

Gender Planning and Development: Theory, Practice and Training

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In this book Caroline Moser draws on her experience of planning – micro and macro – in developing countries, in ‘The Third World’, to use her language, and then delineates a route, namely gender-planning, and offers it as a useful tool towards the purpose of women’s empowerment.

Aware of the rich and continuously evolving discourse on the subject of women’s position and advancement in the developing countries, Moser takes considerable pains to address the subtle nuances that permeate the terminology. For example, she clarifies the difference between terms such as ‘sex’ and ‘gender’, between ‘woman’ and ‘gender’, between household and family, between strategic and practical needs and between process and technique.

This unpacking of terms, and their histories, especially in Section 2, Part II, is one of the most useful elements of this book and fills an important gap in the literature, especially as the subject and constituency moves from the *cognoscente* to the development functionary.

Moser’s basic proposal is that planning is a technique, an expertise, and that planners need to cross-fertilize with those concerned with, and knowledgeable about, women’s emancipation and empowerment. She offers frameworks, case studies and training modules to illustrate *how*.

She argues that, ultimately, planning is politics – both its content and delivery. Politics is pressure and power, and here is where she brings in women’s organizations, and the women’s movements, to provide the political vehicle for ensuring the

launching pad for her concept of gender planning. This knitting of the movement into a technical framework fills another conventional gap – or chasm – in this kind of technocrafting advice/or literature.

However, Moser’s faith in and enthusiasm for gender planning, ‘This book is the voyage of discovery I have made over the past decade, during which time gender planning has dominated my life’ (xi) leads to awkward – if not incorrect – reviews of ‘history’, for example when locating the birth of ‘WID’, which she describes as follows: ‘The term “women in development” was coined in the early 1970s by the Women’s Committee of the Washington, DC, Chapter of the Society for International Development’ (2), or in her description or assumptions about shifts ‘in policy approach’ in the developing countries – ‘from “welfare” to “equity” then from “anti-poverty” to “efficiency”, and finally to “empowerment” . . . moving from modernisation policies of accelerated growth, through basic needs strategies associated with redistribution to the more recent structural adjustment policies’ (55) – and now the Moser formula?

These notions of time-set, Northern idea (or wisdom) led wagons to peace and justice, is no more feminist currency – North or South. It is embarrassingly like colonial discourse especially staking claim to ideas, locating birth, in specific places and people.

Moser’s work is ‘based on the premise that the major issue is one of subordination and inequality, its purpose is that women through empowerment achieve equality and equity with men in society’ (p. 4). However, today’s discourse on women and development would move away from making equality with men the goal, even if the route used is women’s empowerment, ‘Emancipation’ and its flip-side, namely the ‘victim’ connotation, is also out.

Chaotic as the alternative to a single 'mantra' or schema might be, today's mood and mode – and wisdom – is to give space to the myriads of energetic, brilliant, self-generated changes that are bursting on to the development landscape. It is to watch and maybe offer wide-spread solidarity to these quests. It is to crack even the subtlest of veiled but hard bureaucracies. It is to place the initiative in civic society.

Moser distances herself from feminist research, saying at one point when she describes planning as a technique: 'feminist academic research . . . has not been concerned to identify how such complexities might be simplified into methodological tools' (5). The fact of the matter is that Feminist research challenges the technology of planning, its claim to complexity. Feminist advice emphasizes listening and drawing in, not training and emancipating.

Another question: is the issue of emancipation and empowerment of women only a 'Third World' issue? This whole notion, which alas pervades most of the centres of development in the North – that 'development' (and within it uncovering the missing veiled woman) is the business exclusively of the South – is puzzling, if not unacceptable. Growth and development – however one wants to distinguish between them – is everybody's business. Women are missing, uncounted, unheard and sequentially fed (i.e. eating last and least) or not feeding themselves, everywhere. Women of the North (in the USA) are struggling even for the right to abort and in Japan for the pill and IUD – so?

