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WOMEN-IN-DEVELOPMENT AND WOMEN'S STUDIES:
AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE

by

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Abstract: Future work on issues concerning women and development requires an internationally oriented scholarship on women that is closely tied to both research and practice. American universities have not served us well in cultivating that scholarship--both because of failures to include international orientations and teaching and research concerning women. In the growth of an internationally oriented scholarship on women, several important groups have also remained aloof from each other instead of joining forces. Women in "area studies" were responsible for the first major United States academic conference on international feminist issues in 1976, but this initial effort did not lead to the integration with feminist scholarship and development studies that organizers had hoped for. The formation of the new Association of Women in Development in 1982 drew on other groups of academic researchers and practitioners, building on regional networks supported by USAID's Office for Women in Development. Although there is some overlap between the academic researchers primarily concerned with development research and practice and academic researchers focusing on teaching and research about women internationally, these two groups have not yet sufficiently linked forces to develop a body of research on both theory and policy. In development-assistance institutions, which play an important role in supporting both research and projects oriented to women in development, female staff are still few and lack power. This makes it difficult to consolidate critical and adversary research with activities that more directly serve the interests of development-assistance institutions. Developing the common ground of theory and policy is not the same thing as achieving consensus nor is consensus needed to carry forward our common enterprise. An important element in this common enterprise at the present time is to achieve better integration of findings and analyses about women and gender in the ideas prevailing in the development community. Far too many people concerned with development planning and research still consider that "women's issues" are simply a matter of advocacy by a few activists who can be satisfied by a few token gestures. This usually means that action and research concerning women are subjected to "false specialization"--the creation of a special niche where women in marginal positions and small budgets lack institutional influence. It is crucial for the development community to realize that "women's issues" have arisen as a result of vast changes brought about by development. These changes represent fundamentally new problems for researchers and planners that must be approached in new ways. On the practical level, introducing "women's components" into projects, while important, should be seen only as steps in a broader process of integration. Women's projects are often needed because policies affect women adversely. Why not focus equal attention on achieving policy changes? This requires common efforts by many different individuals and groups concerned with women and gender relations. The internationalization of Women's Studies, the development of research paradigms that make gender central to analyses of social change, and rethinking development issues from a new perspective on women are all essential to meeting the challenges of the immediate future.

WOMEN-IN-DEVELOPMENT AND WOMEN'S STUDIES: AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE¹

Our survival as citizens and as scholars depends on our deepened understanding of the world and on the actions we take on the basis of this understanding. As women, and as scholars studying women or practitioners taking action for women, we share this need. How should we go about meeting the challenge of an international scholarship on women that is also closely linked to practice? As our practice has come to be defined, we are most concerned with equality--with women's ability to partake of the resources a society makes available to its citizens. But we have also come to define this equality in much broader terms than simply equity between the males and females of a given social stratum or class. In both research and practice, all of us have come to be concerned with equality of opportunity for all people, not only women, and with the problems of poverty that seem to be disproportionately the problems of women.

Until now, our response to the challenge of an international scholarship on women has been very limited, for both good and bad reasons. The deficiencies of our scholarship have, in turn, limited our capacity to take effective action. Action, in turn, has not sufficiently influenced scholarship.

Among the good reasons, I count the fact that the new scholarship on women, in general and in all countries where it exists, has grown out of our personal experiences, our personal concerns for equality. Yet the fact that we have made the personal so political--or, if you will, the political so dependent on the personal--has also created problems in the international arena that we will need to confront. (I discuss these a little later.) We have learned, through our personal commitments and passions, that studying women requires not only advocacy but also depth and concern for context. In the studies of women we know well, in our own societies, these qualities are increasingly reflected in the new scholarship on women. But by the same token, many of us have been reluctant to extend the reach of our scholarship to the women of societies with which we are unfamiliar. This reluctance has, on occasion, been reinforced by the complex pattern of opposition to research on women by outsiders to a particular society. The nature of this opposition will need to be the subject of very careful dialogue, for it limits the options of both sides. In short, to achieve an international scholarship on women, we must all learn to confront the problems of transcending personal experience and count up the costs and benefits on all sides.

