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Development and Women's Writings from Southern and Northern Africa

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Abstract

Women have historically provided vision and leadership to African countries and are now being recognized as pivotal to the overall sustainable development of Africa. In many cases, however, this recognition has not resulted in the empowerment of African women, who still face great discrimination. This edited volume explores the contributions women have made to all phases of development—planning, design, construction, implementation, and operation—and the obstacles they have had to face. Besides analyzing the current situation and identifying trends, the contributors also make recommendations for policy reform and for future planning.

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Development and Women's Writings from Southern and Northern Africa

Victoria Carchidi

The appalling situation of the majority of Third World women is not a remnant of archaic systems of patriarchy, or a sign of backwardness and underdevelopment; on the contrary, it is a sign and product of modern development.

—Bennholdt-Thomsen 1988: 159

INTRODUCTION

“Development” is a concept widely used and variously defined. When used to describe desired change for groups of people, however, it must be based in the concerns and interests of those people and center on women, who disproportionately bear the brunt of change and inculcate young children with the values to continue development. This chapter looks at short stories written by women from two regions of the African continent to discern the hopes and dreams, fears and despair of women in these regions and as a source of information for those hoping to further development projects.

Women's roles in development, while widely acknowledged today, were, for a long time, ignored (Jabbra and Jabbra 1992: 12). Development that focuses on technology, in tandem with Western attitudes toward men and women, has tended to value men's contributions over women's work, often domestically centered. Although acknowledged more clearly now, the blind spot concerning women has not been erased in the way it structures priorities (Rathgeber 1992: 22). Scholarship into women's issues has been “ghettoized,” segregated as a special issue, rather than seen as central to a proper reconfiguring of development to meet the needs of all people, including women (Mona Russell 1992: 123). The heightening of awareness made possible by forums such as this volume is a valuable prelude to the eventual integration of men's and women's work,

reflected in a people-centered, not male-centered, theory of success, progress, and value.¹

To paint any picture of Northern and Southern Africa requires a very broad brush indeed: both regions encompass several countries, and together they offer the contrast of a Muslim, Mediterranean, largely Francophone region led by Egypt, against a Sub-Saharan region dominated by British colonialism and the Republic of South Africa. Such extremes make a comparison fruitful—do the literary works of women in these two areas have anything in common? In addition, one commonality—that each region contains a dominant country closely allied with the First World industrial cultures—prevents a perniciously patronizing approach to what can be learned from these writers.

One approach to development is statistical: compiling tables of life expectancy, literacy, number of live births per woman, household income, and so forth. Any numbers so generated are subject, of course, to critiques about sampling, interpretation, and so on. In addition, these neat numbers provide averages that may not correspond to any person's actual experience. They also isolate factors, rather than looking at interconnections between the different data. Such general analyses demonstrate the grossness of the measurements usually applied to even the most diverse and personal life issues. Gender and development (GAD) is an approach that considers not just women's positions but the underlying questions of gender hierarchy: "It seeks to analyze culturally specific forms of social inequality and divisions, to see how gender is related to or interlocked with other forms of social hierarchy" (Young 1995: 135). For such an approach, women's literature becomes both a difficult and a crucially important source of information: difficult because the number of female writers is limited by literacy,² and crucially important because women's writing allows women's voices to be heard.³ To listen to women writing creatively is to hear the song that is silenced by statistics: the song of specificity, not generality, the song of human desires in all their complexity, of confusion and compassion, of struggle and defeat. Women's literature from Northern and Southern Africa captures, as no table, graph, or other generalizing technique can, the diversity of life in these regions.⁴ Only by moving away from quantified representations of life, by turning back to the stories with which people shape their lives, can development help people to flourish not simply as economic units or in predetermined social groupings, but in the ever-changing and flexible ways that human societies have forged for themselves throughout time.

