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GENDERED GEOGRAPHIES
OF DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

The relationship between gender and development is controversial. In recent years, two examples of the gendered practices of development have caught the world’s attention. The first is the scandal surrounding aid giant, Oxfam, regarding the sexual exploitation by its staff of vulnerable women and girls in Haiti and the organization’s seeming failure to discipline staff appropriately. The second is the reports that victims of the Syrian war are being sexually exploited in order to access aid, and the women are refusing to collect the aid resources, including food, because they fear such exploitation and the associated stigma. Women without male protectors are seen as particularly vulnerable. These stories point to the dark side of the development industry and the politics of development more broadly, and women’s ongoing vulnerability at multiple geographic scales in crisis contexts. They support Pearson’s (2005) critiques of conflict management, more generally, as a subfield of academic and humanitarian development that fails to take gender into account in any meaningful way. Crucially, they reveal how significant is the ongoing interrogation of gender and development.

This chapter focuses on gendering the geographies of development, and it explores the multiple ways in which development, a concern with ‘global poverty and inequality’ (Potter 2014, 17) – as an intellectual project, a practical set of interventions and policy measures and as a political construct – is gendered; namely, how it works to shape social relationships between men and women. The geographies of development call also for an appreciation of the spatialities of development. This reveals how economic, political, social and cultural variations across national scales are key to the meaning of development, with the historical (and problematic) association of the need both for development with countries and conditions in and of the Global South and responses to development emerging from such contexts and from the beneficent Global North. These wider geographies have significant implications for gender relations. The term ‘geographies of development’ also refers to spatial specificities within cities, regions and households that work to shape gendered outcomes in various ways. Similarly, the geographies of development are shaped by gender, with crude use of the male/female binary being central to many assessment frameworks and mainstreaming agendas.
This chapter first explores definitions of gender in the context of development and charts the areas of development that are commonly concerned with gender, including the key policy response of mainstreaming. It then moves on to consider dominant historical and current approaches to the project of gender and development cognizant of the geographies of these intellectual and policy trends, with a particular focus on questions of difference, representation and power.

How gender shapes development concerns and vice versa

Gender is a concept used to describe the social differences between men and women and to analyse the notion of what it means to be female or male in a given social context. It is recognized as a political, intellectual and practical concept, and this multidimensional nature is especially evident when analysed in relation to development. In a paper on gender and mobility, Hanson (2010) contrasts two broad approaches; namely, ‘how mobility shapes gender’ and ‘how gender shapes mobility’, with the latter often revealed through quantitative research that takes the unreconstructed binary variables of male/female at face value and uses them to evidence substantive patterns and changes in mobility over time. Hanson critiques this body of work for failing to take context into account and for revealing very little about how mobility differences actually affect and shape women’s lives — yet such work is all-powerful and dominates the policy discourse and academic work. This chapter is not claiming that work on how gender shapes development fails to consider the complex impacts on women’s lives, but it does argue that, at the scale of the global development or financial institution (see ADB 2018 and WHO 2018, for example), gender is almost always used as a binary variable (male/female) through which to understand different aspects of development as a problem or, perhaps, an opportunity. This binary variable is quite often homogenizing and heteronormative (Cornwall 2017) and, most commonly, gender in these contexts refers to women and girls, although some evidence is emerging of a widening focus on vulnerable boys and men.

Quantitative accounts of how gender shapes development are evident in the key publication by the United Nations (UN), *The World’s Women* (UN 2015), which employs the male/female binary as well as, at times, the developing/developed regions distinction. Focusing on these trends here is purposeful. Despite the many problems associated with such broad-brush essentializing interpretations, these have shock value and reach and, as such, they are useful to underscore the global message that gendered inequalities do persist and, hence, that gender continues to matter in the context of development, recognizing that gendered inequalities are critical in so-called developed contexts, too.

Three key trends are noted. The first is that economic disparities persist between men and women, with significant disparities in labour-force participation in Northern Africa and Western and Southern Asia. Globally, women suffer from a gendered pay gap, earning between 70 to 90 per cent of what men earn in full-time positions. Women experience higher levels of unemployment (UN 2015). A second trend pertains to violence, and the data show that around a third of all women around the world have experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of partners or of sexual violence by other men, with up to 30 per cent of women in half of all developing countries experiencing a full lifetime of such violence (UN 2015). The responses to violence against women reveal distressing trends, and many women are not seeking any sort of help following experiences of violence and even fewer are turning to the police for support (UN 2015).

