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# Introduction

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Over the last decades, many scholars have tried to depict the gender perspective within development and foreign aid policies. The debates have ranged from the ‘Women-In-Development’ (WID) perspective, with its attempts at placing women on the agenda in international development, over the ‘Gender-And-Development’ (GAD) perspective, highlighting gender power asymmetries, to the ‘gender mainstreaming’ strategy, which aims to assess the gender implications of any given policy or policy proposal. This special issue critically reviews the current gender and development strategies – particularly gender mainstreaming. It features four articles and one essay that examine the ways in which gender and development strategies have been translated *from the formulation of policy into institutionalised practice*. One of the key questions dealt with in the articles is how well discourses and ideas of gender equality travel between different institutional and geographical

contexts. The articles discuss the implications of processes of translation in terms of their content. They question whether the ideologies that inform the strategies might disappear in the process of institutionalisation, and if they have become 'empty signifiers' in both theory and practice.

The point of departure is the impact of a heightened focus on gender mainstreaming as a global gender equality strategy in international development, which derived from the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. Now, more than 15 years later, the authors of this special issue attempt to assess how gender mainstreaming has fulfilled its *transformative objectives* – if at all. They do so in a somewhat polarised context, in which two different approaches – the 'integrationist' and the 'agenda-setting' – compete for prevalence. While the integrationist approach aims at *integrating* gender into existing development agendas, thereby achieving positive changes incrementally, the agenda-setting approach seeks to *fundamentally change* the priorities of development agendas and ensure transformation. The articles of this special issue analyse these different approaches in specific geographical and institutional contexts, and debate whether they have led to 'empowerment' or 'depolitisation'. Moreover, they address whether or not gender mainstreaming leads to 'participatory/democratic' and/or 'bureaucratic/technical' developments.

The articles focus on both *discursive* and *institutional* perspectives of gender mainstreaming. The theoretical debates around gender and development discourses have mainly been informed by postcolonial and deconstructivist critiques of the universalist aspirations in the global feminist movement, the Western conceptualisation of 'gender' and the evolutionary underpinnings of 'development'. Taking this critical legacy as a point of departure one of the articles questions notions of gender equality and the stereotypical gendered and racialised

discursive representations of gender and development in a donor agency (Arnfred). Inspired by the theoretical perspectives of the two gender mainstreaming approaches, another article focuses on EU gender mainstreaming discourses (Debusscher). The common denominator of these articles is their emphasis on the instrumentalisation of gender mainstreaming and gender equality at the donor level.

Theoretical debates around the concept of gender mainstreaming and its institutionalisation are inspired by work on gender(ed) institutions and the role of bureaucracies including the so-called 'femocrats' as agents of change in processes of translation, that is in the interaction between structures and actors. Two of the articles deal with these perspectives (Joseph, Gouws & Parpart and Højlund Madsen). On the one hand the articles analyse the ways in which gender mainstreaming is shaped by the different actors that implement the strategy (i.e. the donor community, the national gender machineries and the women's movements) and ask how well equipped these institutions are in terms of dealing with the strategy. On the other hand the articles bring the debate forward by developing a new gender mainstreaming model for addressing the discriminatory structures within the institutional set-up.

More specifically, in the first article, *A Transformative Approach to Gender Mainstreaming: Changing the Deep Structure of Organizations*, Trunette Joseph, Amanda Gouws and Jane Parpart analyse the United Nations Development Programme Country Office in South Africa and its gender mainstreaming efforts at the level of discourses, policies and implementation. Through this empirical analysis important theoretical insights and innovations are drawn: the authors argue that the masculinised deep structures of organisations often work as a hindrance for gender mainstreaming strategies as it fails to contribute the human and financial resources necessary for imple-

menting the strategy properly, for example. Thus the authors find both ‘entrenched opposition’ and the ‘absence of a organisational transformation process’ within the masculinised structures which leads to the gap between policy and practice. In order to obtain transformative results the institutional cultures must be addressed, and Joseph, Gouws and Parpart suggest using a Transforming Gender Mainstreaming Model as a tool to ‘rethink the mainstream’.

In her article *Getting the Institutions Right for Gender Mainstreaming* Diana Højlund Madsen analyses gender mainstreaming efforts in another national context, namely the Ghanaian. By referring to the work of Rai, the article analyses the location, mandate and resources as well as the links between the national gender machineries and the gender desk officers in the Ghanaian context. Højlund Madsen argues in favour of a strengthened focus on the institutional perspectives of gender mainstreaming processes; the institutional dimension is crucial in the adoption of gender mainstreaming strategies as well as in the leap from policy to practice. Also in the Ghanaian context, gender mainstreaming efforts have been characterised by an integrationist approach and they have consequently not led to transformative results in terms of changing prevalent gender relations and asymmetries. Thus, the strategy has been used as a rhetorical and not an institutional device, and the author concludes that ‘getting the institutions right’ is still a challenge.

