# Who Might be 'Othered' in Today's Development Debates?

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**Based on the Post-Colonial Concept of 'the Other', who Might be 'Othered' in Today's Development Debates?**

Development has been seen as a liberal economic process of transformation, where a state once backward and primitive would become modern and industrialised. However, it is within this development framework the belief that the female population were 'the other' was able to thrive (Parpart, 1993). Underdeveloped societies are frequently seen to possess deeply entrenched patriarchal values which deem women inferior, "bound by tradition" and therefore "unable or unwilling to enter the modern world" (Parpart, 1993, p. 447). This leads one to ask why the female population is "unwilling" and "unable" and consequently marginalised; as feminist Simone de Beauvoir notes, the 'othering' of women "was not based on an empirical given" (de Beauvoir, 2009, p. 6). Later in her work, de Beauvoir provides a possible explanation for women's social, economic and political 'othering': biological differences. If biological differences do play such a crucial role, it would suggest that the impact of development processes on women – notably decolonisation and Orientalism – are simply the inevitable result of inherent weaknesses (Wittig, 2010). However, because decolonisation and Orientalism impacted less upon the Western woman, the disparities between her and her counterparts in the 'Third World' must be appreciated. Segregating women further could weaken the force with which 'Third World' women fight to remove their prescribed title. However Momsen (2010) saw this further segregation as essential: she considered the argument that all women were 'othered' equally both patronising and overly simplistic. With this in mind, the impact of decolonisation and the influence of Edward Said's Orientalism on theory and policy will be considered. This will be followed by an assessment of whether the Western woman can be 'othered' in the same way as her counterpart in the developing world. Lastly, one will briefly consider the argument that the notion of 'the other' should be removed entirely from all development debates.

**The Context of 'the Other'**

One of the defining features of development in the twentieth century was mass decolonisation. Different colonial histories meant decolonisation processes varied substantially between states, consequently causing fractures in international and local solidarity. China, Russia and their allies, respectively, adopted their own versions of capitalism and communism respectively, and newly-independent states adopted nationalist policies to try and cater for the multitude of sectors suddenly in need of government assistance. This often resulted in economic and social rights taking precedence over civil and political ones. The 'Asian Way' demonstrated this development strategy of "economic modernisation without political modernisation" (Tatsuo, 1999, p. 28) as civil and political rights were considered a luxury only developed liberal democracies could afford. Such economically driven rationale soon showed to be detrimental to the development of the citizenry, as human rights took a backseat and illiteracy and poverty figures escalated. Women were placed in stereotypically female roles such as teaching and light industry, leading them to be economically and politically 'othered' in cultures which were already incredibly patriarchal. Combined, these factors provided the required evidence to support Said's concept, Orientalism.

Orientalism essentially advocated the "advanced/backward binarism" of the late nineteenth century (Said, 1993, p. 145). Decolonised nations were optimistic about their newly acquired independence, however the West was

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simultaneously seeking to retain its title as the "historical agent" responsible for "the modern spirit and civilisation" (Tatsuo, 1999, p. 39). As a result, Asia became 'the other' and *ipso facto* represented Counter-modernity (Tatsuo, 1999), making them "a problem which needed addressing and managing" (Rai, 2004, p. 56). Feminists have since argued that the problem of women as 'the other' was exacerbated by Orientalism, as every non-Western female became "hapless" in the eyes of the West (Rai, 2004, p. 56). The institutionalisation of 'the other' within international bodies like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank not only reinforced the divide between the West and the developing world, but also widened the gap between the Western woman and her foreign equal. This encouraged the likes of Yasuaki (1991), Momsen (2010) and Mohanty (2004) to argue that women of the developed world were not 'the other' in the same way the women of the developing world were. Development theory and policy needed to be culturally specific in order to accurately assess and respond to the different ways women could be 'othered' – otherwise the overly-simplistic and imperialist notions of Orientalism would be echoed throughout development policy and thus hinder progress towards gender equality.

## The 'Othering' of Women

In societies where gender ideas are deeply rooted women face a number of major cognitive challenges when trying to overcome 'othering'. The patriarchal prism is a prime example of a cognitive concept which needs to be addressed and concerns the "prioritisation of public sphere activities over the private realm on the basis of a power relationship between the two" (Marchand & Runyan, 2000, p. 45). In South Africa for example, the patriarchal prism is incredibly hard to shift: despite the high number of women in powerful and authoritative roles, domestic violence against women is extraordinarily high (Rao & Kelleher, 2005). India is facing a similar problem: the leader of the ruling party and several chief ministers are women, as are a number of the nations' business icons. Yet India has also been declared the worst of the G20 countries in which to live as a woman – over 24,000 cases of rape were reported in 2011 and sex trafficking increased by over 120% on the previous year. (Biswas, 2012) These stark differences highlight the need to break down the patriarchal prism and the need to move away from the belief that the public and the private are two entirely separate spheres. As Enloe (1989, p. 185) argued: "the personal is political". Having women in positions of power undoubtedly moves towards the dismantling of patriarchal rule however the techniques which sometimes place women in power – gender mainstreaming, for example – do not necessarily deal with the entrenched beliefs held of women within the private sphere. Clearly the public-private divide needs to be broken down, yet this will be an incredibly long process. Gender mainstreaming can, however, have an impact at removing the title of 'the other' for those women already beyond the private sphere.

