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Feminist Anthropology Meets Development

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Introduction

This chapter reflects on the emergence of feminist scholarship in anthropology and its contribution to "gender and development" as a social field of policies and practices. Generally speaking, anthropology as a discipline has been very conducive to studying the variety of human social organisation and cultural meaning systems. In the aftermath of the Second World War, which paralleled the liberation struggles in the colonies, the scientific landscape of anthropology evolved into a divide between a "pure" scientific and a "critical" orientation. "Pure" scientific in the sense of a value-free approach, and critical in the sense that the knowledge produced was considered to be useful for the emancipation of "oppressed" groups in the "Third World", such as peasants, landless labourers and women (Wertheim, 1974; Huizer and Mannheim, 1979).

In order to contribute to women's emancipation and to understand the differential effects on women and men at all stages of development planning and policy-making, the lacunae of empirical data at the community level had to be filled. In the Netherlands as early as the mid-1970s, feminist anthropologists engaged in critical field research and became pioneers.[2] Based on these early endeavours, the dialectical relationship between feminist anthropologists and the practice of "gender and development" opened up avenues for theoretical advancements. In this chapter, I will demonstrate that women anthropologists followed by feminist anthropologists provided insights in the wide range of women's and men's contributions to society so that power mechanisms of social exclusion and gender inequality could be unravelled.

In the first part of the chapter, a brief history of scientific knowledge production by women in anthropology is outlined. In the second part,

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the convergence of feminist anthropology with the cultural critical turn in anthropology is presented. This will be followed by a pioneering case from the Netherlands. In the third part, some reflections on the gains, frustrations and fascinations of working with gender as a powerful category of analysis in anthropology will help further the debate. I will argue that, in spite of the many setbacks and the pervasive lack of genuine political commitment to improving the living conditions of marginalised, subaltern or excluded social groups, particularly various categories of women, feminist anthropologists politicised the taken for granted social relationships between men and women. The launching of the concept of gender went hand in hand with high expectations to both understanding the obstacles to and finding solutions to achieve social justice and fight many forms of discrimination against women.

(Early) women anthropologists and gender

> "…anthropology was probably the discipline that contributed most to the North-American (or sociologistic) account of gender…" (Visweswaran, 1997, p. 593).

The history of anthropology shows that from the very beginning women have played a timid, yet relevant role in describing the diversity of women's and men's social roles and the wide range of symbolic representations of femininity and masculinity. Documenting women's roles however did not necessarily mean that the project was a feminist one. The epithet "feminist" was added in a particular historical moment, and referred to a crucial change in the interpretation, representation and understanding of relationships between men and women. In her essay on feminist ethnography Visweswaran (1997) roughly distinguishes four phases of female scholars in anthropology.[3]

In the first period (1880–1920), social roles were seen as the immediate result of biological sex. By providing detailed empirical data on native Indian women's important roles and recognition in politics and rituals, American women anthropologists (Elsie Clews Parsons, Matilda Cox Stevenson and Alice Fletcher) debunked the Victorian conception of womanhood and questioned the evolutionary paradigm in which the Victorian model of society was represented as the most civilised. These ethnographies laid an early basis for both critical anthropology and for anthropologically informed feminism.

In the second period (1920–1960), gender roles were increasingly understood as being independent of the biological sex and much more

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attributed to the workings of culture. Thanks to Margaret Mead's study on "Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies" (1935), a theoretical distinction was made between biological sex and sociologically distinct gender roles. For years, psychologists, sociologists and philosophers engaged in the nature–nurture debate. It was not, however, until the publication of Ann Oakley's "Sex, gender and society" (1985[1972]) that a separate concept was used to capture at once the sociologically informed roles of men and women. Gender was born.

The third period (1960–1980), and the most well-known in gender and development circles, coincided with the Second Wave Feminist movements and the political rebellion against biology as destiny. In studying the wide range of women's social roles and conceptions of femininity in other cultures, feminist anthropology was useful in helping Western feminists make sense of their own oppression (Reiter, 1975). Monumental works, which are still prominent today, were produced by American anthropologists (Rosaldo and Lamphere, 1974; Reiter, 1975).

