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Gender, development and the politics of knowledge

Anthropological and ethnographic perspectives. Introduction

Anneke Newman* et Elena Aoun**

The promotion of gender equality has been integrated into all levels of international development since the 1980s, whether within UN agencies, international donors and organisations or government ministries. The globalisation of gender, including its integration into conditionalities of aid, has had significant implications in the Global South: in the elaboration of national policies, the creation of ministries and departments, and the increasing numbers of NGOs dedicated to these questions. Various Western countries, such as Sweden, Canada and France, have committed to elaborating "feminist foreign policies". Prominent universities in the Global North and South[1] have supported these trends through research and teaching programmes that train practitioners, diplomats or researchers in the field of gender. It is this broad landscape that we refer to as the field of Gender and Development (GAD).

Whether in the day-to-day practices of development, advocacy and diplomacy, or in official statements, GAD spaces often reveal distinct differences between their members' rhetoric and practices on gender. Their actions can frequently have what a wealth of empirical evidence shows are detrimental impacts on women and gender minorities, especially those marginalised by race, ethnicity, class and geographical location – particularly in the Global South. Many of these organisations attempt to alleviate the consequences of gendered inequalities but arguably fail to address their underlying causes – and can even actively contribute to them – because they are themselves embedded in structural systems of global inequality.

* Department of Conflict and Development Studies, University of Ghent; anneke.newman@ugent.be
** Institute of Political Science Louvain – Europe, UCLouvain; elena.aoun@uclouvain.be

[1] For the purposes of this introduction, we follow Demeter's definition (developed on the basis of structural biases in academic publishing) of "Global North" as consisting of the United States, United Kingdom, Western Europe including Scandinavia, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, Israel and high-income Asian countries like Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and South Korea. "Global South" refers to Latin America, Southwest Asia and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and lower income Asian countries. This classification is not without its problems, for instance the BRICS countries and Eastern Europe occupy some place "in the middle" (2020, pp. 9-12).

While these critiques have been made before (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Jad, 2004; White, 2006), we propose that this trend has become particularly visible over the last year, during what has been deemed by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) a plausible genocide[2] against the Palestinian people, war crimes and crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court,[3] and ethnic cleansing by leading Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem.[4] Most development organisations rapidly condemned sexual violence endured by Israeli women at the hands of Hamas on 7 October 2023.[5] Yet, many mainstream media outlets headquartered in the Global North continued to advance the discourse that such acts were committed in a widespread and systematic manner – which was used to justify retaliation against the entire Palestinian population – even after evidence to support this analysis became difficult to locate.[6] In contrast, much less has been said or done regarding the deliberate and multifaceted forms of gender-based violence that Israeli forces have inflicted on Palestinian children, women and men after 7 October, or indeed during the previous 75 years of illegal occupation. These violations include systematic rape and sexualised torture of prisoners; reproductive violence; snuff films mocking murdered people in sexualised ways; and generalised lack of access to food, shelter, sanitation and healthcare due to displacement and bombardment which has put pregnant and lactating women, infants, children and adolescent girls at particular risk.[7]

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[2] See the ICJ ruling (24 January 2024): https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-ord-01-00-en.pdf; and its ongoing statements regarding Israel's refusal to comply with the court order (3 January 2024 and onwards): https://www.icj-cij.org/case/192

[3] See Statement of ICC Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan KC: Applications for arrest warrants in the situation in the State of Palestine (20 May 2024): https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/statement-icc-prosecutor-karim-aa-khan-kc-applications-arrest-warrants-situation-state

[4] See B'Tselem, "The world must stop the ethnic cleansing of northern Gaza" (22 October 2024): https://www.btselem.org/press_releases/20241022_the_world_must_stop_the_ethnic_cleansing_of_northern_gaza

[5] The Mission Report of the Special Representative to the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict concluded that "there are reasonable grounds to believe that conflict-related sexual violence occurred in Israel during the 7 October attacks" (p. 4) (14 February 2024): https://news.un.org/en/sites/news.un.org.en/files/atoms/files/Mission_report_of_SRSG_SVC_to_Israel-oWB_29Jan_14_feb_2024.pdf

[6] A later report by an Al Jazeera investigative unit found that "while isolated rapes may have taken place, there was insufficient evidence to support allegations that rape had been widespread and systematic": see Al Jazeera, "October 7: Forensic analysis shows Hamas abuses, many false Israeli claims" (21 March 2024): https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/21/october-7-forensic-analysis-shows-hamas-abuses-many-false-israeli-claims

[7] See the statement from the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls in *Middle East Monitor*, "The silence on Gaza from countries with feminist foreign policies 'is deafening and deeply troubling'" (12 August 2024): https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20240812-the-silence-on-gaza-from-countries-with-feminist-foreign-policies-is-deafening-and-deeply-troubling/;
UN Women's report on the gendered impact of the invasion of Gaza: UN Women, *Gender alert: The gendered impact of the crisis in Gaza* (2024): https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-1/Gender%20Alert%20The%20Gendered%20Impact%20of%20the%20Crisis%20in%20Gaza.pdf;
UNFPA's regular press releases and reports on gender-based rights abuses in Gaza: United Nations Population Fund (various dates): https://palestine.unfpa.org/en;
and a review of diverse gender-based crimes committed by Israel in *Liberation*: "Israeli women soldiers:

Yet, beyond UN circles, major international NGOs working on human rights have been relatively quiet regarding the gendered impacts of violence in Gaza and the West Bank. The same goes for those countries that pride themselves on their feminist foreign policy: Reem Alsalem, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls, has called their silence on Gaza "deafening and deeply troubling".[8] The German government has cut funding for women's organisations critical of Israel's military campaign in Gaza[9] and suppressed critical voices in the country, including those of Jewish individuals and organisations,[10] whilst continuing to send weapons to Israel.[11] Although France clearly positions itself as having a feminist diplomacy,[12] its Minister for Equality between Women and Men threatened to defund feminist organisations that it deemed to have been "ambiguous" regarding the condemnation of the 7 October attacks.[13] Western feminists and organisations have also been criticised for remaining largely silent over the suffering of Palestinians.[14]

Meanwhile, many departments and academic associations based in the Global North – including those representing the disciplines of anthropology, international development and gender or women's studies – have issued statements condemning the war on Gaza and illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories.[15] Yet, irrespective of their voiced

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Partners in racism & genocide, not examples of 'gender equality'" (2 March 2024): https://www.liberationnews.org/israeli-women-soldiers-partners-in-racism-genocide-not-examples-of-gender-equality/

