

Review Article

From Mexico to Beijing: 'Women in Development' Twenty Five Years On

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During the past twenty five years the Women in Development (WID) approach has become an increasingly important issue in the literature on Third World development. WID policies and related activities have now been incorporated into the aid practice of most development agencies. This paper critically analyses the diverse and conflicting ideologies that have emerged in the WID literature since the early seventies.

In the early seventies a general disenchantment with development strategies in Third World countries led to a reappraisal of development theory and practice. The search for alternative strategies led to the first detailed investigation of women's productive roles in economic development (Boserup, 1970), and a growing awareness that women, like the poor, have remained peripheral to development efforts. In 1972 the United Nations (UN) designated 1975 as International Women's Year highlighting the need for involving women in issues of economic development (Buvinic, 1986). This culminated in the UN Decade for Women (1976-85) which had as its theme equality, development and peace. The decade saw three international conferences: - the first in Mexico inaugurated the decade and explored why development had failed women, then followed a review conference in Copenhagen in 1980, and in 1985 a conference in Nairobi to assess the decade's achievements (Mair, 1986).

In September 1995, the fourth UN world conference on women was held in Beijing and part of its

agenda was to appraise the progress in improving women's lives since the 1975 International Women's Year. It is therefore timely to review the diversity of feminist development approaches that have emerged since the early seventies. These approaches have ranged from the early liberal feminists' emphasis on 'integrating' women into the existing development processes, to more recent work on proposing alternative visions of development that challenge both the concepts and methodology of conventional development practice (Henshall-Momsen, 1991). At times it is difficult to 'pigeonhole' the various WID feminist perspectives because of the interrelationships and overlaps between them. However, it is worthwhile to attempt to locate and identify the particular dominant ideological perspectives that underlie specific WID programs and policies, and inform the portrayal of women in WID literature.

Liberal feminists

The emergence of the WID liberal feminist approach is closely linked with the women's movement in the 1970s which was gaining strength in the United States (US) and other western countries. The primary aim of the women's movement in the west was to integrate women into the public domain on an equal footing with men. Thus, professional middle class

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women began establishing committees within organisations to lobby for greater professional employment opportunities and for an end to economic and social discrimination against women.

One such women's committee was formed within the Washington Society for International Development (SID). The committee pushed for an increase in the number of women at SID meetings, and for an expansion of women's employment opportunities in aid agencies. They coined the term 'Women in Development' as part of their strategy to pressure American policy makers to recognise women in their aid policies (Rathgeber, 1990). By 1973, their lobbying resulted in the Percy Amendment to the United States Foreign Assistance Act. This amendment ensured that all aid programs of the United States Agency for International Aid (USAID) 'give particular attention to those programs, projects and activities which tend to *integrate* [own emphasis] women into the national economies of foreign countries, thus improving their status and assisting the total development effort' (cited in Tinker, 1990, 31). This emphasis on integrating women into the development process was at the heart of the liberal feminist approach. Advocates pointed to the accumulating evidence that Third World women were not only ignored in development plans, but that their economic situation had barely improved over the years. Hence, it was time to bring women into the design of development projects, and introduce legislative reform to allow women greater access to education, employment and other productive sectors.

Liberal feminists who advocated 'integrating' women into the development process relied on modernisation theory which dominated mainstream development theory between 1950 and 1970. Modernisation theory equates 'development' with growth in national output (GDP) and 'progress' with increases in educational and occupational opportunities; it perceives 'traditional' economic systems and cultural attitudes as barriers to development (Rostow, 1960; Hoben, 1982). Whilst liberal feminists largely subscribe to this view they differ from mainstream modernisation theorists in that they argue that since women are ignored in male-biased development plans then women are disadvantaged and marginalised by the development process (Jaquette, 1982). Men, on the other hand, are perceived as the 'winners' as they are given access to credit, education, new technology and in some countries, where prop-

erty rights were changed, easier access to land ownership (Bandarage, 1984).

Because liberal feminists assess the position and status of women in society according to their participation in formal political and economic structures, the original WID approach took as its main focus women's 'productive' roles and concentrated on increasing women's productivity and their access to formal economic activities. As a result, income generating schemes and 'equal participation' strategies were a characteristic of the original WID approach. However, the focus on the formal sector neglected an assessment of women's total work burden, or their work in the informal sector. Moreover, reports from developing countries now show that rarely did new opportunities for women 'trickle-down' to poor women. In India Papanek noted (1981) that the expansion of women in higher education was restricted largely to urban middle and upper classes. Bandarage (1984) also recognised, that for Third World women changes in education and employment opportunities only helped a few elite women who would have gained such positions anyway because of their social rank and family connections.