It was the merit of Gayle Rubin (1975), after a systematic revision of some influential social theories (Marx, Engels, Lévi-Strauss, Freud and Lacan), to coin the idea of a sex/gender system. She defined the sex/gender system as "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (Rubin, 1975, p. 159).

Rubin made an outspoken plea to rework traditional anthropology in order to "include the implications of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage, surplus extracted in the form of daughters, the conversion of female labor into male wealth, the conversion of female lives into marriage alliances, the contribution of marriage to political power, and the transformations which all of these varied aspects of society have undergone in the course of time" (1975, p. 210). Conceptualised as the "'political economy' of sex" (note that Rubin put political economy in inverted commas and not sex), this article with its many detailed descriptions of the social organisation of societies was foundational for later theory-building in feminist anthropology.

However, parallel to women's liberation movements of the 1960s, the sex/gender system did not provide an explanation of the universality of women's inferior social, economic, political and symbolic position. Sherry Ortner (1974) in her – by now almost "cult" – chapter "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" tried to link the female versus male divide to another universal ordering principle: nature versus culture. In her words: "Local variables of economy, ecology, history, political and social structure, values, and world view – these could explain

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the variations within this universal, but they could not explain the universal itself. And if we were not to accept the ideology of biological determinism, then explanation, it seemed to me, could only proceed by reference to other universals of the human cultural situation" (Ortner, 1974, p. 83). She argued that on a physiological, psychological and social level, women were considered to be closer to nature than men. It is beyond the purpose of this chapter to present the debate that was triggered by her explanation. Instead, I would like to highlight how her essay illustrates the preoccupation of feminist anthropologists to document the variability of social roles and cultural meanings of women and men and to problematise the asymmetry in the social gender construct.

Influenced by prevailing structuralism and structural-functionalism, other feminist anthropologists in the same period addressed other universal binary oppositions, such as private versus public and/or formal versus informal. Since women were much more occupied in the private sphere of the house, the argument went that they were logically excluded from the public sphere of politics, economics and religion (Reiter, 1975 for France; Nelson, 1974 for the Middle East). But, at the same time, Carole Rogers (1975) deconstructed the myth of male dominance by unravelling formal and informal power dynamics in France.

Furthermore, Marxist inspired feminist anthropologists questioned the material basis of economic production and emphasised the role of women in the sphere of social reproduction. Partly explored by Rubin, feminist anthropological research and theory-building evolved around the organisation of labour, and the invisible and unpaid work of women that contributed to the wealth of both men and the capitalist system. All of the aforementioned theoretical attempts made in this period were heavily inspired by an ideology of sisterhood and the political project to liberate women worldwide from patriarchal oppression.

In the fourth period (1980–1996), identified by Visweswaran, "woman" as a homogeneous social category was problematised and the conception of sex itself as a social construct emerged. Marked by a Foucauldian conception of social reality, gender was conceived as the discursive origin of sex. Some feminist anthropologists embraced the postmodernist turn in anthropology, yet this was not the case for feminist anthropologists who worked in the field of gender and development.

The review essay by Visweswaran (1997) effectively demonstrates how various historical periods of ethnographies produced by women in anthropology have gone hand in hand with various ways of

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understanding gender. The main critique however was that the majority of these scholars were located in the West. Third World women claimed their space to talk about their oppressions and their definitions of feminism (Amos and Parmar, 1984; Amadiume, 1987; Mohanty, 1988). As a consequence, positionalities along geo-political, class, ethnic, age, sexuality and other lines got included in both reflexive and political concerns of social analysis. Furthermore queer theorists have profoundly contributed to revise theories and to stimulate new readings of gender. In addition, new forms of femininity, such as the female chauvinist pig (Levy, 2005) or the top-girls (McRobbie, 2007) emerge in society and are being integrated in post-feminist theory-building.

