Constructing Gender Across Cultural Space:

Japan's International Development Programs

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ABSTRACT

The central question in this research concerns how development discourse within the Japanese

International Co-operation Agency (JICA) constructs women and gender across geographical regions. In-

depth interviews, documents and videos inform this analysis. Findings describing programs implemented

by JICA in East Asia, South Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East suggest that those areas

perceived as more culturally distant, particularly those aligned with Islamic communities, are more likely

to focus on women's sexuality and to consider women as passive victims than those in more culturally

proximate areas.

Gender has become a particularly contentious arena within the field of development, as institutions and

communities struggle over the nature of representation, the construction of social problems, and the

appropriation of resources directed toward development intervention. This study explores the construction

of women within the context of gender issues engaged through global development programs funded by

the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA). Specifically, when JICA's development projects

and programs are conceptualized and described, how are women's roles and needs framed within the development process? And, how do gender issues differ across the region within which the development intervention is implemented? This case study of JICA, as a wealthy bilateral donor, allows an exploration of Orientalist constructions that complicates assumptions situating global power solely within western territories, and considers constructions of gender within contexts differentiated according to cultural proximity (Straubhaar, 1991).

The central concepts in this work include attention to issues of development and gender within the context of Japanese development intervention. Specifically, development is conceptualized as a form of institutional discourse, communicating assumptions about problems, communities and solutions (Wilkins & Mody, 2001). For the purpose of this research project, gender is understood as a social construct interpreted and engaged within organizational settings, connected with considerations of race, ethnicity and other markers of cultural difference through the policies and practices of development institutions.

Development and Gender

The underlying framework for this research assumes that development operates as an institutional discourse that articulates knowledge about women and gender through intervention (Crush, 1995; Escobar, 1995). This discourse extends beyond descriptions of communities and conditions, establishing an expertise that is created within and legitimated by development agencies (Hegde, 1996; Moore, 1995). The articulation of social problems involves defining problematic conditions and identifying groups as holding those conditions in a way that allows an organization to pose strategies and programs deemed as legitimate solutions (Schˆn, 1979). As critical actors guiding social intervention, donor institutions need to be examined given the tremendous power their rhetoric and practices wield in shaping global debates and influencing recipient nations and communities (Wilkins, 2000a).

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The notion of development discourse as knowledge that enables powerful groups to establish authority and justify intervention is rooted in Said's theoretical work (1978). His discussion of Orientalism has been critical in drawing attention to the structural and historical dynamics that guide and constrain ideological domination, through media, military, education, as well as development institutions. Said shifts his framework, from one in which western European nations engage in Orientalism, to the importance of recognizing the role of the US as a dominant power in the current global context. I would like to extend this argument further, suggesting that what matters is not necessarily the territorial place, but instead the connection to resources that matters in this power struggle (Shah & Wilkins, 2004). Said's articulation of the role of power in the process of cultural production holds value across historical contexts (Park & Wilkins, 2004; Shome, 1996). In this work I argue two complementary positions: first, that regional differences of west vs. east need to be reconfigured, so as to recognize Japan's role within this context, as contributing toward its own Orientalist vision of the so-called "Middle East"; and second, that notions of patriarchy should be integrated within this broader understanding of cultural imperialism (Midgely, 1998).

Feminist scholarship draws our attention to gender as a social construct, negotiated within organizational and social contexts. Feminist theories of organizational dynamics encourage analyses of gender domination and oppression through examining discourses that define women's issues and potential solutions (Buzzanell, 1994; Cal·s & Smircich, 1996). Understanding women's development issues as part of broader gender dynamics illustrates a shift from the Women in Development (WID) literature more prominent in the 1970s toward issues of "gender and development" (GAD; Einsiedel, 1996; Goetz, 1997; Parpart, 1995; Wilkins, 1999).