The major failing of the liberal feminist approach must lie in its heavy reliance on its 'western' assumptions. These include:

1. Participation in the formal economy increases a woman's status, an assumption exported directly from the western women's movement. Thus, liberal feminists viewed modern economic systems as a path to women's liberation.
2. Incorporation into the modern sector is socially progressive and a necessary precursor to self advancement. Hence, little value was accorded women's existing work roles.
3. Those sectors of society that have not been integrated into the development process (e.g. women, informal sector) have yet to experience 'development' and are thus perceived to be inferior.
4. Women's poverty is an aberration within an otherwise equitable economic system (Bandarage, 1984). By simply increasing women's participation in the 'modern' sector and implementing legislative reforms their lives would be greatly improved.
5. As traditional beliefs and social structures disadvantage women in participating in the development process they are viewed negatively.

Many of these assumptions can be equally applied to modernisation theory, indicating the indiscriminate

and uncritical adoption of modernisation ideas by liberal feminists.

Further, because liberal feminism and modernisation theory are closely aligned they share other faults in common. For example, both see development occurring in a linear cumulative process, traditional structures as static, and that anything 'modern' is advanced and 'tradition' is backward. Also, because liberal feminists and modernisation theorists measure 'development' by GDP, which only records goods and services produced in the formal economy, a large part of women's work was (and still is) neglected. Thus the concept of 'integrating' women into development, suffered from the very thing proponents of WID were fighting against - that is, the invisibility of women's multiple work roles, particularly in the informal and indigenous economies.

By the late seventies, several writers began questioning the liberal feminists' notion of 'integrating' women into the development process (e.g. Robert, 1979; Boulding, 1980; Papenek, 1981; Spiro, 1987). Some of the early criticisms were directed at the ambiguity of the concept of integration. As Sicoli (1980) remarked, 'the role of women in food and agricultural production is already so pervasive in most countries that exhortations to integrate women into rural development run the risk of sounding ridiculous' (cited in Spiro, 1987). Opposition to the early WID perspective also came from Third World women themselves who questioned its applicability to poor rural women, and questioned the relevance of western feminism that underpinned the approach (e.g. El Sadawi, 1980). Others, even more skeptical of this approach, went as far as to urge women to resist integration and instead to act independently and work for change. Elise Boulding (1980) claimed that for women to 'cooperate with being integrated into the present international order is to destroy all hope for a different future'. This questioning of the type of society into which women should be integrated became a major issue in the emerging alternative feminist perspectives on women in development.

Marxist and neo-Marxist feminists

With growing discontent with the liberal feminist perspective, there was increasing recognition of the negative impacts of capitalist development on women. Thus, rather than merely focusing on how women had been left out of development, attention shifted to examining the ways women were incorporated into the modern economy and their exploitation

as a result of capitalist development. Marxist feminists argued that women's disadvantage is not just an aberration within society requiring a simple remedy of 'integration' or 'equal access', because non-elite men are also 'victims' of inequalities inherent in the capitalist world system (Bandarage, 1984).

Unlike liberal feminists, Marxist WID feminists examine the differential adverse impacts of capitalism on men and women. Their analysis is broader, recognising the historical context of development and the role of class structure within the world capitalist system. Marxist feminists argue that we cannot study the situation of Third World women unless we examine the issues of capitalist production, changing class relations and international economics (Beneria and Sen, 1981; Stolcke, 1981). To explain the worsening position of women in societies undergoing capitalist penetration, advocates took two main routes: the 'female marginalisation thesis' approach and one drawing on dependency theory.

Female Marginalisation Thesis

The changing roles of men and women resulting from the transition to modern capitalist forms of production (see Engels, 1972 for more detail; also Papenek, 1979; Etienne and Leacock, 1980; Molyneux, 1981; Jaquette, 1982), laid the foundation for the 'female marginalisation thesis'. This theory holds that the nature of capitalist development has restricted women's access to economic opportunities, because women's unpaid labour in the domestic sphere and their exclusion from the labour force are necessary for the survival of capitalism. It is argued that by separating women from production, women provide the labour for the reproduction of the labour force (thereby allowing lower wages), and act as a reserve 'army of labour' to be temporarily deployed during periods of increased labour demand (e.g. seasonal shortages) (see Beneria and Sen, 1981).

