

# Introduction: Gender, a Necessary Tool of Analysis for Social Change<sup>1</sup>

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Being compelled to constantly deconstruct and reconstruct generally used categories, feminist thought provides a major heuristic contribution. This book endeavours to show how the concept of gender<sup>2</sup> allows us to revisit development studies and to convey that studying development is not possible without including gender.

Gender is fundamentally interested in the issue of power. As a tool of analysis, it enables us to understand the historic, social and cultural construction of differences, and of inequalities. The concept of gender “is embedded in feminism, and not a gentler avatar of it that would make it more acceptable” (Bisilliat and Verschuur 2000, p. 14). It is a tool that needs to be reforged, redeployed and renewed through the prisms of social movements and feminist studies diverging in views, and in the context of globalised capitalism and of crises.

Gender is necessary to understand the “development of under-development” – as some described the process of globalisation of capitalism in the “third world” – characterised by the growing prosperity of some in parallel with the exclusion of the others. And yet, gender remains hidden, under development.

There has been little exchange of writings on gender and development between specialists and non specialists, at least in the French speaking context. Many non specialists are reluctant to “open the black box” of gender social relations as they fear that this will further complexify the analysis. This disinterest, including amongst women, is also reflected in the denial of power relations that are specific to gender in the name of an idealised and referential equality. As a result, such writings suffer from a prejudicial marginalising ghetto effect, which demonstrates a tenacious resistance to gender. Others are content in understanding gender as a simple variable of diversity: women, men, the young, etc. This book,

meant to be didactic, aims at providing keys to reading and mapping this rich literature so as to allow for a better understanding of the complexity of the interrelationship between gender and development.

Indeed, despite the fact that women's rights have become self-evident as a result of feminist struggles since the 19th century and that gender has been a part of the development discourse since the 1980s, this concept still remains marginal and most commonly used to divert attention, as a euphemism so as to not evoke questions of power and the subordination of women.

The 'nor-male'<sup>3</sup> social sciences (Chabaud-Rychter et al. 2010, p. 13) are unconsciously geared towards the masculine. Theories that are meant to be "neutral" or objective are in fact blind to gender inequalities. Theories and discourses of "development" tend to consider the experiences of subalternised women as insignificant and outside the scope of relevant conceptual analysis. On the contrary, we consider that "gender and development" is not a particular category of the general. It is not about the works of researchers whose point of view would be particular, sex-specific, militant and non scientific (Devreux 1995) in opposition to researchers whose point of view would be objective and neutral. Gender studies have a heuristic value in all the disciplines and fields of study and are not limited to certain domains such as family, health, the social realm and agriculture. Wars, the economy and finance, diplomacy, law: there is no such thing as a neutral domain or discipline.

Gender is embedded in symbols and language, norms and values as well as in institutions and nations. This concept seeks to understand how female and male actors create social life in their activities and interactions. It provides a different perspective by observing daily situated practices, the meaning provided by actors to their practices, their points of view, the diversity of their experiences and their inventiveness (Granié and Guétat-Bernard 2006). It acknowledges that people have room to manoeuvre, the capacity to change and can evolve to become the subjects of their own history. This is a strong assertion as it argues that in situations of subordination women still have room for interpretation and action. The challenge is well known but needs to be re-affirmed: it is to enhance women's visibility and their ability to become subjects, which entails that they be socially recognised.

To apprehend social analysis through gender means to understand social constructions of femininities and masculinities in their interactions and dynamics; to acknowledge their diversity as they interweave with other categories of class, race<sup>4</sup>; to analyse women and men's places and engagements and the social relations they construct. But to

enter social history through gender also means to talk about women specifically.

By accentuating the issues of social reproduction and of social relations in the productive and reproductive spheres, gender studies highlight the “essential cause of under development and of the prosperity of the capitalist sector” (Meillassoux 1975, p. 149). They provide insight into the mechanisms of reproduction of inequalities in development.

Researchers and experts from different parts of the world have contributed to this book, a book that establishes bridges between, and contributes to bringing awareness to, works from different schools and systems of thought linked to diverse feminist movements. These include works by French speakers who English speakers often have not heard of, works of Spanish speakers, to whom others are often indebted but who are not known and disseminated as they should be, and those of English speakers who are well known but sometimes scattered. This book, being published in both French and English and hopefully in Spanish soon, contributes to such exchanges.