This is where the educational experience of the American system of education has not served us well--nor has that of other nations, but I will concentrate here on our immediate situation. A major cause for the parochial nature of women's studies in the United States--the bad reasons--lies in the overwhelmingly parochial nature of our schools and universities. They are parochial in the sense that, although the United States aspires to world leadership, we have not bothered to learn much about

this world outside our boundaries. Indeed, our aspirations diminish our achievements and cloud our vision. At the present time, the failure of our educational system is further related to a preoccupation with our "image" by the national leadership and a reluctance to discuss matters of substance in the public arenas where they belong. This preoccupation with our "image" as a nation, vis-a-vis other nations, reflects a dismal incapacity to understand that intellectual connections are an indispensable element of international relations. This incapacity is reflected in equally dismal resource allocations to international studies on our campuses. Furthermore, in the 1970s widespread revulsion against the United States' role in Vietnam led many to reject an international orientation that had developed in the 1960s through greatly increased academic and cultural exchanges and through the personal experience of young people in the Peace Corps. Today's resurgent isolationism, therefore, has depleted the capacity of our schools and universities to teach students about other societies and about international issues. Cuts in spending on education, particularly with respect to languages and humanities, have contributed to our present disastrous incapacity to learn and teach about the rest of the world. Further cuts in spending are already being talked about, particularly in those types of funding that initially supported the development of university centers of language and area studies. Neither government action, nor the frequently mentioned need of American business for knowledgeable employees, seem ready to support an increased attention to education about the world outside United States boundaries. To be sure, professional newsletters carry many advertisements for teachers of Japanese, but there are few other vacancies.

One result of these changes has been the growing preoccupation of academics in less favored area specializations with research on materials that already exist in our libraries--historical texts, religious scriptures, and the like--rather than with new social problems that require visits to the field and the gathering of current data. This tendency is particularly damaging to the study of women, for there are few texts directly relevant to current issues. Concentrating on traditional texts gives an inadequate picture of the actual concerns of the women of other nations and has quite frequently led many of them to criticize such research efforts. The texts that might be more relevant--such as unpublished diaries, memoirs, and photographs hidden in family trunks--are still largely unknown in these nations, as they have been in ours until fairly recently, and also require active efforts to locate, edit, and publish.

In short, general trends in United States international relations and in educational policies have naturally affected women's studies. But within the last decade, efforts also have been made to broaden our scope and begin to focus on international issues in research and practice on women. Let me discuss some of the developments in the varied categories of researchers and practitioners concerned with women and international issues, from my personal perspective.

Women in Area Studies

Beginning in the mid-1950s, internationally oriented activities greatly expanded on United States university campuses, often through the establishment of "area studies" centers devoted to research and teaching about non-western societies. These centers stressed language study, anthropology, history, literature and art, while some included sociology, economics, geography, political science. Women graduate students began doing dissertations on women in other societies, often in the face of stubborn opposition from teachers and colleagues. Most decided on a woman-related topic on their own, sometimes once they were already in the field. Other researchers, including myself, began to make the study of women our central concern in the early 1970s (or even earlier), well before women's studies courses were widely established or women-in-development projects even discussed. Interest in research on women was strongest, in this early period, among women academics who specialized in research on Latin America, Africa, and some parts of Asia.

In 1975, International Women's Year and the United Nations conference in Mexico City, consolidated these trends by giving some legitimacy to scattered research efforts and strengthening the establishment of academic networks. The formation of women's caucuses in international professional associations, such as the International Sociological Association, speeded up this process.

In 1976, a group of scholars drawn from the women's caucuses of three of the four major area studies associations in the United States (Association for Asian Studies, African Studies Association, Latin American Studies Association) organized the Wellesley Conference. The three area studies associations supported the conference organizers in their initial efforts and provided the model of an academic conference based on the presentation of research papers in panel sessions on specific topics, with audience participation in discussions. At the time, these women's caucuses had several hundred members; some groups had already organized earlier conferences in conjunction with overseas colleagues.

The Wellesley Conference did not include papers on women in North America or Europe, for its specific purpose had been to provide a counterweight to the many meetings that already were being held on women in these parts of the world. From the viewpoint of some overseas participants, this emphasis was a serious defect of the conference. On the whole, however, participants welcomed the opportunity to begin building links with women scholars in many parts of the world beyond the preoccupation with studies in their own countries.

As the program evolved, resources were found to invite about one-third of the 135 speakers from overseas, but no one really anticipated the huge size of the conference itself. Nearly five hundred participants, including many from overseas and many temporarily in North America, came for four days of active and sometimes acrimonious discussion. Many of the major questions

raised at the meetings still dominate our present concerns. What should be the relation between research and practice, theory and policy? What should be the role of researchers and practitioners working in countries of which they are not citizens? What should be the impact on scholars and practitioners of the political relations among the nations of which they are citizens?

For lack of a readily available better title, conference organizers chose the name "Women and Development" to stress its international aspects. As expected, critiques of the meaning and effects of "development" were among the major feature of papers and discussions. Important insights into the problems of international scholarship on women and the building of international networks came out of these discussions at Wellesley (and a follow-up meeting at Wingspread) and remain with us. But the initial impetus for the Wellesley meetings should also be kept in mind: it was the need to focus attention on and develop closer relations with the women of other nations--a group largely neglected in teaching, research and action programs by women in North America. It was hoped that ideas and resources would be pooled for future development of what was expected to be a new and growing field in women's studies.

