

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES ON WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

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Methodological Guidelines for Feminist Research: Recalling our History

I have been asked to highlight the historical evolution of ideas and analysis connected with the theme "Women and Development," based on my own experiences and on the methodological and conceptual issues which evolve around what is called women's studies and research.

It is necessary to remind ourselves that women's studies, and also research in the field of women and development, was not initiated by research institutes but was a result of the women's movement. Without the women's movement, there would not have been a UN Women's Conference in Mexico in 1975, a UN Decade for Women which ended in 1985 in Nairobi, nor would we be sitting here today to discuss the relevance of development for women in the context of mountain resources. This is the general historical background. But my personal history also reflects this rootedness in the women's movement.

In 1979, I was invited by the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in the Hague to set up a programme for Third World women, entitled "Women and Development". It was, I think, one of the first of its type. At that time, there were only two women among the sixty staff members of this Institute. One of them, a feminist, Mia Berden, had organised a workshop in 1975 for Third World women out of which came the demand that the ISS should create a senior lecturer's post in the field "Women and Development" and start a programme of teaching and research. I was accepted for this post not only because I had worked and lived in India for a long time, and had done research on Indian women, but, more importantly, because of the fact that I was active in the women's movement and had spelled out some **methodological postulates for women's studies and feminist research** which at the time had just begun to emerge. These postulates were widely discussed among feminists in Holland, where I had first discussed them at Nijmegen University in 1977 (Mies 1983).

One of the main problems, which women who participated in the Women's Movement faced in the academic institutions, was the fact that our own experiences of oppression and humiliation as women; our anger and our rebellion against a patriarchal men-women relationship; as well as our subjectivity, could not be applied to the research or study process. We had to split ourselves up into two contradictory halves: the socially constructed "woman" and the cool, indifferent, and neutral scholar. Another postulate of dominant research was the strict separation between politics and research or knowledge; a postulate that meant that the political goal of our movement should not enter the sphere of research and studies.

Based on such experiences of a "double consciousness" (Nash 1974), I formulated seven basic methodological guidelines for feminist research which were meant to help us overcome the dichotomies that cut our lives apart. In the following, I will briefly summarize these postulates, because I still consider them necessary for any meaningful research on women's problems which aims to further women's liberation:

- o The postulate of **value freedom**, or neutrality and indifference towards the researched, has to be replaced by **conscious partiality** which is the opposite of so-called "spectator-knowledge" (Maslow), achieved by showing an indifferent, disinterested, and alienated attitude towards the "research objects".
- o The vertical relationship between the researchers and the researched - the "**view from above**" - must be replaced by a "**view from below**". This is the necessary consequence of the demand for partiality and reciprocity. Women who are committed to women's liberation cannot have an objective interest in a "view from above".
- o The contemplative, uninvolved "spectator knowledge" must be replaced by **active participation in actions, movements and struggles** for women's liberation.
- o This further implies that the **change of the status quo** becomes the starting point for the research and scientific quest.
- o The research process must become a **process of conscientization**, both for the researchers and the researched.
- o This process should be accompanied by **studying women's individual and collective history**, particularly their struggles.
- o Women's studies should strive to overcome the individualism and competitiveness, that are so characteristic of most mainstream research, and begin to collectivize and **share their experiences and insights**.

These methodological guidelines did not evolve through studying social science literature, but in the course of social action in which I participated, together with my students, in Cologne. In 1976, we were struggling to establish a house for "Battered Women" and had started a campaign against violence against women. Most of the above guidelines were tried out in an action research project undertaken during our own struggle. The results of this project are summarized in the book "**Nachrichten aus dem Ghetto Liebe**" (1980).

A second instance in which these methodological guidelines were used was in a research carried out among rural women in South India in 1978-1979, among women making lace for export in a home-based industry, and among poor peasants and agricultural women labourers (Mies 1982 and 1986). The usefulness of this approach could be seen in the ability of the women themselves to use this research for their own movement, their mobilization, conscientization, and organisation (Mies 1988 and Chambers 1985). In the case of the lace makers, this study was used to spark off the initiative to set up a new organisation for these women, the Working Women's Forum.