In France, feminist theories have a long history but have only recently engaged with the issue of development, and to a very limited extent. In contrast, English-speaking and Nordic feminist networks made the link between gender studies and the question of development much earlier. As a result, they are much more present in the international system of knowledge production. A sense of a domination of an “expert” discourse explains the resistance to the concept of gender in France especially since French feminists have analysed it as a theoretical decline in comparison with the discourse of social relations of sex which, in French, explicitly refer to a power relation. Popular, autonomous, Spanish speaking, non hegemonic feminists are also reticent to its utilisation: fears revolve around the technicisation, de-politicisation and the NGO-isation of women’s movements. Decolonial perspectives which provide alternative points of view (from Black feminists, indigenous, migrants and subalterns located in the North for example) without leaving behind the terrain of concrete social conflicts, have linked the cultural and the political economic critiques. They have contributed to the renewal of feminist thought on development, in the Global North and in the Global South. Thanks to the contributions of researchers from diverse horizons and systems of thought, this book results in the cross fertilisation of reflections on the concept of gender in development, on its analytical scope and also on its transformative scope in terms of the propositions it makes.

The first specificity of feminist thought consists of a systematic deconstruction of the categories that are generally employed – which are not only inadequate but also contribute to invisibility and establish biases and hierarchies – and then reconstruct the schemes of analysis.

Feminist research adopts a point of view that is anti-positivist and *situated*, firmly believing that the claim to objectivity of science is unfounded and that reflexivity should be an integral part of analysis. It is a science of practice and subjects that crosses over disciplinary fields. Convinced of the systematic and diachronic dimension of gender relations, feminist researchers plead for interdisciplinarity, an intersection of views and a sharing of methods and concepts.

Feminist research is both an intellectual and a political project. It is an intellectual project in the sense that it is aimed at a continual renewal of concepts. It is a political project in the sense that researchers do not aim at establishing the universal truth of concepts, but at contributing to more just and democratic societies. Research and commitment are not thought of as separate and incompatible but as mutually nurturing. In all domains, theoretical reflections are inspired by problems that are often defined within feminist movements and, in return, they feed into action by creating points of reference and redefining the universe of possibilities (Ollivier and Tremblay 2000, p. 38). Being anchored in social movements has allowed feminist research to contribute to the renewal of knowledge, practices and methods of action. This explains the particular attention that has been provided to *social demand*, and to the continual give and take between research, expertise and militancy. The chapters by Fenneke Reysoo (about anthropology) and Agnès Adjamagbo and Thérèse Locoh (about demography) are illustrations of such cross-fertilisation. The chapter by Isabelle Guérin (a researcher) and Miriam Nobre (president of the World March of Women when the text was written) is the result of a dialogue between research and activism. Other chapters state how central research-action is to feminist research. The chapter by Sonia Alvarez (a sociologist) also suggests that the interactions between funders, researchers and activists can be both fruitful and dangerous as they sometimes result in a loss of critical view.

Such an anchor in action and in practice results in chaotic trajectories consisting of sometimes uncontrolled strategies and tactics as well as of trials and makeshift solutions, but also of reactivity and resistance which effects are sometimes hardly contained and can be counterproductive in the sense that they go against the initial causes. As a result of being anchored in action but also due to difficulties of legitimacy and

thus of finance in the academic sphere, the production of knowledge has often been closely linked to the financial aid of certain cooperation agencies and/or international institutions. This interdependence was particularly strong during the period of the construction of the field of knowledge, during the United Nations decade for women (1975–1985) and the pivotal international conferences that followed. This interdependence explains, to a great extent, why knowledge of gender and development was constructed in a very unequal way between regions and between disciplines. Western and English-speaking countries' cooperation agencies have contributed substantially to this effort as a result of the pressure from feminist movements in these countries, where such movements were also more interested in development issues (Verschuur 2009). This contributed not only to the inequality in knowledge construction between the French- and the English-speaking worlds, but also to the weak integration of the otherwise substantial inputs of French feminist theories to the elaboration of thought on gender and development. Similarly, some disciplines such as economy or law were relatively unreceptive to feminist studies. Some fields, such as sociology of development, only retained an extremely reduced facet of gender, while other disciplines, such as demography, retained more.

Gender as it is defended here is embedded in a feminist thought, which supports an assumed commitment for social transformation and for more justice, whether it concerns women or the entire set of other marginalised categories. Feminist researches are plural, replete with controversies and disagreements and their works on development share the same characteristics. They are, however, distinguished by an epistemological position that is largely shared, over which they do not possess a monopoly, but to which they have largely contributed.