NORTHERN AFRICAN STORIES

Education offers women one way to develop themselves. For example, Wedid Zenie-Ziegler writes of Egyptian women that greater knowledge about the social codes that do control women's lives could allow women more options. She bemoans that a "special, optional clause called the *Isma*" gives women "the right to seek a divorce.... Countless other women are not even informed of the

existence of the *Isma*" (1988: 128). Such lack of information is common, Zenie-Ziegler points out, in a country where 75 percent are illiterate. Although she points to special status accorded an educated woman, or *muwazzafa*, "[o]nly very few women gain access to education, despite the introduction of compulsory education since the revolution of 1952" (66).⁵ Even more basic information is lacking, Zenie-Zigler states: "Boys and girls—particularly the girls—sometimes come to marriage totally ignorant of sexual matters" (1988: 116).

Such lack of knowledge may contribute to cultural practices such as female circumcision, a procedure that Peter Adamson (1996) argues has led to enormous pain and suffering for women. In Alifa Rifaat's "Who'll Be the Man?" a woman explains the reason for the procedure to a young girl: "So that men will come running after you without your asking. And when your husband goes away for a long time, you won't suffer at all" (1990: 77). Critics of the practice take a less benign view, some linking it to patriarchy: "To perpetuate discriminatory systems, cultures adopt practices to control women. One of the most notorious is female genital mutilation," which threatens more than 2 million girls each year (Nelson 1996: 134).

Nawal El Saadawi, herself an educated Egyptian doctor and activist, well known for her opposition to clitoridectomy, writes indirectly about female circumcision in "She Was the Weaker" (1989). This story describes a weak young man, who is bullied by his mother and who despises his frailty. On his wedding day, the groom must demonstrate his bride's virginity by inserting his finger into her genitals and showing the blood. The bride is presented to him vaginally, but he is too feeble to push his finger through the entrance, apparently infibulated after circumcision. The groom then shows his clean hands and spits, thereby denying the "purity" of the bride. This vignette demonstrates the intolerable expectations that patriarchy places on men, as well as women. The story also shows that, ultimately, women suffer from patriarchy to a greater extent: the man protects his weakness by transferring it onto his bride's body like a scapegoat.

Some women, like the groom's mother in Saadawi's story, affiliate themselves with the powerful status quo, even against other women. The inescapability as well as the desolation of such affiliation are shown in Rifaat's "Another Evening at the Club." Samia misplaces a valuable ring her husband has given her; he accuses the maid Gazia, who is taken away by the police. Later in the day, Samia finds the ring on the floor and waits anxiously for her husband to rectify matters. He is glad the ring is found but unconcerned. Samia points out that Gazia is still being interrogated: "They've been beating up the girl—you yourself said they'd not let her be till she confessed" (1987: 192). But her husband's reputation is all-important; he decides to sell the ring so no one will know it has been found and pats Samia's cheeks: "It was a gesture ... that promised her continued security, that told her that this man who was her husband and the father of her child ... carried the responsibilities, made the decisions," while her role is "to be beautiful, happy, carefree. Now, though, for the first

time in their life together, the gesture came like a slap in the face" (192-93). Samia's error is enacted on the body of Gazia, the powerless servant. Yet when Samia's husband suggests they go out to the club, Samia smiles and joins him. Her choices are few; although socioeconomic status separates her from the maid, Samia is equally subservient. It is not surprising that many women fight against such a recognition.

Men and women, however, can also join forces to oppose oppression. In "Eight Eyes," (Rifaat 1983) the central male character resists the compulsion to "be a man" and continue a blood feud, despite accusations of being weak and "spineless." Only his mother's voice has so empowered him, by criticizing "the barbarism of animals that they wanted to force on you in the name of virility" (336). In this instance, a mother helps her son oppose cultural machismo; husbands and wives, too, can oppose custom.

In Assia Djebar's delightful "My Father Writes to My Mother," a marriage of true affection and respect leads the narrator's father to send his wife a postcard:

my father had quite brazenly written his wife's name, in his own handwriting, on a postcard which was going to travel from one town to another, which was going to be exposed to so many masculine eyes ... and what is more, he had dared to refer to her in the western manner as "Madame So-and-So ...," whereas, no local man, poor or rich, ever referred to his wife and children in any other way than by the vague periphrasis: "the household" (1993: 164).

The postcard marks a turn in the marriage, allowing the wife to refer to her husband directly in her conversations with others. Their affection is strong enough to cut through local custom. The story, however, attests to more than their love: this couple's affection is like a brief flash of light that all the more brightly illuminates the stultifying customary denial of a wife's existence.

