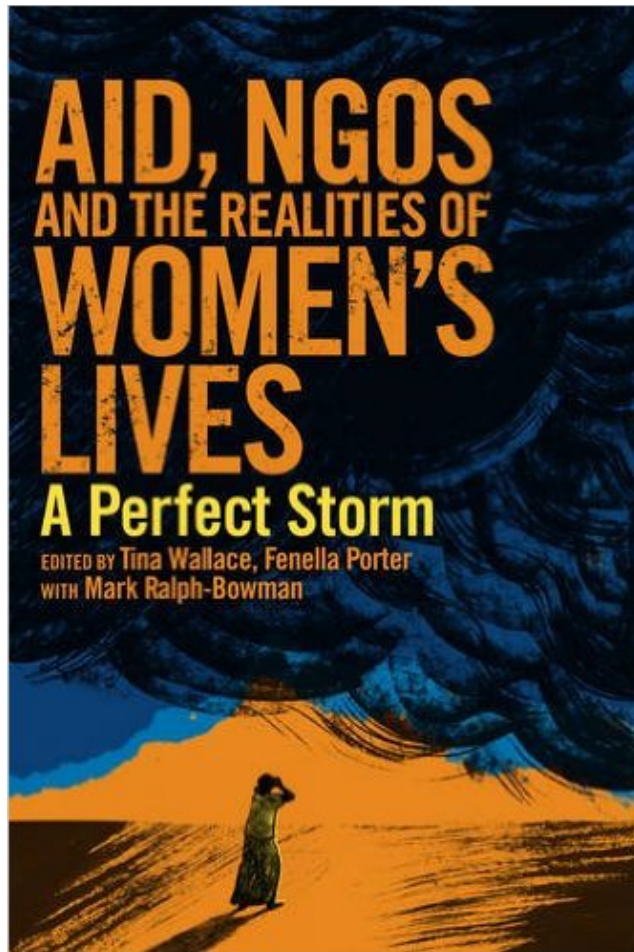


# Where (or what) is the feminism in development?



Fenella Porter

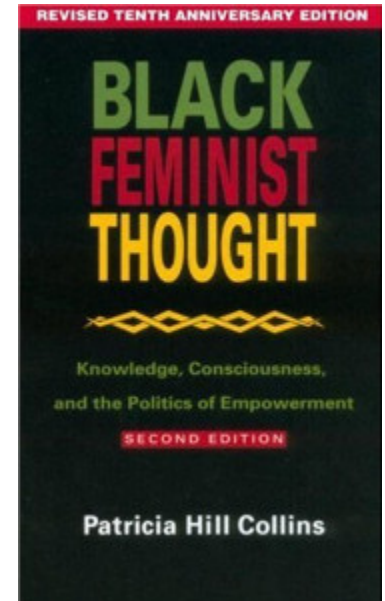
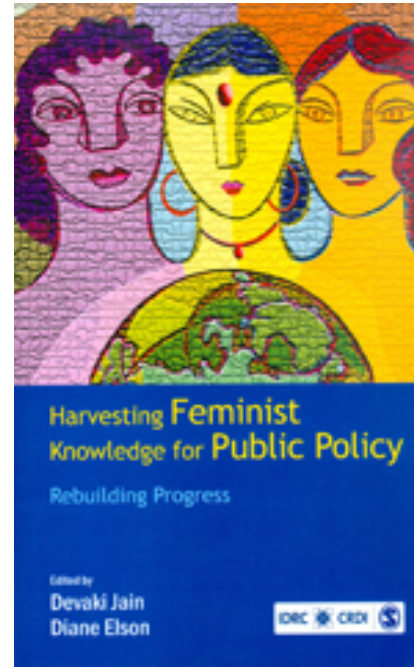
# A hostile landscape



- More money for 'women and girls', but a shrinking space for feminist analysis
- Complacency amongst feminists? Becoming distant from the struggle?
- No room for critical thought, reflexivity and praxis
- We lose good people

# It's not what we do, it's how we do it ...

- GADN Feminist Alternatives project – about *doing* things differently
- Also about *knowing* things differently – relationships of power central
- Power has shifted back to the North and back to fitting within the dominant social and cultural norms
- Reclaiming feminism means challenging that power, and



# Different assumptions – and some questions

- Changing relationships and working in a different way – solidarity and movement building; funding relationships?
- Recognising the energy from the global South, without sapping it
- Working with other movements – black lives matter, labour movements, feminist movements
- There are opportunities – but also challenges. Do we risk peoples' jobs, livelihoods, and the hard-won trust and respect of governments and donors?

## DSA presentation

### Bringing feminism back into development work

#### Point 1: The landscape is hostile and getting more hostile

- The landscape has been shifting significantly and quickly over the last 10 years. Much of this has been documented in *Aid, NGOs and the Realities of Women's Lives*, as well as by many others working and writing on these issues. These are the conversations that have dominated in the study group - It's grim out there!
- There has been money for the 'women and girls' agenda recently, but in many ways accelerated the shrinkage (the narrative about gender and empowerment has become very narrowly focused on particular forms of empowerment, and sometimes quite mythical ideas about how to achieve that). The worst bit about the shrinking space, for me, is that I think it has allowed feminists working in development to become complacent and distant from the principles of struggle that underpinned the knowledge and analysis from which all our work has evolved.
- This is now translating to the academic space as well, where university courses are under threat because students (rightly) do not see in these courses the skills and knowledge they need to progress in development. The space to develop critical thinking, and understand the hugely complex lives of poor women, is being squeezed out by the need to accumulate skills in marketing and managing etc.
- We are losing good, committed people from development work, because they cannot undertake meaningful work in the current landscape.

#### Point 2:

- The paper for the GADN 'feminist alternatives' project focused on new ways of working ... not what we do, but how we do it. We know about the principles of feminist analysis, but if we are to make a difference in the lives of women, it has to be about putting these ideas into *practice*.
- But there is no way to recognise how this makes a difference. Metrics in development are all about VfM, RoI, efficiency etc. Knowledge creation is about student numbers, employability, and 'impact' (based on simplistic numbers). The ideas about reflexivity, and knowledge through 'praxis', are much out of favour and this means that we no longer know how co-create knowledge, by working alongside people.
- There is no space for rights, for political and social transformation ... this is in development practice and is affecting the academic space as well.
- Social norms fit within a political and cultural space that is governed by power, and power in development has shifted out of the analysis, back to the North, to people with money, to donors, KPMG etc etc
- Taking power out makes it about behaving nicely and not 'doing harm', but what drives this is not being understood

#### Point 3:

- Feminism came out of struggle and fight – there's no fight left.
- We have to change our assumptions in our relationships and work in a different way - alongside women in their contexts. It needs to be about movement building (new Womankind strategy), about working in ways that shares resources, that isn't just about transfers of money (that embeds power).

- We have to recognise that a lot of the energy and knowledge is in the global South and we are not hearing it, we are not allowing this to shape and give direction to the work that we do.
- Why are we not working alongside other movements – labour movement, environmental movement, where are we in black lives matter? What have we got to say about that? (Nothing).
- There are many issues with working in different ways – and particularly there are risks associated with rejecting the dominant paradigms in terms of where the money is coming from. But there are also opportunities, and as a movement I think there is much to be gained from seeking out these opportunities.
- However, as a trade unionist and someone in a position of responsibility in an NGO, I also know that peoples' jobs depend on maintaining income in organisations, and to some extent on ensuring that a position of trust is maintained with government and other donors. How can we protect these?
- I don't have answers, just questions ...