Despite the analytical weaknesses inherent in the production/reproduction dichotomy and the difficulties experienced in testing the marginalisation thesis (see Scott, 1986), it was an influential thesis in the eighties. Because women are viewed as exploited unpaid workers trapped in the domestic domain, there is an underlying assumption that only by incorporating women into 'productive' employment can their independence and well-being be promoted. Thus, like liberal feminism, wage employment is equated with women's increased autonomy.

Moreover, the marginalisation thesis, with its emphasis on women's isolation in the domestic domain, failed to recognise that many women were already involved in the waged labour force for household survival and for many this employment was the source of their disadvantage. Due to the growing number of women in export and processing industries in Third World countries, recent research is now examining the nature of women's incorporation into productive employment. What is of concern is women's marginalisation within the productive sector and their exclusion from economic resources and power (Faulkner and Lawson, 1991).

Dependency Theory

Later, many neo-Marxist feminists drew several of their theoretical constructs from dependency theory to further exemplify the oppression of women in developing countries (Youssef, 1976; Schmink, 1977; Leal and Deere, 1980). Briefly, dependency theory emphasises the historical forces that led to a capitalist core of nations that own most of the world's capital and which have incorporated developing nations into the world economic system as a source of cheap labour and raw materials for industrialised nations (see Frank, 1974; Cardoso and Faletto, 1979; see also Manzo, 1991 for a recent review of dependency theory). With incorporation, subsistence agriculture was replaced by export cash cropping; urban migration increased as people moved to work in the new industries; and male and female work roles were transformed (Jaquette, 1982; Nash and Safa, 1985). Furthermore, according to those drawing on dependency theory, the exploitation of female labour intensified as 'traditional' societies were incorporated into capitalist production. Beneria and Sen (1981, 150) remarked that capitalism:

generates and intensifies inequalities, making use of existing gender hierarchies to place women in subordinate positions at each different level of interaction between class and gender. This is not to deny the possibility that capitalist development might break down certain social rigidities oppressive to women. But these liberating tendencies are accompanied by new forms of subordination.

Advocates argue that capitalism exploits women more than men because women are the lowest paid in the workforce, thereby facilitating the accumulation of wealth by capitalists. Capitalism is thus viewed as

increasing the subordination of women. Subscribers to this view also recognise that not all women are similarly exploited, and emphasise that poor women are likely to experience greater exploitation than wealthy women (Stoler, 1977). Feminists drawing on dependency theory therefore emphasise the importance of class, and steer away from the tendency of liberal feminists' to treat women as an undifferentiated category.

A characteristic of both dependency and female marginalisation theorists is the tendency to view women as 'victims' of the overpowering capitalist structures. The research emphasis on capitalist exploitation of women not only helped create a portrayal of women as helpless and passive victims, but failed to provide any further insights into how women themselves perceived the process of development, and what strategies or responses they were adopting as their societies became incorporated into the global economy. Women are not always passive bystanders but have often been active in trying to change adverse situations. This may be articulated simply by refusing to work on a new scheme, by collectively voicing their protest, or by actively pursuing the opportunities created by development (see Obbo, 1985; Tandler, 1989). For example, women in the Eastern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea, in response to restricted access to cash incomes and their disapproval of men squandering money on beer and card games, began a movement known as *wokmeri* (women's work). Modelled on traditional kinship systems, the groups save, invest and redistribute cash through exchange payments and small loans to one another. In this way women gain greater control of their cash, redress income inequalities and demonstrate their capacity to participate in the market economy (Sexton, 1984).

Further, Marxist and neo-Marxist feminist analysis of women's situation and the division of labour exclusively in terms of capitalist forces, also failed to take account of 'non-capitalist' elements, such as clan structure and kinship organisation/obligations that also shape household production and work roles. The importance of non-capitalist factors in many societies has meant that much of Marxist and neo-Marxist feminist analysis is limited in scope. However, such a criticism is also applicable to research grounded in neo-classical economics, such as liberal feminism.