An even more surprising example of unity between husband and wife is shown in "The Long Trial," by Andree Chedid. A traveling holy man blesses a woman who offers him food and water: he calls for seven more children for her. But she has nine, who like "grasshoppers, bounded against her, encircled her, transformed her into a clod of dirt, inert. Their hundreds of hands became claws, nettles twitching her clothes, tearing her flesh" (1983: 205). The mother, stricken, demands the holy man recant the benediction. Angry at her blasphemy, he calls her mad; in her desperation she even *demand*s her husband join her plea against such a blessing. To her astonishment, her husband does not beat her for her demand but instead joins his voice with hers to halt childbirth. The village turns against the holy man in violence as he refuses to take back his words. The next day the men are arrested. The long trial is over—on one level, of course, because the men are gone, the women will no longer suffer from childbirth. But on a more profound level, the story suggests, the trial of separation is over, as husbands and wives have joined together to fight an unjust construction of womanhood inappropriate to material conditions.

Another story demonstrating a moment of marital closeness, however, also limns the fragility of such unions. In "Amina" (Saad 1985) a woman has given birth to a baby daughter and lies mourning in the hospital. This is her fourth daughter, and she and her mother fear repudiation. But against all expectation, her husband, Hamid, is caring: he "looked at his wife, tried to smile and searched for something nice to say.... 'Don't cry,' he said distressed. 'The important thing is that you and the girls are in good health.'" He goes on to point out they can try again later. This story demonstrates both that happiness and kindness can exist and that the power is disproportionately the husband's and that the "shame" of the child's sex disproportionately the wife's—thereby showing an entrenched devaluing of women.

Wedid Zenie-Ziegler writes powerfully of the importance of children in marriage: "In Arab society, celibacy is despised. The aim of marriage is to perpetuate the species, therefore to procreate" (1988: 115). Furthermore, when noting the lack of interest in contraception, Zenie-Ziegler notes, "Fertility is a basic value ... and the *Quran* exalts the role of wife, and even more, that of mother" (73). Thus, women like Um Hani, who is twenty years old, has six children and is expecting the seventh (27).

Yet these women have very little access to money; Um Hani sews dresses to help support her family. Consequently, they depend on male wage earners and will accede to any demands to obtain this support: "Financial security, it is true, is a far from negligible concern in all social classes, especially the most underprivileged. Thus, many women are ready to make all sorts of concessions to obtain or preserve it. ... For Fatma and most of the women questioned, the man's fundamental role consists of assuring his family a basic material well-being and comfort" (Zenie-Ziegler 1988: 69).

Many of these works value a husband for more than food and shelter. In Rifaat's "The Kite" (1987), an old widow, Widad, is courted by her childhood sweetheart. She at first refuses him, but after a kite steals one of her chicks, she reconsiders. In the story, two advantages of a husband are manifested: he can lead the prayers that Widad longs to offer for her simple life, and he can offer protection—specifically, as a scarecrow against the kite, but metaphorically as more general physical security. This simple and lovely story's subtext, that a woman needs a man to be safe against sudden incursions of violence into her life, is a message women receive in both a rural Muslim community and in a Westernized city.

Western critics' views of the Maghreb have been colored by reactions to Islam; Zoubeida Bittari's "The Voice of Happiness" (1990) concerns a woman who tries to gain greater freedom for herself, at first by accompanying her young son on excursions. The disquiet this causes her family is shown when, after a late-night dentist visit occasioned by Ramadan, her husband refuses to let her in the house, and her parents denounce her as a whore. A sympathetic male lawyer helps her find a job as a domestic (after checking with the dentist that her story

is true). Although her new life is a great pleasure to the narrator, she grieves at having had to leave her son behind because of her uncertain state.

Although Bittari depicts a son as being the innocent path to his mother's freedom, that situation is quite unusual: the mother is young, this is her only child, and, although sad at the separation, she gives up her son. A more brutal depiction of the role of children is presented in Noha Radwan's "The Silk Bands" (1990), in which the mother endures marital abuse amounting to rape and sees her little children binding her with silk bands to the bed of torment.