Yet today, the scholars who are concerned with the study of women in the broader context of their specialized research and teaching about Asian, African, Latin American, Caribbean, and Middle Eastern cultures and societies from a base in North American universities represent one of the great neglected resources for an internationally oriented effort for women. These scholars have the specialized training in language, history, cultural and social studies, plus a strong interest in women, that should make them ideally suited to work with colleagues in women's studies and in women-in-development programs. But although there are some exceptions, this has not happened.

Instead, area studies specialists committed to women have often had to give in to the pressures of their institutions and funding agencies to shift their attention to other subject matters. Small underfunded area centers and departments generally refuse to allow a faculty member to specialize in research and teaching on women. These scholars also lack the stimulation they once hoped to find from a larger group of colleagues also interested in women but not necessarily sharing their area specialization. For reasons that I will discuss later, development-assistance agencies and organizations have also failed to take advantage of the skills and interests held by this group of scholars.

Ironically enough, all this is happening just at the moment that women's studies programs--even on the same campus--are beginning to discover the need to include the women of other nations in their research and teaching. In part, this need is fueled by the presence on United States campuses of growing numbers of women from other nations who have come here to study and find themselves very frustrated. In part too, greater pressures for

participation and recognition of cultural traditions other than those of the dominant majority in this country come from within the women's studies movement itself.

Another source of the impetus to broaden our perspectives as activists and scholars committed to women comes from the strong emphasis on the interdisciplinary nature of the new scholarship on women. True interdisciplinarity means, of course, that we cannot restrict ourselves to the women of a single place and time. The disciplines and modes of knowledge in which we are rooted draw their strengths from many different ways of knowing--some claim universal applicability and ignore historical time or social structures, while others see no validity in anything that is not specific in space and time. It seems increasingly clear that a claim to universal applicability of knowledge about women that does not pay careful attention to empirical facts drawn from many diverse cultures and societies can result only in sterile or premature attempts at a general theory. We cannot have it both ways: arguing for a universally applicable set of explanations for the position of women while taking universal applicability as a given and, therefore, failing to take the trouble to check ideas against empirical fact. Even if we had no other reasons to support the internationalization of research and practice on women, this last point alone argues in its favor.

Women in Development: Theory and Policy

International Women's Year did not initiate a new movement--it only confirmed what women in many countries were already experiencing. Changes in the global relations among nation-states affected women's work, women's power and women's family relations. Thus the impetus given by the series of international conferences and action programs legitimized what had already begun to happen and gave concerned people some of the means to proceed.

With respect to issues linking women with the development process, Ester Boserup's landmark book, Woman's Role in Economic Development (first published in English in 1970 and since translated into several languages) has become something of a symbol of our awareness of the varied effects of change and development on women. Her ideas have been incorporated into much later work; they have also been challenged. Ironically, in spite of the book's wide popularity, the research agenda she outlined for systematic data collection and analysis by national governments and international agencies has been slow in being followed. Later critiques of the effects of development on women, contained in much of the research stimulated by the UN Conference, emphasized the adverse effects, whether intended or unintended, particularly on poor and uneducated women. Governments and international agencies, concerned by the lack of effectiveness of many conventional development programs, began to add women's projects to the mix. Development-assistance institutions and organizations also began to use a new rhetoric with regard to women. On occasion, the rhetoric has been accompanied by significant institutional changes and resource allocations--but these are not nearly as large as the rhetoric sometimes seems to suggest. This can work to our disadvantage.

Let me now concentrate briefly on some direct effects of these changes on the relationships--within the United States--among the various groups and categories of people concerned with women's equity. This includes practitioners and researchers in development-assistance organizations; academic researchers, teachers, and students concerned with international issues and women; and the broader women's studies community. Most of these people are women but a small and significant number are men.

The formation in 1982 of the new Association of Women in Development (AWID) has put these relationships into somewhat sharper focus than before. It would appear, at this time, that the members of AWID represent a significant portion of the action or practice element in internationally oriented efforts for women's equity. For this reason, it is particularly important to examine the relation between theory and practice in this field, between research and action.

In its initial organizational efforts, AWID has drawn on several major groupings: persons concerned with women and development issues in development-assistance agencies of the United States government, in private voluntary agencies in development-assistance work (funded by private contributions plus, in some cases, grants from USAID), and on the faculties or administrative staffs of some United States universities (primarily, but not exclusively, Title XII land-grant institutions). Precursors of AWID include the regional networks funded by USAID's Office for Women in Development. These networks have often succeeded in forging links among concerned women otherwise isolated on their campuses and within professional associations in disciplines relevant to development issues (particularly in agriculture and natural resources). In the private voluntary agencies, staff members concerned with women's issues have often played leading roles in putting women's projects into the assistance portfolios of their organizations and in stimulating the attention of donors to the problems faced by poor women in low-income countries.

