

visual character of the places where we spend our lives gives us the patterns by which we see”.

Landscape in America is a compelling book about points of view. It is a major contribution to those interested in the American landscape. It is also an invitation to reflect upon the function of places and landscapes as a preeminent aspect of the human condition.

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FEMINISM/POSTMODERNISM/DEVELOPMENT by Marianne H. Marchand and Jane L. Parpart (eds.). London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

In the 1970s, feminists, scholars, and activists started to challenge the theory and practice of development espoused by international aid agencies and nation-states both in the South and in the North. The resulting perspective: Women in Development (WID) was not satisfying either and was criticized for its Western modernization bias. A more radical transformative potential was presented by the new movement of Gender and Development (GAD) that started to prevail during the 1980s. Around the same time, feminists (mainly in the North) started to investigate the possibilities that postmodernism can provide for (Western) feminist theory and practice.

Feminism/Postmodernism/Development provides the arena for these two lines of inquiry—postmodern feminism and women and development—to meet. Can and should the latter accommodate and/or incorporate the former? In the first, introductory chapter, editors Marchand and Parpart briefly sketch the fundamentals of the three terms in the book’s title and outline the points of conflict and agreement and the mutual influences between them. This introduction equips even the less-versed reader with basic tools to deal with the paramount epistemological and ontological issues that emerge when development encounters postmodern feminism. These issues include the meaning of the categories ‘women’, ‘North/South’, ‘Third World’, and their role in theory and practice; the power/knowledge nexus and the role of the ‘expert’; the relations between local and privileged knowledge; the relations between subjectivity, identity, and structure; and representation of the ‘other’. More specifically, the central question on which the contributors were asked to reflect was: “Can a critical and flexible adoption of postmodern feminism provide the basis for a more sensitive approach to development of women in the South?” (p. 15).

The contributors, coming from a variety of countries, informed by different theoretical approaches and involved to varying degrees with academic work, grassroots activism, and actual experience with aid agencies and development projects, present different views and different ways of tackling this question. I will first review those authors who chose to respond to it directly in a somewhat programmatic style, and later those who chose to present their postmodernism-informed research and let the reader answer the question for her/himself.

Rathberger (Chapter 11), focusing on 'indigenous knowledge', argues that GAD, when combined with postmodern thinking, can be flexible enough to incorporate local knowledge and women's own definition of themselves and their lives. Chowdhry (Chapter 1) sees in DAWN's manifesto, a text that is inspired by both socialist and postmodern feminism, an alternative feminist discourse that is empowering Third World women. Barriteau (Chapter 8) calls for a 'Caribbeanized' locally-grounded feminist theory, arguing that postmodern feminism can inform the construction of a feminist theory that will be sensitive to the 'multiple contested locations' and 'shifting interactions of women's lives' without 'victimizing' Caribbean women.

Many acknowledge that the main contribution of postmodern feminism is the recognition that the situation of women is a function of multiple power relationships, and that there is no single 'women's situation'. Thus, Hirshman (Chapter 2) reveals the modernist bias in DAWN's manifesto (the very one celebrated by Chowdhry) and rejects it for its totalizing narrative. She argues that adopting the production-reproduction grid as the main analytical framework privileges one aspect of women's life and diminish the complexity of development processes and women's experience by reducing them to the universal categories of either 'labor' or 'gender oppression.'

The other authors present quite a long list of potential 'harms' that postmodern feminism can bring to development discourse. Nzomo (Chapter 7) and Udayagiri (Chapter 9) together miss none: Postmodern language is inaccessible, it focuses on textual analysis and overemphasizes language and discourse at the expense of real life circumstances. But even more harmful are its anti-essentialist and anti-universalizing tendencies that undermine democratic ideals, precluding the possibility of solidarity among women as well as any political action. "Can it lead the way to political action and change through a textual analysis that is decipherable for the most part only by erudite academic feminists?" (p. 166). The answer is negative.

For the most part, the authors reiterate the 1980s debate regarding the possible contribution/challenges of postmodernism to feminist thinking and practice. However, it is clear that the implications of the 'pros' and 'cons' that were voiced then, assume a much larger significance when dealing with women in the Third World. For example, the problem of 'obscure language' is much more acute when dealing with women with inadequate literacy skills. The futility of textual analysis is much more apparent in the face of hunger and lack of basic needs. At the same time, critical postmodern thinking is much more necessary for Third World women as it can help resist the totalizing tendencies of Western feminism, which when incorporated into the development discourse re-creates neo-colonial discourse, disempowers Third World women, and offers strategies that are of little relevance to the lives of the majority of marginalized women in the world.