The third area, where this approach and these principles were applied, was the course on Women and Development at the ISS in the Hague. I had introduced a course "Fieldwork in Holland" for the women from Third World countries who attended the programme. The aim of this course was to bring Third World women into closer contact with women's groups in Holland; to give them first-hand knowledge of the situation of women there; as well as knowledge about the women's movement, concerning which, many had only vague and mostly negative ideas.

This experience proved to be very enlightening for both groups of women. They conducted reciprocal research on each other and Third World women learned that First World women, in spite of their education, their being "developed", their higher income, their greater access to paid

jobs, and their modern life style, were not liberated, but suffered from sexist violence and were sometimes ideologically more fettered to the housewife, mother, lover image, than they themselves. The myth that education, modernization, and development leads to women's liberation was almost immediately vanquished.

The Dutch women, on the other hand, learned that Third World women are not all poor and uneducated, that some were even more educated than themselves, and that, above all, they were less dependent on the ideology of romantic love, and hence less emotionally oppressed. The whole exercise led to the shedding of a number of prejudices on both sides; particularly about concepts such as "development" and "underdevelopment". It was clear that "development" had not liberated Western women. It had neither done away with inequality between the sexes nor with violence against women. The Third World women began to realize that it would be foolish to follow this model of "development" or to emulate modern Western women. One Philippino student summarized this learning process in the following way:

I have always thought that Western values are good for Western people and Eastern values are good for Eastern people. Now I have realized that Western values are also not good for Western people.

On the basis of this fieldwork in an advanced industrial society, it became necessary to look much more critically at the various strategies and programmes devised to "integrate women into development". What did development mean? Who benefited from it and who had to pay the costs? Why did this development not lead to the abolition of patriarchal men-women relations? Why were women still not equal, in spite of their belonging to an "advanced" society? Why was violence against women on the increase? What was the relationship between women in the "developed" or "overdeveloped" societies and in "underdeveloped" societies? What did we have in common, what divided us? And it became clear to us that this whole talk of development, of "integrating women into development", could only be understood if we placed it into the global strategies used by the capitalist economic order, to integrate the whole world into its market system. "To integrate women into development" meant to tap their labour everywhere, at the lowest cost, for the production of commodities to be sold in the world market.

Many other women and men (who had a similar methodological approach to research, action, and participatory orientation, and were committed to establishing subjective relationships between researchers and the people with whom they did this research), united by a common political goal, came to a similar critical assessment of the concept and strategy of development (Werlhof 1985; Shiva 1987; Bennholdt-Thomsen 1988 and Alvares).

All these researchers began to understand that the concept of **development**, which, in the common understanding, stands for modernization, industrialisation, urbanization, technological progress, economic growth, monetarization, and commodity-production, as well as a higher standard of living, measured by the consumption rates of such commodities, hides reality; and that this development has another dark side to it, to which it is intrinsically connected. V. Shiva (1988) states: "there's development and maldevelopment", or to use A.G. Frank's phrase: "development breeds underdevelopment". The rise of the modern western industrialized societies would not have been possible without the colonization of Asia, Africa, and South America, without the subjugation of women; and without man's domination over nature. These are what I call the "three colonies of White Man".

"The view from below and from inside" (our own subjectivity, feelings, empathy etc.) helps above all, to get rid of the myth that development means a linear, evolutionary process. This is what is usually understood by development. Some have already reached the top: Western

industrialized societies, men, city dwellers, and the middle class. Others that are striving to reach the same level are the "underdeveloped" societies, women, rural people, and the working class; or generally the lower classes.

Within a finite world with limited resources, there cannot be evolutionary development for all based on the model of the overdeveloped societies, because these societies would not be "developed" if they had not robbed other societies and their natural environment of necessary survival requirements. There cannot be unlimited growth in a limited world for all. Only some can grow at the expense of others. There cannot be unlimited progress for all. Only some can pursue this linear progress without end, at the expense of others, who then face regression.