[8] See *Middle East Monitor*, "The silence on Gaza from countries with feminist foreign policies 'is deafening and deeply troubling'" (12 August 2024): https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20240812-the-silence-on-gaza-from-countries-with-feminist-foreign-policies-is-deafening-and-deeply-troubling/

[9] See *Mada Masr*, "Germany cuts funding to Egyptian women's rights organization for criticizing Israel" (7 December 2023): https://www.madamasr.com/en/2023/12/07/news/u/germany-cuts-funding-to-egyptian-womens-rights-organization-for-criticizing-israel/

[10] For information on Germany's repression of pro-Palestinian Jewish activists see The New Arab, "Anti-Muslim racism by proxy: Udi Raz on how Germany is stepping up repression of pro-Palestinian Jews" (8 May 2024): https://www.newarab.com/news/udi-raz-berlin-stepping-repression-pro-palestine-jews

[11] For a comprehensive report on Germany's arms exports see Forensis, *Short Study German Arms Exports to Israel 2003-2023* (2 April 2024): https://content.forensic-architecture.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Forensis-Report-German-Arms-Exports-to-Israel-2003-2023.pdf

[12] See the French Foreign Ministry's official page on feminist diplomacy: "Diplomatie féministe" (March 2024), https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/politique-etrangere-de-la-france/diplomatie-feministe/

[13] See *Le Monde*, "Aurore Bergé menace de supprimer les subventions aux associations féministes qui auraient tenu des « propos ambigus » sur l'attaque du 7 octobre" (12 February 2024): https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2024/02/12/aurore-berge-menace-de-supprimer-les-subventions-aux-associations-feministes-qui-auraient-tenu-des-propos-ambigus-sur-l-attaque-du-7-octobre_6216137_823448.html

[14] See the analysis by Maryam Aldossari, Senior Lecturer at Royal Holloway, University of London in *Middle East Eye*, "Le silence du féminisme occidental sur la souffrance des femmes palestiniennes à Gaza révèle sa faillite morale" (8 March 2024): https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/opinion-fr/le-silence-du-feminisme-occidental-sur-la-souffrance-des-femmes-palestiniennes-gaza

[15] For a list of English-language academic statements see Palestine in Progress: https://www.palestineincontext.org/solidarity-statements.html;
statements from gender/women's studies see: https://geosci.uchicago.edu/~abbot/Docs/GenderStudies.pdf;
and the statement from the Executive Committee of the European Association of Social Anthropologists: https://easaonline.org/outputs/support/gaza1023.shtml

commitment to gender-sensitive policies and hosting of globally renowned centres on gender and women's studies, many Northern universities maintain investments in companies or relationships with Israeli universities that have been found to be directly complicit in the occupation (Wind, 2024). They have often cracked down on pro-Palestinian encampments and protests on their campuses and displayed hostility to those, including Jewish individuals and organisations, who have advocated for Palestinian human rights. Among the many institutions that can be mentioned are Columbia University,[16] Harvard[17] and Northwestern[18] in the US; the LSE in Great Britain,[19] Sciences Po in France[20] and the Université Libre de Bruxelles in Belgium.[21]

Of course, there are many other examples of enormous gendered inequalities and violence past and present that we could mention, including the ongoing conflicts in the DRC[22] or Sudan.[23] However, we focus on the Palestinian case for two reasons. First, because the reactions of many Northern institutions to Israel's actions expose, like never before, the double standards of the Western liberal project and the inadequacies of the development enterprise. Second, they reveal that although we might consider GAD to be part of the wider international development apparatus, it is also intimately interconnected with our universities as sites of knowledge production and our everyday lives as citizens of conscience.

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[16] See the condemnation of the police and university's treatment of the student protest by Columbia Law School Human Rights Institute (19 April 2024): https://hri.law.columbia.edu/hri-statement

[17] See the statement condemning the violent treatment of student protestors, by Harvard Faculty and Staff for Justice in Palestine: https://www.harvardfsjp.org/statement

[18] See condemnation by Jewish Voice for Peace of police destruction of the Sukkah erected by Northwestern Jewish students in solidarity with Gaza, "Tell Northwestern: Stop punishing Jewish students for practicing their faith.": https://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/resource/tell-northwestern-stop-punishing-jewish-students-for-practicing-their-faith/

[19] See the critique of LSE's handling of the student occupation by Gina Romero, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Assembly on X (formerly Twitter) (7 October 2024): https://x.com/Ginitastar/status/1843399825204936712

[20] See the denunciation of the university's approach to the protest by members of SciencesPo Médialab "Support for the freedom of expression and mobilisation of Sciences Po students" (26 April 2024): https://medialab.sciencespo.fr/en/news/communique-25-avril/

[21] See the statement by Ligue de Droits Humains and 13 organisations regarding what they consider to be excessive state oppression of pro-Palestine protests in Belgium: "Une dizaine d'ONG et syndicats s'inquiètent des mesures répressives qui visent le mouvement propalestinien en Belgique" (20 September 2024): https://www.liguedh.be/une-dizaine-dong-et-syndicats-sinquietent-des-mesures-repressives-qui-visent-le-mouvement-propalestinien-en-belgique/;
and the critique of the ULB's unique decision to suspend academic accords with Palestinian universities: Le Vif, "Être à la hauteur de l'histoire: l'ULB en temps de génocide" (28 June 2024): https://www.levif.be/international/moyen-orient/etre-a-la-hauteur-de-lhistoire-lulb-en-temps-de-genocide/

[22] See the statement by UN Women and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (30 April 2024): https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/statement/2024/04/statement-by-principals-of-the-inter-agency-standing-committee-on-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-crushing-levels-of-violence-displacement-fuel-unprecedented-civilian-suffering

[23] See the statement by the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (13 June 2024): https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/USG_and_Special_Adviser%20Nderitu_Sudan_13_June_2023.pdf

The complexities and ethical implications of this intertwining emerge within our collection of essays, consisting of three peer-reviewed articles (Véronique Plouffe, Julie Castro and Emmanuelle David) and three interviews with scholar-practitioners and/or activists (Amani Rizq, Stella Nyanzi and Romina Istratii). During the process of coordinating the special issue, we (Anneke Newman, Elena Aoun and Alena Sander) engaged closely with these contributions, interacted with our interviewees and tried to decode unfolding events over the last few years in Palestine, Sudan, the DRC and elsewhere. We also set off on a reflexive journey to understand how we ended up with a more homogeneous issue in terms of authorship, topics, frames and approaches than we had initially willed or anticipated. Throughout this process, we increasingly realised that the politics of knowledge constituted an underlying and crosscutting challenge. This realisation, and the lack of substantive critical research on this issue, especially in francophone scholarship, led us to focus in our introduction on this politics of knowledge.