Finally, the dire inequities in gendered terms, in relation to positions of power, political and corporate leadership and influence, are summarized, revealing a male domination in judiciaries
and governments globally. Women occupy positions as chief executive officers (CEOs) in less than 4 per cent of the world’s top 500 corporations (UN 2015). These damning statistics reveal mixed trends across developed/developing contexts, with some Global South countries scoring high in the representation of women in certain powerful sectors, underscoring the message that gender inequalities do not necessarily map onto the so-called ‘development’ indicators.

Alongside this global recognition of gendered development inequities has been the corresponding rise in gender mainstreaming (GM) as a policy response. Ideas around GM originated in the UN World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985, followed by a commitment by the European Union in 1995 to incorporate a gender dimension into policy-making. GM and the adoption of a gendered perspective were required across the UN from 2001 onwards (UN 2002, v), defined as follows:

the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.

GM has been adopted across most international development organizations and large global NGOs (Pearson 2005), with GM policies commonly employed in a largely bureaucratic and technical manner through the use of checklists, gender impact assessments, training manuals, meetings, data collection and analytical tools (Parpart 2014). Implementing meaningful GM has, however, proved challenging. The papers in a special issue of the Journal of International Development (2014, 26 [3]) critically analyse the reasons. Van Eerdewijk and Davids (2014, 304), for example, note the ‘excessive technocratization and depoliticisation’ of GM and the tendency to burden those least able with the task of transformation (ibid., 308). Parpart (2014) argues that the proponents of GM failed to consider the multiple resistances that would emerge in response to the implementation of GM policy, which are often widespread yet unacknowledged, including by senior staff. Commonly, GM is considered to be challenging neither gender relations nor the structural inequality, with ‘men and masculine privilege … left off the hook, as are cultural, economic and political institutions’ (2014, 390). Simply put, GM is seen as a continuation of the much-critiqued women in development (WID) approach discussed below.

This quick summary, which rests on a relatively uncontested understanding of what gender itself means, opens the door to a more nuanced analysis of how gender and development intersect and, in particular, how changing development trajectories and geographies work to construct gendered identities and lives.

**Gender and development: key debates over time**

As in the academic disciplines of geography, sociology, and so on, gender emerged as a key focus for analysis and critique in the academic field of development studies from the 1970s onwards, recognizing that the concept and subject of development, itself, has evolved since it first emerged in the 1940s (Potter 2014). Because of the discipline’s close ties with the policy community and the practice of development, the concept of gender quickly made its way into interventions by development institutions, although its passage was fraught and contested, as the experiences of mainstreaming above illustrate (see Pearson 2005). Westernized accounts of debates pertaining
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to gender and development adopt a standard narrative summarizing the intellectual path using the all-too familiar WID, WAD and GAD terminology, referring to ‘women in development’, ‘women and development’ and ‘gender and development’ (see Young 2002 for a useful summary). These are briefly outlined here as they are fundamental, recognizing how very particularly located the perspectives are.

‘Women in development’ (WID) captures an approach to gender and development aligned more closely with the liberal feminist politics that emerged from the 1970s onwards. The liberal emphasis was around critiquing and resolving the absence of women from development programmes and on offering a far more complex interpretation and understanding of women’s economic roles than hitherto, often with a view to enhancing the productivity of women’s activities. This work was significant and sought to justify women’s inclusion in terms of the likely impact on poverty and its alleviation. Critics pointed to the lack of emphasis on gender equality in this approach, and WID has been persistently critiqued for its unwillingness to ‘rock the boat’ or challenge norms in any meaningful way, particularly patriarchal norms and capitalist systems of production. Brown summarizes the problems of the application of WID approaches through often male-dominated policy formulations and institutions, which tend to ‘be geared towards bringing women “into” the economic sphere, but without challenging the roles already ascribed to them in a division of labour established during the process of colonization’ (2006, 62). As such, WID is often belittled as the ‘add women and stir’ approach (Moser 2016), with Moser previously noting that such interventions illustrated an ‘efficiency approach’ to gender and development (Chant and Sweetman 2012). Despite decades of critique, WID is not irrelevant; on the contrary, authors such as Cornwall (2017) note, with palpable frustration, just how prevalent a WID perspective is, encapsulating much gender and development policy currently. Brown (2006) concurs but, drawing on findings in Tanzania, she addresses critiques of WID head on and makes the important point that gendered interests shift over time and, for poor women, WID-oriented programmes can meet immediate practical needs and also result in unanticipated forms of empowerment. She uses her research to complicate ‘our understandings of a distinct WID/GAD dichotomy, along with the practical/strategic distinction(s) that helps define it’ (2006, 79).