Building on a GAD perspective, critical feminist approaches to development respect diversity across communities of women (Luthra, 1996; Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996), within an attempt to build a collective identity as an imagined community of participants seeking to improve women's status

(Cardinal, Costigan, & Heffernan, 1994; Steeves, 1993). Within this global feminist approach, gendered practices and outcomes within the development industry need to be considered within broader experiences of oppression, connected with various conditions of marginality, such as race, ethnicity and class (Chua, et al., 2000; Mohanty, 1991a, 1991b. "Third world women" tend to be constructed in monolithic terms as generic others, as passive, traditional, and victimized (Hegde, 1996, 1998; Shome, 1996). Moreover, women's roles tend to be conceived through their bodies, as motherly nurturers or sexual temptresses (Cal·s & Smircich, 1996; Chua et al., 2000; Cloud, 2003; McLaughlin, 2003; Meyer & Prugl, 1999; Mohanty, 1991b; Rodriguez, 2001; Wilkins, 1999).

Ideological critiques of this problematic representation of women tend to situate this power of cultural production in the territorial "West" (Cal·s & Smircich, 1996; Harcourt & Escobar, 2002; Hegde, 1998; Shome, 1996). Western feminist theory itself, based on the experiences of privileged white, heterosexual, middle-class western women, becomes targeted in this critique (Cal·s & Smircich, 1996; Mohanty, 1991b). Some (Cal·s & Smircich, 1996; Hegde, 1998) suggest that we reach beyond deconstructing western texts alone, in order to demonstrate the influence of global dynamics and to articulate the voices of women experiencing oppression. Several critical studies have engaged in this latter step: some describe the experiences of women dairy farmers in India, framing their actions as active and not passive responses (Papa et al., 2000; Shefner-Rogers et al., 1998). These explorations of women's experiences demonstrate their complexity, as women engage development processes actively within their communities, while these processes also work to preserve male dominance (Hegde, 1996).

While we are beginning to see more literature addressing the positions and perspectives of marginalized groups, we still need to engage in critique of those institutions dominating development practices. This critique may help us to understand how it can be that although over time more resources have been directed toward women and gender issues, particularly since the 1995 Beijing Conference, gender inequalities in terms of political rights, economic resources, participation, and access to health and other

resources, persist (World Bank, 2002). Despite the increased attention to gender issues and the proliferation of women's organizations and other sympathetic NGOs, programs advocating gender concerns stagnate within what Staudt (1997) refers to as a "bureaucratic mire," in which institutional policies and cultures constrain attempts to reposition and to reframe development priorities and funding.

Japanese Development Intervention

These issues of development and gender are explored within the context of the Japanese International Co-operation Agency (JICA). While recently many bilateral and multilateral development agencies in the West have begun to "mainstream" women's issues, thereby disintegrating their visibility through their integration into other programs (Wilkins, 2000b), JICA has been expanding its contributions to development programs addressing gender issues (JICA, 2000). Since the UN Beijing Conference for Women in 1995, JICA has increased its attention to WID through its own allocations, sponsorship of UN programs, and collaboration with other bilateral donors, such as USAID (MOFA, 2002a; OECD, 1999). While Gender/WID funding prior to 1995 constituted less than 10 percent of overall spending (since 1991 when this was first measured), this proportion has increased, toward approximately 15 percent in recent years (JICA, 2002d). Given JICA's prominence in the development industry, an examination of its approach is critical to our understanding of development programs overall devoted to improving women's conditions.

JICA's programs are of interest for two central reasons. First, until recently JICA has been the largest bilateral donor in the world, but has been largely neglected in the development literature published in the English language. Japan's historical experience as a donor chronicles a transformation from being a post-WWII recipient to dominating the industry as a bilateral donor. In some ways, Japanese development approaches still recognize aid as compensation for past colonial and military experience, such as the exploitation of "comfort women" in Asia. Japan's emergence as a global economic leader meant

increasing attention to its role as a global actor in the field of development (Fukushima, 1999). By the

1990s, Japan's contributions accounted for almost one-quarter of all bilateral aid. Although Japan's

overall allocation may have dropped relative to its previous contributions (OECD, 2003), its ODA is still

quite high relative to most other bilateral donors. Drawing attention to Japan's prominence helps to

establish the lack of validity of east/west and north/south distinctions.