## **Presentation of the book**

The first part of this book provides insights into disciplines mobilised in development studies in light of the concept of gender. How have some authors in their disciplinary fields seized inputs from feminist studies to discuss and renew concepts and methods? The objective is very ambitious and this book does not pretend to be exhaustive. Some disciplines have been left aside, and amongst those taken up here, the authors have sometimes made the choice of limiting themselves to certain themes. This overview provides ample evidence of the great diversity of approaches, which are more or less radical and oppositional, more

or less heeded and consensual. The controversies illustrate the relative divergences both concerning disciplines (i.e., is economy a science of choice, of production or of distribution and redistribution? Is law a reflection of societies or a force for social change? etc.), and about the concept of gender itself.

To open this disciplinary analysis, Christine Verschuur endeavours to revisit the history of development and the very concept of development through the prism of gender. The challenge is twofold. It means first of all that the invisible has to be rendered visible: to restore local realities and struggles, to do justice to the actions but also to the voices of the subalterns, including women, who have been ignored, despised and erased by history. Gender thus restores power to the centre of the analysis of change. To render visible the invisible also entails pointing to a central axis of development, that of social reproduction. In the 1970s, Marxist anthropologists already tackled this issue as they denounced the way in which capitalism fed itself from – rather than destroyed – domestic social relations. This matter, however, has become even more topical as a result of the globalisation of social reproduction. The second challenge entails rethinking analytical frameworks and actions. Christine Verschuur explains that feminist and decolonial perspectives are rich as they embrace both agency and domination as well as highlight the social, symbolic and cultural – and not only economic – dimensions of power. Recognising the structural constraints of globalised capitalism and following the total failure of development theories based on a *trickle down* approach, she advocates a focus on the *bubble up* approach and suggests that we lend value to local, concrete and cultural struggles and initiatives that hold the potential for alternatives.

In order to retrace the journey of feminist anthropology and its successive contributions, Fenneke Reysoo highlights the example of the Netherlands. She frames her work in critical epistemology, which addresses both ethnocentrism and androcentrism, repeatedly deconstructs binary and hierarchical categories, systematically examines the magnitude, inertia and multiplicity of forms of domination but also sheds light on spaces of “creative invention”. The author also draws attention to the fragility of feminist anthropology and to its struggles both with the world of development cooperation – upon which it closely depends while running the risk of permanent instrumentalisation – and with the academic world in which it is often ignored.

This assessment underlines the advances but also the multiple resistances. It highlights the very unequal degrees of advancement between

disciplines, as mentioned above. The contrast between demography and sociology is particularly striking. Agnès Adjamagbo and Thérèse Locoh demonstrate that demography was nurtured by feminist inputs so as to enrich methods, cross disciplines and thus renew theories pertaining to demographic transition and fertility as well as health, migration and marriage. The different facets of demographic behaviour and practice appear as complex, situated trajectories which only a systemic approach of gender relations existing in the societies examined can highlight.

On the other hand, according to Blandine Destremau and Bruno Lautier, sociology of development has remained enclosed within a micro sociological approach, which is blind to politics and power, and impervious to the inputs of decolonial and intersectional feminist sociology. To analyse this, the authors rely on studies of poverty. They illustrate the way in which gender has been made trivial, instrumentalised, naturalising familial roles without deconstructing rematernisation and legitimising the retreat of the state. The authors consider that the “povertologists” have only introduced gender with its “negative heuristic value” by reducing it to a functional and additive dimension, which distorts its original meaning.

By examining the pivotal role of institutions in the economy as well as their gender dimension, Irene van Staveren and Olasunbo Odebode restore and revitalise an old struggle of heterodox economists (which has been largely hidden by the hegemony of the neoclassical paradigm). The authors use the term “institutions” to suggest that social norms and culture have an influence on economic decisions and that economic behaviours contribute to shaping social and cultural norms. The markets and the allocation of resources are not the results of a confrontation between supply and demand but of a social, historical and political construction where social institutions (legislation, rules and norms) play a determinant role. Moreover, and it is here that the concept of gender allows for renewed perspectives and a rediscussion of concepts, some institutions are neutral in the point of view of inequalities (not only in terms of gender but also in terms of class, race, religion, etc.) while others are not, and it is this asymmetry that has to be highlighted and understood, in order to be denounced and combatted. Bringing down a central tenet of the discipline that is also very present in many development policies, the authors demonstrate that access to material resources is a necessary, albeit not sufficient, condition for the emancipation of dominated groups, and notably of women.

