

(Re-)Reading the 1st Thai Government's *Women and Development Plan (1982-1986)* through a Postcolonial Feminist Lens

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Abstract

This study aims to answer the following two research questions: *how has knowledge about women in Thai society been produced, by whom, using what method(s), and what have been the results?* And, *why has invaluable knowledge written by subaltern women (in particular that of Pornpet Meuansri) been ignored in this process?* Based on the assumption that the centralized bureaucracy not only administers but also ‘produces knowledge’ through its policies and plans, we will examine the Thai government’s first plan on the development of women entitled, *The Five Year Plan on Woman and Development (1982-1987)*, and its effects on (subaltern women’s lives, in particular,) Pornpet, a farmer who fought with the government for her land rights for almost 40 years (1968-2004). This document will be critically read alongside Mohanty’s essay, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” (1984). Structurally, this research is divided into four parts. They are 1) Introduction, 2) (From) “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses”, 3) (to) Thai Bureaucrats and the Construction and Representation of (Rural) Thai Women in the National Development Plan, and 4) (and) Its Critique, respectively.

1) Introduction

(Politically and) historically speaking, in the last 75 years, there has been a shift in colonial relations from ‘Europe and the rest’ to the ‘US and the rest’, facilitated in part by Western global organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank. The new concept and practice of “Development” initiated by these organizations have been aggressively introduced to and implemented in Thailand (and other so-called ‘Third World’ countries) through the government’s policies and mechanisms. The First Five-Year National Economic and Social Development Plan (started in 1961) and the following three plans (all 5 years each) placed their primary focus on industrialization and economic development. It was not until the Fifth Five-Year National Economic and Social Development Plan launched in 1982 that women’s issues and problem-solving strategies were elaborated and included with this vital (but mainstream) document under the heading of Women and Development Plan (1982-1986).

Looking from an ‘archival’ perspective, this 38-year-old document can be considered not only as a ‘plan’ (to be implemented by the government bureaucracy) but also as ‘**state archives**’ on and about Thai women. Such archives are needed to be (re-visited and) re-read to develop more in depth and breadth of understanding of how knowledge on and about Thai women has been produced and disseminated by the government during the past 40 years and what has been the effect. In sum, this research will be undertaken in the belief that, as I have earlier proposed in my previous study¹ [and would like to explore further here],

¹ “‘My ‘W/ri[gh]t/E’ and My Land’’: A Postcolonial Feminist Study on Grassroots’ Archives and Autobiography (1937-2004).” Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, 2014. A ‘grassroots’ here refers to Pornpet Meuansri, a Thai farmer woman who had fought with the government for her land rights and justice for almost four decades. On May 31, 2004, she was brutally murdered on the way back home from her farm. What she left behind were her 400 petitions, diaries, letters, news clippings, court documents and other archival records. I have based my study on some of her more significant archives as well as her autobiography. According to the timeline, Pornpet’s land rights campaign emerged in the media in the 1980s and lasted for two and a half decades at about the same time that significant changes began to take place in the women’s movement both globally and locally as I had elaborated:

... The process of tracing ‘*how*’ such dominant knowledge has been constructed will help us to learn about the origin, and therefore where the suppression of grassroots women’s knowledge began, and to have a tool to *deconstruct*, *reconstruct* and above all to *decolonize* ourselves and open a new space to build up our own body of knowledge about women in the Thai context which will include marginal voices (Sinith, 2014:1-2).

In tracing this trail, a postcolonial feminist lens will be utilized. Regarding postcolonialism, roughly speaking, this concept places its consideration on the notion of the authority (and non-authority) of ‘knowledge production’. According to Blunt and Will, it “... has been, and to a large extent still is, controlled and produced in the West; the power to name, represent and theorize is still located here” (2002: 9). Therefore, as they both elaborate further, the key aspect of postcolonialism is

... [to challenge] the experiences of speaking and writing by which dominant discourses come into being and understanding the spatiality of power and knowledge. Spivak (1990) has shown that practices of speaking and writing are not innocent, but are part of the process of ‘worlding’, or discursively setting apart certain parts of the world from others. Knowledge is a form of power and, by implication, violence; it gives authority to the processor of knowledge (Said, 1978) (*ibid.*).²

Globally, the shift in the ‘political’ agenda of the United Nations’ International Year of Women brought with it significant domestic changes. Locally, the three dominant streams of the women’s movement – academic, bureaucratic and NGO – were deeply integrated into the Thai sociopolitical context. Women’s units in many universities and ministries, as well as women’s NGOs, were set up with financial support in the form of foreign aid. In terms of their mission, the academic departments tried to initiate research, bureaucratic agencies paid attention to ‘developing’ (poor) women through various ‘training’ projects, while NGOs proposed western dominated campaigns on sexuality and related issues. The problems faced by rural women (comprising 80% of all women in Thailand), i.e. women, their land–rights and their fight with bureaucracy, simply do not appear as part of the agenda of the mainstream women’s movement (2014:4).

²For further discussion on this concept see, for example, Sinith (2014), Williams and Chrisman (1994), Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (1995), and Young (2003).

The concept of postcolonialism as a distinct body of writing was developed in the late 1970s with Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) considered a landmark text. Then, six years later (1984) "Under Western Eyes³: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" by Chandra Talpade Mohanty recontextualized postcolonialism within a feminist discourse. In doing so, Mohanty made visible the (hegemonic) relation between the First World and the Third World Woman which influenced all later postcolonial feminist scholarship⁴ with her critique that "...the political project of Western feminism and its discursive construction of the category of the 'Third World woman' as a generic, homogenous, victimized stereotype that Western feminists must save"⁵.

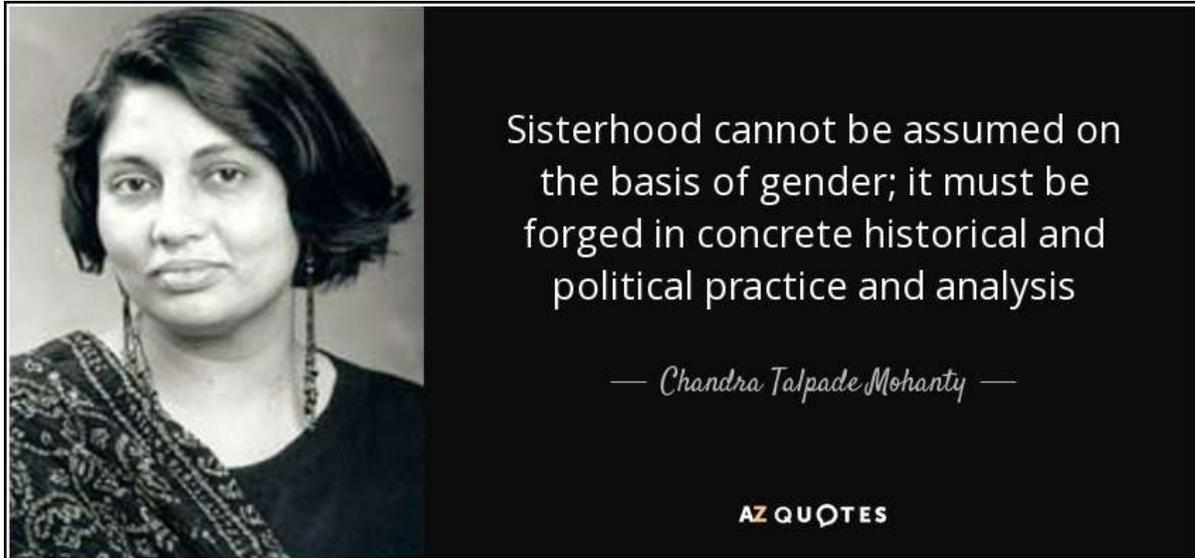
In my research, Mohanty's essay will be read as a framework alongside my examination of the Thai government's first plan on the development of women and its effects.