This argument leads to the second reason then why it is important to foreground Japan's role within the

development industry: recognizing Japan's development work complicates theoretical notions of east and

west, underscoring a need to reconfigure our frameworks into divisions across power, and access to

resources (Shah & Wilkins, 2004). First-third world distinctions typically envision the first world in terms

of wealthy, northern, western nations, positioning the US as the central actor orchestrating development

policy and practice. It is important to acknowledge Japan and other communities not only in terms of their

economic power, but also in terms of the different perspectives they bring to development practice

(Nederveen Pieterse, 2001).

Research Approach

This research explores institutional discourse on women and gender through a case study of JICA. Similar

to other post-structuralist analyses of development discourse (Escobar, 1995), this approach offers an

analysis of language in organizational contexts as an illustration of power struggles that privilege some

while marginalizing other perspectives (Buzzanell, 1994). The methodological framework explores

institutional discourse through engaging a "critical realist" approach (Deacon, Pickering, Golding &

Murdock, 1999), recognizing both the value of interpretive scholarship that focuses on the construction of

social reality, along with the importance of broader structural circumstances that constrain and are shaped

by these interpretations. The critical realist approach assumes a variety of methodological approaches

contribute to an interdisciplinary understanding of development as an institutional practice, thus

grounding interpretative approaches to organizational communication within the political and economic contexts in which development projects are produced.

In this study, I focus on JICA programs that address women's and gender issues. In order to learn about these projects, I personally interviewed 39 JICA staff and consultants in-depth, and reviewed roughly 200 official reports and 5 videotapes. Informants were selected through a snowball sampling procedure, initiated through direct contacts with JICA directors in Washington DC and in Tokyo headquarters offices. In the course of the interviews, informants were asked open-ended questions following a set schedule concerning their professional histories; their current professional roles; the purpose of their organizational division; women and gender projects supported by JICA; the organizational climate for and history of conceiving, implementing and evaluating these projects; and their justifications for implementing projects addressing issues of women and gender.

With informants' explicit permission, all interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. Confidentiality was assured each participant. All informants were given a choice regarding the language of the interview; only three requested that the interview be conducted in Japanese, which was facilitated through a hired interpreter. Those documents that were in Japanese were translated and/or summarized by hired translators. It should be recognized that substantive meanings might be misconstrued through the process of translation; reviewing multiple texts in different languages on similar topics may have helped to circumvent this concern. In addition to interviews, written documents and videos were reviewed. Informants were asked to suggest documents or videos they thought reflected their work. I also used an electronic database within the JICA library system to identify reports describing projects concerning women or gender.

Analyses followed a grounded theory approach to coding, exploring the "logic of the narrative" (Deacon et al., 1999, p. 303) for consistencies and contradictions within and across transcribed interviews,

documents, and videos. Analyses moved inductively toward recurring themes (Jensen, 2002), concerning

cultural proximity of regions, types of programs implemented, constructed roles for women, and

understanding of gender within the development process.

Situating Women and Gender Development Programs in Regional Contexts

In this section, I explore how women and gender are constructed across cultural space within discussions

of programs implemented in geographical regions. Japan's bilateral Overseas Development Assistance

(ODA), including technical cooperation projects, expert dispatch, training, loans, and more, focuses

mostly on the Asian region (46.5 %). Given Japan's history of military conquest and attempts toward

regional appeasement, its ODA in Asia reflects a more reactive than proactive approach, in an attempt to

avoid appearing interventionist in the affairs of regional neighbors (Wilkins, 2003). Other regions attract

less funding, directed toward Africa (12.1 %), Latin America (10.8 %), and the Middle East (7.8 %). Less

than five percent of funds are directed toward Oceania, Europe and other locations, while about 18

percent supports the UN and other global organizations (JICA, 1999). Given the prominence of Asia in

this funding scheme, I separate South from East Asia. Because Oceania and Europe attract

proportionately few resources in overall ODA or toward women's issues, these regions are excluded from

analysis.