The third article is entitled *Promoting Gender Equality in EU Development Aid: From Transformative Policy to Transformative Practice?* In this article, Petra Debusscher analyses the development aid policies of the European Commission; the Commission applies a twin-track strategy which combines specific funds for women’s empowerment with gender mainstreaming. Debusscher argues that the strategy privi-

leges EU interests and expert-bureaucratic concerns instead of addressing the needs of the poorest developing countries. Three problems are particularly highlighted by the author: instrumentalisation of gender equality to achieve other goals, framing gender equality as women’s responsibility, and lack of consultation of regional civil society. Also in this article, the conclusion is pessimistic regarding the implementation of gender mainstreaming strategies: the integrationist approach to gender mainstreaming prevails and there is a lack of transformative potential which hinders actual change. There seems to be a lack of political will for a more comprehensive implementation of gender equality measures in development aid policies.

The last article of this special issue, *Women, Men and Gender Equality in Development Aid – Trajectories, Contestations*, by Signe Arnfred, discusses different notions of gender equality as they are defined by donors, women’s organisations and post-colonial feminists as well as the images of women in development contexts. The Beijing Platform for Action has served as a starting point for developing a universalised language regarding gender and development. Focusing on the development from 2000 onwards, the author argues that different understandings of gender equality nevertheless exist among donor agencies and women’s organisations at all levels. Furthermore, Arnfred finds that women are depicted in contradictory ways. The unified language of the Beijing Platform for Action focuses on economic entrepreneurship and depicts women as being strong and active, disregarding the importance of care and motherwork. This discourse coexists with colonial feminism which focuses on women as oppressed, poor and in need of development as a means of modernising.

In the essay *Gender Mainstreaming: Failings in implementation*, Carolyn Hannan argues that the gender mainstreaming strategy has not failed; it has simply not

been adequately implemented yet. Limited understandings of the strategy contribute to the lack of implementation, and Hannan identifies a number of common misperceptions: gender mainstreaming should involve both women and men; it should not exclude other gender equality strategies; its implementation should always be context-specific and involve local actors; it should ensure substantive gender equality work and not limit itself to focusing on gender balance in staffing; it should not be considered a separate measure but instead be integral to the work of all sectors; and a visible leadership should be prioritised along with effective accountability mechanisms. The author calls for a continued commitment from the United Nations in terms of leadership, support, monitoring and role model practices.

In sum, the articles of this special issue analyse and assess gender mainstreaming strategies in a development perspective by looking at different contexts, i.e. particular national settings in Africa, namely South Africa and Ghana, as well as the European level and the development policies of the European Commission. Common to the empirical analyses of the articles is the attention paid to the gap between policy and practice in gender mainstreaming efforts, the importance of organisational and institutional structures as well as the discussion of differences between integrationist and agenda-setting models of gender mainstreaming.

Finally the special issue contains a debate piece as well as a number of book reviews. In *Perspectives on International Adoption from South Korea*, Maj Eun Herløw addresses the complex issue of international adoption and return adoptees. The author

discusses both international and individual dilemmas related to adoption processes. International adoption practices, which have been profitable for countries like Korea, are to a certain extent considered legitimate in times of economic crisis but less so in times of prosperity. At the individual level, adoptees growing up in Western families have been deprived of half of their life story, namely the one related to their place of birth. Facilitated by new international communities, an increasing number of adoptees return to Korea in search for lost aspects of their identity and Herløw explains how they develop a social strategy of interaction in order to adapt to the situation in which they find themselves.

The images in this issue are from the series *Maputo Diary* by the Danish artist and documentary film director Ditte Haarløv Johnsen (b. 1977) who grew up in Maputo, Mozambique. The series of intimate and personal images was taken between 2000 and 2010 and portrays family and friends in a narrative that interlinks with Haarløv Johnsen's own story and wish to belong in the Maputo life. It is a story about Antonieta who works as a prostitute, Marcelo who is in jail and 'The Sisters' – a group of young homosexuals Haarløv Johnsen met on the street back in 2000. Her pictures depict daily life for people, for whom death is omnipresent and life is lived in the present to the extreme. Alongside the photographic series Haarløv Johnsen has also produced a documentary film about *The Sisters*.

It is our hope that researchers as well as practitioners will find inspiration for their work on gender and development in this special issue.