³ The term *Under Western Eyes* has its own historical meaning dating back over a century ago. First, in 1911, it was the title of a novel by Joseph Conrad. Then in 1936 the novel was developed into a French film ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Under_Western_Eyes_\(novel\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Under_Western_Eyes_(novel))). Finally, 73 years later the phrase was creatively and critically appropriated by Mohanty (with the subtitle: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses).

⁴ They are, for example, "Perceiving Feminism: Some Local Responses" by Nilika Mehrotra (*Sociological Bulletin*, 51:1, 58-79), "Victimization of Muslim Women in Submission" by Aysel Morin (*Women's Studies in Communication*, 32:3, 380-408), "Centrality of Experiences and Third World Women" by Maria Angelica de Leon Relucio (*MP: An Online Feminist Journal*, July 2008) and "Gender, Work and Resistance: South Korean Textile Industry in the 1970s" by Mikyoung Kim (*Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 41:3, 411-430), respectively.

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chandra_Talpade_Mohanty

2 (From) “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses”

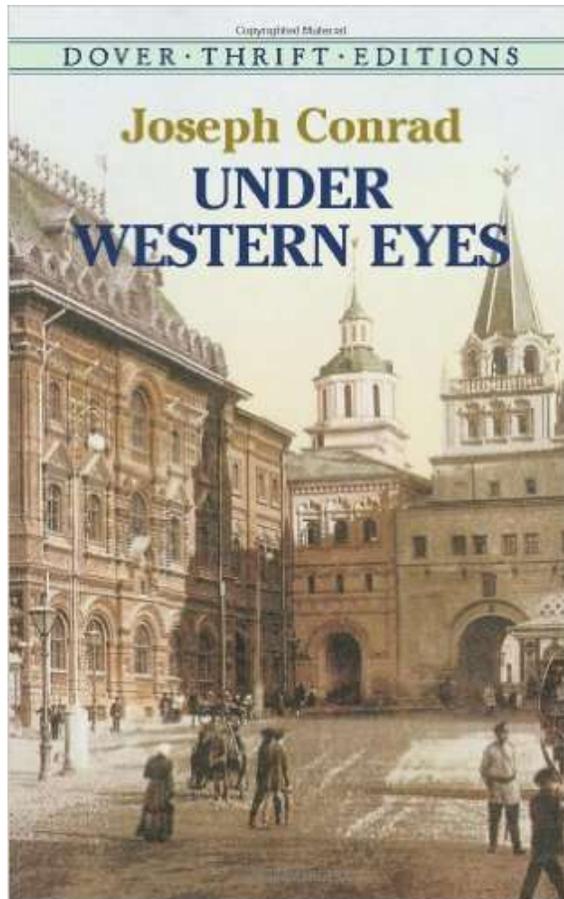


In her provocative article “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” (UWE), based on her critique of nine texts from Zed Press’s *Women in the Third World* series⁶, Mohanty elaborates that the term ‘colonization’⁷

⁶ They are: Patricia Jeffery, *Frogs in a Well - Indian Women in Purdah* (1979); Latin American and Caribbean Women's Collective, *Slaves of Slaves: The Challenge of Latin American Women* (1980); Gail Omvedt, *We will smash this prison!: Indian Women in Struggle* (1980); Juliette Minces, *The House of Obedience: Women in Arab Society* (1983); Bobby Siu, *Women of China: Imperialism and Women's Resistance 1900-1949* (1981); Ingela Bendt and Jim Downing, *We Shall Return: Women of Palestine* (1982); Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, *Women of Africa: Roots of Oppression* (1983); Maria Mies, *The Lace Makers of Narsapur: Indian Housewives for the World Market* (1983); and Miranda Davies, ed., *Third World/ Second Sex: Women's Struggles and National Liberation* (1983). According to Mohanty, these nine books “... focused on the following common areas in discussing women’s ‘status’ within various societies: religion, family/ kinship structures, the legal system, the sexual division of labor, education, and political resistance” (Ibid: 357).

⁷ Actually, Mohanty begins her first paragraph provocatively and powerfully:

It ought to be of some political significance at least that the term “colonization” has come to denote a variety of phenomena in recent feminist and left writing in general. From its analytic value as a category of exploitative economic exchange in both traditional and contemporary marxisms (particularly contemporary theorists such as Baran, Amin and Gunder-Frank) to its



Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses

Chandra Talpade Mohanty

boundary 2, Vol. 12, No. 3, On Humanism and the University I: The Discourse of Humanism. (Spring - Autumn, 1984), pp. 333-358.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0190->

[3659%28198421%2F23%2912%3A3%3C333%3AUWEFSA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Y](http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0190-3659%28198421%2F23%2912%3A3%3C333%3AUWEFSA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Y)

use by feminist women of color in the U.S. to describe the appropriation of their experiences and struggles by hegemonic white women's movements... (Ibid).

“has been used to characterize everything from the most evident economic and political hierarchies to the production of a particular cultural discourse about what is called ‘Third world’” (Ibid: 333). However, in her study, the discursive aspect or the notion and relation between (the hegemony of) the First World’s (feminist) *writing* and their construction of the Third World Woman is the central focus. As she elaborates:

I would like to suggest that the feminist writing I analyze here discursively colonize the material and the historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/ re-presenting a composite, singular “Third World Woman” --- an image which appears arbitrarily constructed, but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse (Ibid.: 334-5).

In order to reveal the process of the production of ethnocentric universalism within the context of a hegemonic First/Third World connection presented in (Western) feminist discourse on women in the Third world, Mohanty directs her critique at three basic analytical principles employed in these texts.