To unpack this and the other themes raised above, in the following we present: a definition of GAD and the outlines of an "anthropological" approach to its study; a review of debates on knowledge production relating to GAD, including emergent critiques of power dynamics within universities; and a critical, self-reflexive account of our coordination of this special issue and its implications for knowledge production in anthropology of development.

Defining the parameters of an anthropological perspective on GAD

This special issue emerged because, in thirty years of activity, the journal *Anthropologie & développement* of the *Association pour l'anthropologie du changement social et du développement* (APAD) has published only one volume dedicated to questions of gender (no. 20, 2000). Given the disciplinary remit of the journal and our desire to generate a coherent collection, we requested that contributors propose an *anthropological analysis of GAD* according to three criteria that align with the approach to anthropology of development that has been elaborated by APAD members. This approach involves an unbiased empirical investigation of the "tangle of social logics and the heterogeneity of the players involved in development operations" which "meticulously explores the interactions of all kinds involved in the world of development, bringing into play representations, strategies, structures, actors and contexts" (Olivier de Sardan, 2001: 729–730, translation from French).

Ethnographies of everyday contestations over gender in development practice

The first criterion we requested of our authors was *a focus on the GAD apparatus*. We understand the "development" in GAD to be a galaxy that includes (White, 2006: 56):

> […] aid agencies, government ministries and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dedicated to its pursuit. Like other industries, the development industry is committed at once to producing an output (development), and to reproducing itself. Its "means of

> production" comprise a set of institutions, techniques and processes for bringing about change, of which the key tool and symbol is the development plan.

White also highlights explicitly the importance of knowledge production within the development apparatus (ibid.: 56):

> While it foregrounds its materiality […] the industry also comprises a set of regimes for the production of power/knowledge. Despite its tendency to present itself in technical terms, development is never politically neutral.

Around this more institutionalised apparatus, anthropologists of development have drawn our attention to a wider "developmentist configuration", namely "a complex set of institutions, flows and actors for whom development constitutes a resource, a profession, a market, a stake or a strategy" (Oliver de Sardan, 2001: 730–731, translation from French). In other words, anthropologists of development study the social worlds that development produces or enables, which are often only loosely and indirectly connected to more institutionalised apparatus.

As for the sub-field of Gender and Development, it is common in academic scholarship and university syllabi to see it explained in terms of an evolution in three phases: Women in Development (WID) in the early 1970s; Women and Development (WAD) in the mid-1970s; and Gender and Development (GAD) in the 1990s. WID was a feminist critique (Boserup, 1970) of existing paradigms which assumed that economic development would have identical effects on men and women. WAD differed by articulating women's issues as a product of inequalities grounded in systems of capitalist production – particularly in the distinction between "productive" and "reproductive" spheres and labour – and fought to render more visible the contributions of women to development. Its origins are attributed to the First World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975 (Gordon et al., 2024).

GAD shifted the terms of engagement by bringing "gender" – not just "women" – into the frame of analysis. Its proponents argued that social inequalities were the consequence of power hierarchies underpinning heteronormative constructions of femininities and masculinities, understood to be socially produced, non-natural and unstable (Icaza and Vázquez, 2016). The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 is often seen as a significant moment in the history of GAD as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted by 189 countries, set the global agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment (Gordon et al., 2024). It was also at this point that GAD came to be solidified as a sub-field of development practice and within university programmes (Rivas and Purewal, 2024; Vigoya, 2017).

GAD is also presented within scholarly literature as having "unfolded in a particularly rich context in feminist theorizing" (Icaza and Vázquez, 2016: 64) which included critiques of feminist theories informed by white, middle-class Western perspectives for ignoring the concerns of queer, working-class, Chicana, Black and postcolonial feminists (Verschuur, 2010). The latter thinkers introduced performativity (Butler, 1993) and race and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 1990) as central concepts or frames of analysis; criticised marginalising and stereotyped portrayals of "Third World Women" (Mohanty, 1984); and proposed that the concept of "gender" is a construct based on Euro-North

American cultural experiences whose equivalent either did not exist in precolonial societies or whose manifestations there took very different forms (de Lima Costa, 2016; Lugones, 2007; Oyěwùmí, 2002). The approaches that flourished during this period were both critiques of the assumptions embedded in earlier Western feminisms and alternatives grounded in diverse cultural and religious settings, such as Islamic feminisms (Ahmed, 1992; Mernissi, 1996) or African feminisms/womanisms (Nnaemeka, 2004; Ogunyemi, 1996).

The WID-WAD-GAD narrative is the "mainstream" history of the GAD sub-field, which is why we mention it in a journal targeted at scholars and practitioners who are interested in development but not necessarily familiar with debates about gender. However, this narrative has been criticised for reinforcing the idea that GAD is a "teleological pathway which diverges but emanates from dominant Eurocentric thought and values" (Rivas and Purewal, 2024: 897). In other words, if the diversity of postcolonial or Southern feminisms is mentioned, as we sketched out above, it is usually from the 1970s onwards, which "delimits other feminist traditions as only existing relationally to white, Eurocentric Global North feminist visions" (ibid.: 897).

The dominant narrative eclipses the far longer histories of non-Western transnational feminist movements and their engagements with global inequalities, and the fact that feminist theorising has always been diverse. For example, one could cite associations of Brazilian women fighting for abolition in the 1880s who published a journal, *A Familia,* against slavery; the Argentinian anarchist immigrant workers who published the feminist journal *La Voz de la Mujer*; and the first Latin American feminist conference organised in Buenos Aires in 1910 (Gargallo, 2002; Verschuur, 2010). Another example is the emergence in the 1920s of transnational feminist movements in the Middle East and Eurasia which organised two Arab Women's Congresses and two Eastern/Oriental Women's Congresses during the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. Central to these meetings were discussions of the violations of Palestinian women's rights and support for their struggle against British colonial powers and Zionism (Joseph, 2000; Verschuur, 2010). One could also mention the involvement of Black women in Pan-African movements and anti-colonial struggles. These networks spanned the US, Caribbean, Europe and the African continent from the organisation of the first Pan-African Conference in London in 1900 (Nangwaya, 2016). They included the publication of magazines like *Femmes du soleil* and *AWA: la revue de la femme noire* in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s which connected feminists across francophone Africa (Dieng and Sall, 2023) and the creation of the African Women's Union in 1962 and Pan-African Women's Organization in 1974 (Mohamed, 2024). That the latter's predecessor was funded by the Soviet Union again challenges the dominant Western Europe/North America-centric historical narrative of WID-WAD-GAD.

