

Writing Women/Reading the Self: An “Itinerary of Thinking” about Hsin Hsing Village, Taiwan*

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The author introduces three major paradigm shifts in theories of women and development in Taiwan over the past 50 years when she was involved in research in Hsin Hsing, a rural community in west-central Taiwan. This paper explores the way theory has been engraved in her work by adopting an epistemological and reflexive stance. On the one hand, based on nuanced ethnographic data, the author explicates how different epistemological stances provided her the lenses with which she presented the “reality” of women during different stage of her research. On the other hand, a reflexive stance compelled the author to confront her own processes of thinking. The epistemological choices led her to produce a number of different “truths”, but the reflexivity challenged her to admit that. In sum, the author argues that while her *descriptions* of Hsin Hsing women’s lives mirrored reality, her interpretation of the meanings attributed to them were profoundly shaped by the theory that guided her thinking.

Keywords: Feminism, Neo-Marxism, Global Capitalist Patriarchy, reflexivity, oppositional discourse and resistance.

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** Professor Emeritus

The title of this paper was inspired by an article published by Gayatri Spivak in 1985 (see Landry and MacLean 1996:53-74). In it she asks, “What has been the *itinerary of my thinking* during the past few years about the relationships among feminism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction” ? (Spivak 1996:54, emphasis added) To answer this question, she traces the way theory has “been inscribed in ... [her] work” (*ibid.*), laying out the inadequacies of Marx’s and Freud’s work from a feminist perspective and reflecting on the limitations of her critique in light of her later understanding of the impact of race and colonialism on women’s lives. My purpose in this paper is less ambitious than that of Spivak. It is to think about the way I have written about the women of Hsin Hsing over the past three decades, interrogating how theory has shaped my representation of their experience. Toward this end, I adopt an epistemological and reflexive stance in the paper, locating my thinking about the women of Hsin Hsing in changes in feminist theorizing about women and the development process. More specifically, I explore what kind of “truth” is produced by a specific type of epistemology.

I begin by outlining changes in feminist thinking about women and the development process. Then, I discuss how the transformation of Hsin Hsing’s economy over the years is related to the lives of women, interweaving this narrative with an analysis of how changes in my theoretical orientation were reflected in my interpretation of women’s lives and my representation of them. I conclude by reflecting on the outcome of adopting an epistemological and reflexive stance, arguing that texts are inevitably partial and written from a particular author’s point of view.

Feminist Theorizing About Women and Development¹

Women and International Development (WAD). The intellectual heritage of this approach—that emerged in the 2nd half of the 1970s—includes two different arguments: that of neo-Marxism; and that of radical feminism which posits that men’s control of women’s sexuality and reproductive capacities are the root of women’s oppression. In the view of proponents of WAD, uneven development within the world system is a product of processes of capital accumulation while gender inequality is systematically produced by and is essential to a fundamentally unequal international

1 The earliest theory to emerge (1970s) was labeled Women In Development (WID). It draws on the tenets of liberal feminism and modernization theory. Because I have not drawn on this theory in my analysis of women’s lives, I do not discuss it herein.

order. Labeling this order, "Global Capitalist Patriarchy" (Mies, et al. 1988), advocates argue that capitalism needs non-capitalist forms of production to ensure its maintenance and perpetuation. In their view, men as well as capital benefit from the relegation of women to underpaid productive and unpaid reproductive labor. While they link patriarchy to a mode of production framework, they nevertheless tend to focus on ideology, homogenizing women and viewing them as "victims" with few choices in the face of overarching structures of power.²

Gender and Development (GAD). This school of thought emerged in the 1980s.³ Although adherents also are concerned with the effects of capitalist development and patriarchy on women, they were dissatisfied with WAD's emphasis on women as the key category of analysis. In their view, such a focus ignored men's role in the subordination of women and elided the way relations of everyday life are connected to relations of production in local and world economies. The unequal relations between women and men that contribute to women's marginalization, they argue, are the result of the social construction of reproduction and production within the world capitalist system. They thus focus on gender relations and the way in which they mediate individual experience of structural forces. Acknowledging the intersection of class and gender, they seek to unravel how this nexus translates into gains and losses for different groups of women and men. Further, in contrast to their forbears, proponents consider women agents who are able to manipulate situations over which they seemingly have little control. Accordingly, they do not consider them solely as "victims".