Feminist anthropology as cultural critique

The heuristic value of gender as a useful category of analysis is closely related to the intellectual project of feminist anthropologists to be critical. Indeed, the early women anthropologists in the US already provided detailed descriptions of other cultures that underwrote the necessary reflections to question their own society. Such a project comes with a double cultural critique and particular epistemological and methodological positions. On the one hand, in line with mainstream anthropology, the values and worldviews of Others have to be appreciated by a *rupture épistémologique* (Bourdieu et al., 1969). This is a cognitive process of defamiliarisation (Marcus and Fischer, 1986, p. 128 ff) so that even the most basic preconceptions of how "things" are and what they mean are problematised. For instance, basic questions in relation to what it means to be (un)married, (un)employed, peasant, citizen, privileged etc. are scrutinised. Yet, before the emergence of feminist anthropology few (male) anthropologists questioned what it meant to be a man. Critique of androcentrism focused specifically on the reference to the universal Man and the absence of women as social actors in the monographs produced by (male) anthropologists.

On the other hand, anthropology as praxis could not be left out of a critical scrutiny. It started with the critique of ethnocentrism and androcentrism. It soon expanded toward a critical analysis of the relationship between the researchers and the researched (informants). Anthropological knowledge was not merely an extraction of information from informants, but a co-operative and inter-subjective project: a dialogue between two (or more) subjects who co-produce cultural meaningful knowledge. The epistemological posture was informed by conscious impartiality (Mies, 1979) and introduced a claim of subjectivity in science.

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Women and development

> "The job of creating 'gender awareness' is done. After all, the argument goes, the major development agencies and donors have all incorporated clear commitment to ensuring that women are adequately taken into account at all stages of development policy." (Molyneux, 2007, p. 227)

The International Year of Women (1975) and the first international conference on women in Mexico (1975) are important landmarks that triggered a demand for more information on women's life experiences in what was then called "changing social and economic conditions" (Postel-Coster and Schrijvers, 1980, p. i). Pioneering work by Boserup, a Danish economist (1970), highlighted two important arguments. First, that development affects women's and men's lives differently and second, that development models were grounded in Western conceptions of womanhood and female social roles. She observed, for example, that the introduction of modern technologies in agriculture and male biases in extension service provisioning turned African rural women into housebound housewives (the so-called housewifisation process).

Boserup stood not alone. A number of feminist anthropological studies demonstrated the adverse effects on women's positions in communities and countries affected by development interventions. The Dutch anthropologist Risseeuw (1988) documented how the British rulers in Sri Lanka had negatively affected local kinship relations and how women were "kissed out of their property" (p. 61). Upon her third return to the Mafia community in Tanzania, the British anthropologist Caplan (1988, p. 11) noticed that food had become sparse in the villages and the health status of women had deteriorated. With changed modes of agricultural production and men becoming more involved in cash crop production, women and children became more dependent "on the male control of bought food in the household" (1988, p. 11).

Critical voices emerged to ensure that development policies should positively resonate with "local cultures". Two main solutions were proposed. First, more empirically grounded data had to be generated. Second, participatory approaches were promoted so that development projects could be formulated in assessing the needs of local populations. It was the era of basic needs assessments, which more than once turned into rapid (rural) appraisals. Feminist anthropology and "gender and development" evolved as two professional fields. Indeed, while feminist anthropologists produced insightful empirical studies, thanks to a

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relatively long-term stay in a community, genuine dialogical exchanges and in-depth understanding of the functioning of gender power relations, those trained in "gender and development" concentrated more on the basic needs assessments and rapid (rural) appraisals. The latter profession underwent constraints by policy-makers' needs and project cycle timeframes. When and where did the tensions emerge and when and where could the two meet?

Feminist anthropology meets development: a pioneer case from the Netherlands

This case study takes us back to the 1970s and to the Netherlands. Anthropology as a discipline is institutionalised in various forms: social anthropology, cultural anthropology, sociology of non-western societies and development anthropology/sociology. In this context of critical science and societal turmoil, the Minister of Development Co-operation, Jan Pronk (Labour Party) was invited to give an address at the first International Women's Conference in Mexico (1975). To prepare himself for Mexico, the Minister contacted the anthropologists Els Postel-Coster and Joke Schrijvers at Leiden University, and within less than two months, together with female colleagues and students, they wrote a report "Women on their way" with the subtitle "development towards emancipation".[4] With the benefit of hindsight, it is hard to imagine the dire absence of any knowledge on the situation of women in the "Third World".