There cannot be industrialisation without ecological destruction. Men cannot rise to the status of lord and master, without enslaving women. The white man could not have established his "free and democratic" societies without large scale slavery in the Caribbean and the Americas and without colonization. Development, hence, in reality, means this double-faced, antagonistic, and polarizing process in which some rise and others go down.

This also means, **development is not possible for all and cannot be generalized.** Some scholars have calculated what would happen if the standard of living of the average European or American was extended to all people living on this planet. The result would be that we would need two more planets, one for the extraction of resources and the other to dump our waste.

That this development is **also not desirable** was already understood by some of my students in the Hague. And it has also been understood by millions of women and men in the underdeveloped countries who are, at present, fighting for the preservation of the very basis of their existence. They do not want to sacrifice their land, their forests, their children's future, or their own lives on the altar of "development and progress". Women in the Himalayas fight for the conservation of their forests, their land, and their water resources. Millions of people in India fight against the big dams which will destroy their land, their homes, their history, and their culture. People in Brazil fight against the destruction of tropical rainforests. There are many here amongst us who have been closely associated for years with such survival struggles of women; the struggle of **people against development.** I agree with Claude Alvares who said recently: *"The earlier this development stops, the better for the people who so far have paid the costs of this development."* I would add: it would also be better for us, particularly for us women in the overdeveloped societies, because it would force us to try to live on the resources available in our own lands. We would have to give up the wasteful production and consumption which enslaves most of us. And we would have to establish a much more careful relationship with our natural environment which, as everybody knows, cannot grow endlessly.

From "Integrating" Women into Development to "Investing" in Women

Having given you a brief description of my personal history in feminist research, particularly related to the problem area - Women and Development, and of some of the insights that emerged in this process of action and research, I now want to turn to the macro level of the "discourse" on Women and Development.

It will be remembered that the subject of women and development entered public discourse around 1975 in the context of the International Women's Conference in Mexico. There, it was admitted that women generally, but Third World women in particular, "had been left out" of the development process. This deficit was first identified by Esther Boserup in 1970. She proved empirically that, rural women in Africa, Asia, and South America, in particular, had not

benefited from development in these areas. Her findings were corroborated by many reports on the status of women prepared by the Governments of underdeveloped countries. It was found that women's economic, educational, legal, and political status had deteriorated in most poor countries and that, in the rich countries also, the conditions of women were not better. To remedy this situation, the World Plan of Action was formulated with the main aim of "integrating women into development".

I shall not go into a critique of this strategy, because I merely want to point out that before the Mexico Conference, poor women were already "integrated" into the development strategy, mainly as invisible and unpaid or low paid subsistence producers and homemakers. They constituted the necessary "underground" for modernization in the development process. Integrating women into development did not mean questioning this basic sexual division of labour; or even the international division of labour between overdeveloped and underdeveloped societies; the strategy followed the evolutionary paradigm criticized above.

What was meant by this catchword was mainly the following: Women in underdeveloped societies, as well as rural women, should get more education and more access to modern technology, and to **income generating activities**, by which they would be able to supplement the insufficient income of their husbands. It did not mean that their control over subsistence production would be strengthened, that exploitation of their natural resources would cease, or that their men also would be asked to share in this survival production.

It meant, in fact, the introduction of women more directly into commodity production; into a market-oriented production instead of production for their own sustenance. It meant production for **money** instead of production for **life**. It is revealing that the phrase which is used does not talk of women's **labour**; it talks of **income generating activities**. By avoiding the concept 'labour', two things are achieved: women are basically defined as housewives involved in some cash-earning production to supplement that of the male "breadwinner" - this is what I call the **process of housewifization** (Mies 1986). As women are not defined as workers, there need not be any fear of their unionizing or their demanding better wages. Furthermore, women do not produce usually what is necessary in their local environment, but rather what can be sold in an external market, mainly foreign, where the purchasing power exists. This is the reason why so many of these programmes are based on the production of superfluous luxury items such as handicrafts, lace, flowers, and exotic foods for the already overconsuming Western buyer.