Postmodernism and Development (PAD). Emerging as a strand of thinking about women and the development process in the 1990s, PAD traces its intellectual roots to postmodernism and to socialist feminism.⁴ Proponents focus on the deconstruction of language and discourse to examine how meaning is constructed and wielded to create and sustain difference. In the view of proponents, the subjugation of women is rooted in colonial and post-colonial regimes of power/knowledge. They question the assumptions of modernity, particularly its belief in rational, scientific, value-free thought, and argue

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- 2 Variations exist in the WAD school of thought. Feminists working in Latin America, for example, give precedence to class over gender, although they call upon the notion of machismo in explaining the relationship between women and the development process (see Safa 1980).
 - 3 It was created by a group of feminists working at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.
 - 4 Socialist feminism rejects the idea that class precedes gender and insists that both men and capital benefit from the relegation of women to unpaid domestic and subsistence work. Its intellectual heritage is rooted in world systems theory and radical feminism.

that all knowledge claims are partial and that language/discourse is a form of control by which those with knowledge impose their will on those not similarly endowed. Scholars who adopt this way of thinking celebrate the heterogeneity of women, seek to discover and recover their previously silenced voices and subjugated knowledge, and strive to analyze how language/discourse shape the way women interpret reality and assign meaning to their lives. Recognizing women as agents, they emphasize marginality as a site of resistance and the multiple forms that resistance takes.

Writing Women/Reading the Self

I first went to Hsin Hsing in the late 1950s—not out of any particular intellectual interest—but because I married Bernard Gallin, an anthropology graduate student. Like many such wives of that era, I served as an auxiliary labor force in the field, taking notes during interviews, typing them after the fact, and wandering around the village observing the world of women. In the decade following our 17-month stay in the field, we produced two sons and I began to pursue a graduate degree, focusing on the sociology of development and, with the emergence of the second wave of the feminist movement in the U.S., developing a feminist consciousness. During this period, I also accompanied him on two separate trips to Taiwan, continuing as his assistant as he studied out-migrants from the village to Taipei. Finally, during four subsequent field trips—two in the 1970s and two in the 1980s—my status changed from assistant to researcher. Below, I interrogate five articles that were products of my research with the women of Hsin Hsing.

In my first sole-authored article (R.S. Gallin 1984a), I responded to two questions raised in a special issue on development and the sexual division of labor published by *Signs* (Safa and Leacock 1981): What is the effect of the structure of world capitalism on the division of labor and women's status? What is the relationship between patriarchy and women's work and status? To answer these questions, I analyzed data collected in 1979-80, as well as field notes created during our 1957-58 stay in Hsin Hsing, to explore change in women's work over time.

In the 1950s, when the village economy was based primarily on agriculture, women managed the house and children, raised poultry, dried and preserved crops, worked in the fields (mainly weeding), and, in their "spare time", wove fiber hats at home to earn income. Because Hsin Hsing was an extremely poor village, some men migrated to cities to seek work for pay. This stream of men out of the village quickened in the 1960s and, as Taiwan's large cities began to industrialize, unmarried daughters were deployed to them to earn money to augment their families' coffers.

The withdrawal of men from the countryside profoundly affected the nature of married women's work. They became farm managers, hiring workers to plow, transplant seedlings, weed, and harvest crops. If their husbands were unable to leave their work in the city, women also paid wages and taxes and exchanged rice for fertilizer. In addition, they spent a good deal of time in the fields, supervising labor or checking the flow of irrigation water. Married women, in other words, became a primary rather than an auxiliary labor force in agriculture. Nevertheless, although household members recognized women's managerial labor as work that contributed to the well-being of the group, they tended to devalue it because, in Taiwan's developing economy, a family's livelihood depended more on a husband's wages-and those of unmarried daughters-than on the minimal profits reaped from the land.

In the 1970s, the economic system of the village was transformed. Labor-intensive factories and businesses burgeoned in the area and in the village. Homes in Hsin Hsing became satellite factories, artisan workshops, shops, and small enterprises. Agriculture also was chemicalized and mechanized, minimizing the need for either a physically strong or a large labor force. As a result, women were propelled into the off-farm labor force.