Emancipation was defined as "development in the direction of factual equality of the sexes, a situation in which the domination of one sex over the other is eliminated" (Postel-Coster and Schrijvers, 1976, p. 102). The obstacles toward the achievement of emancipation of women were considered to be related to both natural and cultural constraints. Interestingly, the authors had chosen not to use the concept of "power", neither the term "feminist". In those days presenting the relationship between women and men in terms of "power" differentials was (still) taboo, and the epithet "feminist" was too strongly associated with the spread of Western ideology.

After the conference in Mexico, the Minister was well aware that the Programme of Action could not be implemented without a better understanding of the life conditions of women. As a result, he decided that more anthropological research was needed. A mandate was given to the team of Postel-Coster and Schrijvers at the University of Leiden[5] to conduct research in Sri Lanka, Egypt and Burkina Faso (1976 to 1981).

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The results of the research projects conducted in Sri Lanka in 1977–1978 and the subsequent policy recommendations were published in 1980 under the title "A woman's mind is longer than a kitchen spoon".[6] The conditions of women in different sectors of society were studied: "work, employment and mobility", "education, training and information" and "organization and political participation". The authors also included a detailed analysis of the various stages of women's lives in order to "demonstrate the full reality of women's lives and problems" (Postel-Coster and Schrijvers, 1980, p. ii).

An action component was planned to be part of the research: a women's agricultural co-operative in the North-Central Province (village of Kurunduwila), a coir- and mat-making project in Mahagoda (South-West Coast), and a weaving project in Siriyagama were established. These pilot projects unveiled "various possibilities and problems of planned change for women" (1980, p. ii) in concrete settings as they faced resistances from local elites, intermediary bureaucrats and were met with suspicion from husbands and relatives.

The field research was carried out according to the methodological canons of anthropology in those days: the researchers settled down in the communities (some with their families), learned the language and stayed there for a long period of time (one year). A methodological innovation was that the Dutch anthropologists insisted on working in a team with Sri Lankan researchers.[7] The focus was laid on the cultural constraints that women experienced in accessing vital resources (1980, p. 6). The researchers observed in detail: "the limited freedom of movement for women, physically as well as socially, the extreme emphasis on motherhood as the only acceptable role; the restriction of activities considered suitable for women; and the low esteem accorded to these activities and to the female sex, by both men and women" (1980, p. 6).

Yet, cultural constraints happened to be malleable and adaptable to concrete situations that could fulfil immediate needs. According to Postel-Coster and Schrijvers: "striking changes in this field [cultural constraints] can occur if there is support from a structural basis" (1980, p. 7). Indeed, regular employment was considered to be so valuable, that women could travel considerable distances to work. Interestingly, some of the constraints were identified as the "direct results of modernization and development planning. For instance, as a result of the transition from subsistence to cash cropping (...) women are cut off from their traditional economic resources. The same holds true for the introduction of large scale industry and trade (...)." (1980, p. 7). In addition, the

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report provides detailed descriptions of how cultural meanings operate: "The fear of being ostracized for 'unwomanly' behaviour prevails" (Postel-Coster and Schrijvers, 1980, p. 51). Therefore, in the realm of political activities men will almost exclusively dominate and women will remain excluded: for cultural reasons the system maintains itself. Furthermore, "obligations of housework and childcare keep them from attending meetings" (1980, p. 51). Strikingly, without using the concept of gender, which had not (yet) travelled from the United Kingdom (Oakley, 1972) to the Netherlands, the report is very explicit on the empirical observable elements such as womanly or unwomanly behaviour, division of labour within the household and in society, and power relations between women and men.

The insights in cultural meaning, social organisation and access to vital resources gained at the local level were set against macro-economic and structural features of Sri Lanka as a "Third World" country and how it affected the conditions of poor women: "The major constraints for development for poor women in a poor country like Sri Lanka result from the macro-structural mechanisms of inequality, which places the country as a whole in a highly unfavourable position within the international context. Similar mechanisms are operating within national economic and political structures. (...) Cultural ideas have reinforced this process so far" (Postel-Coster and Schrijvers, p. 119). Economic development, in the sense of expansion of the capitalist economy, had induced widening gaps between women and men. Accordingly, it is not only in the current age of globalisation and neoliberalism that gaps have widened. This had already started with "the changes in production and the penetration of the money economy (that) have only widened the already existing gap in the valuation of men's and women's work" (p. 119 and chapter II).