They are, firstly, the strategic location of “‘women’ as a category of analysis”⁸ or “... the assumption of women as an already constituted, coherent group with identical

⁸Again under the section “‘Women’ as Category of Analysis, Or: We Are All Sisters In Struggle”, the author kicks off with a very clear statement :

By women as a category of analysis, I am referring to the critical assumption that all of us of the same gender, across classes and cultures, are somehow socially constituted as a homogeneous group identified prior to the process of analysis. This is an assumption which characterizes much feminist discourse. The homogeneity of women as a group is produced not on the basis of biological essentials, but rather on the basis of secondary sociological and anthropological universals. Thus, for instance, in any given piece of feminist analysis, women are characterized as a singular group on the basis of a shared oppression. What binds women together is a sociological notion of the “sameness” of their oppression (Ibid: 337).

In this regard, besides a summary and specific quotation discussed in the text, some paragraphs from Mohanty’s article will be cited in detail for the readers to gain more depth of meaning of her critique. This is because initially and primarily, this piece of writing aims to provide examples for students enrolled in the course WS 684 Feminist Research Method, in particular, the session

interests and desires regardless of class, ethnic or racial location or contradictions, [which] ... implies a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy ...” with universal and cross-cultural applicability (Ibid.: 336-7). Concretely speaking, Mohanty chooses five specific examples of writing in which “women” as a category of analysis is utilized in Western feminist discourse on women in the third world. They are:

women are defined as victims of male violence (Fran Hosken)⁹; victims of the colonial process (M. Cutrufelli)¹⁰; victims of Arab familial system (Juliette

focusing on the notion of “conceptual framework”. The rationale is that what it is about and how to utilize it to frame and sharpen one’s own research practice is a very challenging step in conducting said research.

⁹Hosken’s work (1981) focuses on human rights and female genital mutilation (“FGM”) in Africa and the Middle East in which she claims that “‘male sexual politics’ in Africa and around the world ‘share the same political goal: to assure female dependence and subservience by any and all means” (“FGM”, p 14)”. In this regard, Mohanty offers the following critique:

[H]ere, women are defined consistently as the victims of male control --- the “sexually oppressed”. Although it is true that the potential of male violence against women circumscribes and elucidates their social position to a certain extent, defining women as archetypal victims freezes them into “object-who-defend-themselves,” men into “subjects-who-perpetrate-violence,” and (every) society into powerless (read: women) and powerful (read: men) groups of people. Male violence must be theorized and interpreted within specific societies, both in order to understand it better, as well as in order to effectively organize to change it. Sisterhood cannot be assumed on the basis of gender; it must be forged in concrete, historical and political practice and analysis (Ibid: 339).

¹⁰ The second way in which “women” as a category of analysis is used in Western feminist discourse on women in the third world is through the notion of “Women as Universal Dependents”. For example, in Cutrufelli’s *Women of Africa: Roots of Oppression*, such statements like, “‘My analysis will start by stating that all African women are politically and economically dependent.’ Or ‘Nevertheless, either overtly or covertly, prostitution is still the main if not the only source of work for African women’” are “sprinkled liberally” throughout the whole book. Mohanty thus raises the following question:

I wonder if, in 1984, anyone would write a book entitled “Women of Europe: Roots of Oppression?” What is it about cultural Others that make it so easy to analytically formulate them into homogeneous groupings with little regard for historical specificities? Again, I am not objecting to the use of universal groupings for descriptive purposes. Women from the continent of Africa *can* be descriptively characterized as “Women of Africa.” It is when “Women of Africa” becomes a homogenous sociological grouping characterized by common dependencies or powerlessness (or even strengths) that problems arise (Ibid: 340).

Minces)¹¹; victims of the economic development process (B. Lindsay and the [liberal] WID school)¹²; and finally, victims of *the* Islamic code (Jeffrey)¹³. This mode of defining women primarily in terms of their *object status* (the way in which they are effected or not effected by certain institutions and systems) is what characterizes this particular form of the use of “women” as a category of analysis.

In the context of Western women writing/ studying women in the third world, such objectification ... needs to be both named and challenged (Ibid:338).

¹¹ In *The House of Obedience: Women in Arab Society* (1980), Minces elaborates that “... *the* patriarchal as the basis for ‘an almost identical vision of women’ that *Arab* and *Muslim* societies have...” In this regard, Elizabeth Cowie’s work (1978) suggests that “... women as women are not located within the family. Rather, it is *in* the family, as an effect of kinship structures, that women as women are constructed, defined within and by group”. Mohanty further challenges that Not only are *all Arab* and *Muslim* women seen to constitute a homogeneous oppressed group, but there is no discussion of specific practices within the family which constitute women as mothers, wives, sisters, etc. Arabs and Muslims it appears don’t change at all. Their patriarchal family is carried over from the times of the prophet Mohammed. They exist, as it were, “outside history” (Ibid: 342).

¹²Universalization through economic reductionism as produced by scholars involved in “Women and Development” enterprise such as Irene Tinker, Ester Boserup and Perdita Huston focus on the effect of development on third world women create similar effects as they build on the same assumptions as in the previous cases. That is “[a]s in the case of Minces’s patriarchal family, Hosken’s male sexual control, and Cutrufelli’s Western colonization, *Development* here becomes the all time equalizer. Women are affected positively or negatively by economic development policies” (Ibid: 343). Mohanty critically provides analysis at this point:

Thus, according to Perdita Huston, women in the third world countries she writes about have “needs” and “problems,” but few if any have “choices” or freedom to act. This is an interesting representation of women in the third world, one which is significant in suggesting a latent self-presentation of Western women which bears looking at. She writes, “What surprised and moved me most as I listened to women in such very different cultural settings was the striking commonality --- whether they are educated or literate, urban or rural --- of their most basic value: the importance they assign to family, dignity, and service to others “I wonder if Huston would consider such values unusual for women in the West? (Ibid: 344).

¹³ In Jeffrey’s *Frogs in a Well - Indian Women in Purdah* (1979) Mohanty observes that [it] considers Islamic ideology as a partial explanation for the status of women in that it provides a justification for the purdah. Here, Islamic ideology is reduced to a set of ideas whose internalization by Pirzada women contributes to the stability of this system. However, the primary explanation for purdah is located in the control that Pirzada men have over economic resources, and the personal security purdah gives to Pirzada women. By taking a specific version of Islam as *the* Islam, Jeffrey attributes a singularity and coherence to it (343).