The fact that these histories are far less known in development circles than that of WID-WAD-GAD is significant because it reveals what Rivas and Purewal describe as the "gender and development (GAD) impasse" or "silences and refusal to own up to feminism's own history of exclusion and complicity in violence within the GAD field" (2024: 897). Indeed, scholars working within postdevelopment, postcolonial and decolonial traditions have argued that GAD is thoroughly implicated in the colonialist continuities of the development

apparatus (Langdon, 2013). Despite the diversity of development initiatives and significant variation in their implementation and reception, the apparatus – particularly at higher levels – displays common characteristics. It tends to propose that global inequalities can be eradicated through discrete and largely technocratic interventions, and imposes a relatively linear process of "modernisation" on "traditional" or "developing" societies. To achieve this end, it uses goals and tools largely developed in the Global North and rooted in Western norms – such as microfinance or affirmative action quotas for women in political positions – but presents them as "universal" and "neutral". Finally, it reproduces the paternalist attitude that certain people (privileged by race, geographical location, class status or adherence to "modern" norms) embody or possess the requisite knowledge and expertise to "develop" others, and not vice versa (Klapeer, 2017; Kothari, 2006; Newman et al., 2023; Roodsaz and van Raemdonck, 2018; White, 2006).

In relation to GAD specifically, anthropologists have pointed out how gender and women's empowerment were instrumentalised – marked by Hilary Clinton's speech at the 1995 UN Conference for Women in Beijing – and used as a tool of "femo-nationalism" (Farris, 2017) to justify military intervention in the Middle East and Afghanistan by US and NATO forces (Abu-Lughod, 2013). We see the continuity of such appropriation in Israel's "women washing" and "pinkwashing" of the plausible genocide, where the participation of women and transgender individuals in combat roles is hailed as a victory for gender equality: a discourse reproduced by mainstream Western media outlets.[24] Arguably, gender thus continues to be used as a mechanism of what Lugones defines as "modern/colonial power" (2007).

With these critiques in mind, for the purposes of anthropological analysis we understand GAD as encompassing all the WID-WAD-GAD phases. Indeed, their boundaries were never so distinct in practice, and contemporary GAD spaces often reflect a combination of discursive framings, gender ontologies and approaches associated with WID, WAD and GAD (Thompson and Prügl, 2017). This trilogy can therefore be understood to comprise a "set of gender projects that sit somewhat uneasily together" (White, 2006: 57), but that share the following broadly overlapping goals and characteristics (ibid.: 57):

> They create "expert knowledge" about women and gender; they institutionalize this within development agencies in the shape of women's or gender units, projects and planning tools; and they redistribute development resources in favour of women, both in the creation of "expert positions" for (mainly) women within the development hierarchy and in targeting women as "beneficiaries" in "the field".

White's definition dates from the early 2000s and focuses on women; we would update it to add the increased attention paid in some spaces over the last two decades to persons minoritised as a result of their sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) more broadly (Klapeer, 2017; Nyanzi, this volume) and engagement with the socially-constructed nature of masculinities and hence inclusion of men and boys in gender work as "beneficiaries" or

[24] See *Liberation*, "Israeli women soldiers: Partners in racism & genocide, not examples of 'gender equality'" (2 March 2024): https://www.liberationnews.org/israeli-women-soldiers-partners-in-racism-genocide-not-examples-of-gender-equality/

change agents (Plouffe and David, this volume). Nonetheless, we still consider that a hallmark of GAD according to this definition is its institutionalisation within the structures, practices and power relations of the international development apparatus. Hence, while feminist, queer and women's activist movements have always had a considerable impact on GAD, their activities are discussed by our authors only insofar as they engage with and struggle against the more institutionalised GAD apparatus (Nyanzi on queer movements in Uganda; Rizq on Palestinian women's rights projects).

The second criterion for our authors' papers was *fine-grained qualitative studies of practical materialities.* We here align with the broader orientation to anthropology of development defended by APAD, "that takes development as an 'object' of study or as an 'entry point' for the study of development" (Olivier de Sardan, 2001: 731, translation from French). Hence (ibid.: 730–731, translation from French):

> […] our posture as researchers is not to save or condemn development, but to understand through it the actions of all kinds that claim to be related to it, from near or far (on the side of "developers" as well as "developed"), in the diversity of their meanings and practices.

For this reason, our contributions hone in on concrete empirical examples of doing GAD, whether as revealed through participant observation or introspective auto-ethnography. Plouffe unpacks Plan Canada's use of the recent "Gender Transformative Approach" in GAD, the cultural biases of this supposedly "neutral" model and its lack of adaptation to "local" contexts. Castro studies HIV/AIDS prevention programmes with sex workers in Mali, showing how national-level discourses on destigmatisation are refracted by practitioners on the ground through the lenses of local value frameworks. David investigates the use of art competitions by international cooperation organisations to promote gender equality in Morocco, evidencing how these projects rest on largely depoliticised and non-confrontational gender discourses which discourage a clear endorsement of feminism. Rizq shares experiences of development projects in the context of Israeli occupation. She unveils the power dynamics that impose foreign agendas and understandings of GAD that tend to disempower Palestinian communities and deprive them of a say about their genuine needs in a most challenging environment. Nyanzi discusses queer movements and programmes to alleviate menstrual poverty in Uganda, arguing that they are impeded by essentialising ontologies of gender and Christian value frameworks. Finally, Istratii juxtaposes the complexity of the gender dynamics she observed in African contexts, and experienced when being raised in Greece by immigrant Moldovan parents, compared to the narrow, normative and universalising gender checklists and training workshops she encountered in GAD practice and while studying at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS).

The third criterion we used for defining an anthropological approach to the study of GAD is *a posture which seeks to illuminate the multiple and contested meanings assigned to common taken-for-granted terms, and instances of translation or tension where they meet.* Critical scholars have argued that GAD has tended to operationalise understandings of "patriarchy", "heteronormativity" and "gender performativity" as "normative ahistorical totalities" (Icaza and Vázquez, 2016: 66). Like other anthropologists and qualitative social

scientists, we were interested in "how gender and sexuality understandings operate within development projects and how they interact with local epistemologies" (Roodsaz and van Raemdonck, 2018: 17). The terms included in our call for papers consisted of understandings of "gender", associated concepts like "gender equality" or "gender transformative approaches" (see Plouffe, this volume), as well as the diverse meanings attributed to "feminist" and "decolonial" approaches as evoked in the context of GAD debates (see Istratii, Nyanzi and Rizq, this volume).