This analysis then focuses on women and gender development programs implemented in the regions of

East Asia, South Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. These specified regions correspond

loosely with the cultural spaces mapped out through official and informal discourse within JICA. Within

subsequent discussions of each region, I characterize constructions of the region's cultural proximity to

Japan, the types of programs for women and gender implemented, the roles attributed to women, and

relative consideration of gender within development processes.

East Asia

The assumption that women in East Asia fare better than women in many other regions guides descriptions of projects in this region. The cultural proximity of the region colors the perceptions of these communities as well as the development activities directed toward it. While there are clear historical conditions that account for the dominance of this region in Japanese ODA funding, development professionals appear to prefer to work in East Asia. As one informant explained, most of the experts sent on development missions would rather work in this region, "because they don't want to go to Africa or Central America, or Central Asia. In Southeast Asian countries, people are nice, look like Japanese people, food is good, clothes, they don't have to learn French or Spanish." Another development professional offered the justification that "in a way we do understand more of Asian culture, which is closer and the same."

Recent discussions suggest that in this region women's living standards are improving, given high rates of education, literacy, and employment, and low rates of fertility and infant mortality (JICA, 2002a, B-1, B-3). When women's issues are recognized within the region, they tend to foreground economic concerns related to training. One recent project, initiated in 2001, centers on training Asian women to become entrepreneurs, in order to achieve economic independence (YWACN, 2002). Through these sessions, women are encouraged to start businesses, particularly in babysitting and caretaking services, food and beverage services, clothing and retail sales (JICA, 2001; YWACN, 2002).

Another prominent training program was established through the TESDA vocational training center in the Philippines. The magnitude of this program would not have been quite as immense without the high level of political support from the Japanese Prime Minister, who promised support for a women's center during a speech in the Philippines in 1994. His political clout made this case "very, very exceptional." Even though various politicians have cycled through the position of Prime Minister, this project has continued

to receive support and be implemented with "unusual speed." This "unusual" project gained support

through the advocacy of both Philippine and Japanese politicians, building on the historical momentum of

the 1995 Beijing conference, responding to the issue of wartime comfort women (MOFA, 2002b).

Although this project may have taken on gender and development issues as it emerged through

implementation, initially strains of more traditional WID approaches guided these efforts. An early study

report on the construction of this national vocational training center begins with an explanation of its

focus on women, who "have a special role in regard to pregnancy, childbirth and lactation to rear the next

generation" (JICA, 1996a, p. 1). More recent documents concerning the regional training offered in this

center clearly attempt to position its work within a gender and development framework, recognizing the

need to integrate gender issues into technical vocational education (TESDA, 2001, p. 1).

These more recent, more publicly recognized projects tend to focus on women's active participation in the

economic sphere. There are still some remnants of constructing women through their more passive roles

as reproducers, through attention to family planning and maternal-child health issues in the region. These

projects connect women's nurturing roles to "traditional" beliefs that are seen as inhibiting healthy

behaviors: in one video's opening narrative, the narrator explains that "in the Philippines, pregnant

women still resort to superstitious beliefs and old customs. In some areas, though health services are

available, some women still do not frequent them. Due to lack of knowledge on the importance of

prenatal care. … poor health [results] among mothers and babies." However, these types of constructions

of women are relatively few compared to attention to women's more active economic roles in East Asia.