As hinted at in critiques of WID, subsequent ‘women and development’ and ‘gender and development’ approaches emerged in the late 1970s, both as a response to WID and as a more sustained and forceful critique of how gender was understood in development. McIlwaine and Datta (2003) describe this critical shift in how gender and development is theorized as one from the ‘feminization’ of development to the ‘engendering’ of development, and they chart the opening out of debates, research and focus of work on gender and development. As with wider feminist debates around the 1970s, the rise of GAD in particular served to unleash a sustained critique of patriarchy alongside capitalism, placing power at the epicentre of analyses. Critical questions were raised over historic and current economic models, including the introduction of structural adjustment programmes across much of the Global South and the impact of global financial crises, such as that experienced in 2008 (see Kabeer 2015 for an effective summary of research on this). Gendered impacts of these sustained shocks are not linear or simple, and male loss of employment is often evident alongside rising pressure on women and a squeezing of their time and resources. The evidence points to women taking on low-waged informal work and ‘low status and physically demanding jobs like cleaning, laundry and sex work’ as they strive to feed children and support families (Kabeer 2015, 199).

The burden of women’s double roles, in productive and reproductive terms, emerged as a central concern of a GAD focus, with Kabeer (2015) drawing on Palmer’s earlier work to describe asymmetrical sexual divisions of labour in the household and the ensuing ‘reproductive tax’ (in
Kabeer 2015, 195), forcing women to spend less time on paid employment and increasing their dependence on men. Other work reveals how development interventions themselves can fuel further challenges for women: ‘By not recognizing inequalities in the sexual division of labour, whereby women perform the bulk of labour associated with “the home,” women’s burden increases with their “integration” into the development process’ (Brown 2006, 62). Feminists continue to note this burden emerging from development interventions themselves, as women and girls are increasingly heralded as a development resource. In their work on smart economics, Chant and Sweetman critique the politically problematic practice of forgoing women’s interests for the sake of the efficiency and the outcomes of the development interventions:

In smart economics, lack of an essentially political critique of what is wrong with the world at the level of analysis results in programming which focuses solely on the agency of individual women and girls to deliver development goals – changing the world with minimal or no support from other actors.

Chant and Sweetman 2012, 526

Feminists note a rise in the feminization of responsibility (adding to women’s burdens) as a result of macro-economic trends (Chant and Sweetman 2012), which ties into the concerns over the ‘feminisation of poverty’ also proposed by Chant. As is evident from the above, the critiques and questions asked by feminists working from a GAD perspective are unsettling. GAD approaches put forward an agenda and a strong series of critiques centred on transformation, empowerment and the wholesale change of structures shaping society (see Young 2002 for details). Chant and Sweetman (2012) emphasize relationality, shifting the emphasis from the problem of and for women to society more broadly: ‘A gender and development approach recognizes gender inequality as a relational issue, and as a matter of structural inequality which needs addressing directly and not only by women, but by development institutions, governments and wider society’ (2012, 518). This more critical approach is evident in Oxfam’s Gender and Development, which publishes scholarly papers interrogating a wide range of development-related issues from a feminist perspective, including the Sustainable Development Goals, resource extraction, fragile states, and so on. Much of this work does, however, focus on the experiences of women rather than men.