The studies in our special issue confirm that GAD is a highly contested terrain, with significant divergences in understanding that are manifest at various levels and in different spaces: in conceptions of feminist theory inside and outside the academy, articulations of GAD agendas, production of practical models, implementation of activities and in appropriations or contestations by practitioners, "beneficiaries" or activists. Our authors show that these high degrees of diversity in understandings are accompanied, at times, by quite incommensurable gender ontologies (see Istratii, this volume). Concepts like gender are therefore, once again, revealed to be "equivocations or equivocal categories: although they appear to be the same (i.e., to have the same meaning), in fact they may not be when signified by other communities" (de Lima Costa, 2016: 53).

Inter-disciplinarity and structural approaches

And yet, despite our attempts to delineate an "anthropological" focus, this issue also reflects a strong inter-disciplinary slant that combines a focus on the particular in specific contexts with more structural analysis. Indeed, such a posture is common within anthropology of development more generally (Olivier de Sardan 2001: 747–748, translation from French):

> […] the approach [to anthropology of development] based on the interweaving of social logics which, in socio-anthropology, for methodological reasons favours the "micro-political" level, has everything to gain by collaborating with complementary scientific enterprises adopting more panoptic and "macro" perspectives.

Literature on GAD is itself highly inter-disciplinary, political and applied. Since its origins the field has been informed by feminist theorising, characterised by "a critical stance and with a view to changing the realities they analyse and focus on" (Destremau, 2017: 253, translation from French). Academic scholarship on GAD reflects the same trends. Many people who critically study GAD have received anthropological training, yet also identify as feminists and are inspired by theorising and methodological approaches from gender, queer, postcolonial, decolonial or women's studies. In reality, drawing a bounded line around "anthropological" perspectives on GAD becomes difficult to achieve in practice.

Interdisciplinarity has therefore informed our identification of cross-cutting themes in this special issue. While all of our contributions testify to the plurality of interpretations of gender in GAD spaces, significant commonalities become apparent once the papers are read as a collection. These similarities entail recurring patterns in the ways in which power functions within what Istratii describes as collectives of "expert consultants, gender trainers, research

institutes, programmes of study […] and their publications" or, to use the concept developed in international relations, "epistemic communities of practice" (Haas, 1992).

As revealed by our authors, epistemic communities of practice share a tendency to reify certain gender ontologies and practical change models to the exclusion of alternatives. They hold the authority to dismiss differing perspectives, which often include the experiences of (the most marginalised members of) "targeted" communities. They do this by constructing – discursively and through everyday practices such as reward and gate-keeping – certain knowledges and knowledge producers as legitimate. Meanwhile, they push out – or "shut up" as Rizq puts it – alternative perspectives, or maintain them in a subordinate position at the margins. Our authors also reveal how power relations contribute to domesticating local actors and targeted populations into the most "conventional" and less critical or subversive forms of feminism (see David and Rizq, this volume). Hence, influential epistemic communities of practice tend to shift away from the perspectives and experiences of those most marginalised by gender/sexual hierarchies and instead gravitate towards the interests and worldviews of the more privileged members of those communities, or those willing to play the game according to donors' rules.

Our studies eschew simplistic assumptions that the Global North and South are monolithic blocs, and that the former influences the latter in a unidirectional manner (c.f. Olivier de Sardan, 2001: 735), by demonstrating the complexity of power dynamics in knowledge production within GAD epistemic communities. See, for example, Nyanzi on the tensions between queer/feminist movements and state initiatives for women in Uganda, or Castro on the diversity of perspectives on HIV/AIDS prevention in national discourse and among civil society organisations in Mali. The case studies also reveal the wide diversity and intense contestation of gender ontologies and feminisms in Northern contexts, including within universities (Grinspan et al., 2023; Ngeke et al., 2024; Istratii and Nyanzi, this volume). Based on the various contributions in this issue, our key argument nonetheless resonates with Destremau's conclusions (2017: 254) that, elevated to the rank of "expertise", are "knowledges validated by norms of power, produced in dominant social strata, often at a distance from the social realities they speak of".

Three of our contributors (Rizq, Nyanzi, Istratii) specifically implicate academia and universities' publishing and teaching practices as sites in which these silencing tendencies occur, reflecting wider emergent debates in the GAD field. In what follows, we review insights into the dynamics of knowledge production within GAD generated over the last 25 years, before showing how "many of the debates that have characterised GAD and feminist pedagogical spaces are now 'spilling over' into academic institutions" (Amin and Girard, 2024: 857).

The politics of knowledge production in GAD

Scholars have long studied the power inequalities in knowledge production within the GAD sector. One area of particularly intense analysis has been the rise of "gender experts" charged with implementing the gender mainstreaming agenda formally introduced at the

Beijing conference in 1995 as an overall strategy to support gender equality. All development organisations were mandated to implement this agenda through the "integration of gender equality concerns into the analyses and formulation of all policies, programmes and projects" (Mukhopadhyay, 2016a: 78). This process led to the creation of an international network of gender experts and a distinct body of expertise which "takes gender relations as its object and gender inequality as a policy problem to be solved" (Thompson and Prügl, 2017: 89).

In their large mixed-methods study of gender expertise, Thompson and Prügl use Bourdieu's concept of "field" to argue that gender experts occupy "a transnational social field distinct from (although loosely connected to) the feminist movement". Like other professional fields, it is structured with "barriers to entry, […] different bodies of knowledge about gender relations that are valued differently according to the reputation of those who develop it, and this produces professional hierarchies" (Thompson and Prügl, 2017: 89). When investigating the basis of gender experts' expertise, they found an elite space in which university education was a near-universal prerequisite, although training in a specific discipline was not required. However, when gender experts were asked which individuals or texts they turned to for inspiration, their answers revealed a stark anglophone hegemony. Forty per cent of experts had trained in the US or UK, and generally came from a handful of elite institutions (LSE, IDS, Cornell, Harvard, Melbourne, Graduate Institute Geneva). Hence, while gender expertise is weakly standardised and the field loosely structured, a narrow range of individuals, (academic) institutions and ideas exert enormous transnational epistemic influence. These findings dovetail with other empirical evidence of "the hegemony of Anglo-Eurocentric knowledge-making and funding regimes on development discourses, policies and practices across the world" (Gordon et al., 2024: 830).