The action component to the research demonstrated how an initial period of a development project, aiming at improving the life conditions of poor women, encounters strong opposition from the local elite (mainly men) and engenders conflicts between the women themselves (p. 122). It is unrealistic to assume, the authors say, that there is a "social or economic basis for solidarity between women, and poverty only increases their competition for the scarce resources, they need time and support to experience the benefits of joint efforts in the service of common interests" (p. 122). In other words, poor women organise their income-generating activities in accordance with the day-to-day survival of their family. They manage their time and energy in view of the urgency of their responsibilities as a mother and spouse in a poor family.

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Therefore, they may have little motivation to participate in activities that aim at bringing about change in the mid- or long-term.

The action component allowed the researchers to find out that the women at the grass roots were unaware of "the function of various government departments, local services, the ways to obtain legal justice and protection, etc. (...) On the one hand this is a matter of poor information, on the other of the general inaccessibility of the middle levels of local bureaucracy. Here, the officers experience no incentive to responsibility for the well-being of poor people, who are without any power. The main reason is their dissatisfaction with their own position due to relatively low salaries, frequent transfers, lack of provisions in accordance with their class, etc. Moreover, the hierarchical organization of the local bureaucracy forms a serious constraint for the development of decision power and responsibility in the lower ranks, which usually deal with matters immediately relevant for the villagers." (p. 54)

The research *cum* action projects conducted in Sri Lanka and reported in the "Kitchen Spoon..." may seem outdated. Part of its terminology has outlived its story, and a complete strand of new concepts, in the first place gender itself, but also power, agency, empowerment, did not yet travel. Notwithstanding, I think that it is a very strong piece of work. In the first place, it is an exponent of feminist anthropological (new) canons: lived experiences of women, perspectives from below, life cycle approach, linking structural conditions and cultural constraints with unequal power relations. It is also one of the first systematic endeavours in anthropology to debunk androcentrism (called viricentrism by Schrijvers, 1979).

The strength of this pioneering work lies in the fact that it provided the empirical basis for *inducing* the concept of gender. Women's and men's social roles, their conceptions of themselves and of womanly and manly behaviour, the local power differentials along lines of social stratification and life cycle, the functioning of bureaucracies are discrete yet a bunch of elements that today are captured under the term "gender". And although Postel-Coster and Schrijvers did not coin the term, their research gave all the empirical ingredients to ground it.

The awareness of this historical development is important with regard to the current critique of gender as a buzzword (Smyth, 2007). Indeed, from a feminist anthropological perspective, gender has for many become too much of an abstraction which is disembodied. The contraction of so many cultural, social, economic and political phenomena into one term has contributed to the confusion. Indeed, the concept of

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gender is complex, because besides allowing for a descriptive analysis of social roles and sexual division of labour, it intrinsically refers to power relations between women and men. Contracting all these empirical realities and aggregating it under one concept has eroded its empirical references. Used outside concrete social contexts, gender tends to circulate as a disembodied concept.

Theoretical advancements, ever since

> "Different forms of feminism have produced different understandings of gender, where gender itself cannot be separated from the categories of race, class, or sexual identity that determine it." (Visweswaran, 1997, p. 592)

Over time, new readings of gender and the gendered dimensions of social organisation have been introduced. Being initially intended to understand power relations between women and men as a primary organising principle in society, it has become under attack. Coloured, black and hyphenated feminist scholars criticised Western white feminist scholars for homogenising the social category of women (Mohanty, 1988; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1981, bell hooks, 1984). By coining the term intersectionality, they drew attention to the articulation of co-occurring structures of oppression (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins, 2007). In addition, they objected to the representation of women living in the global south as being victims, devoid of any form of agency. They were not mere pawns in power games beyond their control (precocious or forced marriages, unwanted pregnancies, unmet needs in contraceptive matters, exploited in the labour market, subordinated to husbands, excluded from property rights, manipulated by techno-medicalisation of health care, unrecognised by patriarchal religions, ...). A call for the integration of multiple positionalities (multi-cultural societies) and emergence of standpoint epistemologies (Hartstock, 1987; Harding, 1986) were logical outcomes.