Her second critique, is "... the uncritical use of particular methodologies in providing 'proof' of universality and cross-cultural validity" (Ibid: 337) in at least three different ways. The most basic use is the employment of arithmetic as a means of argument i.e. "the more the number of women who wear the veil, the more universal is the sexual segregation and control of women"¹⁴ (Ibid: 346). The second use is the decontextualized utilization of concepts such as reproduction, the sexual division of labour, the family, marriage, household, patriarchy, etc. whereas in reality these concepts radically vary from one environment to another. For instance, Mohanty provides the comparative case of the U.S. and Latin America's growing number of female-headed households¹⁵. What she discovered was that while the recent increase of the middle class American female-headed families could be interpreted as 'feminist progress' in that more women made choices to be single parents (e.g. lesbian parents), this was not necessarily the case in Latin America. Regarding the latter, female-headed families more often took place among the poorest women whose life choices are the most economically restrictive and which, at some level, is perhaps more similar to the rise of Black and Chicana (as well as white working class) female-headed families in the U.S. In sum, the significant changes in female-headed households in the U.S. and in Latin America could be taken into consideration but not as a universal indicator of women's independence or a universal indicator of women's impoverishment. As she concludes "[T]he *meaning* and *explanation* for the rise obviously varies according to socio-historical context ... [and above all] ... [B]eyond sisterhood, there is still racism, colonialism and imperialism" (Ibid.: 348). Last but not least, another method that has been employed is somewhat complicated in that it confuses the gender differences revealed in empirical studies and those revealed in analytical organization of cross cultural work. Based on Beverly Brown's review of the book *Nature, Culture and Gender*¹⁶ suggesting that the superordinate universal binary categories of nature:culture and female:male can be

¹⁴The author here is referring to Ann Dearden, eds., *Arab Women* (London: Minority Rights Group Report No.27, 1975), especially pp.4-5.

¹⁵Olivia Harris, "Latin American Women --- An Overview," in Harris, ed., *Latin American Women* (London: Minority Rights Group Report, No.57, 1983).

¹⁶ Beverly Brown, "Displacing the Difference -- Review, *Nature, Culture and Gender*" *m/f*, 8 (1983) 79-90; Marilyn Strathern and Carol McCormack, eds., *Nature, Culture and Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

empirically investigated through field work. As a result, what is lost is the significant differentiation between “Women” and “women” as there is confusion between representation and (material) realities. In this regard, as argued by Mohanty, the blurring of distinctions elaborated in the studies on women in the third world “... (which is present in Western feminists’ self-representation) eventually ends up constructing monolithic images of ‘Third World Women’ as women who can only be defined as *material* subjects, not through the relation of their *materiality* to their *representations*” (Ibid.: 349).

Apart from the above two analytical principles of utilizing “‘women’ as a category of analysis” and the uncritical use of particular methodologies employed in the nine texts, the third principle is “... [the] political principle underlying [these] methodologies and the analytic *strategies* ...” (Ibid.: 337). As a result what has been created *is* not only the assumption of women as a group of homogeneous oppression but also the representation of an ‘average Third World woman’ “... [who] leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being “Third World” (read: *ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized*, etc.)” (Ibid.: 338, italics mine). Above all, it also implicitly suggests the contrary self-representation of Western women as a binary analytic reference as being “... educated, modern, ... [as well as] having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions” (Ibid.). In other words, it is only Western feminists who could “... become the true ‘subjects’ of this counter-history”, while, on the other hand, third world women “... never rise above their generality and their ‘object’ status” (Ibid.: 351).

What occurs hand in hand with the above analytic principles is a *colonialist move* as the hegemonic relation between first and third world scholarship. For instance, instead of recognizing how they have been constituted as women *through* the provided structures, third world women have been classified as “subjects *outside* of social relations” (Ibid.:351) based on Western feminist’s assumption of women as a coherent, already constituted group placed in kinship, legal, economic, religion and other structures

judged as phenomenon according to established Western values. It is here that ethnocentric universalism gets its start as discussed by Mohanty

When these structures are defined as “underdeveloped” or “developing” and women are placed within these structures, an implicit image of the “average third world woman” is produced. This is the transformation of the (implicitly Western) “oppressed women” into the “oppressed third world women” (Ibid.).

In summary, feminist (as well as other disciplines of) scholarly practice is not apolitical scholarship. It is conducted, disseminated and countered in the relational matrix of power. Western feminism¹⁷ has appropriated and ‘colonized’ the complexities and heterogeneities of women’s lives in the non-Western countries through their discursive production of the “Third World Women” image. However, this discursive process and practice that colonizes women’s representations has taken place not only at the global (between First and Third world) but also the local level, and not only through ‘texts’ but through the many country’s ‘national plans’. In the following section, Thai feminist bureaucrats writing on ‘other’ Thai women (through the country’s national plan) will be analyzed through the frame of colonialism within.

3 (to) Thai Bureaucrats and the Representation and Construction of (Rural) Thai Women in the National Development Plan

In response to the U.N. 1975 First World Women's Conference in Mexico City and the 1980 World Decade for Women in Copenhagen, the Thai government appointed delegates to attend both conferences. Then, the National Economic and Social

¹⁷ While critiquing western feminism’s approaches on creating monolithic or homogenizing images of third world women, Mohanty herself is aware of the trap of doing the same thing, that is, of ‘creating monolithic and homogenizing images’ of western feminists’ that they ALL homogenize and objectify the third world woman into an abstract, all-encompassing image. As a matter of fact, there are western feminists who have been able to avoid objectifying third world women but they do not dominate the field. Therefore, the dominant writings (i.e. the Zed Books’ Third World series) which are more influential need to be “... defined and named” (Ibid.: 335).

Development Board of Thailand (NESDB), under the Office of the Prime Minister, was encouraged by the government to “pick up the ball and run with it”. As elaborated by the NESDB Secretary, Sanoh Unakul:

The NESDB recognizes the need to prepare the Development of Women Plan [which is to be included] in the Fifth Five-Year National Economic and Social Development Plan based on the understanding that women’s basic problems were the consequence of earlier NESDB plans as well as some *selections* from World Conferences resolutions and suggestions which are *suitable* to Thailand’s socio-economic conditions in order to formulate policies and approaches on development of women for the period spanning 1982 to 1987, accordingly (1981, italics mine)

In terms of implementation, on February 27, 1980, the ‘Short Term Working Group on the Development of Women’ was appointed to draft the *Five Year Development of Women Plan (1982-1987)*. The working group was composed of 10 bureaucrats¹⁸ (5 men and 5 women), of which half were staff from the NESDB and the remainder were representatives from four major Ministries (i.e. Interior, Education, Public Health and Agriculture)¹⁹, and were mandated to finalize the draft within 10

¹⁸ They could be more adequately referred to as either ‘comprador feminists’ or “femocrats.” The latter has been widely utilized to refer to “[A] female politician or senior civil servant; a female bureaucrat in an agency dealing with women's issues” as argued by Van Acker (1999:120), Pettman (in Kramarae and Spender, 2000: 847), and Chappell and Hill (2006: 166) (<http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/femocrat>, retrieved November 9, 2012). Nonetheless, I prefer to employ the term ‘comprador feminist’ in that it etymologically reflects the aspect of (a) native person(s) who act(s) on behalf of foreign business. In this regard, the way the ten civil servants performed as the intermediaries of the Thai government and the UN to implement their ‘Women and Development’ enterprise without, in Fanon’s terms, “... engaging in any radical restructuring of society” (in Blunt and Wills, op.cit: 182) can be considered as conducting comprador work.