At the end of the International Decade for Women (1985 in Nairobi), it again became clear that this catching-up development, or the integration of women into development, had not in the least, changed the basic patriarchal structure, in which women were caught up, nor had it solved women's survival problems. On the contrary, things had become worse. Integrating women into development had not only increased women's workload, but it had not given them more income and assets. The famous UN-statement made the round that women perform two thirds of the world's labour, get one tenth of the world's income, and possess less than one hundredth of the world's resources. A whole series of studies on the effect of development on women had meanwhile shown that, almost everywhere what development meant for women was the destruction of their independent subsistence base, ecological destruction, more work for sheer survival, more inequality between men and women, more violence, more state control over women's lives, (particularly in the sphere of reproduction and health), and generally more destruction of women's dignity and integrity (Agarwal 1988; Schrijvers 1988; Ng and Mazna 1988; Chee Heng Leng 1988; and Werlhof 1985).

The World Bank and Women

After the Mexico Conference, not only the UN-organisations but also the NGOs and the World Bank adopted, at least on paper, the strategy of "integrating women into development". In the following paragraphs, I shall analyse briefly the World Bank's policy with regard to women from 1975 to 1988.

In 1975 we read in a World Bank statement:

The need to recognize and support the role of women in development is an issue which the World Bank considers of great importance for itself and its member Governments. The Bank expects to participate to an increasing extent in the efforts of those Governments to extend the benefits of development to all of their population, women as well as men, and thus ensure that so large a proportion of the world's human resources is not underutilized.

The World Bank spelt out two main goals for its women's policy: (i) to educate women in order to increase their productivity to use their "underutilized capacity more productively" and (ii) to increase their knowledge about contraception and family planning in order to bring down the population growth rates.

The World Bank put pressure on Third World Governments asking for loans to take specific action to reduce fertility and to raise the status of women. These two goals are not contradictory, but are part and parcel of the same strategy of "investing in women", as will become presently clear.

What is meant by the phrase: "increase women's productivity?" In classical economic terms it means to use their labour for the production of exchange values and to produce commodities for an external market, which can generate a profit. The term "productivity of labour" is clearly related to the process of capital accumulation. It also means to increase the output of this labour in a given time and for a given cost. Hence, to increase women's productivity means, above all, from the point of view of capital accumulation, to save costs and link women's labour to the monetary economy; to **draw them away from subsistence production**; because as long as people only produce what they need for themselves, money cannot "breed" more money.

We may ask, at this present juncture, why the World Bank has discovered women; particularly poor Third World women? The reason is that women are mainly seen as housewives and mothers who are responsible for the family, the children, and the old; in short, for the production of life. That means that their reproduction responsibilities simply force them to accept wages which are often below subsistence level. This is, in the final analysis, what makes their labour so "productive". According to Claudia V. Werlhof, women defined as housewives, and not the male proletariat, are the optimal labour force for capital. Therefore, free wage labour has not been generalized, but the definition of women as housewives has. The reason for this housewifization, according to Werlhof, is that the wage of a labourer in the industrialized West is too expensive, he works too little (due to trade union pressure), and knows too little.

He can do only what he is paid for and what has been agreed upon by contract...he cannot be mobilized for all purposes, as a person, a whole human being. The masculine work capacity is too inflexible and unfruitful (Werlhof 1988, 79).