Fatima Mernissi (1990) recounts a traditional folktale that also attests to the imprisonment of women. In the tale, a prince and a carpenter's daughter engage in verbal and sexual sparring; he then asks to marry her. Her father is reluctant but agrees when his daughter persuades him. But the prince asks the woman whether men or women are smarter, and when she replies, "women," locks her in the cellar. Thanks to her father, who has dug a tunnel to the cellar, the heroine continues happily enough, appearing in the cellar only to give her nonsubmissive reply every day. Meanwhile, the prince travels about and on three occasions meets a mysterious woman with whom he spends a week and sires a child. These are, of course, all his wife, who cleverly contrives these encounters and finally appears with the three children and wins her rightful place as wife, the prince finally acknowledging—and accepting—her cleverness. Yet this tale indicates the huge disparity in power, if not in cleverness: the prince is free and can seek out sexual partners; he is also free to acquire and incarcerate a woman because of some words she utters, threatening his assumption of superiority. The woman must rely on her father's sympathy and wealth to dig tunnels, set up luxurious tents, care for her children, and so forth, in addition to her enormous cunning and self-control.

Outside the realm of the folk story, however, women's cunning acquires a more desperate hue. In Rifaat's "An Incident in the Ghobashi Household" (1987), a mother discovers her daughter is pregnant and decides to disguise herself as the mother of the arriving infant. The ruse, however, requires a gamble: the pregnant daughter must go to Cairo, alone and unprepared, until her child is born and can be produced as the mother's own.⁶

Djebar's bored and restricted girls in "Three Cloistered Girls" (1993) play a dangerous game, writing to pen-pal lovers with the most unrealistic dreams of escape, which leave them vulnerable.

SOUTHERN AFRICAN STORIES

Understandably, Southern African stories touch on different topics than the ones mentioned before. However, although treated differently, some themes recur: specific oppressions are highlighted, as are universal themes of partnership and parenthood, albeit inflected by local concerns.

An example of the general and specific can be seen in Barbara Makalisa's poem "Fight On!" (Kitson 1994: 71-74). It identifies pressures facing both

Northern and Southern African women—if not all women. However, these material restrictions are felt differently given local conditions, as shown in the obstacles confronting three generations of Southern African women. For example, the poet's grandmother faces resistance to education: her father tells her, "School is for lads" and that now that she can write her name and read the Bible, that is all he will undertake, as soon she will marry and leave her family.

The poet's mother, in turn, faces the double bind that allocates women's responsibility for child care on top of their other work and then blames them for children's behavior: "When I excelled, Dad sang a song./ When I failed, Mama was to blame." In the third generation, the speaker herself faces lower pay for the same work, as well as the contempt showered on any woman seeking to control her fertility and develop abilities. She and her friends face fixed and stereotypical expectations of women; as she points out, she is paid less because her "main task should be baby production." Her efforts to control her fertility, for her own health and that of her children's, are described as a prostitute's behavior. The same imputation of prostitution accompanies any efforts by these women to assert their abilities.

Rather than give in to this form of coercion, the speaker urges women to struggle on in the war against such little attitudes, returning to her pioneering grandmother's efforts. She cries that education can provide a spear in the battle, and knowledge a shield (74).

That education can act as a weapon for preventing oppression is suggested both in Northern and Southern African writing. Of note in South Africa is the apartheid regime, which has been felt throughout Southern Africa as efforts to deracinate the black population and relocate it to homelands influenced by family structure. Women, seen as a particular danger by the apartheid government, were disproportionately affected by pass-law restrictions (Bernstein 1985: 16-17). The literature of this region, written from exile both within and outside the continent, reflects writers with a range of backgrounds and affiliations.⁷

Race as a political opposition creates one sort of chasm in women's solidarity.⁸ In Agnes Sam's "Two Women" (1989) a white woman arrests a black female guerrilla fighter she finds on her farm. The fighter manipulatively tries to create fellow feeling, but their polarization is too great. However, once the fighter is able to disable the car in which they are traveling, the situation changes. They hear a car approaching, and the captor points out their common vulnerability: "Whichever way—one of us will be raped." The fighter suddenly fears, "If she were caught with me now, I would be a party of whatever was done to her." As in Rifaat's "Another Evening at the Club," here each woman, fighting for her side of a racial battle, is suddenly united with the other: upon their bodies will be enacted the violent struggle of racial dominance. The story illustrates that, although guerrilla warfare may seem an absolute split, women on either side are equally subject to incursions of male violence: women become the site for the acting out of political violence at the very same time that they are prevented from meaningful participation in public life.⁹