Another observation of knowledge-power made in relation to gender mainstreaming was its often limited impact on addressing deep-seated structural inequalities. This was frequently attributed by scholars in the early 2000s to "depoliticisation", defined as "the process whereby an issue is removed from the political realm […] into the realm of expertise through which is becomes a technical question" (Kunz, 2017: 75; see David, this volume). However, this strict dichotomy between the technical and political has since been critiqued, including on the basis of (auto-)ethnographic evidence. What counts as "political" or a radical challenge to the status quo is subjective and depends on context, and even seemingly "technical" tools like checklists can create spaces for critical discussions that call into question the structural underpinnings of gender inequalities (De Jong, 2016; Kunz, 2017).

Rather, the limitations of gender mainstreaming appear to have been an inevitable product of the institutionalisation process. This also occurred as a result of the "NGOisation" of GAD in the 2000s whereby NGOs, rather than social movements or women's groups, were framed as the ideal vectors of social change and democratisation (Jad, 2004; see David and Rizq, this volume). The costs entailed in making gender "governable" for programmatic purposes required that "truths about women's position and situation, and about gender relations, had to be generated through research and knowledge frameworks that were

acceptable to the governance of gender" (Mukhopadhyay, 2016b: 135). GAD is therefore characterised by "governance feminism" which represents (Halley et al., 2006: 340):

> [the] installation of feminists and feminist ideas in actual legal-institutional power. It takes many forms, and some parts of feminism participate more effectively than others; some are not players at all.

As Mukhopadhyay (2016b: 137) argues, "governance feminism" represents a "success" for feminists in the sense that they were previously side-lined within the development apparatus, but also created new hierarchies in terms of which feminisms came to be represented. She explains that:

> Positions within governance institutions have made some of us [feminists] more powerful because we are involved in the act of ruling […]. Outsider voices have either to be filtered through the systems and procedures set up to govern gender or have to be generated for the purposes of policymaking. The so-called outsiders have little power over, or direct say in, matters.

These observations align with the conclusions of other GAD critics who note that the rich diversity of feminisms around the world is rarely reflected in the work of researchers and practitioners situated within development and international cooperation (Verschuur, 2010). Moreover, even activist movements do not necessarily represent the perspectives of ordinary people minoritised by gender hierarchies, whose voices can be almost totally absent from GAD debates (Destremau, 2017). Others have noted how individuals racialised as white (Kothari, 2006; Rivas and Purewal, 2024; Vigoya, 2017; White, 2006), or adhering to gender framings generated in sites of epistemic authority in the Global North and/or aligning with postcolonial elite interests (Dasgupta, 2017), are perceived to be more knowledgeable and hence come to wield more influence.

Of course, as our papers note, these tendencies are accompanied by dynamics of "vernacularisation" whereby local practitioners embed GAD "scripts" on gender and sexuality within broader realities and value frameworks in their specific contexts. However, as these scripts overwhelmingly "involve exclusionary mechanisms that lock out beneficiaries' participation as full subjects possessing valuable knowledge" (Roodsaz and van Raemdonck, 2018: 17), they rarely enable genuine dialogue between experts, practitioners and "beneficiaries", nor do they promote participants' full problem-solving capabilities (see Plouffe, Castro and Rizq, this volume).

In summary, anthropologically informed research has revealed important insights into the limitations of GAD for the fields' "beneficiaries". Key to this are probing questions about whose knowledge, voice or definition of evidence "counts", and the mechanisms through which some perspectives come to be silenced. However, beyond observations that certain universities of the Global North dominate when it comes to training gender experts (Thompson and Prügl, 2017), in general, scholars of GAD have been slow to apply the same level of critique to knowledge production in *academic spaces.* It is to more recent interrogations of this phenomenon that we now turn.

Universities: key links in the chain of GAD knowledge production

The lack of attention paid to power dynamics in academic research is problematic because:

> […] universities are […] often doing GAD work, both through training people who take on GAD work, locally, regionally, and internationally, and through the production of knowledge and tools that GAD practitioners utilise to develop and evaluate policies and projects (Amin and Girard, 2024: 859).

A critical focus on universities as important links in the chain of the GAD apparatus has only recently started to emerge, particularly among researchers using a decolonial theoretical framework. One bias identified is the question of academics' privileged positioning which means that certain gender-related inequalities go unresearched. For instance, Kisana and Hole (2023) argue that knowledge production institutions in India, and intellectual spaces in the diaspora (including the famous postcolonial Subaltern Studies group), are dominated by upper Dwij/Savarna castes. This contributes to extremely high rates of alienation and suicide among lower-caste students in India, and a neglect of caste as a frame of analysis for making sense of the struggles of women whose experiences reflect multiple patriarchies associated with different castes. Vigoya also explains how elite academic spaces in Latin America have tended to exclude the perspectives of women of colour, indigenous and queer women (2017).

A second contentious issue concerns whose voices are promoted through academic publishing. This system "underpins the information ecosystem that fuels the development inheritances and imaginaries" (Narayanaswamy et al., 2023: 308) and plays a key role in silencing perspectives such as those from religious worldviews (Istratii, this volume) or queer subjectivities (Nyanzi, this volume). Critiques have been made of: academia's narrow policing of what counts as "objective", "scientific", "legitimate" or "rigorous" knowledge (Demeter, 2020; Kunz, 2017; Istratii, this volume); global structural disadvantages in access to the latest scientific literature and training in academic writing (Demeter, 2020; Nyanzi, this volume); the power imbalances and structural challenges inherent in North-South research partnerships (Kontinen and Nguyahambi, 2020; Ouattara and Ridde, 2013); and the ways that publishing perpetuates divides "between elite (read: developed) 'knowers' and the rest (read: underdeveloped/developing)" (Narayanaswamy et al., 2023: 308).

Even scholars committed to challenging these hierarchies report struggling to overcome the norms that structure their professional lives, particularly the time required to meet publishing deadlines; we return to this thorny question in the following section, on our production of this special issue. However, innovative approaches are increasingly being undertaken, including the inclusion in journals of non-traditional writing formats like poetry (Nyanzi, this volume), storytelling, affective experiential accounts (Istratii, Nyanzi and Rizq, this volume) and creative multi-dimensional outputs (Fichtner and Newman, 2021; Icaza and De Jong, 2018; Narayanaswamy et al., 2023). Authoring and editorial processes are being re-imagined to involve more collaborative dissemination strategies and dialogue, trust and knowledge co-creation between editors, reviewers and authors (Kontinen and Nguyahambi, 2020; Narayanaswamy et al., 2023).