The next chapter is devoted to law. Isabel Cristina Jaramillo reviews the diversity of approaches. To capture law from a feminist perspective is to denounce the androcentric, but also the eurocentric and the neoliberal dimensions of the law and of its applications. For example, the punitive approach to sexual and domestic violence, which is characteristic of the neoliberal period, considers such violence as a moral and individual fault and not as a reflection of inequalities of power between men and women. Furthermore, to capture law in a feminist perspective is also to reject the alleged neutrality of judicial rules and to show the extent to which some norms and fundamental judicial principles such as those of free choice, consent, protection or individual property can create or legitimate dominations, oppressions and discriminations. To address law from a feminist perspective is also to use it as a tool of equity, inclusion and social change, including all the debates relating to parity.

In order to address the way in which studies in international relations are revisited by feminist studies, Elisabeth Prügl focuses on the theme of security. The specificity of feminist studies in international relations lies in their different approach to the analysis of power – a human-centred analysis instead of an analysis centred solely on the State – and in the fact that they use the gender perspective to explore new fields of study (security, violence). In her analysis of the security sector, Prügl describes the proliferation of debates concerning the way in which armed conflicts (and their resolution) reflect and reconstruct gender relations. Through her analysis, we see that a feminist perspective enables the shift and broadening of the debate, redefining the notions of victim, of actors and of violence. In times of war, as in times of peace, women are both victims and actors, and this is also the case for men. While describing the plurality of approaches, the author shows how the global and systemic perspectives provide an innovative vision. Captured within a continuum of violence, armed conflicts appear as a reflection and a catalyst of the norms of femininity and masculinity that are evidently not given but are contextually specific and historically constructed.

The second part of this work deals with specific fields of study following a similar objective: to show how gender shifts debates, raises new controversies, highlights the shortcomings of the dominant paradigms, as well as proposes renewed approaches and concepts. Here again, the list of themes chosen is partial and incomplete. However it offers an overview of the advances, the inputs and challenges of feminist research on development.

Drawing on the issues raised by women farmers in France and Brazil since the modernisation of agriculture, Hélène Guétat-Bernard analyses



rural and agricultural questions. Her starting point is to consider that if social frameworks are constraining, they also create, from socially constructed as well as historically and spatially located spaces, contextual practices and experiences for women and for men that are today sources of recognition. The challenge is now to renegotiate the position of values and to consider precaution and attention as essential concerns that should be universally shared. Feminist thought thus proposes a renewed ontological vision revolving around individuals who consider themselves as interdependent with the rest of the world. Women farmers are fighting for the recognition of their status and their specific work on exploitations. For quite some time, they have also been concerned with the effects of productive models on ecosystems.

It is one specific concern of feminist thought to repeatedly address this articulation between productive and reproductive work and the critique of such categories. The purpose is here again to denounce these categories or to endeavour to make visible the working time of marginalised women. If the research on care, understood as an economic-affective exchange (Verschuur 2013) is debated, it has also allowed us to highlight the interest of anti utilitarian position and to denounce the shift towards an accounts-based vision of the world. The term *care* is also an expression of that which has no price, the gift and counter-gift that are so critical to the very foundation of humans beings' existence on earth, within their relation to the world, to others and to things. It is thus a revolution of the values that is engaged in by the works on *care*, including the "*care of the environment*" (Laugier 2012).

In the chapter on migration, Christine Catarino and Laura Oso remind us that feminist thought has foregrounded the place of migrant women in reproductive activities that play a (non-recognised) role at the heart of the capitalist dynamics. However as feminist thought is focused on the role of women migrants in these contributions, few debates have examined the place of men in social reproduction. Here re-emerges a debate that is present in other texts: keeping in mind the criticism that "works related to the global care chains have been essentialising women by restricting them to motherhood", the challenge is to recognise the place that men can and must occupy in the time and activities of attention and of protection. One of the challenges of the feminist approach is to focus on the social construction of masculinities, which are in constant flux. Indirectly this text, as the others, includes a contestation of hegemonic masculinities.