Analyzing these phenomena with arguments derived from the WAD perspective, I concluded that traditional norms and values were congruent with the political economy of Taiwan. As I put it in the article that appeared in *Signs* in 1984:

Women meet all the criteria defining ... [the] ideal labor force. They provide a submissive, docile, and transient ... [pool of labor], willing to accept low pay and unlikely to remain in one job long enough to argue for wage increases or improved working conditions. With their minimal training, they are also prepared to accept the lackluster and poorly paid jobs available in labor-intensive industries. Their tractability makes them ready to be drawn into or expelled from the labor market according to the exigencies of the capitalist economy.

Women manifest these traits because the precepts of the family continue to govern their lives. Socialized in norms of hard work, responsibility, compliance, and subordination to the interests of the patriliney, women accept the expectation that they will sell their labor power to repay the costs of rearing and marrying them and to reproduce the family group. Held responsible for maintaining and servicing the household, women accept the double burden of domestic responsibilities and wage labor in the public sector. Provided with only a modicum of education and training, they subscribe to the belief

that they will attain security and upward mobility through marriage and the advancement of the family economy.

The marriage of patriarchal ideology and contemporary capitalism allows the family, the nation, and the international market economy to take advantage of women's unpaid domestic and underpaid public labor without altering cultural definitions of male and female roles or transforming the structure of male status and authority within the family (R.S. Gallin 1984a:397-98).

As this conclusion reveals, my adoption of the theoretical stance of WAD bound me to the representation of women as a homogenous group—"victims" who lacked the power to resist the multiple oppressions that structured their lives. I curbed their voices to make way for my representation of them as casualties of global capitalism and Taiwanese patriarchy, producing a text from which their voices were sanitized. In short, I located myself in a field of power (Western theory) to produce a particular knowledge about women in rural Taiwan.

Moreover, because I emphasized the larger forces that shaped women's lives, I failed to consider social changes in the village that might have allowed me to construct an alternative narrative of their existence. For example, I omitted discussion of the increase in the number of complex families in the village and the strategies villagers used to modify the structural arrangements of the group in order to maintain themselves as a single unit. I also failed to discuss how this change led to alterations in the norms governing family life (see Gallin and Gallin 1982), a case in point being the encouragement parents gave daughters-in-law to engage in remunerative work during the time traditionally reserved for activities on behalf of the larger family. In fact, as a consequence of this normative change, many young married women entered the off-farm labor force, particularly those whose mothers-in-law assumed some of their role responsibilities during the daytime.

In the absence of such a discussion, I failed to consider the structure of everyday relations between women in the household even though I knew that, in the 1950s, an authoritarian hierarchy governed relations within the family. Great emphasis was placed on respect for age differences and the desires of the young were subjugated to those of old, just as the wishes of women were subjugated to those of men. I also knew that villagers had altered the way marriages were arranged and that dating and free-choice marriage were common in the village by the late 1970s. Did older women continue to subjugate younger women under conditions of economic and social change?

In a second article published in 1984, I addressed this question by focusing on

women's integration into the households of their husbands. I described therein how a mutual affection frequently developed between a young couple during the pre-marriage dating period. This relationship posed a potential threat to a mother-in-law, giving her daughter-in-law a decided emotional advantage in their rivalry for a son's affection and loyalty. In addition to this emotional advantage, daughters-in-law had an economic advantage as well. A bride entered her husband's household with private money (*sai-khia*) that could grow considerably if she worked for pay. A mother-in-law had little wealth to offer in competition. So the answer to my question was, "Yes". Economic change altered the relationship between generations of women in the village. Nevertheless, I concluded that *all* women were "victims" because, I argued, "development extracted a heavy toll from older women who suffered the consequences of the generational inequality bred by the process as well as from younger women who remained embedded in the gender inequality perpetuated by the process" (R.S. Gallin 1984b:90).