Given existing relationships, and given the dependence of Title XII universities on United States government research funding--especially in Schools of Agriculture and Home Economics--and also given the existence of the Percy Amendment that mandates attention to women in development, a strategy focused on inserting women into existing research and action projects in development assistance promises to be very effective. Project design can be improved by including women as beneficiaries. Project performance can be raised if the people actually doing much of the agricultural work are also addressed. In addition, the inclusion of women faculty, research staff, and graduate students in large on-going projects in their institutions obviously also improves their positions within the university.

In the long run, however, AWID's present emphasis on only one sector of the larger community concerned with women and international issues is not without its problems. It seems to me that stressing the distinctions between persons concerned with policy or action and those who teach and do

research on the same set of issues makes it harder to develop the solid infrastructure of ideas and experience on which all are dependent. This is particularly serious with respect to women and development issues because there are not many of us and we have often faced serious opposition. Indeed, I feel sure that some of the resistance to a more thorough integration of women into development policies and projects comes at least in part from a failure to present cogent arguments in terms of national and global development policies. It is in this connection that the failure to develop a unified knowledge base for understanding and action on these issues has been most damaging.

Obviously, distinctions between "theory" and "policy" orientations are well known in the development community and not confined to women's issues. I happen to think that the gulf between so-called theorists and so-called practitioners is the major weakness of development thinking in general but have observed that this gulf seems harder to bridge with respect to women-in-development issues than otherwise. In the larger development community, there is a fair amount of mobility and communication, in spite of very serious bureaucratic institutional barriers. Many male researchers and teachers in academic institutions spend time working with action and policy agencies on development programs and projects. As a result, they teach more effectively and have more to offer students who come to United States institutions from abroad. United States students can gain a view of global realities more readily from people with this experience. In short, while the boundaries exist, they seem to be somewhat permeable.

After all, many of the innovative ideas in various fields of development have also grown out of very practical, policy-oriented research programs--in effect, the more theoretical work was "sneaked into" the ostensibly policy-oriented work in which people were engaged. It seems to me that there is not yet enough activity of this kind with regard to women and development. Action and policy-oriented studies tend to be designed in ways that do not encourage the introduction of more theoretical considerations. Critical or theoretical work, by contrast, often suffers from a lack of current empirical data or field experience.

Times have changed, of course, since the early days of applied economic research and fertility studies. We face new conditions in our work. The most crucial and the most encouraging of these new conditions is the extent to which collaboration is possible among women in many countries. Partly as a result of new consciousness of these issues, partly as a side-effect of the rising labor force participation of highly educated women, there are now growing numbers of women in development-assistance institutions and organizations. This includes private voluntary organizations, international and bilateral aid agencies, and many governments, some of which have also instituted special "women's ministries" or similar agencies. This increase in the presence of women should place special emphasis on the development of international collaborative relations among women engaged in research and action for women's equity. The participation of women students, now doing graduate work in the United States and other countries foreign to them, will be an important factor in the development of international collaborative networks.

In the field of women's studies, on the other hand, there has been less effort to develop international dimensions, at least in the United States, for reasons that have more to do with the personal and political issues of the women's movement in this country than with the intrinsic merits of the internationalization of women's studies. This is a point to which I return later.

Power and Institutions

The question of power comes up repeatedly in considering these matters--as it has a tendency to do where women's interests are concerned. What is fundamentally at issue in the various divisions and distinctions I emphasize in this presentation is the nature of power and the workings of institutions. This includes the power of institutions to make resource allocations among competing claimants and the power of women in institutions.

There is also power outside institutions--and one kind of power is too often neglected in current women-and-development efforts. That is the power to persuade--through the written word, in newspapers and journals, in professional conferences, and in informal discussions with opponents and colleagues--and it is a power that independent scholars are in a position to exercise effectively. Perhaps because women in this country are unused to institutional power, and therefore preoccupied with obtaining it, we have often failed to use the power of persuasion that might be exercised in this connection by scholars and writers.

Institutional power is another matter. Any policy decision, any action commitment by an institution that has resources to distribute has the potential to affect the position of one individual or group relative to another. That is what makes them such tempting targets for transformation by persons with new ideas; it is also what makes them feared and hated. But answers relevant to the impact of institutional power on the lives of competing claimants for their resources do--and should--preoccupy many of the people working in the field of women and development. Private voluntary organizations, for example, spend much staff time on answering the question "whom are we helping?" and some time (not nearly enough!) on discussing "whom should we be helping?" Staff members spend time in the field working on project proposals to find answers; they argue with project review committees and shepherd proposals through the organization on the basis of these answers. All of these activities are clearly related to power and powerlessness--and to assumptions about the capacity of institutions to affect the power balance through some action, some "intervention," some transfer of resources.