Recognition of gender issues does figure prominently in more recent discussions of development projects

in this region. In Indonesia, rural development programs attend to topics, such as the gendered division of

labor, in gathering water and farming (GLM, 1995). Although this recognition of gender differences does

distinguish this approach from others that focus on women with little attention to power differences

within society, this knowledge is seen as a tool toward achieving more effective and efficient

development projects. Another project in Indonesia, co-sponsored with the Canadian International

Development Agency (CIDA), attempts to generate and interpret data disaggregated by gender to

facilitate governmental planning. According to one expert, the project intended to make "gender problems

… visible with statistics." With this effort we see justifications both in terms of the morality of gender

equality and of the effectiveness of development projects: "Gender equality and gender mainstreaming

are important for ensuring human rights and the effectiveness of national and local developments" (JICA,

2002b, p. 6). Considered by some a "frontier, challenging" project, this work is expected to inform future

efforts in Cambodia and elsewhere.

South Asia

Although general statistics tend to conflate the many diverse communities within a broad category

referring to "Asian" projects, official documents explaining JICA approaches and projects separate South

Asia from the other geographic areas. This distinction is particularly important when considering gender

issues, given the divergent expectations Japanese development professionals appear to have regarding

these different cultural spaces. While WID issues appear to be less recognized in regional plans in East

Asia, they are articulated much more prominently here (JICA, 2002a, B-4), particularly in discussions of

Bangladesh, India, and Nepal. As one informant explained, "South Asia" is perceived as distinct in the

minds of the development professionals: "if you go across [the] Iraqi mountains to India, Bangladesh,

from our mind they are not part of us, they are different, [a] different culture. So it is easier for Japanese

to think about women's equality there because they are poor. It is easier, especially for Japanese men to

think about gender issues, especially in Pakistan, and Afghanistan. [There are] no problems about talking

about women in Afghanistan."

Afghanistan has attracted a great deal of attention recently as a place warranting investment in women's

development programs. According to a recent report from the Gender Equality Bureau (2002), an

advisory council on assistance to Women in Afghanistan has been established to help create programs to assist in the reconstruction of Afghanistan with special consideration of women's needs. Unlike other JICA "peace-building" programs in east Timor, Cambodia and Kosovo, projects in Afghanistan explicitly address women's issues.

Unlike the women in East Asia, women in South Asia are described as victims of domestic abuse, trafficking and honor crimes, as suffering from a lack of legal rights, social status, education and health status. Women in this region are constructed as weak and vulnerable, and thus requiring external assistance in resisting patriarchy and surviving physical violence. When asked why it would be important to help women in Afghanistan, one informant replied: "Isn't it obvious? All the women are wearing this burka." Clothing thus becomes indicative of "traditional" status, particularly in Afghanistan, where, according to another JICA professional, "women's situation is very bad." A female informant explains that Japanese men are more likely to recognize gender discrimination in "countries like Pakistan," similar to "Arabic countries or African countries ... [where] the development of women is poor." These assumptions about cultural norms as constraining women's empowerment resonate within other projects as well.

While the female JICA staff tend to justify these efforts as integral to addressing gender issues more broadly, one male informant explained the importance of including women in a silk worm cultivation project as a way to improve efficiency: when JICA initially attempted to work with the men, they "refused" and "complained a lot," whereas the women appeared to be more "motivated." This particular project was also packaged into a recent video describing Japanese efforts to introduce new techniques for silk sera cultures to rural residents in order to generate income. Although women are explicitly included in training efforts, visually they are situated in background, passive positions, watching male farmers and listening to male experts. The explanation for focusing on women given in this video begins by confirming but not critiquing the practice of women not working outside the home after marriage.

Teaching women to raise silk worms within their homes offers them a way to "earn money" and "improve status" without shifting the balance of power within the household or community. Questions about how women and men share responsibility for making and sharing profits are not engaged, although the profitability of the enterprise, confirmed vocally by Nepalese men in the video, appears to be perceived as the central motivating factor of this intervention.