Although I remained strongly wedded to the WAD perspective in this article, I also began to shift my thinking to the GAD approach, acknowledging that women did not constitute a homogenous group and that age created hierarchical differences among them. Nevertheless, I ignored class divisions among women, although I should have known these existed. Moreover, while there were strands in my analysis which suggested that women, or at least younger women, actively constructed their lives within constraints over which they seemingly had little control, I ignored these examples of agency, continuing to represent *all* women as "victims" of the development process.

After spending eight months in the field in 1989-90, I attempted to correct my omission of class.⁵ In the decade between the two studies, the village had become highly stratified. Its population included members of the proletariat who were protected by government labor codes and received wages determined by contract as well as members of the sub-proletariat who, because they did not benefit from government legislation, received casual rather than protected wages. The village population also included

5 While in the field, I conducted research on the interrelationship of married women's work, family life, and health. Funded by the Fulbright Foundation, the methods I used to collect data contrasted sharply with the informal ones of my years as an "auxiliary labor force in the field." Working with a research assistant, I conducted a survey of 70 married off-farm workers living in Hsin Hsing, conducted in-depth interviews about and observations of women in the economic and social contexts in which they were situated, and collected official documents about employment, labor relations, and health.

members of the petite bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie who both owned the means of production. The former, however, did not hire wage labor while the latter had control over labor power. Given this hierarchical structure, I returned to the question I had asked a decade earlier, this time focusing on how class mediated relations between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law in the context of economic change. The article (R.S. Gallin 1994) that emerged from my thinking began with excerpts from two interviews. In the first, Mrs. Shen, a 65-year-old mother-in-law, laments,

When we were married we cried because we belonged to another family. We had to cook and to serve others. We used to worry would they like our cooking. If they didn't, your mother-in-law beat you. Now we are worthless. Women today are afraid of their daughters-in-law. They dare not criticize them. If you criticize a daughter-in-law, she will run away. Daughters-in-law look at you with ugly faces.

In the second, in contrast, Mrs. Li, a 52-year-old mother-in-law, gloats, explaining, "Now I don't have to wash clothes and cook. I have time to play. I have a good daughter-in-law.

To explain the widely different meanings the two women ascribed to their relations with their daughters-in-law, I argued that,

older women ... who were members of the proletariat or sub-proletariat were among the poorest in the village. Some worked to secure their own futures. Others tried to make themselves indispensable to their daughters-in-law in exchange for material support but found their authority challenged or rejected. And a few, whose children were absent from the village, survived at a subsistence level and relived the drudgery and loneliness of the early years of their marriage.

These women had no control over the resources which are important in contemporary Taiwan. ... They were, in short, dependent on children in whom the major income power rested, and their daughters-in-law had achieved a new bargaining position from which they could defy the older women's traditional authority.

Older women ... who were members of the petite bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie, in contrast, were among the most financially secure women in the village. Mrs.

Li, for example, was an imperious mother-in-law whose daughter-in-law, in her own words, "worked from morning to midnight". The Li family owned a business, which, as productive property, their son and daughter-in-law would inherit. Given the resources at the command of her mother-in-law, the younger woman submitted to the older woman's authority, was deferent, and looked to the day when she would earn a dominant place in the traditional hierarchy that governed relations between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.

In sum, [I concluded,] development in Taiwan has had uneven effects on intergenerational relations among women. In some instances, it is shifting the balance of power between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law and significantly altering the ability of older women to recognize a comfortable old age. In other instances, it sustains and reinforces the authoritarian hierarchy that traditionally governed relations in the family and subjugated younger women to older women. The norms of filial piety, which continue to be espoused in Taiwan, are unpredictable under conditions of change. Mothers-in-law with or without the resources important in a capitalist economy are correspondingly able or unable to achieve a secure old age. Development in Taiwan has engendered income inequality and has not only perpetuated old models but has also created new forms of generational inequality (R.S. Gallin 1994:12-13).

My acknowledgment of how alterations in the class structure of the village, in combination with generational differences, mediated the experience of economic change was undoubtedly a consequence of my gradual embrace of the notion of difference promoted by GAD. Moreover, as my preface to the article showed, precepts of PAD were beginning to seep into my thinking; I engaged in much less "othering" in the article, providing women a subject position from which to speak rather than continuing to speak for and about them.⁶ Nevertheless, although women spoke, I did not hear. I allowed the WAD approach to shape my thinking, representing the women of Hsin Hsing as "victims" of perdurable systems of oppression.