Within institutions, for example in development assistance, staff members working on women's issues are often among the youngest and least powerful participants in large hierarchies. People low on the organizational totem pole can rarely afford to take risks, particularly if they can then be criticized for trying to advance the self-interest of a group to which they also belong. This has both advantages and severe

disadvantages. As experience has shown, successful changes in the policies of institutions engaged in development assistance with respect to women have resulted from very skillful organizational politics by insiders--a process often agonizingly slow and time-consuming.

Outsiders may have no role in this process or even a negative one. For example, a person coming from outside the institution or organization may be eager to speed up the process of institutional persuasion by offering to contribute critical research or new ideas. Yet for the staff member, such an outsider is potentially a "loose cannon on deck" as a collaborator, for she could potentially jeopardize the staff person's slow and careful work inside. By contrast, men in senior positions can more readily afford to invite some critical appraisals by outsiders or take a chance on supporting a project that may or may not work well. Less powerful staff members must be more cautious and, in any case, have fewer resources at their command.

The particular nature of women's programs and projects also involves many thorny issues of power that often transcend questions of institutional power just mentioned. Although the desirability of women-in-development projects is often discussed in highly personal terms that reveal a distressing amount of personal prejudice in both the United States and elsewhere, I am sure that the issue of power relations is equally, if not more, crucial.

For example, projects designed to enhance the income-earning opportunities of poor rural women have at least the potential effect of lessening income differentials. Since middle and upper-class families are among the employers of poor rural women in low-income jobs, alternative earning opportunities could affect the supply of female labor--provided that enough new and better jobs were created by the project.

To give another example, specialized women's ministries in some countries depend very heavily on existing women's associations for the implementation of programs and on political patronage to gain support within their government. While women's associations in many countries have very impressive records in fighting for women's educational and legal rights, the newer types of income-generating projects for poor women are relatively new for many such groups. The grass-roots, participatory style of some development projects by private voluntary organizations is also unfamiliar and may be seen as threatening existing power relations in some nations. Yet there is again a tendency to phrase opposition to women's projects in personalized terms that focus on women's roles in the family and culture.

In actual fact, of course, women's projects--even if they increase women's access to new income-earning opportunities--have a far smaller effect on culture and social order, including the family, than some other innovations. I am convinced, for example, that the single most powerful factor in changing the division of labor and relations between women and men can be the introduction of a new seed variety, with its attendant demands for new cultivation methods, cash for new inputs like fertilizer, and a need

to develop new marketing methods. Yet I have never heard anyone mention the effect of new seed varieties on male-female relations or the stability of the traditional family.

Academic researchers can often gain a very different view of a situation if they are working independently. Indeed, many have achieved impressive rapport with particular groups, often among the very poor and powerless, that is sometimes equalled by workers in private voluntary associations but rarely by persons working through official channels. It is the independence of some academic researchers that makes their relations with official development-assistance agencies often problematic and may constitute an additional element in the tensions between the two groups.

In the first instance, however, tensions and misunderstandings between academics and persons in development-assistance institutions arise most often because of the differences between them in terms of goals and constraints. While academic researchers on women in other countries are sometimes actively involved in women's advocacy efforts, their professional activities generally do not emphasize recommendations for action or project design but the collection and analysis of data on a broad range of issues affecting women. For project workers looking for answers to very specific questions, academic research reports may appear infuriatingly irrelevant at first glance and be put aside. Similarly, academics often dismiss the baseline research of project or policy researchers as too superficial and too constrained by institutional requirements to come up with quick recommendations for concrete action.

There is obviously a division of labor here, rather than a conflict of interest--but in the underfunded arena of women-in-development work, it is sometimes difficult to see the difference. This leads to tensions that divide us instead of alliances that unite us. The tensions between what one of my friends likes to call "Boston" and "Washington"--the academic and policy worlds--are of an institutional, rather than a personal, sort. This suggests to me that they reflect the real success of institutional politics that serve to marginalize women and try to contain change by making minority groups the watchdogs of their own progress without genuine institutional commitments.

Developing the Common Ground

At this point in our intellectual and practical development as a group of people concerned with women's equity in both poor and affluent nations, we have relatively little formal ground on which to stand together. Like any critic, I have probably exaggerated divisions and fissures in order to make my point. But I think it is true that we cannot--yet--lay claim to shared theoretical frameworks or paradigms for change.

A common ground of theory and policy is not the same thing as consensus. Given the importance of the fundamental issues we address, I think that consensus is unlikely. It is also undesirable, for our vitality

depends on continued discussion of very different alternatives--and even that discussion is often broken off or undercut because the institutional preconditions for exchange do not exist.