This is the reason why the World Bank, at present, no longer talks simply about "integrating women in development" but about "investing in women". At this year's Annual Conference of the World Bank and the IMF in Berlin, a paper was presented by Barbara Herz which had the title: "Briefing on Women in Development." Barbara Herz is the Head of the newly created World Bank Division: Women in Development, which was set up by the President of the World Bank, Mr. Barber B. Conable, Jr. In this paper the main points of the new strategy of "investing in women" are clearly spelled out. The paper starts with the well known facts that women world-wide are already doing most of the work, not only in the household (in "reproduction") but also in food production and industry. It is also admitted that all this labour, in spite of its important contribution to the society, is not adequately remunerated. The reason for this situation, however, is not seen in the sexual division of labour and in exploitation in the world market system as such, but in "women's low productivity" which on its part is attributed to lack of education, lack of training, and outmoded or patriarchal traditions:

But women lack the means to work at full or even moderate levels of productivity. Their capacity to contribute is specially constrained by tradition, sometimes codified in the law or policy, that limits their access to information and technology, to education and training, to credit and resources and to markets (Herz 1988, 2).

The message is clear. Women are poor because they are not sufficiently linked to the money economy and the market system. The strategy following from this analysis is obvious:

Investing in women can make development programmes more productive. As women already do a lot of the work in agriculture, it would lower the costs of development programmes considerably if Governments would invest in women.

The case of the Kenyan Government is cited where extension agents now mainly choose women agriculturists for their programmes. The Government hopes that extension can thereby be doubled and costs reduced.

The result would be greater food security for rural families, greater food supplies in towns, and greater export earnings.

The paper addresses these women in agriculture now, no longer as subsistence farmers, but as "entrepreneurs":

As a general proposition, it makes sense to allow women, like other entrepreneurs, an expanded range of economic opportunities and let them weigh market potential and family concerns rather than assuming they "should" stay in certain lines of activity. Culture may limit the scope and pace of such expansion, but the economic virtue of deregulation ought to be clear (Herz 1988, 2).

It is interesting to note the shift in terminology. Until recently we heard talk of "income generating activities" - not of work. Now women are called "entrepreneurs". But unlike male entrepreneurs they have to combine and "weigh" family concerns and market production. The strategic aim of this new terminology is to hide from the women themselves the fact that they are exploited for the world market and the production of export crops. It also conceals the fact that these women, most probably, will never be able to accumulate capital, unlike real entrepreneurs. Other beneficial effects expected from "investing in women" are the following:

- o To help poor women get access to credit.

As success stories, the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh and SEWA in India are mentioned. It is emphasized that 250,000 assetless women in Bangladesh (250,000 have received bank loans and have shown a much better payback record than most credit programmes).

- o To help poor women get access to more and better education and training, particularly with regard to income earning.
- o To promote more effective and sustainable use of food, water, and other natural resources.

The World Bank paper recognizes that women in most underdeveloped countries are responsible for fuel, water, food, and sanitation. It repeats the well-known myth that, due to this responsibility, women are the ones to be blamed for environmental destruction, particularly in their search for fuelwood. The big dams and timber companies, who export exotic timber, and the big national and transnational corporations are not mentioned amongst the destroyers of the environment. Women's survival struggles for the maintenance of forests, water, and soil resources, against these corporate interests, are not mentioned. The fact that they have to cover longer distances in the hills to find fuelwood is attributed to their outmoded farming methods:

Women are also likely to lack access to improved, environmentally sound farming methods. They often get stuck with outmoded technology that may be more conducive to misuse of land as population density rises (Herz 1988,3).

The foregoing interpretation overlooks some important facts: environmental destruction, as is well known, is due solely to "improved farming methods" of which none have been found to be ecologically sound so far; either in the North or in the South. On the other hand, the "outmoded technologies" used by women have never destroyed the environment, provided that their territories have not been invaded and exploited by colonizing interests. Shifting cultivation never destroyed the forests before this (Shiva 1987). As a remedy to environmental destruction, women are mobilized to join the World Bank's social forestry programme. It is their responsibility for the family which makes them the optimal partners of the World Bank:

Because women must supply the family, they often have more incentive to make these programs work. Including women more effectively in such natural resource management programs can contribute solutions to some of the most pressing environmental threats; including the recent catastrophic flooding and soil erosion in South Asia and the widespread decline in forest cover (Herz 1988,3).