Feminist anthropologists have always been sensitive to the plurality of the category of women and the diversity of women's living conditions, needs and interests. The postcolonial turn in the women's movement has, however, influenced prevailing practices in feminist anthropological research. On the one hand, as we have seen with the example of the "Kitchen Spoon..." project, feminist anthropologists, whose research contains an action component, have been keen to collaborate with feminist scholars and activists in the countries of concern. Dialectics of

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dialogue and studying up, studying down and studying sideways were innovative approaches (Schrijvers, 1991). Each of the actors involved (western feminist anthropologists, local feminist researchers and activists) had their specific power positions to lever social conditions of poor or marginalised women.

On the other hand, as time passed, "native" anthropologists emerged. An important number were trained in western-based universities. In addition, several universities in the south created their own departments of training in anthropology as well as in gender studies (see Amina Mama, 2007 for Africa). The plurality of belongings was sometimes positively conducive to fruitful co-operation (Reysoo et al., 1995 for Bangladesh). Unfortunately, at other moments, sources of misunderstandings and mutual exclusions were inscribed into a paradigm of the "political economy" of belonging.[8]

Frustrations[9]

In the field of *academia*, irrespective of some exceptions, feminist anthropologists have continually been treated with suspicion by mainstream anthropologists who were sceptical about the action component of their research. In addition, feminist anthropology never has had the financial resources to become strongly institutionalised.[10] In many departments of anthropology, students may at best be exposed to one or two gender courses. In an era of strong exigencies in matters of scientific excellence, feminist anthropology or gender studies reviews are not among the highest rankings. Furthermore, feminist anthropologists working in development have always strongly integrated an interdisciplinary perspective, used predominantly qualitative methodologies and worked with critical innovative conceptual tools, among them gender and power – reasons for Strathern (1987) to infer that feminist anthropology can never fully integrate the mainstream, because it exists to critique, to deconstruct and to challenge. Feminist anthropologists, therefore, are in a structurally unequal position to compete on an equal basis with those anthropologists who play the game according to the hegemonic academic rules.

Unfortunately, feminist anthropology has remained a disciplinary field mainly inhabited by women. This has to do with the fact that in academia it is easier to set up courses that deal entirely with feminist anthropological issues by highly motivated women than to convince male colleagues to integrate a gender perspective in their theoretical and thematic fields. At best, they accept that feminist colleagues teach one session on gender in their curriculum (to do justice).

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It is also more common that students (MA and PhD) who want to integrate a gender perspective in their research seek supervision among anthropologists specialised in gender theories, rather than pushing thematically specialised anthropologists to integrate a gender perspective. Hence thematic (gender-blind) specialists can go on ignoring gender as a category of social analysis, whereas feminist anthropologists have to be well-informed about a large variety of thematic fields (migration, security, economics, governance, globalisation, environmental issues, etc.).

In the field of gender and development, in many countries we witness more or less the same process as described by Goetz and Sandler (2007, p. 164ff) for the international scene: gender experts are not strongly integrated in the major decision-making venues ("logic of marginality"). They argue that "the abuse of women's rights simply fails to produce a sense of a life-threatening, economy-paralysing crisis, in the same way that humanitarian emergencies, environmental disasters or uncontrolled capital flows do" (2007, p. 163). As a result, more energy and financing have gone into the elaboration of UN normative frameworks than to actions on the ground.

Another testimony comes from the early 1990s UK gender and development scene. Eyben, a former senior gender specialist at Overseas Development Administration, testifies: "Most senior civil servants never saw gender as genuinely significant, or as warranting a change in the content of policy dialogue with aid recipient governments or a shift in expenditure patterns. Some officials described gender as a tedious matter of 'political correctness'" (Eyben, 2007, p. 66). Gender mainstreaming when it gained international recognition in the aftermath of the Fourth International Women's Conference in Beijing (1995) continued in practice to be absorbed and disarmed by the indifference of bureaucrats, and by hostility and resistances. In the end confusions about who was really in charge, absence of clarity about where the budgets were located and who was responsible turned gender mainstreaming in a "pathetic illusion of transformation" (Stephen Lewis, in Goetz and Sandler, 2007, p. 161).