This book also endeavours to engage with debates on different positionings, as the one addressed in Jules Falquet's text. Relying on the

Francophone materialist feminist thought, she defends the analysis of a “double logic of appropriation and exploitation in which women are trapped”. The discourse of neoliberal globalisation relayed by international organisations, which suggests that work would liberate women, is analysed as a “big scam”. Jules Falquet supports the idea that relations of work (of exploitation) have not replaced logics of appropriation which prevail in the construction process of social relations of sex as well as of “race”; she speaks of “connected vessels”. Historically, “the continuum of that work which is considered feminine” allows for a constant re-balancing of different modes of obtaining work from women trapped between exploitation and individual and collective appropriation. By suggesting a parallel between the crisis of the welfare state and the increase in feminine migrations in the sphere of care activities, the feminists have foregrounded the issue of the exploitation of migrant women in the evolution of the capitalist system. Care is the invisible work of women and rather than attempt to symbolically re-evaluate it, there is urgent need, as the author suggests, to claim effective social protection and a serious unionisation of women.

In a feminist analysis of the current economic crisis, Lourdes Benería attempts to produce a comparison with the debt crisis and the policies of structural adjustment that marked the 1980s and the 1990s in many countries of the South. According to her, the advances of feminist works in economics are based on their radical critique of the orthodox thought, which is founded on economic rationality and an idealised individualist vision. The lack of consideration of issues relating to solidarity and ethics but also the incapacity to think of environmental questions is at the origin of the current crisis. Feminist thought in economics has, on the contrary, prioritised an exploration of the value of the being (the well-being) and not just of having. The orthodox feminist thought does not concentrate on economic growth but focuses on human well being for all. The current crisis has accentuated the flexibilisation of the employment market and destroyed a certain number of jobs, mainly at the expense of male workers, forcing women to find solutions to compensate for the reduced income of their partners, which is comparable to the situation in the context of the South 20 years ago.

Two chapters focus on social movements, the battles and the alternatives. The chapter written by Sonia Alvarez focuses on women’s social movements. Starting from a genealogy of Latin American feminisms, the author offers a refined and nuanced vision of the NGO-isation of development, of the decisive but highly ambiguous role of certain feminist organisations in the recognition of gender by international

agendas, and of the way in which they have been progressively technologised and “disciplinised”. But she also shows that the contemporary period is marked by repeated questioning, a stronger pluralism in forms of struggle, notably popular struggles, and a disengagement from the so-called development programmes to the benefit of global struggles and a renewal of alliances.

The chapter on social and solidarity-based economy, by Isabelle Guérin and Miriam Nobre, interconnects issues which are addressed in other articles. Beginning with a gender analysis of practical experiences of initiatives in the field of social and solidarity economy, the authors affirm the crucial importance of denouncing those dominations and oppressions that cut across market relations but also necessarily those that undermine relations outside the market. It is precisely through denouncing these that we can pinpoint the danger of such experiences if they naturalise the role of women, trapping them therein and adding an additional workload. Social movements and the experiences of productive innovations described are anchored in a *local feminism*, which is close to people and territories, rearticulating women’s diversity of engagements between productive and reproductive, private and public. In this article lies a nagging question, which is present in other chapters: the reversal of the production of values to create a world that is not utopic but real and where “reproductive” engagements are no longer ignored or understood as a feminine virtue, but are at the foundation of a new definition of wealth and of what it means to live well together.

This book demonstrates how gender allows us to revisit the disciplines mobilised in development studies and other central fields of study. Forged by feminist studies and movements, gender is a useful but also indispensable category of analysis. Even if this work does not pretend to be exhaustive, it advocates overcoming resistances to gender, creating bridges between feminist studies from different systems of thought and horizons, and contributing to forging innovative concepts. Feminist thought is by essence critical of the globalised capitalist system, of economism, of andro-centrism (Fraser 2009) and of the failure to take into account the “others” and the “private”, and has contributed to efforts to decolonise thought on development (Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel 2007; Fraser 2009; Verschuur 2010; Destremau and Verschuur 2012). In connection with the current crises and the necessity to find anti-systemic alternatives (Guérin, Hersent and Fraisse 2011) feminist thought, in a position that is firmly critical of globalised capitalism, renews the thought on development.

## Notes

1. Translated from the French by Adriella Gauthier, Kaveri Haritas, Emmanuelle Chauvet and the authors.
2. Throughout the book we use the term of gender and gender relations instead of sex and social sex relations. These terms now prevail internationally in development policies as well as in academic spheres.
3. “Normâles” in French, “mâle” for male.
4. Using the term “race” entails difficulties since it consists in adopting a vocabulary produced by stereotypes and prejudices. Race is a social construction. Social relations of race refer to the fact that race is the expression of a power relation. The terms racialisation and ethnicisation aim at capturing the processes by which certain social groups are represented or identify themselves to a race identity or an ethnic identity. We use the term “race” throughout this book in this sense and without quotes.

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