¹⁹ They are:

1. Mr Narong Nittayaporn (NESDB); President
2. Kanya Lohitratana, MD (Department of Public Health); Working committee
3. Mr Siri Kerd –In (Department of Community Development; Working committee
4. Mrs Puengpit Dullayapat (Department of Agricultural Promotion); Working committee

months. The 1982 plan was a ‘milestone’ document for Thailand in the domain of Women and Development. On the one hand, primarily but politically, it was the *first* Thai Government authorized (viewpoint and) *plan* on the issues of women (and development) conducted locally in response to the global agenda. On the other hand, secondly and practically, this document, officially incorporated into the Fifth Five-Year National Economic and Social Development Plan, was implemented through various Ministerial and Departmental mechanisms and units.

This 32 page-length 1982 plan is composed of six domains. They are 1) introduction, 2) women’s problems broken down according to six primary topics (i.e. 2.1) *economic*, 2.2) *education*, 2.3) *religion, art and culture*, 2.4) *public health*, 2.5) *politics and 2.6) social environment*), 3) major objectives, policies and approaches, 4) specific measures and tactics, 5) goals regarding development of women’s roles and activities, and 6) major plans on the development of women’s roles and activities (as well as an appendix). However, in order to undertake an analytical trace on how (rural) women were represented under Thai bureaucrat eyes, issues regarding women’s problems (topic no.2 above) will be the primary focus.

Structurally and initially, the introductory section begins by elaborating on two significant statistics. Firstly, among the 47,000,000 Thais counted in the 1980 census, 49.6 percent were women. The ratio of men to women in the work force is 49.84 and 50.16 percent, respectively (1981: 1, 3). Additionally, literacy statistics from 1970 indicate that of a total of 4,265,424 Thais 10 years of age or older who were deemed illiterate, 69.95 percent or 2,983,544 were women (Ibid.: 1). The co-relation between the two sets of statistics concludes that “the condition of women’s illiteracy and low literacy

5. Mrs Kasama Worawan Na Ayudhya (Department of Non-Formal Education; Working committee

6. Miss Rushanee Suwattee (Department of Labour); Working committee

7. Mrs Saowaros Thongparn (NESDB); Working committee

8. Mr Wisut Karnjanasook (NESDB); Working committee

9. Mr Supat Sooksuwan (NESDB); Secretary

10. Mr Sumon Wongpiya (NESDB); Secretary Assistant

resulted in the poor quality of women's labour in the labour force" (Ibid.). As the Plan's authors continue:

[P]opulation is the most important means of production in the [process of a] country's development. [However,] the acceleration of productivity cannot take place without [increased] quality of the population in terms of skill, knowledge, efficiency and morals; ... [therefore] the problem with women's labour lacking adequate education, ability and competency that would be required to ensure the expansion of economic growth should be taken into consideration for the sake of the country's development (Ibid.).

The second domain in the document is regarding women's problems in different areas. Here we find that, firstly and *economically*, in 1980, based on information provided by the National Statistics Office, there were 10,277,500 women in the labour market (or 45.6 percent of the total female population). Of these, there were 4,295,300 women workers in the agricultural sector, (or 41.9 per cent of all women workers) and 761,700 female workers (or 7.4 per cent) in industry and manufacturing. The remainder are in commerce, public service and others (Ibid: 4). In brief, the plan summarizes the common problems faced by urban and rural women in four areas:

1. Women have inferior quality of education and working skills. Despite the education system offering equal opportunity for both sexes, men have an advantage in accessing education because of their superiority according to social and familial attitudes. Moreover, sometimes it is women themselves who neglect education and skill training opportunity. Struggling under economic pressure with less education and skill push women into earning their living by taking socially unacceptable jobs [i.e. prostitution] (Ibid.).

The remaining three common problems faced by urban and rural women include inequalities in wage earnings (lower than men), labour law violations by employers (if

working in an industrial sector) and lack of access to credit due to inefficiencies in credit service provided by both public and private sectors. Moreover, specifically in regard to rural women, there are three principle areas identified by the plan where obstacles are significantly greater than with urban women:

1. Most rural women are wageless as they work in the agricultural sector where they are mostly self-employed. Additionally, rural women's burdens regarding family responsibility are greater [than urban women] as they often live in extended families which they are expected to take care of.
2. Rural women have much less education as they often have less opportunity to access training. [The quantity and quality] of education, vocational and non-vocational training²⁰ institutes as well as ['extracurricular'] activity clubs in the rural areas are not as good as in the urban areas. As a result, rural women have insufficient skills and creativity.
3. Rural women have less opportunity to find jobs as there is less industrialized growth distribution in the rural areas. Therefore, there are limited workplaces for workers (Ibid: 5).

²⁰ The issue of 'training' raised in the plan reminds me of what Mohanty elaborates on Huston's work that

...Huston states that the purpose of her study is to describe the effect of the development process on the "family unit and its individual members" in Egypt, Kenya, Sudan, Tunisia, Sri Lanka and Mexico. She states that the "problems" and "needs" expressed by rural and urban women in these countries all center around education and training, work and wages, access to health and other services, political participation and legal rights. Huston relates all these "needs" to the lack of sensitive development policies which exclude women as a group or category. For her, the solution is simple: improved development policies which emphasize training for women field workers, use women trainees, women rural development officers, encourage women's cooperatives, etc. Here, again, women are assumed to be a coherent group or category prior to their entry into "the development process." Huston assumes that all third world women have similar problems and needs (op.cit. 343-344).

In practice, in Thailand, the enterprise of "training" in law, health care, sanitation and income generating (through making paper flowers) etc, for the (urban and) rural poor women becomes an effective channel for middle class feminist to have power over the grassroots as well as to earn more significant income from such training projects funded by the Government and International NGOs.

Within the framework of hierarchical dichotomy, women are considered to be substandard to men as well as rural to urban; thus, according to this logic rural women are in the situation of double marginalization not only in terms of gender but also (political) geography. Exacerbating this is their presumed marginalization within the same gender. Despite the fact of their relative deprivation, urban women seem to be better placed in terms of status as further elaborated in the section on *educational* problems:

Although gender is not an impeding factor in enrollment into the school system ... rural women have less opportunity to acquire education than urban women. The result of unequal educational access affects the country's socioeconomic development i.e. women with low education have more children than women with higher education. Additionally, at the same age level, the number of rural women with inadequate knowledge and skill entering into the labour force is higher than with urban women. Among the rural women who entered the labour force, 71.8 percent graduated grade four [whereas] 16.4 had left school with less than a grade four education. Therefore, the authors concluded "... the quality of the product produced by them was inferior" (Ibid.: 6).

In terms of a non-formal educational system, the plan (simply) addresses that what obstructs women from accessing adequate education from "joining development activities which did not previously exist in their traditional life" is their "lack of self-confidence" (Ibid.: 7).