Most of the various strands of Marxist/neo-Marxist feminist analysis of women in the develop-

ment process argue that women's liberation cannot occur within a capitalist system. Therefore, they argue solutions to improve the situation of women should be political/structural, not technical, as integrating women into the existing system only serves to sustain and perpetuate national and international inequalities. Thus, revolution or a break from the international capitalist economic system is part of the solution to women's liberation (Jaquette, 1982). How revolution will be achieved, or how a break from the capitalist economic system will specifically benefit Third World women, is not discussed in detail. Rather, it is assumed that the demise of the class society, the socialisation of domestic tasks, and entry of women into waged work will automatically benefit women.

Whilst liberal and Marxist/neo-Marxist feminists disagree about the causes of women's subordination and status in society and why they have been disadvantaged by the development process, there are many similarities between the different perspectives:

1. As both perspectives tend to concentrate on the formal economic sector, suggested intervention strategies tend to emphasise solutions based on income generation or other economic programs outside the domestic/informal sphere. Thus, little consideration is given to relieving women's heavy subsistence workloads, or understanding women's existing work roles especially in the informal sector.
2. Most analyses ignore women's multiple roles and assume women have the time to take on added responsibilities. There is still an assumption that women are associated with subsistence and child-care, while men are portrayed as part of the productive, 'non-domestic' domain.
3. Both perspectives assume that women are passive bystanders in the development process rather than considering what women can and do contribute to development.
4. There is an overwhelming assumption that women need to be incorporated into the labour force (as it is assumed this will improve their status), to the neglect of investigating women's perceived needs and incorporating women into decision-making processes.
5. Both derive their analytical categories (e.g. private/public, reproduction/ production) and their intervention strategies from feminist and/or capitalist experiences in the west. Such analytical categories derived from industrialised countries are

often irrelevant or inappropriate in the study of 'traditional' (pre-capitalist) societies. For example, Melanesian studies have shown that women's work is performed within a complex interconnected kinship system that does not display the rigid productive divisions or possessive individualism of industrialised societies (see Strathern, 1990).

6. Neither perspective acknowledges the dynamics and diversity of indigenous cultural and social systems.

Thus, as is the case with liberal feminists, Marxist/neo-Marxist feminists rely on theoretical assumptions and analytical categories derived largely from the western capitalist experience and continue to misrepresent the diverse situations of Third World women. They have, nevertheless, widened analysis by examining women's disadvantaged position not simply as a result of male bias, ignorance, or lack of integration, but by linking it to broader social and economic inequalities and structural barriers (Bandarage, 1984). An historical aspect is also added to the study of women, and there is recognition of development as having varying effects on different groups of women.

Socialist feminists

In the 1980s there occurred a further shift in ideology to which can be given the label socialist feminism. Many socialist feminists saw the liberal analysis of women as too narrow and viewed Marxist emphasis on capitalism and class as ignoring gender relations, male oppression and the exploitation of women. Socialist feminists pointed out that even in socialist states and pre-capitalist societies, male dominance is pervasive. While some socialist feminists do not necessarily see a link between women's entry into the labour force and increased status (e.g. Sacks, 1974), most, however, see the interaction of male and capitalist oppression as operating together to subordinate women. Moreover, socialist feminists move away from concentrating on women as a category and instead focus on gender. Because of the focus on gender rather than women, some have begun to use the term 'gender and development' in place of 'women in development' (Moser, 1989. Rathgeber, 1990).

Socialist feminists argue that an emphasis on gender, in particular gender relations, is necessary to explain the subordination of women and to understand why women are relegated to inferior roles.

They view gender roles not as a naturally given set of tasks fixed by biology, but socially constructed reflecting the cultural, religious, ideological and historical forces in a given society, and acting to subordinate women (see Rathgeber, 1990; Ostergaard, 1992; Moser, 1993). Hence, the social construction of production and reproduction as reflected in gender roles is considered the basis of women's oppression (Rathgeber, 1990). Gender relations, and the way in which they are socially constructed is considered essential in any study of women. Accordingly, this approach brings patriarchy into the analysis of women's situation.¹ Socialist feminists thus broaden and modify the Marxist feminist approach of examining capitalism's impact on women to include the structure of male domination. Whilst class is still considered an important issue in the analysis of women, this new perspective identifies patriarchy as working within and across classes to subordinate women. More recently, socialist feminists have also added caste, ethnicity, race and religion to the list of factors contributing to women's oppression (Sen and Grown, 1987; Elson, 1991).