Although most of the projects in this region may focus on women's more passive roles, more recent recognition of gender concerns has become more prominent in rural development, agriculture and forestry projects. In a watershed conservation project in Nepal, the ultimate goal, according to one informant, is "poverty reduction," but to achieve this "we need the participation of women." In Pakistan, JICA supported the establishment of a National Training and Resource Center for Women in Development (NTRC), designed to promote "gender mainstreaming into the socio-economic development process" (Ikeda-Larhed, 1995, p. 1). This discussion distinguishes development issues of equality and human rights from those of expediency, while critiquing WID as reinforcing women's existing roles and favoring a more holistic GAD approach (JICA, 1996b, p. ix). In her summary of the situation, this consultant points to patriarchal conditions within Pakistan, such as the practice of confining women to their homes, as sustaining "gender discrimination against women" (Ikeda-Larhed, 1997, p. 3), which impedes the "national development" process (p. v). Within the region gender inequities tend to be blamed on "Islamic" culture. This reference to Islam will concern us again in discussions of development projects in Africa and the Middle East.

Latin America

The cultural proximity of Latin America is less obvious. While geographically distant, development professionals perceive some intermediary connections with Japanese immigrants in the region. While

overall emphases target economic growth, poverty, democracy, the environment, and natural disasters, here too we find programs targeting descendents of Japanese immigrants (JICA, 2002a, B-6, B-7).

In most written descriptions of this region, WID projects are not emphasized. Recent documents specifically focusing on JICA's gender programs articulate these concerns in South and Central America as those pertaining to minority and ethnic groups, poverty and inequity, women's participation, eradication of domestic violence, education, literacy, employment, health, fertility and contraception.

Through interviews, projects within this region addressing women and gender concerns were highlighted. Although JICA has addressed a variety of concerns, from rural development to health and nutrition in Guatemala, its emphasis here has been on women's education. JICA's attention to the issue of female participation in formal educational structures needs to be understood within the context of the Common Agenda established between the US and Japan, signaling primary education within Guatemala as a central concern. Since the mid 1990s, USAID, JICA, UNDP and other donors have collaborated on educational programs for girls and women in this country. JICA's contribution toward this larger effort has been to send experts and volunteers, build schools, and train educational administrators (JICA, 2002a, E-5). Although female education appears to be a central concern within JICA support for WID programs in Guatemala, this focus appears to have been established as a way of partnering with other prominent donors in the field, rather than as a response to strategies conceived internally within JICA.

JICA support for WID programs in Paraguay evolved differently than in Guatemala, mostly addressing projects in the areas of agriculture, forestry, health, and nutrition. In one example, a community health project, implemented in Paraguay 1994-99, targeted mothers and health professionals in an effort to improve sanitary and health conditions for communities and children.

Whereas health projects such as these frame their efforts in terms of women's roles as mothers and nurturers, other programs in agriculture and forestry appear more likely to take gender considerations into

account. Overall then we see a variety of women's roles invoked, from the more passive nurturing roles in

population projects, to women's more active civic engagement in education and active economic

participation in rural development projects.

Similar to agriculture, forestry and rural development projects in other regions, JICA projects here also

attempt to include gender analysis in their descriptions of development problems and proposals for

solutions. Projects evaluated in Paraguay were commended in evaluation documentation for recognizing

women as central actors in rural development issues, giving women more voice in decision making, and

increasing knowledge of women's rights (Hujikaka, 2002).

Africa

Several development professionals within this organization echo a concern with attending to gender

issues in Africa, believing that women's issues are more "serious" here than in many other regions. While

many agree that regional interests are quite distinct in relation to gender concerns, one informant offers a

hierarchical scheme, explaining that conditions in Asia are "much better than Islamic or African

countries." This sense of cultural distancing is apparent as well in discussions of "expert dispatch," in

which consultants are more easily hired for assignments in Asia than Africa.

Programs in this region include attention to reducing women's burdens and increasing their access to safe

water (JICA, 2002a, B-8, p. 3), while more specific discussions of gender concerns elaborate other issues,

including women's suffering from economic crises, societal and sexual violence, high birth rates, HIV,

low levels of education and literacy, high rates of mortality and fertility, and reduced access to political

and economic participation. Another area addressed in this region is that of genital circumcision.