Moreover, women agriculturalists, in particular, have a distinct disadvantage and lack of opportunity in obtaining new knowledge as they are often neglected by modern agricultural training projects which primarily target men agriculturalists to participate (Ibid.: 8).

It is interesting to discover that the notion of educational deficiency is utilized not only as a ‘yardstick’ to measure and classify women’s status but also as a cause to explain many of the problems that will be discussed in the *public health* topic:

Mothers with lower education always follow traditional beliefs and eat improper foods [read: no protein] during pregnancy. According to government statistics, 81 percent of mothers who died during pregnancy and while in labour were caused by complicated illnesses resulting from malnutrition (Ibid.:9).

Malnutrition during pregnancy also affects [the standard] weight of the new born. While the new born of rural women weighed approximately 2.6 kgs or less, the new born of Bangkokian middle income families typically weighed 3 kgs or more. Additionally, as malnutrition significantly affects the infant’s brain development (and therefore intelligence) up until the age of two years, it was concluded that the “*mother should have knowledge on nutrition*” (Ibid., italic mine).

Further, according to public health statistics compiled in 1978, the ratio of doctors and nurses to patients was 1:289 and 1:565, respectively, in Bangkok and 1:17,280 and 1:5486, respectively, outside of the capital. In all regions, 47.1 percent of urban mothers gave birth to new born infants in hospitals or health centers and 38.9 percent at home. In contrast, with the help of midwives, 89.1 percent of rural women gave birth to their infants at home and only 8 percent in hospital or health centers. Under bureaucrats’ eyes, (rural) mothers are judged for “not having knowledge in taking care of their infants after delivery” (Ibid.: 11). Additionally and comparatively, they continue, due to the fact that mothers employ incorrect methods [read: traditional ways] in raising their infants and due to inadequate public health services for mothers and their children, “... infants often succumb to complicated illnesses and the mortality rate is higher than those of [other] developing countries” (Ibid.: 12).

Additionally, it is not surprising to discover that the burden for family planning is placed on women, in particular, rural women as discussed below:

Women have an important role in family planning. The goal to decrease population growth could not have successfully taken place without women's cooperation. Too many children would result in the decline of the health of the mother and her infant and affect the livelihood of each family especially in the hand-to-mouth and uneducated group. Family health is an important problem for this class. According to the statistics, rural women become pregnant too frequently (every 22 months). It should be at least every 28 months. The circumstance of having many children might cause disabilities in infants at birth as well as higher mortality rates than usual infant mortality. Most mothers with many children are in agricultural households ... (Ibid.: 12).

In this regard, there is no reason given as to why 28 months is better and why 22 months is "too frequent"? Moreover, regarding women's problems as it relates to the topic of *politics*, we discover that the relation of politics to (rural) women is defined around the issue of 'leadership'. The authors assert that (rural) women "do not have enough opportunity to acquire training to be a leader". As a result of having been "... traditionally trained to maintain the household and take care of family members, in particular, their parents and their husbands, ... [thus] it is their husbands who [always] take charge in becoming rural community leaders." Additionally, the authors continue, "[in regards to middle class women] although 86 percent graduated with a BA or equivalent, and in some cases even a PhD, their leadership role is restricted to within their own field of work as it relates to women's issues. They are not accepted in taking a leadership role in an administrative position that would be equal to that of men." They continue with the following as if it were a matter of fact: "all key positions, e.g. village headman, subdistrict headman, district chief and governor, are held by men, from the local to the national [levels]" is argued as a reason supporting the author's argument (Ibid.: 13,). However, their argument is quite inconsistent as they seem to be saying: rural women only need opportunity of education to be leaders, and urban women face

societal bias that prevents them from filling leadership roles. Rural women would be facing societal biases that would need to be overcome as well once they had achieved adequate education. Or, in other words, it could be read (through a classist lens) that the ‘location’ of rural women is only at the community level, i.e. in their remote villages. (A very rare few might have made it but) the majority of them would hardly reach any position at the administrative level.

There is not much discussion under the topic of *religion, art and culture* which is summarized under five principle points. They include,

3.1 As a result of socio-economic changes, people struggle to live their lives ...

Thus, there is no time to study and pay attention to religious teachings.

3.2 Regarding moral teachings, there is still a lack of good method in teaching morals effectively and have people accept it as their way of life. Moreover, the bombardment of Western culture as well as the lack of role models in society makes it more difficult to have a learning process on ethics, morals and good tradition and culture.

3.3 There is very little attention and activities given to morals and ethical education for people through media, both by the public and private sectors in comparison to the investment in other activities, in particular, the commercial advertisement (Ibid, 8).

...

What strikes me are the few lines in 3.1 that “... as a result of socio-economic changes, people struggle to live their lives ... thus, there is no time to study and pay attention to religious teachings.” There might be many who are too preoccupied in making their ends meet in daily living. However, there are some like Pornpet who regarded Buddhism and Buddhist teachings and practices as central to their every day lives. Therefore, we should regard their assertions with some suspicion. From her 1965 diary, Pornpet regularly went to the temple, offered food to the monk as well as had discussions about Buddhism with him. Then, when her struggle to have her land returned

began, her purpose was also to achieve justice or Dharma (=Buddha's teachings). Further, throughout those years, she was able to study anytime and anywhere, i.e at the protest camp in front of the Government House, at the psychiatric facility or even during the long month she spent in jail.

The final topic covered in the document, women and *social environment*, is further divided into two subtopics. They are women's social attitudes and values and specific social problems related to women. It is noticeable that the issue of women's problems as it relates to social attitudes and values is presented in a few lines in which the context is contradictory in itself. It is that in (optimistically) starting off by elaborating that "... currently Thai women occupy many roles in society, in particular, in all aspects of economic development. They also recognize themselves in the role of (social) change leaders." However, they abruptly (and pessimistically, while contradicting their earlier assertions) concluded that "... they are not quite ready yet to assume such a role. It is because most of them hold the *traditional belief* that the character of a person is difficult to change" (Ibid.: 13, italics mine).

Finally, it should come as no surprise that under the bureaucrat's eyes, the most sensitive and 'specific' women's social problem is caused by a 'specific' group of women, i.e. 'prostitutes'. As usual, the story starts off by presenting some statistics on prostitution from a few sources in particular statistics from the Department of Social Welfare's 'Foster House for Jobless Women' which elaborates that among the number of prostitutes who come to ask for their help 34.2 percent have no formal education, 65.5 percent have some formal education but less than grade 4, and 5.3 percent have grade 4 or more²¹. Therefore, it was concluded by the authors that "... educational background is the crucial factor for women in making decisions to become prostitutes." However, they also stated that "individual causes i.e. physical and mental abnormality, lack of proper coaching ... [as well as] ... being lured" accounted for as much as 37 percent who

²¹My observation is the number provided is quite problematic as altogether (65.5+34.2+5.3), it comes to 105 percent.

became involved in prostitution (according to the statistics provided by the National Research Council of Thailand) (Ibid.: 14).