This reminds me of the German "Trummerfrauen", after World War II, who had to clear up the ruins in the bombed cities to make Germany liveable again. Men make war against other people and nature and women have to clean up the mess afterwards. There is no mention in this passage that those who have caused and are still causing environmental catastrophies and destruction of the rain forests should stop waging war, because these are the same interests which the World Bank represents on a world scale (Shiva 1987 and 1988). It is much easier to blame the poor and their "reckless breeding" for environmental destruction. This, then, is the last and, in my view, main reason why the World Bank is interested in "investing in women": to slow down population growth. This was already one of the two main aims of the World Bank's policy for women, in 1975, which were stated as: to increase women's productive labour and to decrease women's fertility. Poor women in underdeveloped societies are wanted as producers but not as reproducers of more of their kind, or as consumers (Mies 1986).

To implement this programme, a number of steps are proposed; such as giving women more access to credit, investing in the informal sector and in income generating activities where women can become "small entrepreneurs", and providing more education and training programmes for women. In the field of population control, a new programme was launched, the Safe Motherhood Initiative (SMI) which combines measures to reduce maternal mortality with birth control. President Conable announced that the Bank would double its population, health, and nutrition lending over the next several years and "give much more attention to the safe motherhood dimension..." (Herz 1988,6).

If I try to compare this policy statement with earlier ones, I cannot discover much that is new. It is rather more of the same, with more outspoken terminology. "Investing in women" places development programmes for women more clearly into a capitalist market strategy than the discourse on "integrating women into development". It is also based on the same philosophy which attributes poverty to the lack of money, modern technology, education, and capital growth. It does not draw a lesson from available evidence which shows that it was precisely this development, this integration of women into the market economy and into export production, which has destroyed women's control over their independent subsistence base, and eventually increased their poverty. It also does not take into account that this development, as Bina Agarwal has pointed out, means an increased state intervention in women's lives, particularly in the context of population control measures (Agarwal 1988 and Akhter 1986). In many cases it has also led to an increase of violence against women (Mies 1986; Kelkar 1988; and Phongpaichit 1988).

Given this situation, it is now time to ask whether we should continue to use such phrases as "investing in women" and to uncritically adopt such a strategy as that proposed by the World Bank. Would it not be better, as Claude Alvares suggests, to stop this development as soon as possible and allow poor people in general, and poor women in particular, to keep control over their material base of existence and work for their own subsistence instead of working towards propagation of export and capital growth?

The Chipko women have shown that they do not want this modernization, this industry, this development, or this wage labour which they know is possible only at the expense of their water, soil, and forest resources; the basis of their sustenance, life, and culture. They know that the integration of men, and their own resource base, into the money economy will throw them into poverty and dependence. The women of Nahi Kala in the Doon Valley, who fought for the closing of a chalk mine in their area, put it thus, when asked what were the three most important things in life which they wanted to conserve:

Our freedom, forests and food... without any of these we are impoverished. With our own food production we are prosperous. We don't need jobs, either from businessmen or the Government. We have our own livelihood. We even produce crops for sale, like rajma and ginger (1 quintal for Rs 1000 to Rs. 1200). Two quintals of ginger can take care of all our needs (reported by Vandana Shiva 1987).

At the beginning of this Workshop, I think it is important to reflect upon which of the two ways should be pursued: the one proposed by the World Bank and followed by a number of States and NGOs for profit (namely "investing in women"), or the path proposed by the Doon Valley and Chipko women, namely to **strengthen women's control over their subsistence base**; their independence from the market, from external economies, and from external commercial interests? Such a goal is diametrically opposed to the way development and progress is defined by the World Bank, most international organisations, and many NGOs. This is, in Magda Renner's words: "What is technically feasible and economically rewarding to the entrepreneurs today, is propagated as progress and development" (quoted in Shiva 1987,8).