Kenya was the focus for attempts to integrate WID concerns into development efforts even prior to the

1995 UN Conference for women. Khasiana (1992) describes a JICA development study to explore ways

to "train grassroots women in Kenya in practical skills to enhance their productivity" (p. 2), through

promoting skills in agricultural techniques, appropriate technology, business, social dynamics and culture,

legal rights, maternal-child health, and family planning. This author blames cultural traditions, such as a

"Muslim influence [that] has resulted in many women not attending school" (p. 49), along with women's

lack of access to "modern technology" (p. 57).

Similar to other regions with Muslim populations, distinct cultural histories are reduced to monolithic

contexts in which women become passive victims of traditional cultures. Moreover, attention to

population, family planning, and genital circumcision in this region serve to emphasize women's

sexuality in a way not seen in discussions of women in East Asian and Latin American regions.

Gender concerns are not as clearly articulated in this region as they are in some of the others. When

gender, as opposed to women's needs, does surface as a central issue, it does so in reference to forestry

projects in Kenya and Tanzania (Mwateba, 1997).

Middle East

Similar to constructions of women in Africa, women in this region figure prominently in both general

discussions of regional policies and specific descriptions of gender and WID projects. Women's issues

are highlighted as central to development work in this region (JICA, 2002a, B-9). A repeated refrain links

women's low status in the Arab region to conditions within Islamic societies, perceived as culturally

distant. An early family planning project in Egypt was difficult to implement, according to official

documents, because of the perceived sensitivity of population issues in this cultural context. An informant

explains that in "the Islamic countries, it is easier for the Japanese [to recognize] gender discrimination."

Another female development professional believes that many in Japan hold particular images of women

in Islamic countries, assuming that "women are all beaten up," which serve to justify women's projects in

these countries, where even male development professionals "have no hesitation."

The larger programs associated with WID in Jordan fall within the scope of family planning. One JICA

official sent to administer programs there explained that among the more than 10 programs she

monitored, only this particular project had any direct relationship to women's or gender issues, although

she recognized a larger organizational mandate to integrate gender issues into other development

programs. In order to counter described concerns with women's poverty, health and high rates of fertility,

this program trained health professionals, offered vocational training to women toward income

generation, and used media campaigns to increase knowledge of family planning. To promote family

planning knowledge, extensive information, education and communication (IEC) projects on reproductive

health issues were supported (JICA, 2002c, p. 5). In addition, women were encouraged to generate

independent sources of income, through bee keeping, goat raising, and recycling, as a form of

"empowerment."

Although the word "empowerment" surfaces throughout these discussions, women's roles as mothers

dominate. Consistent with a vision of women's roles as nurturers for their families, communities and

nations, this family planning program is expected to benefit children and families, as well as the Jordanian

society as a whole. This pattern is repeated in similar programs in Turkey, using media to attempt to

change women's knowledge, attitudes and practices related to contraception use (Urata & Utsumi, 1994).

Given the "conservative" nature of the region, the program in Jordan attempted to use Muslim religious

leaders to convince men to support the idea of family planning. According to one informant, the Jordanian

men represented an obstacle to women's attempts to control their fertility. These assumptions about

gender colored the experiences of female Japanese staff working in Jordan, who reported being advised

by male superiors to avoid personal relationships with Jordanian men. This perspective contributes toward

a larger set of cultural norms within the development organization, distinguishing Jordan as a distant,

"traditional" society. According to a senior consultant who had worked on a major IEC project in Turkey,

the issue of family planning is "serious in Africa and [the] Islamic world. Most of the family planning

projects focus in these countries," whereas "family planning in [the] Asian area is almost finished." Yet, because "it is difficult to do family planning in Islamic countries, we start[ed] in Kenya and Turkey and Tunisia, [which are] not deep Islamic countries."