Because of men's perceived control of women's labour, socialist feminism argues that the means to improve Third World women's situation is to restructure gender roles and change cultural attitudes and society in general (Sen and Grown, 1987; Moser, 1989; Elson, 1991). Women are urged to define for themselves the type of society in which they want to live and to challenge directly the gender division of labour, existing cultural ideologies, and other oppressive structures that reinforce their subordination (Kishwar and Vanita, 1984; Rathgeber, 1990). Thus, as Bunch and Carillo note (1990, 77), for the first time women are viewed as active 'agents of change' rather than as development problems.

Socialist feminism challenges existing patriarchal development paradigms and stresses the need for a broader approach with new models that incorporate feminist concerns (see Moser, 1989; Henshall-

¹ Patriarchy is defined in a number of ways. On a general level, it has been described as 'the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society' (Lerner, 1986 in Brydon and Chant, 1989, 245). However, there is considerable divergence among feminists as to the concept of patriarchy and where women's subordination lies (for further discussion see Barrett 1988).

Momsen, 1991). For the first time we see a closer focus on what women themselves want, an examination of gender roles, and a questioning of the concept of development itself. Such a perspective brings us closer to some fundamental issues (e.g., women's needs and the very concept of development) that should be considered when evaluating development strategies.

Both western feminists and Third World women have contributed to this new perspective on women's role in development. Their ideas were largely promoted by a group of Third World women in India who in 1984 formed the Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN). In 1987, DAWN set out their feminist vision of development and their vision of what society should be like. This vision, which has at its core the reduction of poverty and gender subordination, sees the future alternative society as:

....a world where inequality based on class, gender and race is absent from every country, and from the relationships among countries. . .where basic needs become basic rights and where poverty and all forms of violence are eliminated. ...In such a world women's reproductive role will be redefined: child care will be shared by men, women, and society as a whole. We want a world where the massive resources now used in the production of the means of destruction will be diverted to areas where they will help to relieve oppression both inside and outside the home. We want a world where all institutions are open to participatory democratic processes, where women share in determining priorities and making decisions (Sen and Grown, 1987, 80).

Despite the somewhat idealist tones of such a vision, there is at least an attempt to go beyond earlier approaches to examine the development process itself. Socialist feminism argues that earlier moves such as the Percy Amendment in the United States and other women's policies in international aid agencies have had minimal effect on women, and therefore it is necessary to demand 'not just a bigger piece of someone else's pie, but a whole new dish, prepared, baked and distributed equally' (Henshall-Momsen, 1991, 3). Hence, affirmative action strategies or labour saving devices are not enough. It is necessary to place greater emphasis on changing gender relations and the social structures that subordinate women.

Advocates propose both long and short-term strategies. Long-term strategies are directed at dismantling the structures of inequity between genders, classes and nations. This requires national liberation from colonial and neo-colonial domination; national self-reliance; a shift away from export-led strategies in agriculture and industry; greater control of multinationals; and land reforms (Sen and Grown, 1987). Short-term strategies aim to end the current crises of Third World countries while working towards the longer term goals. Short-term strategies include the promotion of a more diversified agricultural base to assist women in food production, greater recognition of women's role in food production, the support of formal and informal sector employment for women, and the political mobilisation of women (Sen and Grown, 1987).

The political mobilisation of women from the grass-roots to the global level is considered fundamental to the success of transforming society (Sen and Grown, 1987). Networking of women at the local, regional and global scale is seen to bring about two major benefits. First, a worldwide movement of women will bring greater political pressure for change. Second, consciousness raising through women's organisations will begin to challenge the subordination of women and patriarchal social structures. By organising, women's empowerment will follow. For this reason proponents of this perspective recommend that funding from international aid agencies be directed to strengthening women's organisations in developing countries.

One of the main criticisms of the socialist feminist perspective is that whilst it endeavours to introduce a new perspective on women in development, it continues to share some of the same problems with the earlier liberal feminist and Marxist feminist perspectives. For example, some socialist feminists, like liberal feminists, identify 'traditional' culture as a major barrier to women's advancement, and continue to focus on overcoming the 'constraints' of indigenous cultural structures (e.g. Moser, 1989). It is assumed that only through remodelling traditional gender roles or, as liberal feminists espouse, a move from 'traditional' to 'modern' economic roles will women's positions and status improve.

Whilst Marxist feminists criticise socialist feminists for drawing attention away from capitalism, there are marked similarities between the two perspectives, and at times the distinction between them appears somewhat artificial and contrived. For exam-

ple, the vision of socialist feminists that childcare and household responsibilities should be shared by men and society generally is very much linked to Engels' goal of making the domestic domain more 'public'. Also, the socialist feminist vision of national liberation from colonial and neo-colonial domination is little different from Marxist feminists' demands for revolution. Thus Tinker's assertion (1990), that this recent feminist perspective on women in the development process differs from earlier perspectives as it has a political emphasis rather than an economic one, is not entirely correct.