The shift in my thinking to the GAD perspective had roots in an invitation to write a paper in which I was specifically asked to adopt that paradigm. My discussion in the article subsequently published (R.S. Gallin 1995) was based on my 1989-90 field

6 I recognize that even the selection of quotes is an author's choice. Thus, my claim that I allowed women to speak for themselves "rather than continuing to speak for and about them" should be viewed with reservation.

data and demonstrated that men were more likely than women to own enterprises and businesses that were larger in scale and more highly capitalized than those of women, and that women were more likely than men to be working without wages in family businesses, to be domestic out-workers, to hold jobs that were classified as unskilled, and to earn less than men. Given this reality, I argued that women and men were incorporated into the labor process in different and unequal ways and that the relations of production were “engendered” on the basis of critical assumptions about gender, systematically constraining women’s options while expanding those of men.

It is not surprising that, given the gender differences I found, I did not completely abandon the premises of WAD in my analysis. Nevertheless, I began to shift my thinking, representing the women of Hsin Hsing in a more agentic way than heretofore. Take for example two excerpts from interviews, included in the article, in which women explain the meaning of money. In the first, a 34-year-old entrepreneur insists, “When a woman has *sai khia*, she can have her own opinion. She can speak louder. If she wants something, she can say, ‘I’m using my own money!’” In the second, a 29-year-old industrial out-worker maintains, “If you have *sai khia* you don’t have to ask your husband for money. You can have self-esteem. You don’t have to be raised-like a child-by your husband”.

Moreover, I heralded the prospect of a life with dignity for the women of Hsin Hsing in my conclusion, writing that, although the intersection of gender ideologies encoded in family conventions, state policy, and managerial practices shaped patterns of production at the local level, the incorporation of women into the labor process also brought with it the possibility of change. As I put it:

Money can be a mechanism that imposes and reproduces hierarchical structures. ... [But,] it can also be a mechanism that modifies gender relations within the family. Although only a few women—primarily young women—controlled their earnings in the village, their access to an income provided them with an extremely important base from which to challenge absolute financial dependence on their husbands—a dimension of the conjugal relationship they judged oppressive. Women’s control of their earnings thus has the potential to erode traditional ideology and its norms of behavior and to provide women with the resources necessary to create an autonomous space (R.S. Gallin 1995:128-29).

Beginning with the two quotes embedded in the article, it becomes obvious that I acknowledged women’s agency and their ability to contest controls imposed by their

husbands. In fact, although I recognized that other women were not able to realize this benefit, I did not portray them as "victims". Rather, as I wrote elsewhere in the article, such women's "waged work ... improved their chances to attain their goals—subsistence, the well-being of the household (particularly that of their children), and long-term security". In other words, I adopted a far less "realist ethnographic account" than previously, abandoning the process of "othering" and allowing women to voice their own aspirations.⁷

Finally, I turn to an article in which I placed insights from the WAD perspective on the "back burner" and draw heavily on tenets of the PAD approach, particularly its focus on difference, language, and power. The paper was based on my 1989-90 field notes or, more accurately, a "deconstructive reading" (Landry and McLean 1996:53) of them to explore the way women constructed and used meaning. Responding to Taiwanese feminists who maintained that the women's movement "must reach, mobilize, and generate 'correct consciousness'...[among] working-class women" if it is to successfully change the structure of gender relations in Taiwan (Ku 1989:22), I described the way older and younger women in Hsin Hsing village dealt with, manipulated, and resisted power in their everyday lives. Although I conceded that the "minor forms of resistance" in which they engaged may not have led to important structural transformations, I maintained that they did produce changes that had "revolutionary implications for how ... [the women led] their daily lives and construct[ed] and reconfigur[e]d their worlds" (Alvarez and Escobar 1992:327). As I argued in my conclusion:

Accommodation and strategic compliance are a part of everyday interaction, and they are mechanisms by which women deal with and manipulate the constraining and enabling factors they encounter in their lives. Resistance, like power, is multiple. It can consist of overt, collective acts of opposition or it can be manifest in "individual acts of subtle defiance" and "muffled voices of opposition" (Villarreal 1992:258).