As in discussions of African women's issues, women's sexuality becomes a defining feature, in descriptions of genital circumcision and fertility as problems and of the many population and family planning projects offered as solutions. Specific discussions of gender emphasize women's comparatively low social, economic, and political status in this region (JICA, 2002d); however, gender analyses are less likely to be articulated formally in development planning or project interventions.

Constructing Women and Gender across Cultural Space

Discourse within this Japanese development agency shapes different configurations of women's needs and gender issues envisioned in programs implemented across regional contexts. In East Asia, where cultural proximity is most closely aligned with JICA, substantial resources are devoted to training and other issues pertinent to national economic development issues. In Latin America, where there are some established cultural connections through Japanese immigrants, the few projects that do address women or gender issues focus on education or health concerns. In more culturally proximate areas, women tend to be conceptualized as more active participants in the development process.

The sense that women are passively suffering from the burdens of their traditional cultures becomes more pronounced in those regions that are culturally distant, particularly in Africa, the Middle East, and even to some extent in South Asia. In this social imaginary, Pakistan, for example, becomes aligned with other countries in Africa and the Middle East through an affiliation with Islam. This research suggests that development agency officials are more likely to emphasize women's issues in those countries hosting predominantly Muslim populations, given underlying assumptions concerning the nature of gender

dynamics within Islam. An Orientalist approach to development incorporates patriarchal assumptions, which envision "other" women in passive roles requiring "our" assistance.

"Helping" women in these culturally distant spaces focuses on women's sexuality, through development programs focusing on attempts to control women's bodies. Others have found similar dynamics, in which the imaginaries of wealthy agencies focus on the sexuality of "other" culturally distant women as their primary concern (Chua et al., 2000; Greene, 2000; Mohanty, 1991b). Although reproductive health should be considered as an important issue, development programs should be faulted for concentrating on this at the expense of a broad range of concerns, and for constructing women as passively responding to interventions instead of actively engaging in decision making about their own sexuality. But it is not just that development agencies create roles for women as passive victims requiring assistance: these visions of women vary across cultural space, such that cultural "others" are more easily justified as targets for development intervention.

This research contributes to communication theory and research by articulating gender as closely integrated with other dimensions in cultural contexts. Gender needs to be understood not as a monolithic condition with universal characteristics, but as aligned with other markers of difference, such as class, race, and religious identity, within broader power dynamics. In addition, communication theory needs to recognize that the power structure of the development industry includes significant actors, such as Japan, beyond northern and western institutions. Moreover, regardless of institutional base, development practice engages in this problematic hierarchical process, reducing women to narrowly caricatured roles. Without a more respectful approach to women and to social change, development strategies will continue to fail.

Potential solutions to these issues, grounded in feminist considerations of advocacy strategies, range from disengagement to mainstreaming (Buzzanell, 1994). With the culmination of the 1995 UN Beijing Conference, along with other prominent discussions granted global attention, gender issues have indeed

become more prominent and more "mainstreamed" into the dominant development institutions, including

JICA as well as USAID and the World Bank. While more attention to gender dynamics, as opposed to

targeting of individual women as responsible for development failures, holds great potential, there is still

the risk that this perspective may become co-opted and thus lose its critical edge. Moreover, the structural

conditions that foster the hierarchical nature of help, along with the process of "othering" that

encapsulates women's roles in passive and sexual terms, are difficult to shift. Supporting the work of non-

governmental organizations (NGOs) may help to facilitate a process of disengagement from the dominant

development approaches, but this strategy itself risks marginalizing issues that need to become more

central to our work in the area of social change. If women's conditions are to improve on a global scale,

not only the discourse but also the structure of development work need to change.

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File A-1 ODA and JICA.

File B-1. ASEAN.

File B-3. Inland Asia (Mongolia, Central Asia, Caucasus).

File B-4. Southwest Asia.

File B-6. Central America and the Caribbean.

File B-7. South America.

File B-8. Africa.

File B-9. Middle East.

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