Although this recent perspective is said to be different from earlier feminist perspectives, many of its underlying assumptions continue to be derived from western concepts or experiences, such as the reliance on capitalist modes of production in the analysis of women's situation, and the practice of categorising activities into dualistic divisions (e.g. production/reproduction). A further criticism is the assumption that existing gender roles are at the root of all women's problems, and therefore the goal is to change these roles. Not only does such a conviction downplay the social value that some women themselves may give to their various roles, but it also presumes that the feminist ideal of transforming gender roles is what all women want. In this way, little recognition is given to indigenous cultural values and social structures, and despite the socialist feminists' concern that women be more active in the development process, they still have certain preconceived notions of what 'development' should entail for women.

Finally, socialist feminists fail to recognise that male and female work roles have been, and are, constantly being altered by economic, social and political change. Detailed accounts of how women from different backgrounds have interacted with these changes and how these have influenced gender relations, work demands, and women's lives generally, still remain sparse in WID discourse. The anthropological literature (e.g. Manderson, 1983; Brown, 1988; Jolly and Macintyre, 1989; Stolen and Vaa, 1991; Hollos, 1991) illustrates the vast diversity of outcomes and unpredictability of these changes. Despite the focus on changing gender roles in the socialist feminist perspective, there is little serious investigation of how this can be achieved and what would be the various outcomes.

Despite the shortcomings of their perspective, socialist feminists should be applauded for their

emphasis on empowering women to take more control of the development process, for their recognition of the value of indigenously controlled women's groups, and for their questioning of the prevailing world order.

Women, environment and sustainable development

The most recent shift in feminist ideology is from WID to WED (Women, Environment and Sustainable Development) (see Braidotti *et al.*, 1994 and Harcourt, 1994a for a detailed account of WED). While WED's origins can be traced to the mid seventies, the relationship between women and environmental issues has only recently entered the strategies and plans of the major international aid institutions (Braidotti *et al.*, 1994).

There are two broad approaches in the WED school: a mainstream approach concerned with the managerial aspects of development practice, and an alternative approach aimed at more fundamental changes in development theory and practice. The former presses for development agencies to be more inclusive of women and the environment in development plans. This model seeks to improve the managerial aspects of aid delivery, to minimise the negative impacts of development on women and the environment, and is supported mostly by mainstream development agencies (Braidotti *et al.*, 1994). In contrast, the alternative development WED approach is influenced by the ideologies of ecofeminism, post-modernism and environmentalism (e.g. Dankleman and Davidson, 1989; Shiva, 1989; Braidotti, *et al.*, 1994; D'Souza, 1994; Harcourt, 1994a) and is linked to the wider shifts in development thinking in the eighties and nineties.

The alternative WED approach arose from disillusionment with contemporary western development models which are seen as the cause of the current global environmental and economic crisis (Shiva, 1989; Carmen, 1994; Henderson, 1994; Braidotti, *et al.*, 1994). Therefore, to avert further environmental degradation, fundamental shifts in the way mainstream development is perceived and practiced are necessary. While socialist feminism also questions the dominant development model, WED's alternative development perspective differs in that it focuses on sustainable development and places people's interaction with the environment at the centre of development discussions.

Although there are several strands within the alternative WED perspective, all claim that contemporary western science is unsatisfactory because it is male-biased and monopolises what is considered valid 'truth' and 'knowledge'. Furthermore, scientific technology and the way it is applied to achieve economic 'progress' has led to a system where the scientific solutions to development problems have resulted in the domination of people and nature (see Braidotti *et al.*, 1994; D'Souza, 1994; Harcourt, 1994b). Because western science provides the framework for contemporary development efforts, it is considered necessary to embrace an alternative approach that questions the assumptions and practices of western science and the destructive nature of economic development on humans and the environment. Thus, general features of alternative development models include the adoption of non-hierarchical lifestyles (Shiva, 1989) and notions of development that respect nature, value participatory democratic processes, and which recognise local knowledges and cultures as central elements in defining different paths of development (Dankelman and Davidson, 1988; Braidotti *et al.*, 1994; Carmen, 1994; Harcourt, 1994b) as opposed to one universally correct knowledge system and mode of development.