Co-option of Movements and Concepts

Those who are committed to save nature and women from exploitation, degradation, and destruction will have to develop a critical ability to discriminate, *"between international NGOs organised by the World Bank, and other international agencies and NGOs reflecting the voice of the local grassroots movements and their struggles"* (Shiva 1987, 10-11). They have to be aware of the tactics of co-option, which since the beginning of the new social movements (women's movement, ecology movement, grassroots' movements of the poor in the South) have attempted to neutralize and integrate a part of the social protest inherent in these grassroots movements. Co-option here means that those who have been identified by these movements as main agents and profiteers of conditions, that degrade and destroy the poor, have adopted rhetoric, slogans, and even the analysis of these protest movements. All of a sudden, they appear on the stage as great defenders of the poor, the great liberators of women, and great protectors of the environment.

What I have described before, about the changing strategy of the World Bank with regard to Women and Development is not at all new. Already, in 1980, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen analysed the World Bank's policy with regard to the poor in the underdeveloped world, which was already in 1974 called "investment in the poor" by World Bank experts. From 1973 onwards, the President of the World Bank, McNamara, promoted the Small Farmers' Development Programme, ostensibly meant to help the poorest in the Third World. In reality, its aim was to use the poor peasants' assets and labour "productively" (1977) and to give them access to small credits and above all "to draw farmers from subsistence to commercial agriculture" (World Bank 1975, 20; Bennholdt-Thomsen 1988, 58).

Vandana Shiva describes similar tactics of cooption with regard to ecology movements in the Third World, particularly the World Bank's Tropical Forests Action Plan. While the actual goal of TFAP is *"to take forestry away from the control of the communities and make it capital intensive, externally controlled..."* (Shiva 1987, 8), the Bank is organising NGOs that demand the protection of tropical forests and use the same language and demands as the World Bank itself. Thus it complements its "top down" strategy with a "bottom-up" strategy. The tactics of co-option of social movements by the powers that be, has also been analysed and criticized by Rajni Kothari, particularly with regard to the Indian Government (Kothari 1988). But I want to point out one aspect of these tactics which I think has not yet been discussed, i.e. the cooption and semantic twisting of concepts. This is observable; particularly with regard to concepts created or used by the women's movement. Co-option of language is, of course, easier than co-option of people and of organisations, because this always costs money and a certain sharing of power. There are also certain concepts which can very easily be co-opted, because they still fit into the dominant paradigms and do not have inbuilt resistance to this process.

One such concept which is today widely used is the concept of "gender" or the "gender discourse". This concept was first introduced by Anne Oakley in 1972 to differentiate between **sex** as something biologically determined and **gender** as something that is a psychological, social, and cultural definition of maleness and femaleness. This distinction, however, follows the well-known dualistic pattern of patriarchal thought, particularly in the West, namely the division between matter and mind, between nature and culture (Mies 1986, 22) and thus removes women's problems from the sphere of material reality to that of culture, from the sphere of economy, labour, and exploitation to that of education and psychology.

By talking of gender, instead of women and men, the whole edge of women's rebellion is blunted. Not only are women again made invisible in this "gender discourse", but this term is utterly woolly and does not give us a clue about the character of these "gender relations"; or about whether they are violent and exploitative, or egalitarian and reciprocal. The concept "gender" is

again scientifically neutral. Men and women can use it without feeling anything about their own subjective role in these relations. The concept "gender" keeps the problems at a distance from people. It does not contain an appeal, an urge to commit oneself and to be concerned. Therefore, it is ideally suited for all strategies which want to maintain the status quo but which still want to dominate the discourse on the women's question. In the women's movement, particularly in women's studies, we experience today an enormous proliferation of this gender discourse which, in most cases, only amounts to verbalism. At the level of structures of power and of economics, we see very little change. Because it hides the real woman, the real people, and the real men. It also obscures the real struggles of women and of men for the maintenance of their human dignity, their life, and control over the base of their own existence.

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