The effect of racial segregation on human intimacy is revealed in stories concerned with sexuality across the “color bar,” in violation of South Africa’s notorious immorality act. Nadine Gordimer’s “Country Lovers” (1990) looks at the effects of racial segregation on a rural couple. In the country, a childhood partnership turns sexual at adolescence. In due course, a baby arrives; in due course, its father kills it. The social conventions of apartheid destroy and render inhuman the communion of the closest human connections.

The combination of race and violence against women can further erode the strongest human affections. In “Milk,” a middle-aged woman is raped repeatedly while her family is held at gunpoint. She becomes pregnant and does not know whether the baby’s father is her husband or the rapist’s. She watches the infant for racial characteristics: “The third day the small face peering from its covers showed a dark tint, as though a shadow had fallen over it” (Joubert 1987: 308). On the fourth day, the mother notes “the new black shadow that had spread over the skin, the structure of the nose was more apparent. It was wide, broad-flanged, like that of the man who had dragged her from the car, while her husband sat with the barrel of a pistol against his temple” (309). Therefore, the mother suffocates her baby while it is nursing. A reporter comes to inquire into the story, looking at the “unattractive ... old and tired” woman and asks, “How does it feel to have smothered your baby?” “She gestures at her breasts. The moisture seeps through the nightdress. “What do I do with the milk? she asks wordlessly. Who do I feed with the milk?” (310).

This story demonstrates the “shadow” that falls over human relationships under racism: the violence it unleashes between people, the invidious concern with color and facial characteristics that dries up humanity. This story’s poignancy rests in the woman’s repleteness—she is full of milk for her child yet, given her circumstances, there is no place for the milk of human kindness. The pain that comes from the inability to be kind and express humanity is equated with the terrible pressure of a milk-filled breast that cannot be nursed.

The effect of such starvation of humanity extends even beyond racially strained relationships, as shown in Ferreira’s “The Lover” (1987). The first-person male narrator recounts how his mistress asked him for a private beachside location at which to meet her lover. The reader discovers the tryst was with death—the mistress shot herself at the beach. Furthermore, (a married man’s) possessive jealousy characteristic and lack of understanding emerge as part of the suicide’s motivation.

More self-aware but just as anesthetized, in Marquard’s “Regina’s Baby” the narrator watches her servant bewail the death of her baby daughter and admits, “I can’t cope with this; emotion, turmoil, confrontation” (1993: 117). When she grieves over the emptiness of her own, well-kept, middle-class life, she prides herself that “[m]y grief is a silent, dignified, poised emotion” (123). The rigid construction of identities along racial strata strips these white characters of real human emotion.

"Regina's Baby" bridges the gulf between rich and poor. The narrator's grief is controlled because it is, after all, unhappiness, not desperation. Bessie Head evokes a more basic concern. "Looking for a Rain God" depicts a rural family¹⁰ pushed to the edge. For seven years there has been a drought; then rain falls, and the family heads out to plant. But the drought returns. "Only the children, Neo and Boseyong, were quite happy in their little-girl world.... They made children from sticks around which they tied rags, and scolded them severely in an exact imitation of their own mother." The women begin to wail; the men stay silent: "It was important for men to maintain their self-control at all times but their nerve was breaking too" (1996: 92). Then the oldest man, Mokgoba, begins to recall an ancient "rain god who accepted only the sacrifice of the bodies of children" (92). The little girls are sacrificed, and the family flees back to town. There await the police and the death penalty for the men. The narrator comments, "The subtle story of strain and starvation and breakdown was inadmissible evidence at court; but all the people who lived off crops knew in their hearts that only a hair's breadth had saved them from sharing a fate similar to that of the Mokgoba family. They could have killed something to make the rain fall." (93)¹¹

The direness of the local conditions presented by Head moves the story out of the local and into an international arena. Global environmental and food production and distribution strategies can avert such tragedy, and the story thus indicts the complicit global community. An equally global concern is violence against women¹²: the 1996 issue of *Vital Signs* addresses violence against women around the world and points out, "Gender-specific forms of violence ... occur where male dominance is institutionalized in social, political, and economic systems" (Nelson 1996: 134). Rape as racially motivated has already been touched on; Gcina Mhlope presents it as almost normal in "Nokolunga's Wedding" (1987).