Many people who are also concerned with development, in many parts of the world, do not really understand what we are talking about--beyond the simple rhetoric that one must now pay attention to women. As we all know, this is usually interpreted in terms of simple self-interest, of giving in to the pressures of advocacy groups. Only very rarely, it seems to me, have we succeeded in breaking through to common ground.

I once asked a group of development economists in a European agency for development assistance why they had not turned their attention to women, given their commitment to agricultural growth in countries with many women farmers. One of them said thoughtfully that they did not quite know how to proceed on that question. There were so few women on their staff. After a pause, I asked: "How many of you are peasants?" It seemed that not one of them had come from a rural farm background. This did not appear to deter them from working on international agriculture.

Similarly, of course, the new information on women and development does not require special life experiences to be understood and utilized in development research and planning. To be sure, some action projects and some field research efforts with women require women staff--to gain access and rapport, to highlight questions of which one is already conscious. It is also a good thing to assure female participation in the process of research and planning, for reasons of power, if nothing else. But once the data are available, why should it require a heightened consciousness of personal problems to pay attention to them? Anyone should be able to use them, yet they are routinely assigned to the province of women researchers, scholars, policy analysts, many of whom also seek these assignments because of their established interest.

I think what is happening here should be called "false specialization"--assigning a special niche to data that do not require it and to researchers who have not asked for it--simply in order to slow down the process of change. The world of science contains many examples of false specialization and I am sure it has proved very handy in universities and research institutions.

But false specialization can also be stood on its head. We can respond by making gender distinctions so central to all our work--in both theory and policy--in terms that reflect the preoccupations of others as well as our own that it will be harder to ignore us.

This requires the development of the common ground we occupy--making it not only available but also useful to both practitioners and academics, policy-oriented researchers and program implementers. At this point in our intellectual and practical development as a group of people concerned with women's equity in both affluent and poor nations, however, we do not yet have enough common ground on which to stand together.

We cannot--yet--lay claim to shared theoretical frameworks or to common formats in which to argue out our differences. We also cannot--yet--dip into a common pool of shared knowledge. We do not have the journals, the library collections, the data bases, the common language that speeds communication and the accumulation of knowledge. What we do have is conferences and conference volumes--good for rapid communication of new ideas but not for slow accumulation of generalizable conclusions. We also have many, many bibliographies. Again, these may fulfill the purpose of convincing doubters that yes, there is something about women in development, or make the life of the harried report-writer a little easier. But bibliographies are no better than the libraries or data-sets to which they should readily lead us. They are no substitute for regular journals or other regular, established modes of professional communication. Bibliographies of ephemeral, unpublished materials may be interesting but they are also wildly frustrating to anyone who wants to use them in longer-range research. And finally, we also have special issues of journals, devoted to women and development--useful for raising the consciousness of those who have still not heard us.

It is plain, in short, that there exists a huge pool of information, brought together by much careful thought by many devoted people. I often think of this new body of information as a new underground literature--a new kind of samizdat--that circulates through personal networks rather than on the open marketplace of intellectual exchange. Indeed, I devote considerable time and effort to keeping my own collection up to date and lending it to students or colleagues. Yet the fact that personal networks are so important in gaining access to our common knowledge also reinforces our status as a falsely specialized community. People who might make important new contributions cannot have easy access to existing knowledge--the new graduate students who might become interested, the isolated colleagues who have developed some of their own ideas, the staff member of an institution who has some new thoughts, all of these must first get into a new network and cannot really dip into our shared knowledge independently. That is an additional reason why the fissions and tensions I have described are so destructive to our progress.

At present, I think it is unlikely that development-assistance institutions and organizations can be persuaded of the importance of building a solid infrastructure of knowledge about women and development beyond what they have already undertaken by way of projects, research fellowships, and partial data-bases. All of these have been useful. They are not enough for what I think we really need. It is also not really the function of these institutions.

Above all, the universities have failed us, not only in the United States but on a global scale. As far as I know, there is not a single major research institute or university center devoted to development-related research and teaching that has included women-in-development activities fully in its program. At best, some research institutions have devoted temporary time or partial resources; none, so far as I know, has made a

serious commitment at a senior level to work on this topic. Given the commitment of considerable resources to women's studies in the United States, for example, this failure on the part of universities is particularly striking.

In this respect, I do not think we have aimed nearly high enough. By focusing our energies on internal institutional changes to achieve the integration of "women's components" into larger programs, for instance, we may have overlooked ways that might have been more persuasive of the merits of our case.

Let me take one example of a major policy issue in which more careful attention to women might greatly improve understanding and suggest policy changes. Questions of income distribution, employment, and class differences are enormously important, especially in low-income countries, where they are not only economically but also politically explosive.