Moser does refer to these commonalities, even quotes herself 'women in the North only too easily think that women in the South have to catch up. Writing in 1989, I provocatively stated, "It may be that women in the UK can learn much from their better organized sisters in the Third World, who long ago learnt the limitations of relying on the State to reduce their dependence on

men"' (210). But these sensibilities are embedded only in the corners of her main programme. The constituency is clearly the 'Third World' and its 'planners'; its project managers (trainers) all needing training for their empowerment.

Today's discourse would talk of making space for women's leadership. Even though Moser does bring in the distinctions between, and progress from, object to subject and subject to agency, the latest evaluations in understanding, the concept of leadership, learning from the significance of women's' lives, is missing from the book.

Today, human resource development and training is seen as a panacea for all inadequacies and injustices by the funding and government community, and there is a felt need for manuals and for training modules. But in fact training is seen by the women's movement as not only inappropriate but an obnoxious intrusion into the personal capabilities of women, especially of the poor women of the South, to handle gender relations and the other spheres of life.

Today many countries – such as India, the Philippines, Cote d'Ivoire – are engaged in political restructuring, for example strengthening local self-government with ensured participation of women. In India, one-third of the elected posts are reserved for women, ushering in 1 million women in politics by the end of 1994. It would certainly transform if not transcend gender planning of the Moser kind.

Moser disapproves of the 'adding-on' approach of WID, and proposes 'building-in' through her Gender Planning approach. But what feminists in Development are proposing is 'driving-over'. Driving-over is not the 'alternative' approach or 'Exit' as Moser calls it. It is driving-over, implying a dismantling, a bringing down of existing systems, while simultaneously overriding it with the groundswell of women's leadership.

The danger is that books such as Moser's will be useful in supporting this fashion among the funders, for bringing in 'gender' – and may add one more round of enforced training pressure from above against which the women's movement is strug-

gling. Moser's book, by catering to the one constituency goes contrary to the aspiration of those whom Moser hopes to serve.

Devaki Jain

Postmodern Legal Feminism

Mary Joe Frug

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Each of the words in the title of this book suggests a field of scholarship wide ranging in thought, specialist in nature and sophisticated in detail. This collection of essays, written over a number of years by the late Professor Mary Joe Frug and edited and published posthumously, brings each of these areas of study together, however, in a rigorous and provocative way. Throughout, Frug's style is wonderful. 'Style is important in postmodern work' (126) she reminds minds us, and although she confesses to some 'performance anxiety' about engaging with that style, there is no evidence of her lack of fluency with it. Both this style and her ideas are intensely personal and engaging, which ultimately makes this collection an inspiring read.

I must admit that I approached this book with both excitement and ambivalence, on the one hand agreeing with Deborah Rhode's statement 'The revolution will not be made with slogans from Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*' (1990: 621), while on the other feeling that a critical analysis of language, discourse and ideas could be invaluable to that same revolution. I hoped that Frug would assist me in resolving some of that ambivalence.

Frug seems to be aware of this potential scepticism in her readers and the book begins with her case for bringing together postmodernism

and feminism in the study of law. Her postmodern feminist analysis, informed as it is by 'the particular blend of psychoanalysis, linguistics and philosophy which is concerned with sexual difference' (114) shows successfully that law is a crucial site for postmodern deconstruction and resistance; that it is 'useful' to 'analyze the gender of legal discourse' (113). To demonstrate that there is both theoretical and political value in a 'marriage' between feminism and postmodernism, she uses as her first example the restrictive framework of what has become known as the 'equality/difference debate'.

Specifically, Frug challenges the dualistic nature of the debate which she shows limits much feminist discourse, including analysis of legal decisions and readings of Carol Gilligan's *In A Different Voice*. She offers multiple readings of these texts, and rather than accept essentializing or universal categories of 'woman', she states that feminists must 'deliberately invoke differences among women' (18). Only then can we 'free ourselves from the belief that our selves are constructed by our sexual identities' (107).

Frug then is faced with answering claims of political paralysis seen by many commentators as inherent in a postmodern analysis of law. If we deconstruct away the category 'woman', the argument goes, we are left with no unifying collectivity from which to argue that gender oppression exists, and therefore the legal arena can be of no assistance in locating or eliminating it. Frug deals with this criticism by