Young Nokolunga is one day suddenly seized by a party of men from a neighboring village and taken to the hut of her future husband, Xolani. The first night she fights him viciously, biting his arm, so the next night the men help in her defloration: "They roughly pulled her back on to the bed, and Xolani was placed on top of her. Her legs were each pulled by a man. Others held her arms. Men were cheering and clapping hands while Xolani jumped high, now enjoying the rape ... she heard roars of laughter before she fainted" (43). This violence goes beyond the physical. Nokolunga has been stripped of her community in fact and in emotion—she wonders why her community let her go, if they cared about her. Such deracination accounts for women's alienation.

Olive Schreiner demonstrates how even seemingly benign treatment can reinforce such isolation for women. "The Woman's Rose" shows two women forced apart, despite their very similarities of class and position. The tale is narrated by a woman of twenty-seven, remembering her arrival in a village twelve years earlier. There had been a reigning beauty there, whom all the men worshiped, but on the narrator's arrival, they deserted her and turned to the narrator, maligning their previous object of attention. The narrator is flattered

and delighted by the unaccustomed attention: "Only one thing took from my pleasure; I could not bear that they had deserted her for me.... I would have given all their compliments if she would once have smiled at me.... But I knew it never could be; I felt sure she hated me; that she wished I was dead, that she wished I had never come to the village" (71). But at the narrator's farewell party her rival gives her a rare midwinter rose for her hair. The adult narrator still cherishes the rose in a wooden box. This brief story indicates the barriers set between people even outside racial and material concerns: it links the issues of "development in the Third World" back to the concerns that confront even "First World" citizens. We all share the same world; these discursive divisions simply attempt to defy the parallels that cut across specific and local conditions: apartheid, sexism, economic exploitation—all similarly function by pitting against each other people who might otherwise find common purpose. In "A Woman's Rose," the women are a striking minority. Certainly, there are plenty of men to court both, but instead one woman is selected to demonstrate that the power to privilege and distinguish belongs to the men.

In the face of these many intersecting oppressions that deform women's lives, it is not surprising that both Northern and Southern African literature celebrates activism. As in Chedid's "The Long Trial" (1983) people can work against oppression. In Gordimer's "A Chip of Glass Ruby" (1982) an Indian wife and mother's commitment to printing protest pamphlets leads to her arrest. Her husband feels confused: "He had married a good plain Moslem woman who bore children and stamped her own chilies. He had a sudden vision of her at the duplicating machine, that night just before she was taken away, and he felt himself maddened, baffled and hopeless" (45). This story shows the uneasy ways in which people must negotiate their conflicting identity positions, as he exclaims, "I don't understand how she can do the things she does when her mind is always full of woman's nonsense at the same time" (47). But, as his daughter reminds him, and as he recognizes, his wife's ability to unite the disparate parts of her world, to see humanity across the bars set up in a divide-and rule state, makes her so central to her family even while in jail. In Tlali's "Point of No Return" (1983) the rift again cuts across a family: S'bongile both understands and resists the need for her partner, Mojalefa, to leave her and fight the pass laws and racism in South Africa. Mojalefa risks death, as well as jail. The story ends simply: "He lifted her chin slightly with his forefinger and looked into her eyes. They seemed to smile at him. They parted" (141). As with the end of "A Long Trial," separation here attests to a common purpose—but also comes at the painful wrenching apart of lives and loves.

CONCLUSION

These stories present no simple answers, because life—especially, many lives—are not simple. So, to the extent that this literature forestalls facile solutions, its effect is beneficial. The women¹³ here discussed live in a variety of

material conditions—rural and urban, poor and rich, and so on. Their lives are shaped by patriarchal and economic forces, as well as by religious and cultural structures that have imposed caste divisions across women.