In this search for a more ecological, democratic and people-centered approach to development, there is a tendency by some proponents, particularly ecofeminists, to view women in this alternative vision as being closer to nature than men based on the idea of some special feminine 'essence' which makes women more protecting, caring, knowledgeable and understanding of nature (e.g. Shiva, 1989). It is argued, for example, that women's affinity and harmonious relationship with nature places them in the position as 'natural' agents against environmental degradation. As such, women are seen as pivotal in any attempt to overcome the environmental crisis (see Dankleman and Davidson, 1989; Shiva, 1989; Women's Environmental Network, 1989). The essentialist and ethnocentric nature of this discourse has been assessed critically elsewhere (see Jackson, 1993; Braidotti *et al.*, 1994). However, it is important to note that this women/nature connection distorts women's association with the environment, imposes a simplistic view of the problems of environmental degradation, and sits uncomfortably with some WED proponents' visions of a development approach that rejects western-biased representations of Third World women.

One area receiving much attention in the WED literature is the issue of representation of Third World women in development and WID discourse. Drawing on postmodern concerns about the construction of knowledge and identity, and the notion of difference (see Derrida, 1976; Foucault, 1976; 1990), some WED proponents question the baggage of western biases and assumptions that act to misrepresent Third World women and their situation (Harcourt, 1994b; Apffel-Marglin and Simon, 1994). Indeed, these WED proponents view WID representation of Third World women as similar to that displayed in colonial discourse. As Apffel-Marglin and Simon note:

The content of the women-in-development discourse differs from that of the feminist colonial discourse, but what has remained constant in both discourses is the binary opposition between the civilized/emancipated, autonomous Western women and the oppressed/backward non-Western women bound by a transcendent, ahistorical 'Tradition'. Such binary oppositions are possible only with the Western subject as the primary reference point (1994, 34).

Whilst WED presents the first concerted critique of the representation of Third World women in WID discourse, it should be noted that questioning and challenging the representation of Third World women has recently been explored in the broader development literature and in post-colonial studies (see Ong, 1988; Spivak, 1988; Minh-ha, 1989; Schick, 1990; Stamp, 1990; Mohanty, 1991; Koczberski, 1993). At issue is how western/feminist development discourse has constructed Third World women and defined them as the 'other' (the object) oppressed by race and gender. Third World women as objects of study are represented as singularly oppressed, passive, powerless, economically inactive and poor, which stands in contrast to the 'modern, educated and sexually liberated' (Parpart, 1993, 444) western woman. Critics argue that this mode of representation reinforces the hegemonic position of western scholarship and knowledge, and relegates Third World women to a marginal position (Ong, 1988; Mohanty, 1991). It has also meant that WID programs and policies have been influenced by inappropriate concepts and assumptions relating to the situation and needs of Third World women (Koczberski, 1993; Parpart, 1993).

Thus, the misrepresentation of women in WID discourse brings into question the relevance and

effectiveness of the WID approach. WED proponents therefore contend that it is necessary to abandon the western-derived conceptual framework of WID and be more open to incorporating the diverse experiences and voices of non-western women.

Conclusion

This review has brought together the diverse theoretical stances that have appeared in the WID literature over the last 25 years. Each perspective has in its own way contributed to the evolving body of research and knowledge on women in the development process and has helped to maintain a focus on women in the aid programs of international and national donors.

Whilst there is little agreement among the various WID perspectives as to why women are oppressed, they share many assumptions which at times has contributed to an inappropriate portrayal of women's needs and interests. These are serious flaws since WID promotes itself as an alternative approach that overcomes the male and ethnocentric biases of conventional development theory and practice. Therefore, much remains to be done in developing an alternative WID approach that allows Third World women to decide how they are represented and how they will manage their own lives. Some WED proponents have already begun this process, and it is possible that as discourse analysis is increasingly applied to the development literature we will see a growing awareness of some of WID's conceptual problems. This may provide further impetus to an alternative WID approach that is more cognisant of the role of dominant knowledge structures in shaping the portrayal of non-western women, and in defining their 'problems' and 'solutions'. This is a fundamental issue which requires greater consideration both at the public level in the wider WID debate, and at a personal level by individual scholars and practitioners in development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to Dr. G. Curry for reading and commenting on earlier drafts of this paper. I am also grateful for the very helpful comments from an anonymous referee.

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