Women are "vocal" subjects, although it is sometimes difficult to see that, when they talk, they are actually actively resisting forms of oppression and dreaming of a better world. Nevertheless, when women assert knowledge that is outside

7 According to Marcus and Cushman, a "realist ethnographic account" excludes "individual characters" (1982:32) and is "almost dogmatically dedicated to presenting material as if it were, or faithfully represented, the point of view of its cultural subjects rather than its own culture of reference" (ibid:34).

the parameters of dominant understandings, they announce to society that a fundamental problem exists with its cultural models and forms of behavior. When women engage in oppositional discourses, they provide elements for the creation of alternative models and practices. Language matters because it both communicates and constructs cultural practice. In truth, language is praxis.

In Taiwan, working-class women's perception of their subordination may not necessarily conform to the view of highly educated women, and they may not aspire to similar solutions to their problems as those which feminists envision.⁸ Nevertheless, I maintain, their resistance constitutes a form of feminist practice. Feminism is a highly complex and diverse set of political practices rather than simply an organized movement committed to transformative politics. Feminism is, in the words of Saskia Wieringa (1994:834), "a discursive process, a process of producing meaning [and] of subverting representations of gender [and] of womanhood" (R.S. Gallin 2002:74-75).

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to explore the way theory has been engraved in my work by adopting an epistemological and reflexive stance. On the one hand, an epistemological stance provoked me to question how I arrived at what I labeled the "truth". On the other, a reflexive stance compelled me to confront my processes of thinking. My epistemological choices led me to produce a number of different "truths". My reflexivity challenged me to admit that, while I believe my *descriptions* of Hsin Hsing women's lives mirrored reality, my interpretation of the meanings they attributed to them were profoundly shaped by the theory that guided my thinking. Until the precepts of PAD nudged me into a space where I could see the possibility of political action taking place, I focused on power relations under global capitalism and Taiwanese patriarchy, thereby objectifying and silencing women.

By locating myself in one particular theoretical position, I usurped women's voices and shrouded from view the way they interpreted reality and assigned meaning to their

8 I described the married women discussed in the article as "working class" to highlight the fact that class is not a matter simply of money or a relation to the means of production. Class is also about culture, about ways of thinking and doing. The culture of working-class women (both rural and urban) is critically different from that of urban, middle-class, educated feminists who wish to "generate 'correct consciousness'" among them (Ku 1989:22).

lives. I write this not to criticize the idea of a materialist analysis that emphasizes power or politics but rather to highlight the way I produced "knowledge". As my experiment with PAD showed, the women of Hsin Hsing were not passive bearers of gender. Rather, they were agents who reflected on the system of inequality in which they were embedded and resisted and challenged its form—a totalizing statement I acknowledge. Nevertheless, I maintain, texts are inevitably partial and written from an author's particular worldview. We must learn "how to read ... [our] own texts" (Spivak 1996:71) to understand the way in which our accounts are shaped by the theory engraved in our thinking. After all, "Ethnographic accounts are constructed and tell particular stories"—if not always the stories the people with whom we work might expect (Visweswaran 1994:15).

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寫作中的女性與自身反思閱讀： 研究臺灣彰化縣新興村的一個思考歷程

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本文根據筆者過去 50 年在台灣中西部彰化縣新興村的研究，所經歷過三波『婦女與發展』理論典範的變遷。由於所採取的認識論與反思的立場，而導致這些變遷的理論直接影響其研究論述與觀點。建基於深度民族誌的資料上，筆者一方面陳述由於不同的認識論所提供的視界框架，使能看到不同時期中農村婦女不同的『真實』面貌。而另一方面由於採用反思的立場，進而不斷挑戰自己的觀點。認識論的轉變，將筆者導向不同的真象，而反思的立場，則讓她理解真象的不確定性。換言之，本文指出：對新興村婦女的描述可能反映出局部的真象，但筆者對這些現象的解釋，卻完全受其學術主流理論的影響。

關鍵詞：女性主義，新馬克思主義，全球資本主義父權化，反思，對立的論述與反抗