Nowadays – at various levels – discussions arise whether to continue with a cross-cutting approach of gender mainstreaming or to return to a more sectoral (women-only) approach of gender and development policy and programming. From a theoretical perspective, a sector wide approach with its potential to plan changes in the everyday life experiences of women may lead to "gender essentialism" defined as an adherence to an uncritical assumption of the existence of the "category

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woman". This can trap gender politics into taking the form of isolating women's issues and hence might ostracise the power mechanisms that lead to women's social exclusion.

Fascinations

> "You miss a dimension if you don't use a gender lens." (Cynthia Enloe, Geneva, September 2011)

It is ironic to observe that, in practice, political commitment and policy attention very often ignore half of the world's population. The rationale to exclude women is never convincing, the rationale to include them is very often worded as a win-win situation. Indeed, worldwide gender gaps have been bridged (Goetz and Sandler, 2007; Molyneux and Razavi, 2005). But at the same time, new gender gaps arise (due to the rise of fundamentalisms, the hegemony of neoliberalism, and the withdrawal of States). Measured in terms of indicators, on the one end of the continuum we observe improvement of formal rights and gender equality legislation, increased educational and health status of girls and women, unprecedented numbers of women participating in the labour market and timid increases in women's political participation (Molyneux and Razavi, 2005). In other words, reshuffling power balances have resulted in creating opportunities for women to access positions, spaces and resources that would have been unthinkable to access in their mothers' times.

On the other end of the continuum, there are still too many women raped and battered. Furthermore, although school enrolment rates of girls have increased, the drop-out rates among female scholars are disproportionately high, and if they achieve their degrees they are confronted with discriminatory structures and practices in the labour market (particular sectors remain women unfriendly and income gaps between women and men remain high). The overall health status of women has improved (as reflected by their higher life expectancy compared to men), but among the newly infected HIV/AIDS patients the majority concerns girls and women. Molyneux (2007, p. 233) argues that this is a "testimony to the lack of female power and autonomy in the most intimate realm of all."

Society is built up of interdependencies; gender as an analytical category aims at disclosing the interdependencies between women and men as well as between feminine and masculine symbolic valuations. Social positions and status of individual women and men, or women and men

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as social groups in society, are woven into a web of local, national and international power relations. Feminist anthropologists have adapted their research agendas and promisingly embark on a global anthropology allowing for systematically exploring the nexus between the local and the global and *vice versa* while remaining faithful to the core methodological, epistemological and theoretical advancements (see also Davids and van Driel, 2005).

Conclusions

What is the heuristic value of gender as a category of analysis in feminist anthropology and the applied field of gender and development?

Feminist scholarship has substantially contributed to scientific knowledge production in anthropology. It has convincingly demonstrated that achieving gender social justice is not just about adding women to politics, economics, education etc. Improving women's life conditions in an ever growing interconnected world is about identifying and changing the underlying mechanisms of power that (re)produce and legitimate structural inequalities. Hence, gender and development interventions as part of a larger project of planned social change will gain from feminist anthropological understandings of symbolic meanings and discursive devices that structure families, communities, social institutions, organisations and societies.

Feminist anthropology as a sub-discipline of anthropology has proven to be innovative, creative and productive. Theories have been elaborated, based on the key concepts of gender, culture and power. Linked to the field of development, these concepts address women's restricted access to and control over vital resources and the misrecognition of women's participation in society at an international level of analysis and global interdependencies.

The main lesson learnt from four decades of "gender and development" as a praxis for planned social change is that it *always* affects the existing social organisation (deliberately or unexpectedly). Gender boundary reshuffling has consequences for women's and men's integration in basic social institutions such as family and marriage, school and workplace, and political organs. Without cultural reinterpretations of newly acquired social roles and newly accessed spaces these gender changes come along with social and cultural strain and stress at individual and collective levels (Reysoo, 2013). New positions sometimes make women and men unintelligible in conventional social environments (see also Butler's 1990 "Gender Trouble"). Feminist anthropological insights help

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anticipate or mitigate these processes of social change and channel reconfigurations of power.