**Difference, representation, knowledge, power and masculinities**

Feminists adopting a GAD approach also pushed concepts of gender and development in other key directions, including centring questions of difference. In the first instance, researchers highlighted the evident inequality of women in the ‘third world’, and proponents of GAD advanced understandings of geographically inscribed inequalities and differences between women in first- and third-world contexts. This opened up discussion about the differences between women at a global scale in a meaningful way although, as will be considered below, in a somewhat problematic manner. However, work progressed on exploring other axes of difference between women in societies that are shaped by ethnicity, religion, age, class, caste, sexuality and disability differences. This field of work is extensive and reflects wider ‘cultural turns’ in the social sciences that take difference and a more fluid understanding of identity as central to understanding how gender in development must be understood.

Debates over ‘gender’ and ‘development’, together and separately, have also benefited from and been challenged by the application of extensive critiques from post-colonial feminist scholars, often working within wider fields such as literary criticism, including Gayatri Spivak,
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Lata Mani, Trinh Minh-Ha, Chandra Mohanty and bell hooks (Kothari 2001; and see McEwan 2001 for a detailed analysis). These scholars have questioned and critiqued the hegemony of Western feminism and, in particular, the arrogance and presumption of such feminists to speak on behalf of ‘others’ (McEwan 2001). Post-colonial feminists also critique the failure to theorize class and race adequately in feminist work, particularly that arising from colonial histories and neo-colonial presents, as well as the tendency to homogenize and essentialize women in the Global South (McEwan 2001) through Western feminist scholarship. A post-colonial feminist approach often begins with a critique of the relationships between ‘gender, race and imperialism’ (Kothari 2001, 46) and forces a re-examination of ‘how other places and people are constructed and problematized’ (ibid.). Their work has much to offer a critique of development as a concept, discipline and project, questioning the very logic of development as inherently problematic. Kothari (2001) argued that the varied works of post-colonial feminists, alongside others, have shaped debates over participation, ideas of expertise and questions of representation – particularly by White women of Black women, usually in homogenous terms. Kothari also questions the use of the singular category ‘woman’, as well as the reliance in Western policy and academia on Western standards and frameworks when studying ‘others’ (ibid., 49). Interestingly, in a subsequent reflection on her original 1986 essay ‘Under Western Eyes’, Mohanty notes that she remains ‘committed to reengaging in the struggles to criticize openly the effects of discursive colonization on the lives and struggles of marginalized women’ (2003, 509), pointing to the persistence of homogenizing and othering discourses over women in the ‘third world’. However, given the shifting nature of global politics and economics, Mohanty’s focus is not simply on the distinctions between Western versus third-world feminist practices but increasingly on an ‘anticapitalist transnational feminist practice’ and using this to build a critique of capitalism more broadly (ibid.). At the same time, there has been a significant set of feminist critiques of a post-colonial feminist agenda that describe the latter as ‘elitist and removed from reality’ and call for a focus on the material conditions of women rather than on discursive debates (see McEwan 2001, 103 for a fuller analysis).

Nonetheless, this wide body of post-colonial feminist critique has influenced a generation of authors writing on the intersection of gender and development, often through a geographical lens, questioning in more complicated ways its epistemological dominance by thinking and writing located in the Global North and West, yet also interrogating and critiquing the notions of women, gender, identity, place and representation, including in the Global South. Some of this work engages with the spatiality of a post-colonial feminist critique through a more global analysis of North/South relations and the politics of knowledge production. Other work uses the scale of the gendered and racialized body, the home, the academy or practices of travel and tourism to rethink how gender is bound up in complex ways within development work. Narayanaswamy (2016), for example, throws open the question of discursive exclusion by critiquing the silencing practices of Southern elite feminists in the context of India who commonly represent the views and interests of upper (class and caste)/middle-class urban Indian women. She questions the process of professionalization and expertise in relation to a transnational development discourse and, in doing so, destabilizes the very idea of a Southern-originated discourse as one that is inclusive and representative (2016, 2170). Syed and Ali (2011), in an effort to understand the mistrust of such projects by those in the Global South, critically examine the idea of the ‘White woman’s burden’ underpinning much (gendered) Western development work. They interrogate Whiteness and trace histories of White women’s engagement in the South as part of the colonizing missions (2011, 356) and locate that practice in current development work, including the rescue of oppressed Muslim women: ‘By virtue of her race, class and gender, the white feminist occupies a privileged place with a moral high ground over development and
welfare, thus establishing her position in a public realm of power’ (2011, 357). Bandyopadhyay and Patil (2017), in contributing to work on tourism geographies, adopt a post-colonial feminist approach and employ the notion of ‘White saviour complex’ to critique the role of White women in volunteer tourism who work in the Global South, using concepts such as ‘contact zones’ (2017, 648) to understand socio-spatial relations imbued with power differentials. They locate the colonial mission as largely masculine and trace the gendered changes in such civilizing missions through to development interventions and seemingly apolitical practices, including volunteer tourism. They question the ways in which such work by young White women continues colonial-era racialization and query how it ties to Western women’s own subjectivities, particularly through the cultural space of the internet and electronic media (2017, 651). They highlight the significance of Christianity that underpins many volunteer organizations and note its continuity from colonialism and its missionary efforts. This work also questions the focus of those located in the Global North on problems in the South, asking why such women do not attend to the domestic inequalities that are evident in the US, for example.