According to Kusakabe (2005) gender mainstreaming is:

[A] strategy for making women's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres, ensuring that women benefit equally with men (Kusakabe, 2005, p. 46)

Courtesy of gender mainstreaming, female participation at national government level is one of feminism's biggest successes against 'othering'. The prime ministers of Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are female; and in Rwanda gender quotas mean women hold 49% of the parliamentary seats (Rao & Kelleher, 2005, p. 57). Furthermore, in Thailand, Cambodia and Laos gender mainstreaming is gaining ground at national level politics. Unfortunately, offices at local and provincial levels have yet to feel the positive effects of this political emancipation strategy; something Kusakabe (2005) argues is due to the ambiguity surrounding what actually constitutes gender mainstreaming. This lack of understanding and the resulting lack of both involvement and incidental proof that abandoning traditional roles is worth pursuing means that local women are less likely to commit to local politics. The effect of female absence is that local governments are unable to "show concrete achievements" which "gives a negative impression" to the national government and discourages the pursuit of the method (Kusakabe, 2005, p. 52). The disappearance of opportunities for women to command authority and influence in patriarchal societies leaves them with few other routes through which to begin dismantling their derogatory status as 'the other'. Even in cases where the concept is understood and women are given an identifiable and legitimate platform for political participation, their influence is not guaranteed (Rao & Kelleher, 2003). Allocated positions often command little influence; sometimes because of the simple fact that the individual is a female in a male-dominated environment;

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other times because the positions lack substantial funding or resources. Evidently institutional changes below national level government are required to help shift the title of 'the other' for women with politics.

Women within the Western world are far less 'othered' within politics than their counterparts in the developing world; however whether the same can be said of the workforce is, at least according to Enloe (1989), an area open to debate. Enloe argues that the once Third World notion of the 'double burden' is now a part of Western culture, too. She claims that as middle-class women with families return to work, the notion "factory and farming women had known for generations, was now becoming part of middle-class women's daily lives" (Enloe, 1989, p. 177). But whether Enloe's point is accurate is debatable. Western women returning to work may have reinforced the gap between the Western and the Third World woman, as 'domestic employers' were rarely white British nationals. So, as women in the West began to shed the title of 'the other', the label only stuck tighter to those women who had immigrated to Western societies as part of the global care chains in order to support their families back at home (Momsen, 2010). Seemingly Enloe's argument is not as realistic as it had intended to be. Ester Boserup's concept of the 'gendered division of labour' provides a much more conceivable explanation of the female workforce and supports the idea that the global economy is gender-blind. Essentially her argument claims that women are in a structurally worse position than men because development is economically focused and leaves unpaid, informal and domestic work invisible on the economic market (Momsen, 2010). As well as accounting for the global care chains Enloe sought to explain, Enloe also highlights the lack of accountability in this often poorly paid, female-dominated sector. The United Nations Conference of International Women's Year made a deliberate attempt to ensure women entered formal employment and were treated equally to their counterparts, however women's labour costs remain up to 50% lower than the expected wages of their male equivalents (Waring, 2003), (Elson & Pearson, 1981). Evidently the marginalisation of women in the workforce is still an area worthy of substantial debate in development theory and policy.

Western societies must not, however, assume that all developing nations are as 'backward' as Orientalist 'othering' would suggest (Donnelly, 1999). Likewise, one has to be careful to assess sociohistorical contexts before assuming women's work is devalued; otherwise "beyond sisterhood there are still racism, colonialism and imperialism" (Mohanty, 2004, p. 269). Yasuaki (1991) reconfirms this point and argues that conflict between the West and developing world over what constitutes the right response to female 'othering' is caused by "West-centric perspectives that tend to ignore or marginalise local perspectives" (Yasuaki, 1991, p. 104). Consequently, one may begin to ask whether we should differentiate between the African, Asian, Latin American woman, and so on. In Arabic countries, only 5% of women living in urban areas perform any formal or informal economic activity; meanwhile in Latin America, 25-33% of women are encouraged to move to towns and find jobs, and in parts of sub-Saharan Africa female economic activity occurs mostly in the agricultural sector (Boserup, 2007). Yet this region-based approach has too been criticised for inadequately dealing with the differences between women within the same cultures: "the interests of urban, middle class, educated Egyptian housewives…could surely not be seen as the same as those of their uneducated, poor maids" (Mohanty, 2004, p. 265). The heterogeneity amongst women both between and within regions is evident, highlighting Momsen's view that we that we must not assess development *a priori* on gender alone" (Momsen, 2010, p. 3). 'Othering' experiences vary substantially, so policymakers clearly need to be informed of the differences between both women and cultures.