Most of the analysis of these issues concentrates on male employment; if women are considered at all, it is in a very marginal sense. Yet readily available data from many countries make it possible, by now, to develop some very different views of on-going processes by the more careful inclusion of data on women. Several points stand out. For one thing, patterns of female labor utilization are changing: growing numbers of educated women are going into modern-sector jobs, often newly created, while at the same time uneducated women are often displaced by technological innovations. The composition of the female labor force, therefore, is changing in terms of educational qualifications and the class background of women workers. Second, poor women must usually continue to work because they and their families need their income; often, these are female-headed households or at least dependent on women's earnings. But when customary work is no longer available, women work in the informal sector or under illegal conditions and are no longer officially enumerated as "economically active." Third, research supports the common-sense notion that poorer families--entirely dependent on their labor--are proportionately more dependent on women's earnings than is true, on the average, for middle and upper income families who also control other resources.

In short, when the true economic activities of women are factored into the analysis of employment and income distribution, it becomes a little easier to see why class differences may be increasing and why income distribution may be more unequal in some situations than before. The inclusion of women then also makes it possible to develop more relevant policy choices that include both men and women in the equation.

Of course, this is a quick sketch and an overgeneralization of some very important global trends. But taken in the more general context of ideas held by many development analysts and planners, this sketch also illustrates some of the lines of policy-relevant theorizing that might make our ideas more relevant to this larger community. Stated in these terms, the argument becomes more familiar and also more cogent to the concerns of policy-

oriented development thinkers. In many discussions, I have found them bored by talk of "women's components" in larger projects, for these are concessions some of them have made long ago in response to what they see as simple advocacy pressure. The more general theorizing, moreover, is much harder to marginalize because it touches on so many central concerns of these planners themselves.

This is what I mean by turning false specialization on its head. Having made gender distinctions central to our work in both practice and theory, we are better prepared to tackle general questions that remain baffling and refractory to conventional analysis. Of course, I will not pretend that there exists a detailed trajectory for such an ambitious proposal but I am convinced it is worth placing on our agenda for the future.

The Personal Is Political: Internationalizing Women's Studies

Let me end this presentation with some personal observations of feminist scholarship and women's studies in the United States, about which I have said very little.

As I mentioned at the outset, the conviction that "the personal is political" has played a major role in mobilizing our women's movements by fueling advocacy efforts and contributing to deeply creative scholarship. This same conviction now causes problems both in the internationalization of feminist scholarship and the development of feminist theory and practice. I think we must admit that not everything that is political is necessarily also personal. Not everything that is personal is necessarily also political.

In women's studies, both here and abroad, much that has been written has served to validate personal experience. Many things have been "named." Many inequalities have been "counted." Validation of personal experience can be deeply exhilarating--freeing one to think and say things one never knew in quite the same way before.

But there are other things that cannot be known in the same way. That is why I think we must also find ways to transcend personal experience. The failure to do so could lead us down a dead-end road and here I am not speaking of the failure of empathy out of an intellectual turning inward that could spell the end of feminist scholarship.

In one of her last published articles, the late Shelley Rosaldo wrote as an anthropologist that the trend toward universalism still pervading the social disciplines was a heritage from Victorian times that we must learn to do without. Some of our best scholars have universalized the particular, have spoken of the experience of all women with a passion deeply rooted in personal knowledge. This too has been an exhilarating intellectual experience.

But we must also learn to find ways to admit that such knowledge can be both limited and limiting. Social researchers, however gifted, cannot reach universal conclusions from a limited data base. In talking about feminist scholarship and the future, I think we can argue from a position of strength that we do not need grand universal statements to make convincing points about specific issues. We will be more readily understood, I think, if we base our conclusions on concrete empirical findings in particular settings. That, in turn, will enable us to develop the paradigms and theories that now appear fragmentary and unconvincing.

As a matter of fact, I expect that new paradigms based on gender as a central variable can transform the existing social disciplines in a very fundamental way. In order to achieve this transformation, we will need to argue our case--perhaps unfortunately, perhaps not--in the terms that can be readily understood in the existing social disciplines, and not in a newly invented language of our own choosing. That again makes concrete empirical findings so important and argues against premature theorizing.

This is also where the internationalizing of women's studies can become very important--in moving us beyond the validation of personal experience to the exploration of very different truths. We cannot achieve this without active collaboration with our colleagues in other countries. I stress collaboration because the ambitious goals that I think we need to set for ourselves cannot be achieved in any single society or culture alone. We may need a female de Tocqueville from India to tell us about ourselves and begin a dialogue about women in the United States--just as those of us who have worked in South Asia need a continuing dialogue with our South Asian colleagues. Both Insider and Outsider views have a role to play in the social disciplines. In our eagerness to accord validity to many different cultural perspectives, we cannot forget that insight.