Aiming to resolve the above problems categorized under six topics, the objective to promote women “to improve their status economically, socially and politically as well as to include their participation in all aspects of the country's development” (Ibid.) was established along with general and specific policies and approaches. In general, the government’s policies aim to “... accelerate the improvement of women’s working skills as well as extend job opportunities and choices in order for women to acquire higher and fairer wages”, along with accelerating the extension of compulsory education, disseminating knowledge on nutrition and health and the extension of adequate public health services for women (Ibid.: 15). Finally, there is mention as to how specific policies will cover the content as to how the government will cooperate with non-governmental organizations to achieve resolving the six problems successfully.

4 (and) Its Critique

In regards to Thailand and in relation to Pornpet’s case, the concept and practice of ‘colonization within’²² operates and is reflected through centralized bureaucracy via dual vectors. On the one hand, there is the practice of (hegemonic) administrative power over people’s daily life (a power that was responsible for expropriating Pornpet’s land). On the other hand, there is the women and development enterprise (which had silenced Pornpet and many other women’s voices). In this section, apart from Mohanty’s critique on Western feminist scholarship, the concept of ‘colonization within’ from a feminist

²²For this term, I had earlier elaborated that:

Therefore, although Thailand was not occupied by either the British or French, it strongly held colonialism within the bureaucratic system of the centralized state government. The names (and frames) of the system might change from time to time (especially after the 1932 coup which overthrew the regime of absolute monarchy and established the regime of the constitutional monarchy) but it seems that the fundamental hierarchical concept of having central power over the periphery has remained (2014:28, with further discussion on p137-151).

perspective will be employed to ‘re-read’ the *Five Year Development of Women Plan (1982-1987)* through the process of answering the two initial research questions of this research. They are 1) how has knowledge about women in Thai society been produced, by whom, using what method(s), and what have been the results? And 2) Why has invaluable knowledge written by subaltern women (in particular that of Pornpet) been ignored.

In order to answer the first question regarding how knowledge about women in Thai society has been produced, we can begin by referring to Jackson's discussion of two key terms describing Thai “semicolonialism”: autonomy and subordination (2010: 50-54). That is, on the one hand, and externally, the Thai government is autonomous from (while also being subordinated to) neo-imperialist global organizations such as the United Nations. As discussed above, the United Nations disseminated a rather striking agenda in the 1970s which included implementing the program on ‘Women and Development’ which required member countries to follow, adopt and implement. On the other hand, and internally, the Thai elites established new forms of domestic control to subordinate and consolidate further its power over its local population i.e. rural women in particular.

Metaphorically and historically, the latter is based on the West’s colonial ethnographic construction enterprise of formulating and controlling the Others which was borrowed by Siamese rulers (specifically from 1885 to 1910) to conduct their own ‘Others Within’ project for the sake of confirming and validating their supremacy and authority (Thongchai, 2004: 41)²³. Almost a hundred years later, in 1980, a more modern project of

²³What he discusses can be summarized below:

Ethnographic construction ... was part of the colonial project to formulate and control the Others of the West. Alongside the colonial enterprise, the Siamese rulers had a parallel project of their own, concerning their own subjects, a project which reaffirmed their superiority, hence justifying their rule, over the rest of the country within the emerging territorial state. It was a project on the ‘Others Within’. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (roughly speaking 1885-1910), travels had mediated the construction of an ethnographic classification in the eyes of Siamese elite (Ibid.).

discursively constructing the 'Others within' shifts from ethnographic note-taking to the making of the 'National Plan' which included the development of (a 'newly found colony' i.e.) women along with respective operating policies, measures and tactics. The 10 drafters of the plan, in which half are NESDB technocrats and the remainder from the Departments of Health, Community Development, Agricultural Promotion, Non-formal Education and Labour, utilized 'statistics' as a major means of argument as well as their own 'arbitrary' beliefs inserted into the texts. Therefore, it should be of no surprise that what was earlier discovered by Mohanty in her study of the Zed Press' Third World Women series regarding the uncritical use of methodologies such as the logic of arithmetic to make unsubstantiated and generalized statements e.g. "the more the number of women who wear the veil, the more universal is the sexual segregation and control of women" (op.cit.: 346), a logic which was easily as well as uncritically used by the Thai Government's *Five Year Development of Women Plan (1982-1987)*.

On the issues of manufacturing productivity, malnutrition and prostitution, statistics is provided as a background (cause) as well as a rationalization. For instance, in the introduction, two sets of statistics, 49.84 percent of workforce women and 69.95 percent of illiterate women, were uncritically used to argue that "the condition of women's illiteracy and low literacy resulted in the poor quality of women's labour in the labour force" without any further evidence or justification (op.cit: 1,3). Additionally, a similar statement is again uncritically repeated under the topic of 'women and education' where they assert that among the rural women who entered the labour force, 71.8 percent graduated grade four [whereas] 16.4 percent had left school with less than a grade four education. Therefore, from just these numbers they conclude that "... the quality of the product produced by them was inferior" (Ibid.: 6). Through the arithmetic approach, the heterogeneity and reality of (rural) women's lives is technically homogenized and reduced to the stereotype of rural women as unskilled, illiterate and tradition bound to suit a particular agenda (and, as Mohanty asserts, "... women are constituted as a coherent group not on the basis of 'natural' qualities or needs, but on the basis of the sociological 'unity' of their role in domestic production and wage labour" (op.cit.: 351)). To make matters worse, at the point where the statistics could not support the conclusion

they were aiming for, the authors would ‘arbitrarily’ provide a conclusion. For example, the state of “lacking self-confidence” is identified as the barrier for those women lacking adequate education needed to participate in the “development activities which did not previously exist in their traditional life” (op.cit: 7). Moreover, as the apparent holders of “traditional belief”, socially they were constructed as being “... not quite ready yet to assume such a role ... of social change agent ” as well as not having adequate knowledge on proper nutrition while pregnant and “in taking care of their infants after delivery” (Ibid.: 13, 9 and 11).

Thai bureaucrats’ patronizing and somewhat contemptuous tone toward (rural) women reminds me of Mohanty’s argument criticizing Western feminist writers’ regarding the “third world difference” which “includes a paternalistic attitude towards women in the third world” (op.cit.: 352). That is

third world women as a group or category are automatically and necessarily defined as “religious (read ‘not progressive’), family-oriented (read ‘traditional’), legal minors (read ‘they-are-still-not-conscious-of-their-rights’), illiterate (read ‘ignorant’), domestic (read ‘backward’) and sometimes revolutionary (read ‘their-country-is-in-a-state-of-war-they-must-fight’)” (Ibid.).