The more so since today's social world is still a more challenging place for women to live in than for men. In addition, it is still harder to participate in society as fully recognised citizens when one belongs to the unskilled, the illiterate, the undocumented, the disabled, racialised or sexualised minority groups. To understand the structural and plural positions of women – and other marginalised social groups – in any community, organisation or society and to deconstruct the cultural constructions of femininity and masculinity in a given context provides insights into their room to manoeuvre (in terms of accessing power resources) and in their capabilities to control their own bodies and lives. Each case study has the potential to assess the strategies that women can deploy in order to make their own lives – and sometimes those of others (through activism) – better ones.

Finally, parodying Butler (1990), each human being has to comply with gender norms in order to remain intelligible. If not, they will trigger conflicts with partners, relatives, institutions or themselves. This may lead to unliveable situations. Feminist anthropologists have exhaustively scrutinised cultural and structural constraints and opportunities in many local contexts and discovered newly created spaces where women and men live new social roles and responsibilities which were previously unthinkable. It is my strong belief that in the discovery of these new creative interstices rests feminist anthropology's high potential and continuous usefulness for development.

Notes

1. I am very grateful to Yvan Droz, Gisela Dütting, Adriella Shanie Gautier, Dorine Plantenga, Saraswati Raju, Joke Schrijvers and Christine Verschuur for their critical reading and constructive comments of an earlier version of this chapter.
2. In the entire chapter feminist anthropologists refer to those scholars who self-identify as feminist anthropologists. In the Netherlands, for example, feminist anthropologists are organised in a professional organisation LOVA (Dutch association of feminist anthropology and gender studies) created in 1979 and still very active today. It is a unique network with currently 110 members (www.lovanetwork.net). In the US the Association of feminist anthropology has celebrated its 25th anniversary in November 2013.
3. For an overview of the institutionalisation of feminist anthropology in Dutch universities see Postel-Coster and van Santen (2002).
4. *Vrouwen op weg. Ontwikkeling naar emancipatie.*

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5. The concentration of research on "women and development" and its numerous publications led to the creation of the research and documentation centre VENO (*vrouwen en ontwikkeling*/women and development), to be renamed VENA (vrouwen en autonomie/women and autonomy) in 1986 and to be closed in 1995. In the decades that followed (1980s–1990s) VENA became a hub for the entire field of women/gender and development experts. Women and Autonomy became the spearhead policy of the Ministry (DGIS, 1992). In addition, all "Women and Development" focal points at Dutch Embassies, in the Ministry and at the major development agencies (not the least SNV) were trained at VENA.
6. The title was borrowed from a Sri Lankan proverb saying that a "woman's mind is as long as a kitchen spoon". The adaptation of the proverb was meant by the authors to pay respect to the women of Sri Lanka and the researchers' "faith in women's qualities, and (their) confidence in the many women (they) got to know as friends, helpers and experts in the art of living" (Postel-Coster and Schrijvers, 1980, p. ii).
7. They also tried to invite Sri Lankan researchers to study the position of women in the Netherlands. But because such an initiative did not fit under the mandate of the Ministry of Development Co-operation, it was not realised.
8. My own work in North-Africa for example has been affected by the outbreak of the first Gulf War in 1991 when politics of identity divided the world in two alongside an axis of evil.
9. The titles of the following two paragraphs are borrowed from the conference "Feminist anthropology: frustrations and fascinations" held at the University of Amsterdam (14 September 2012) organised by LOVA (the Dutch Association of Feminist Anthropology and Gender Studies).
10. The UN special envoy to Africa on AIDS and a vocal defender of women's rights who has made several serious critical statements highlights the lack of financial resources among the UN agencies responsible to implement the Gender Mainstreaming agenda. The same dearth of financial resources can be observed in Ministries of Women Affairs and women's units within large international non-governmental development agencies (see Goetz and Sandler, 2007, p. 161).

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