It may well be the most difficult thing we have ever tried to do but many of the materials for the job are at hand. Let me be concrete. In India, for example, women are a hot topic--books, articles, conferences and other forms of expression bring women's issues before the public. According to my quick count, nearly one hundred articles per year were published in Indian newspapers, periodicals, and journals in 1979, 1980 and 1981. This interest has probably increased since then. Many books about women have been published in India's very active publishing industry, which also has good links with distributors in North America. Under an acquisitions program sponsored by the various governments involved, the United States Library of Congress selects and sends to participating United States libraries new publications from the countries of South Asia (and several other regions, as well). In 1981, this program sent nearly fifty books and monographs relating to women in South Asia to participating libraries; two-thirds of these were in English and nearly half were published in India. In other words, published materials on women in South Asia are available in the United States; to guide scholarly research, some excellent bibliographies are also available. Even though South Asia scholars in the

United States have not generally paid much attention to these materials, several of the women in area studies that I discussed at the outset have maintained a strong interest in research on women.

Internationalizing women's studies in the United States will also be helped--perhaps paradoxically--by the conscious decisions of some of our colleagues in other countries to concentrate their energies in the first instance on developing their national resources. For more than a decade, Indian scholars and feminist activists have focused their efforts on documenting women's inequality, stimulating political and legal action, and developing local programs of education and income-generation for women. As one of the leaders of this effort has noted, they initially followed a strategy of using only materials by Indian researchers to make their points--a "self-denying ordinance," as they called it, to emphasize the role of insiders. With the founding of the Indian Association of Women Studies, such a strategy may be unnecessary: in any event, efforts are now under way in several institutions to strengthen the bonds between Indian feminist scholars and those in other countries, both within and outside Asia. These efforts will provide a model for the development of international comparative research and teaching in women's studies.

Two very concrete recommendations for introducing a more international orientation into women's studies in the United States bring me back to my original starting point. First, and most important, materials and perspectives from other cultures and societies need to be integrated topically into whatever we are studying or teaching about women, instead of being segregated into a distant corner of the course or curriculum. The challenge of this method is to minimize the distinction between Us and Them while also stressing differences in culture, social structure, and individual points of view. Courses on images of women, for example, could deal with materials from, say, Japan, India, Italy, France, Tanzania, Morocco, Argentina, along with materials from North America. With some imaginative searching, I believe that relevant materials are available from all these places on the basis of recent studies by women scholars. In the social sciences, to give another example, materials on female migration, labor force participation, political activities, occupational segregation, role in peasant agriculture--to give only a few obvious examples--are available from a large number of sources, mostly although not exclusively, in English. Here the impact of international emphasis on women-in-development programs has made itself felt in data collection and research reports.

Second, and perhaps more difficult, I think it will be crucial to achieve the integration of a focus on women in the work of existing centers of international studies, economic development, and area studies. This again brings us back to women-in-development efforts to integrate women's projects into those activities on United States campuses related to development- assistance projects. If any efforts have been successful to introduce an emphasis on women into these internationally oriented research and teaching enterprises, it has largely been due to the USAID-related

networks. All the more reason, therefore, to stress the importance of closer relations with women's studies on the same campus. One problem is obvious: international studies occupy the same isolated position on many United States campuses that women's studies programs are all too familiar with. While it is difficult to link two marginal enterprises, it may not be impossible.

I have stressed differences among us and difficulties. In closing let me emphasize the major reason for a stronger international orientation in feminist scholarship and practice. I see signs, in our conferences and in some of our major publication outlets in feminist studies, of the development of highly specialized modes of thought and communication. Ideas are becoming less and less accessible to persons working in different intellectual traditions--yet one of the great strengths of feminist scholarship in the past has been its open communication among many disciplines and between theory and practice. I am afraid this openness is breaking down. If so, we will find fewer and fewer of us and we will be talking only to ourselves.

The major contribution feminist awareness has made to our lives is to emphasize, over and over again, the realities of women's lives--all sorts of women, all over the world. We need to know this world as if it were our own, yet knowing that only a small part of it is ours. Others do not know us very well, either, so this must be a collective enterprise. And while there may be some utility to separate paths, to some division of labor among us, we need to keep our common interests in view at all times. We must not allow ourselves to be assigned to false specializations in which women are removed from their social context, their place in time and space, and where we become--once again--isolated objects of specialized attention. For that is not the road towards equality.

NOTES

1. Keynote Speech, presented at the Conference on Women and Development: Theory and Practice co-sponsored by Hunter College and the National Council on Research for Women, Roosevelt House, New York, 23 March 1983. The proceedings of the Conference have appeared in a monograph published by the National Council on Research for Women.

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