The difficulty of writing itself attests to the importance of what is written. In Mhlope's "The Toilet" (1987) a young woman finds the "room of her own" that Virginia Woolf asserts is a writer's essential haven only in the public toilet, where she shelters from the rain while waiting to sneak back to an illegal room. In an eerie parallel, when Alifa Rifaat's husband forbade her creative career, she obeyed him by not publishing. But to continue writing, giving voice to her perceptions of the world, she retreated, like Mhlope's narrator, to the bathroom (Badran and Cooke 1990: 72). Jean Dejeux points out that women still take *noms de plume* to protect their husbands and families (1994: 8). The difficulty women can have not simply in having their writing published or read or kept in print but in finding time, space, and acceptance within their own families shows how much development is still required.

The literature here discussed invites Western readers not only to view these regions in African as plural and various but to turn that recognition on ourselves—and see that "we" are not one but similarly divided by concerns of class, ethnicity, religion, and other differences. Recognition of the plurality of so-called developing countries can help Western readers see how much still needs to be developed in our countries—literacy, health care, and access to the basic requirements for life like clean water and good sanitation. By so breaking down the subject-object position of the West to help the "other," the literature of Africa can also help Western readers learn from the cultures we presume to "develop."

NOTES

1. Many of my thoughts on development and women's literature first became articulated while supervising Hannah Nash's master's thesis on women and development. Hannah's work has enhanced my own understanding considerably.

2. This does not mean orature is not practiced by those women but that material reaches an outside audience only with difficulty.

3. Just as in development studies, in literary studies women's work has traditionally been ignored and devalued. The change in interest in, and valuing of, women's perspectives has been quite recent; except for exceptional women such as Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf, only the last few decades have begun to accord women's writing the respect and exploration routinely given to men's writing.

4. I discuss short stories here; the time and resources needed to nurture and shape a fully developed novel have been found by African women, but more have been able to find the space of time in which to pen a story. In addition, the narrative form is more useful for development questions, as lyric poetry and drama, two other genres that allow a writer to speak quickly and lastingly, focus more on subjective states of emotion and on performative action. The short story's form by its nature asks for a linear account building to a climax that resonates beyond the events of its

story—thus, I have found it most useful for conveying both information about women's circumstances and the emotional, psychological reactions to those events.

5. In contrast, Mona Russell points out that upper-class Egyptian women conventionally receive very good levels of education (1992: 124).

6. The risk involved is more evident in Saadawi's (1989) darker version of such a scenario: the mother pushes her daughter onto a train in the dead of night so she won't be killed for becoming pregnant by a relative's rape of her ("Circling Song" 17).

7. The temptation to identify writers as "black or colored or white" needs to be resisted, to avoid endorsing the apartheid practice, questionable since its inception, of categorizing people by arbitrary and superficial standards.

8. See my essays "Whither Feminism?" (1994) and "Assuming the Position" (forthcoming) for discussion of other ways feminisms and feminists can become polarized and how we can come together across theoretical and other oppositions, rather than fracturing into factions.

9. Until the 1980s, both black and white women were legal minors (Diana Russell, 1989: 13).

10. This story also addresses the complex family structure: "Mokgoba—who was over seventy years old; two little girls, Neo and Boseyong; their mother Tiro and an unmarried sister, Nesta; and the father and supporter of the family, Ramadi" (90). Kate Young points to the difficulty development studies have with generating methodologies appropriate to the varied kinds of family units in which people live (1995: 114-15).

11. Equally distressing are urban stories of dislocation. For example, the homelands policy that leaves grandparents looking after their grandchildren while parents must work in the cities shows one disruption of life; another is the policy of relocation itself. In Farida Karodia's "Cardboard Mansions," (1993) an elderly woman and her grandson travel to find a remembered community of friends—but it is gone, all she knew removed. The grandson's sudden insecurity makes clear how such changes shatter one's foundations.

12. It is not coincidental that the sacrificed children are girls in Head's story.

13. The term "woman" itself is neither uniform nor hegemonic; there is no single event that is sure to have occurred to every woman and only to women.

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