A third theme in this emergent literature concerns the power hierarchies inherent in the teaching of GAD. Amin and Girard have studied the experiences of students at the all-female Asian University for Women (AUW) in Bangladesh, who felt pressured and alienated by the institution's management to uphold "Western secular assumptions" of women's empowerment as part of AUW's "aim to 'save' these women from their 'oppressive cultures'" (2024: 863). Meanwhile, others have demonstrated that GAD courses taught in the UK (Rivas and Purewal, 2024) and Canada (Gill, 2024) rarely pay much attention to intersectional approaches, race as a socially-constructed structuring principle in development, or the documented harms that mainstream feminist approaches can have on communities of colour. Northern universities reproduce the "whiteness of expertise" (Kothari, 2006) in GAD by obliging doctoral students from the Global South to study their own countries because of funding constraints but also assumptions that they cannot become "experts" on Global North countries (Kanagasabai, 2023). Feminist, critical and decolonial pedagogies have been harnessed to enable more dialogue and a greater plurality of perspectives in the classroom (Freire, 1987; hooks, 1994) but these initiatives can be resisted by university management or students when they challenge mainstream narratives (Gill, 2024; Icaza and De Jong, 2018; Rivas and Purewal, 2024). Istratii's interview speaks directly to these debates as she unpacks her experience as a student on the master's programme in Gender and Development at the IDS – a powerful epistemic authority in the field of GAD (c.f. Thompson and Prügl, 2017). In Istratii's view, research, teaching and training at IDS reflects very little epistemic diversity which can be deeply alienating and frustrating for students.

In summary, feminist literature on GAD increasingly claims to celebrate epistemic diversity, yet creating space for pluriversity is not without its challenges. Reading Istratii's and Nyanzi's texts side by side demonstrates this complexity perfectly. Nyanzi raises the constraints of binary and essentialising constructions of gender that sideline queer experiences and struggles in Ugandan women's movements and national and transnational academic debates, including in publishing. Indeed, many scholars have criticised GAD practice and teaching for being slow to acknowledge such gender diversity (Gill, 2024; Gordon et al., 2024; Rivas and Purewal, 2024).

On the other hand, Istratii's experience is of an ontology of gender fluidity, informed by "a normative gender theory that disproportionately reflected the secular and progressive politics that had characterised second and third wave feminist movements in Western societies" (this volume: 130–131), and how this was imposed by her GAD tutors, silencing the reality that other perspectives exist. Indeed, GAD has long been critiqued for its secular bias and for framing all religious institutions as patriarchal (Amin and Girard, 2024; Istratii, 2021; Roodsaz and van Raemdonck, 2018). Gender experts often refuse to engage with "the religion question" when it conflicts with gender-related development mandates, and religion "is either not mentioned at all or merely referred to as a potential obstacle or a dangerous territory" (Roodsaz and van Raemdonck, 2018: 20). The consequence is that other-than-secular modes of agency are not acknowledged or enabled, which is deeply alienating for students or development "beneficiaries", including gender minorities, forced to choose between their community or a secular definition of empowerment (Amin and Girard, 2024; Istratii, 2021; Newman, 2025; Roodsaz and van Raemdonck, 2018).

While Istratii's and Nyanzi's perspectives could be perceived as being diametrically opposed and irreconcilable, we argue that the reality is more subtle. Queer desires for self-realisation are real and widespread, and many individuals in the Global South appropriate Western-originating models of gender, queer identities or political strategies – including because they find the resources to do so lacking in their own cultural repertoires. Nonetheless, promotion of diversity in SOGI has been mainstreamed into GAD in the last decades, at least among NGOs and donors based in Western/Northern European countries, but often involves "homodevelopmentalism" or "a queer/ed version of developmentalism" (Klapeer, 2017: 44). This approach is grounded in the assumption of "European sexual exceptionalism", (ibid.: 45) namely the idea that promotion of LGBTQIA+ rights and homo-tolerance are EUropean[25] characteristics while homophobia and transphobia are "backward" and un-EUropean. These assumptions reproduce evolutionary modernist tropes and lead to "homotransnationalism" (ibid.: 44), whereby development interventions use Western examples as a normative, unilinear process that other societies have to emulate in order to "modernise" or "progress". As a consequence, the political circumstances (including European and North American imperialisms) promoting discrimination and violence against people on the basis of SOGI are under-acknowledged, as are the ways of being queer or embracing queerness that are grounded in "local" cultural and religious ontologies or value frameworks (see Istratii, this volume).

Therefore, we would argue that the challenge posed by Nyanzi's and Istratii's texts is not necessarily a problem of incommensurable gender ontologies, or a dichotomy of "LGBTQIA+ rights versus religion" *per se* but rather the tendency of GAD – including in university spaces – to impose a politics of "closure and finality" (Roodsaz and van Raemdonck, 2018: 21) rather than "opportunities for inclusive dialogue and exchange […] based on radical egalitarianism" (ibid.: 19). In putting academia under the microscope for reproducing exclusionary knowledge hierarchies – including spaces that perceive themselves to be "progressive" and "critical" – we were forced to confront our own implication in reproducing such hierarchies throughout the production of this special issue. It is to this experience that we now turn.

Channelling knowledge in the making of this special issue

We (the special issue coordinators, Anneke, Elena and Alena) are inspired by arguments defending the benefits of expanding academic publishing to include a wider diversity of perspectives, knowledges and formats than has traditionally been the case (Narayanaswamy et al., 2023). However, we noticed that, during the process of producing the special issue, the same hierarchies that we seek to challenge were being reproduced. We take a moment to unpack some of the contributing factors while adding the caveat that this discussion is quite superficial and merits its own research.

[25] Klapeer (2017) uses "EUropean" to refer to the countries of the European Union as a sub-set of countries located in Europe more widely.

Initially, thirty abstracts involving fifty (co-)authors were submitted by the deadline of the call, with equal numbers of French and English proposals. We calculated that 64 per cent of authors listed their primary institutional affiliation as being an organisation located in the Global North, largely in Western Europe, but also the UK, Canada and the US. The other 36 per cent were from the Global South, mainly sub-Saharan Africa but also Latin America and Southeast Asia. There were seven early-career scholars who had a master's degree and/or were currently undertaking a doctorate, and five researchers working in development organisations or as consultants.