Along these lines, several articles in the book show how a careful analysis, when oriented by postmodern thinking, can offer new insights into the situation of women in the South (and marginal women in the North). I find these chapters to be more useful and thought-provoking than the programmatic chapters. Many of the au-

thors found this strategy to be useful mainly for critiquing existing perspectives and policies for their disempowering Western bias. Chowdhry (Chapter 1) reveals the two interrelated discourses that underlie the WID policies of the World Bank: the (neo) colonial discourse that focuses on women's reproductive roles and the liberal discourse on markets that focuses on women's productive roles. The result is an inconsistent, self-contradictory regime that only disempowers Third World women. Marchand shows how the distinction made between feminist and feminine movements in Latin America hierarchizes the women's movement and silences poor Latin American women's voices and experience. Emberley (Chapter 5) explores the role that 'otherness' play in the 'European subject need and desire to consolidate its subjectivity'. She points to the ways in which liberal feminist ideal of solidarity was promoted using the case of rape of a Native woman in Canada. This strategy, forging an imagery notion of global feminist solidarity, contradicts anti-imperialist discourse and neutralizes it. Parpart (Chapter 12) deconstructs the role of the 'development expert' in the construction and dissemination of 'knowledge' about Third World women. Inspired by postmodernist thinking, Parpart states that questioning the patriarchal nature of Western knowledge should become part of development practice and analysis.

The naturalized (hierarchical) dichotomy between the 'traditional South' and 'modern North' have been the foundation of development literature all along. Raissinguier, Emberley, and Bald (Chapters 4–6) challenge this dichotomy when they put at the center of their analysis women of color living in industrialized countries, thus creating a continuum of marginality. Using a continuum avoids the problem of homogenization and allows for 'difference' to be the constitutive element.

Issues of subjectivity, agency, and production of knowledge feature in many of the articles. The complexities involved become much more apparent when Third World women are involved and postmodern feminism is the orienting perspective. One such example is the representation of the 'other'. Marchand asks, "How poor working class Third World women can gain a voice and subject status in the literature on Gender and Development and actively participate in the production of knowledge about Third World women?" (p. 58). She finds testimonies and life histories to be the most suitable means by which marginalized women can participate in the production of knowledge and "conduct their struggles and resist and delegitimize dominant discourse" (p. 71).

The anti-essentialist stance of postmodern feminism complicates even further the long-debated issue of structure and agency. Raissinguier (Chapter 4) puts the question clear and loud: "How does one frame a non-essentialist analysis of the construction of subjectivity that allows for agency while still recognizing the existence of material and discursive boundaries within which the agent is constituted?" (p. 79). Through her interviews of Algerian high school girls in France, she tries to walk this fine line, showing how they carve a space for their own voice and sexuality in the gap between the image of the 'traditional Algerian girl' and the promiscuous French classmates. Bald (Chapter 6) interviews young Asian women living in Britain. She

celebrates these women's resourcefulness within a much constricted environment. These women created new communities for themselves and fashion strategies "...to empower themselves so that their lives in the 'margin' are more bearable" (p. 112).

One of the most significant contributions of postmodern feminism is its problematizing of any given category, gender included. Sylvester (Chapter 10) takes an extreme social constructionist stance when responding to this challenge. She shows how, in Zimbabwe, the category of gender is being constituted through the interaction among a multiplicity of 'regimes of truth' (a Foucaudian term that she prefers over 'ideology') that each and together intersect with gender regime. "Invariably, all the regimes discursively evoke 'women' as female-bodied persons who have specific and fixed tasks related to childbearing and rearing, nurturance, and support for persons called men" (p. 183). One, however, is left to wonder if indeed this definition is so unique to these specific communities.

This collection of articles, as a whole, does not provide a definitive answer to the central question it posed at the opening. Nor did it aim to do so. The lack of a concluding chapter indicates this clearly. However, the editors did intend to present an analysis that questions various social categories. Indeed, the authors did that and very carefully too, when dealing with categories such as 'women of the South' or 'Third World women'. However, in all the chapters the category of 'Western women' appears as is. 'Women of the North', as well as the category of the 'North' were made into the new 'other'. Such an analysis leaves us with an open question: Is it possible to construct truly sensitive social analysis that will not need to employ any 'other' in order to assert subjectivity? In this vein, I find the portrayal of 'Western feminism' to be unidimensional and oversimplified. Western feminism is a complex, internally inconsistent and constantly changing theory and practice. As such, it does offer new possibilities for social action and new subjectivities, as much as it disempowers women and reifies its superiority over other forms of criticism. By ignoring the former, one overlooks some of the social forces that did shape the agency of various groups of women in the South as well as the North.

Keeping that in mind, I find the main contribution of the book to go beyond its initial purpose. The various chapters (though unequal in quality) offer new ways of dealing with long-debated issues not only in development but in the social sciences in general. Many of the constitutive questions of the social sciences (modern and post-modern) emerge from the Western industrialized context. Using these questions to study other parts of the world has truly transformative potential that can only enrich our understanding of the new interdependent world which we all share. And more specifically, one can turn around the question that the editors posed at the beginning of the book and ask: Can the scholarship and practice that relate to women and development inform postmodernism in general and postmodern feminism in particular? The answer, as I tried to show all through the review, is positive.

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