There are counterarguments to this, which reiterate the challenges faced by those responding to gender issues in development. Women need to feel united against patriarchal society to make any substantial movement towards equality. In continuation, the West cannot react blindly to cultural variations of gender norms but similarly categorising women any further will only reaffirm the status of the Third World woman as 'the other'. Not only will this entrench Orientalist notions of Western women as "the referent point for modern, educated, sexually liberated womanhood" (Parpart, 1993, p. 444), but Third World feminist's fears that they will be "cut off from their own culture" should they work with Western feminists becomes a realistic concern (Momsen, 2010, p. 95). Western analysis often distorts women's multiple realities, reducing "the possibility of coalitions among (usually white) western feminists and working class and feminist women of colour around the world" (Parpart, 1993, p. 444). Asian resistance to Western cultural, ideological and economic hegemony only reiterates this point.

As Hooks notes; "it is a despairing gesture expressive of the belief that solidarity between women is not possible"

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(Hooks, 2010). The West evidently needs to be more educated of women in the Third World to resolve the economic, ideological and cultural binary tensions. Western policymakers would learn that different cultural perceptions of men and women have to be recognised and valued, and that we therefore cannot continue to absentmindedly apply Western standards to non-Western societies (Parpart, 1993). Even with this in mind, this cannot mean human rights violations are permissible. Admittedly the line here, too, is very thin, but "sovereignty, development and traditional conceptions of social order do not absolve…governments from the requirement to implement internationally recognised human rights" (Donnelly, 1999, p. 60). The success stories of women who have begun to alleviate their title of 'the other' in Western society's shows why Western feminists want to cast influence elsewhere. Therefore, just as Western policymakers must not assume Orientalist positions, 'Third World' theorists must recognise the political, economic and cultural benefits Western societies reap in moving towards gender equality.

## Should we use 'the Other' at all?

Several accounting systems have been either proposed or tested to try and overcome idea of 'the other' in the development debate; two examples being the Index of Sustainable Welfare (ISWE) and the United Nations Human Development Index (UNHDI). ISWE places an emphasis on economic sustainability and encourages analysts to move away from the idea that economic growth is the sole measure of all that constitutes development. Yet the index has been criticised, insofar as it focuses heavily on white-collar jobs which are disproportionately found in more developed states and cities where welfare is inevitably better than in rural areas. It also assumes individuals find parts of their work "intrinsically satisfying", which is not always the case in typically 'low end' jobs (Waring, 2003, p. 43). The UNHDI, too, aims to make the individual the level of analysis as economic models failed to do so, however this too has been criticised for collecting too much data to form any significant or universally applicable conclusions (Waring, 2003).

If Western ignorance and Third World resistance withstand and alternative accounting systems are inadequate, perhaps theorists should begin to move away from the idea of 'the other' all together. Most notably, 'the other' puts power into binary terms. For feminists this makes all men powerful and all women inherently weak, which can only make for an ineffectual strategy for combating gendered oppression (Mohanty, 2004). Furthermore, the connotations of 'the other' appear detrimental rather than beneficial to the female fight against victimhood. The title suggests weakness, vulnerability and incapability; all of which are characteristics that will neither increase the likelihood of emancipation nor suit the positions of power feminists have fought for on behalf of women at any level in any culture. Rai (2008) argues that women need to be seen as autonomous, active agents in order for substantial progress to be made in development debates. However others suggest that in cultures where patriarchal notions are firmly entrenched and accepted by women, encouraging women to work can actually make them feel overburdened and make men feel insecure as they fail to maintain their status as the breadwinner (Momsen, 2010). Momsen continues to suggest that "income earning by women does not necessarily lead to social empowerment or greater gender equity" (Momsen, 2010, p. 259). Such ideas can also leave us questioning which men women want to be equal to, opening a whole new area for debate within the development agenda (Hooks, 2010). Ensuring masculine identities are not impeded upon is essential for feminist development thinkers as this would only create a new 'other'.

The egotistical effects of Orientalism fortunately left those who considered the Third World 'the other' criticised for associating such individuals with "all the negative characteristics no longer found in modern, westernised peoples" (Parpart, 1993, p. 454). Hopefully such views will remain part of colonial history rather than shape contemporary development debate. Theory aside, there is little doubt that striking a balance between recognising cultural differences and punishing the violation of widely-recognised human rights is an incredible challenge, particularly when Western feminists see increasing gender equality in their home nations. Policy should not blindly treat women and men equally; naturally occurring differences do exist should be appropriately addressed. The same applies to cultural differences. But 'othering' to the same extent as policymakers of the decolonisation era should not be repeated. 'The other' became a "devastating rhetoric…that beleaguers issues of identity formation" (Suleri, 1993, p. 244). 'Othering' was detrimental to both the lives of those women who were not like 'us' and led to cultural ignorance in Western development discourse; something which would only hinder all individuals concerned. It therefore appears vital to establish solidarity between women which must not be obscured by the need to realise cultural variations, challenging as that may be (Parpart, 1993). As Marchand and Runyan (2000) appropriately argue, women do not

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deserved to be 'othered' by neither the West nor their home country: frequently women are an asset to their country's economy, whether they are from Hong Kong working abroad as domestic workers, an India Chief Minister, or from sub-Saharan Africa working in agriculture.

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