaming in bureaucracies can make at most a modest contribution to political and social transformation. Instead of aspiring to the impossible task of transforming gender relations, more modest objectives can fare a lot better (such as "improving necessary

things which can make a difference in women's and men's lives" [Standing, 2004: 87]). Realising the potential of microfinance is a case in point.

Third, the controversy over globalisation is highly illustrative of the dilemmas and divisions among feminists working in the field of development. While the hegemonic position is a pessimistic one (deterioration of world economic environment, new types of economic oppression and inequality, neo-liberal καταιγίδα) there exists a minority, more balanced view stressing opportunities as well as problems and prioritizing the power of women to chose over the longer run [Kabeer, 2000]. In part, as argued earlier, the different positions adopted by feminists reflect different theoretical frameworks. In my view, a richer picture emerges via the combination of some of the strengths of the individualist-liberal approach stressing choice and agency, with the structuralist approach revealing hidden traps and constraints (what Kabeer calls "the middle ground"): being attentive to voices but also aware of the wider picture and its limitations.

As an afterthought, I would add a fourth- far from original- lesson to be learnt: Collective action remains indispensable in order to mobilize political will, vision and strategy. But again it is not an easy prescription. Priority must be given to the voice and mobilization of the weakest links of the social actors chain, both in policy formulation and theoretical analysis.

References

Beneria, L. & M. Roldan, (1987), *Crossroads of Class and Gender*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
Cornwall, A., E. Harrison & A. Whitehead, (2004), "Introduction: Repositioning Feminisms in Gender and Development", *in Repositioning Feminisms in Development, IDS Bulletin,* Vol. 35, number 4, October.
Elson, D. (1983)
Giddens, A. (1979) *Central Problems in Social Theory*, London, Macmillan.
Joekes, S. (1987)
Kabeer, N. (1994), *Reversed realities: gender hierarchies in Development thought*, Verso.
Kabeer, N. (2000), *The Power to Choose: Bangladeshi women and labour market decisions in London and Dhaka*, Verso.
Moulineux, M. (1977)
Moulineux, M. (1985), "Mobilisation without Emancipation: Women's interests, state and revolution in Nicaragua" in *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 11, number 2.
Moulyneux, M. (2004), "The Chimera of Success", *in Repositioning Feminisms in Development, IDS Bulletin,* Vol. 35, number 4, October.
Papanek, Nash…
Sen, A. (1990) "Gender and cooperative conflicts" in Tinker (ed.) *Persistent inequalities*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
Standing, H. (1991), *Dependence and Autonomy. Women's employment and the family in Calcutta*, London, Routledge.
Standing, H. (2004), "Gender, myth and fable: the perils of mainstreaming in sector bureaucracies" *in Repositioning Feminisms in Development, IDS Bulletin,* Vol. 35, number 4, October.
Van Allen, (1976)
Young, K., C. Wolkowitz & C. McCullagh (eds.) (1981), "Introduction" in *Of Marriage and Market: Women's subordination in international perspective*, London, CSE Books.
Young, K. (ed.) (1989), *Serving Two Masters: Third World Women in Development*, Allied Publishers Limited.
Young, K. (1993), *Planning Development with women: making a world of difference*, Macmillan.