This question about the geography of gender and development is also picked up by Kishwar (2014), who questions the ways in which the Global South is over-selected for analysis and study as a site of ‘gender’ problems, while Eurocentric scholarship tends to overlook the gendered inequalities in the West: ‘The assumption is that they have solved all their problems and have provided benchmarks and a road map for countries in the South’ (2014, 403). Kishwar goes on to critique the development industry’s focus on ‘gainful employment’ as a desirable outcome for all women, including the discourses of feminists who treat women who choose to work as homemakers and mothers as unproductive. This argument is used to make the point that feminism should be about ‘respecting women’s choices, not imposing a pre-set, ideologically determined road map for all’ (2014, 407). More recently, Cornwall (2017) has called for the ‘decolonisation of gender and development’, insisting that the frameworks and assumptions used during the colonial era about households, nuclear families and gender are still evident in the approaches to gender and development, and which work to limit knowledge and marginalize understandings of gender further. Cornwall calls for a ‘3Es’ approach to counter this: emplacement; empowerment; and encroachment (see Cornwall 2017 for details).

Work on gender and development is also influenced by the idea of intersectionality, after Crenshaw (1989), although the reach of this concept is still limited:

social relations and multiple, complex identities, which lie at the basis of persisting inequalities, are seldom taken into account in either development theories or development practice. Where they are, ‘difference’ is often compartmentalized and not integrated.

However, Bastia goes on to note that some key works in gender and development had an intersectional analytic yet did not refer to it by that name. Bastia turns to migration studies and their use of intersectionality to highlight their potential for development studies. The idea of ‘post-colonial intersectionality’ is put forward by Mollett (2017), following Mollett and Faria (2013), to facilitate an analysis of feminist political ecology and to examine human rights discourse in relation to Afro-descendant women in Latin America. Explaining the concept, Mollett and Faria argue that:

postcolonial intersectionality acknowledges the way patriarchy and racialized processes are consistently bound in a postcolonial genealogy that embeds race and
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This concept reflects the way people are always marked by difference whether or not they fit nicely in colonial racial categorizations, as cultural difference is also racialized. Postcolonial intersectionality addresses Mohanty’s warnings against the construction of a ‘third world woman’ and prioritizes a grounded and spatially informed understanding of patriarchy constituted in and through racial power.

*Mollett and Faria 2013, 120*

Mollett and Faria’s work seeks to ‘mess with gender’ by insisting on a focus on race, alongside gender, in relation to a spatial imagination. Geographical processes work alongside these racial and gendered practices to produce particular experiences of inclusion, privilege, exclusion and oppression. These include the global-scale yet uneven discourses of human rights and ‘modernity’, colonial racisms and patriarchies that structure relations across the Global North and South, as well as in their case study in Honduras, and the practices of everyday exclusion from society and space through the implementation of legal measures. These measures include changes to land titling that are both individuated and gendered. Mollett and Faria’s work reveals that gender, race and geographical context are explicitly intertwined (Mollett and Faria 2013).