We then evaluated the abstracts based on their "quality" (i.e. how well the abstract articulated a clear argument, transparently presented a solid body of empirical evidence in support of that argument, showed clarity and coherence in the style of writing, and included an indicative bibliography), "originality" and "relevance" (whether the argument contributed new insights on the call's themes). Our decisions were approved by the editorial board. The final breakdown of the ten accepted abstracts included equal numbers in French and English, with 77 per cent from authors based in the Global North and 23 per cent in the Global South, three early-career scholars, and no non-academic authors. Thus, we had disproportionately rejected abstracts involving researchers based in the Global South and non-academic perspectives – although early-career scholars were relatively well-represented.

The call for papers had had to be re-worked to ensure a sufficiently "original" and "anthropological" approach, which took time given the coordinators' personal constraints. This delayed the circulation of the call and authors were given only six weeks to submit their manuscript after their abstract was accepted. While this timeframe was clearly communicated in the call, several (co-)authors dropped out because they were unable to meet the deadline. Based on our correspondence with authors, we noticed that those who withdrew were disproportionately affected by health issues, precarious employment conditions and/or care responsibilities. Ultimately, seven papers involving eight (co-)authors were sent out to review. Finding reviewers was an additional challenge and authors often had to wait up to six months to receive feedback, which further reduced the time they then had to rework their manuscripts. After another withdrawal and three rejections, three papers were accepted for publication – all written by authors based in the Global North, one at doctoral and two at postdoctoral level.

While we in no ways wish to diminish the excellent scholarship of our published authors, to bring in greater diversity of perspectives, we invited three specialists with practitioner and activist backgrounds, all originally from countries outside the Global North, to give their personal accounts of GAD. These interviews asked the same questions as the original call for papers but allowed interviewees to articulate their lived experience in their own voice and without the traditional expectations of a literature review or theoretical framework. Nyanzi's account is also accompanied by poetry from her anthology *No Roses From My Mouth: Poems from Prison by Stella Nyanzi* written during her incarceration as a political prisoner in Luzira Women's Prison in Kampala (Nyanzi, 2020).

However, our concern remained that as coordinators we had, despite our good intentions, contributed to reproducing the kind of hierarchy in academic knowledge production

that we stand against ethically. Demeter's book *Academic Knowledge Production and the Global South: Questioning Inequality and Under-Representation* (2020) has given us some keys to understand how this happened. Demeter demonstrates through large-scale statistical modelling that "prestigious" scientific journals (i.e. those included in major databases, with a high impact factor) are concentrated in the Global North, while 80 per cent of their published authors are North-affiliated scholars (ibid.: 86–93). He also reviews qualitative studies that uncover the structural constraints for under-resourced universities in the Global South that translate into less training in writing "quality" abstracts or papers (ibid.: 37, 40; Nyanzi, this volume). Demeter also analyses "thematic clustering" (ibid.: 33), the process whereby the topics that are "original", "quality" or even "acceptable" (Nyanzi and Istratii, this volume) are overwhelmingly defined by scholars in the Global North based on their structural privileges and/or intellectual interests.

Many of the trends that Demeter describes arguably applied to the process of producing our special issue. The geographical distribution of the institutions of affiliation of *Anthropologie & développement*'s editorial board, special issue coordinators, and reviewers is tremendously concentrated in the Global North, especially francophone European countries. Our academic networks shaped the channels through which the call for papers circulated, which could explain the lack of submissions from Latin America the Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA) region, Oceania or the Caribbean. As far as we are aware, all the external reviewers solicited by the journal (including those that we suggested) were based in the Global North. Our solicitation of interviewees also reflected personal networks. Istratii and Nyanzi submitted abstracts to the special issue while Rizq is a colleague of one of the coordinators. As Demeter notes, "research has shown a significant positive correlation between the nationality of editors and editorial board members and the nationality of the affiliations of the published papers" (2020: 46). The network effect and thematic clustering might also explain why the process reflected relatively homogenous views regarding standards of "quality", "anthropological" research, and what arguments are "original/relevant".

These insights are quite superficial and do not address all of the power dynamics at play nor their more epistemological aspects. Nonetheless, they reveal a clear structural phenomenon. As a starting point to address such challenges, in Newman's interview with Nyanzi in this volume, both share examples of successful mentorship programmes designed to support the publishing projects of scholars based in low-resourced settings. Similar initiatives have been the topic of debate within APAD for some time (Fichtner and Newman, 2021). Clearly, there is an urgent need for greater discussion on this subject.

In conclusion, the tensions surrounding the production of knowledge about gender in development are frequently analysed by anthropologists when they take place within development organisations and/or at their interface with "beneficiary" communities. However, our reading of our authors' papers, our review of debates on knowledge production in academia generally, and in relation to GAD specifically, and our reflections on the creation of this special issue, have led us to argue that more attention needs to be paid to the dynamics of such conflicts *inside academic spaces*, especially those occurring in the

Global North, given their international epistemic influence. We see little current acknowledgement within anthropological literature on GAD – or among anthropologists of development more generally – of the possibility that academic spaces could reproduce exclusionary tendencies similar to those that are critiqued within development, especially when those spaces are assumed to be "progressive" and "critical". And yet, in our opinion, the reproduction of certain hegemonic ontologies, theories, paradigms or models in GAD cannot be appreciated without considering how academic institutions can gate-keep what forms of knowledge are acceptable which, in turn, shapes the everyday realities of GAD.

Some areas for future empirical exploration include the following. We know that incommensurable diversity concerning perceptions of gender is widespread in development spaces and among academics, but we lack insight into how that diversity is approached in the teaching of GAD, during conferences, or in decisions to review or reject articles. One could investigate in specific contexts whether all knowledges and perspectives are considered equally valid or not, and on what basis. Another question concerns who is invited into such academic spaces in the first place, by whom, and how prevailing value frameworks, epistemologies, ontologies, disciplinary norms and funding regimes in specific academic spaces shape these dynamics. If we return to the examples that opened this introduction – namely the context wherein the opportunity to commit a plausible genocide is articulated by its perpetrators and their allies as a triumph of gender equality, in "a cruel and obscene mockery of women's rights"[26] – we must also ask whose humanity is potentially denied through our actions as academic knowledge producers, and how we can avoid becoming complicit in these processes of dehumanisation. These questions connect to wider dynamics in the current moment whereby certain topics are considered "too sensitive" to discuss or write about, whether as a result of institutional silencing or (self-)censorship. These dynamics also have to be situated in the broader political and discursive context wherein gender, development and academic knowledge production remain highly contested terrains.

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[26] Quotes from *Liberation*: "Israeli women soldiers: Partners in racism & genocide, not examples of 'gender equality'" (2 March 2024): https://www.liberationnews.org/israeli-women-soldiers-partners-in-racism-genocide-not-examples-of-gender-equality/

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