Alongside this focus on difference are the efforts by development feminists to emphasize *gender* rather than *women*, noting the relationality of the concept. As is evident in its title, GAD spelled moves to incorporate a focus on masculinity and development, recognizing the roles played by varied groups of men in shaping outcomes and also as key subjects of a development agenda. From around the 1990s onwards, particularly into the early 2000s, burgeoning publications on this topic (see edited collections by Cleaver 2002 and Cornwall, Edström and Greig 2011, for example) analysed gender roles and the construction of gendered identities, focusing on masculinities in relation to politics, work, violence, poverty and inequality. Some of this work drew on the foundational framings of masculinities as relational, as advanced by Connell (1995), distinguishing between hegemonic, complicit, subordinate and marginalized masculinities (Connell 1995, 76–80), as well as recognizing how masculinities are constructed in relation to femininities, themselves intersected by axes of difference such as race and class. Relational conceptualizations served to assist in the theorization of men in the Global South (for example, see Meth 2009), and beyond the discipline of development studies (see Ratele’s 2016 work, for example).

At the same time, Connell’s framework, particularly the concept of hegemonic masculinity, has come under scrutiny and critique for being too narrow (Gökarkin and Secor 2017, 385). In response, Connell and Messerschmidt address various critiques with a particular focus on the ‘geography of masculinities’ (2005, 849), in which they centre the significance of global, regional and local scales as critical to the ways in which masculinity unfolds. Recognizing the interrelationships between these scales, they advise against assuming a power relation between the three that places the global scale as dominant and note the significance of place in shaping masculinities more generally, thereby avoiding a ‘monadic’ interpretation of place or masculinity uniqueness (2005, 850). Despite this explicit attention to geography, Gökarkin and Secor (2017) argue that other, more recent, academic work continues to employ more complex approaches to questions of ‘scale and place’ than Connell and Messerschmidt achieve (385). Work on masculinities in the Global South placed histories of colonial domination, as well as subsequent regimes of marginalization – the Apartheid state, for example (Morrell 1998) – at the centre of analyses working to understand the significance of domination, occupation, exclusion, racism and violence for understanding masculinities. The lack of employment opportunities for men in such contexts is argued to be critical to masculine identity (Morrell 1998). Masculinity
theorists working across the Global South also highlight the interplay of race, ethnicity and class (Morrell et al. 2012) as central to men’s identities, noting how they are relationally constructed through domination by White men as well as White women. In my own work, I have explored how living in informal housing in South Africa shapes marginalized men’s masculinities (Meth 2009) and, subsequently, how the receipt of state-subsidized housing, in turn, reshapes men’s experiences and identities (Meth and Charlton 2016).

Conclusions

Gender and development, both as individual and relational concepts, are an ongoing practical, political and intellectual issue: gender and development is not done! On a practical front, there is some cause for celebration, depending on what indicators of ‘improvement’ are used. There has been some improvement in education, health and access to political life, however the evidence globally in relation to the private sphere (violence, in particular) and the labour market is certainly depressing. There has often been no significant improvement, alongside evidence that situations for many women are worsening. Development is frequently not linear, and progressive initiatives can have detrimental consequences alongside positive outcomes (see Meth 2015).

Importantly, gendered equality has been achieved neither in countries in the Global North and West nor in many of the rapidly transforming contexts of the Global South. This is despite decades of intervention at policy level in terms of education, and training and investment. Cornwall and Rivas (2015) argue that, despite the inclusion of gender in development policy and practice, it actually lacks any meaningful political clout: ‘Gender equality and women’s empowerment are, we contend, frames that have led feminist activists into a cul-de-sac and away from a broader-based alliance of social change activists’ (ibid., 397). They call instead for a focus on accountability, non-discrimination and inclusion (ibid.) echoing the words of Mohanty in 2003.

Furthermore, as argued by many GAD theorists yet also post-colonial scholars, more attention needs to be directed towards the real aspects of transformation and structural change, particularly of global economic practices, which frequently undermine women’s experiences. Analyses of gender and development also need to remain alert to the specificities of the world’s fluid political climate and the increasing absence of security in certain parts of the world, parts of cities and also some households. Related to this are the ways in which the rule of law is articulated in gendered terms and how it is implemented, abused and protected.

Key readings


References


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Hanson, S. 2010. “Gender and Mobility: New Approaches for Informing Sustainability.” Gender, Place and Culture 17 (1): 5–23.