First World feminists as well as Thai bureaucrats’ ‘re-presentation’ of ‘other’ women (from the third world and rural Thailand, respectively) implies that both assume their ‘self-presentation’ as “secular, liberated, and having control over their own lives” (Ibid: 353). The implications of this practice are further revealed by Mohanty through her argument on “feminist scholarly practices” which are “... inscribed in the relations of power --- relations which they counter, resist, or even implicitly support. There can, of course, be no apolitical scholarship” (Ibid.: 334). Therefore, within her framework, not only the ‘means’ of argument (e.g. use of arithmetic) but also the (implied) ‘ideology’ (“... [the] political principle underlying [these] methodologies and the analytic strategies ...” (Ibid.: 337)) employed by these authors (of the plan) needs to be critiqued.

In regard to the Thai Government's *Five Year Development of Women Plan (1982-1987)*, there are at least two crucial principles, politically and economically, which should be taken into consideration. Firstly and politically, as discussed earlier by Thongchai, under the Siamese elites' eyes, there are two major discursive ethnographic categories formulated through their travelogues and ethnographic notes. These two categories are "... the *chao pa*, the forest, wild people, and the *chao bannok*, the multi-ethnic villagers under the supremacy of Bangkok" (op.cit.: 41). He then continues:

Arguably the ethno-spatial discourse has been more influential on Siam's policies and treatment of ethnic minorities, than scholarly attribution of ethnic identification. It has certainly been prevalent among Thai people, from those times to present, than any scholarly discourse. The concept and taxonomy echoed both the indigenous perception of non-Buddhist, primitive peoples, and colonial discourses of tribes and peasants (Ibid.).

Today, *chao pa*, having shifted to the classification of *chao kao*, or mountain people, are still less assimilated and remain on the margins, while *chao bannok* "... are now considered part of the Thai-self" (Ibid.). However, the socio-political hierarchical relations between *chao bannok* -- the multi-ethnic villagers or *rural* people -- and the Bangkokians remain within the framework or standard dichotomy of rural-urban, periphery-center, poor-rich. To this we can add the dichotomy of uneducated-(formally) educated. One of the most deep-seated prejudices that the so-called 'rulers' appear to hold regarding the so-called 'ruled' is their uncritical and (apparently) negative bias toward those with little or no (formal) education. Even Pornpet herself internalized this 'ideology of inferiority' before she recognized -- through a process of dissonance -- that there was something wrong in regards to that belief and started the process of decolonising the language she had internalized as documented in her diary:

20 February 1965

... [I am] always aware that [I] have no knowledge [and] education. If there is any advice or warning from the higher educated people, [I am] very willing to

follow it. However, [I] have never gotten anything from them except rough, thorny and wounded words, “we are the ones who maintain the law”. We [I] wish we [I] could respond back that it is a wild law.

Though living in the ‘wild’ [in the rural area], [I] am not too wild [too stupid] to understand what should be understood. Why are we [am I] overlooked? (bold mine).

In this regard the power relation between the district chief and Pornpet was not only hierarchical between the ruler and the ruled, the (representative of) the center and periphery, but also the well-educated and the illiterate or those with low literacy. The notion of ‘education’ is used to maintain one of the clearest and strongest dividing lines that has produced two very distinctive and complex classes in Thai society. In the case of Thailand, the process in which the yardstick of literacy -- the literate authorial subject as implicit referent -- is employed to represent the others is one way that “... power is exercised in discourse” (Mohanty, op.cit.: 336).

In summary, through the process of drafting the National plan, explicitly what has been constructed by the bureaucrats was not only the ‘text’ but also the ‘representation’ of rural women as *un/ill-educated person(s), inefficient workers, ignorant mothers*, as well as *unconfident social change agents*. In contrast, the authors’ self-representations are implicitly referenced as well-educated person(s), efficient officers, intelligent mothers (and fathers) as well as confident social change agents²⁴. Of course, these representations

²⁴ The mission of Thai (feminist) bureaucrats’ writing on ‘other’ Thai (subaltern) women through the country’s national plan has revealed, as I discussed earlier, how the top-down process of “Women and Development” has ignored the diversity of women’s lives and experiences. Moreover,

it has also stereotypically constructed their image as a homogeneous, powerless group who are little more than victims of, for example, poverty, male violence, and “traditional” belief systems. Additionally, if viewing this in relational context between the First and the Third World, we would discover that this particular process of development has not only brought about the objectification and marginalization of Third World women’s body of knowledge but also served to maintain the colonial status of the Third World as “followers” especially in the area of intellectual development (2014:3).

are meant to justify the policy shifts required by the broader economically-oriented changes they are aiming for, which will be discussed next.

The second crucial principle underlying the methodologies and the analytic strategies in formulating the plan is economically motivated. In the two decades spanning the 1960s and 1970s, one economic study praised Thailand as "... the fastest growing and most successful developing country in the world. Rapid growth in production, accompanied by progress in alleviating poverty, was impressive ..."²⁵. However, as discussed by Allen Hiken, the oil shocks of the 1970s combined with the global recession during the first half of the 1980s brought tremendous strain to bear on the Thai economy"²⁶. During this crucial period, in order to address the country's economic crisis as well as respond to the UN's newly announced 'women and development' program, Sanoh, the NESDB's Secretary, stated his concerns in the foreword of the Plan:

... women as human resource are the crucial means for the country's development which should not be *wasted* and *neglected*. As a matter of fact, women's population is approximately 50 percent of the total. If it were possible for them to receive systematic promotion and support in order to find a role in society's and the country's development ... it would yield much more positive results for the socio-economy of the country as a whole (1982, italic mine).

Re-reading the government's 1982 statistics, we discover that there were approximately six times as many women workers in the agricultural sector then in the industrial and manufacturing sector, that is, **4,295,300** to 761,700, respectively (Ibid.: 4). What underscores the Secretary's statement that "... women as human resource are the

²⁵ The Library of Congress's Country Studies Program. (formerly the Army Area Handbook Program) "Thailand - The Economy". http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country_studies/thailand/ECONOMY.html, retrieved November 6, 2012.

²⁶ Allen Hiken. "The Politics of Economic Reform in Thailand: Crisis and Compromise." William Davidson Institute (WDI) - Working Papers No. 638 January 2004. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027.42/40024>, retrieved November 6, 2012.

crucial means for the country's development which should not be *wasted* and *neglected*" is to assert that four million women working on farms is wasteful. For the sake of the country's economic development as well as the educational improvement of women they should not be left scattered on farms but should be 'groomed' and brought to work in the factories. Therefore, the 'goals' regarding the development of women's roles and activities was set up to provide 'job training' for women between the ages of 12 and 44 years, the age group for women labourers²⁷, in order to increase their income to at least 5,000 baht per head per year in 37 (of 72) provinces which were considered economically 'backward' (Ibid.: 23).

Additionally and metaphorically, under the bureaucrats' eyes, a 'newly found colony' would be a strong justification to set up a new Ministry to be in charge of its affairs. Recognizing that "leaving both government and non-government 'women and development' units working on their own without any co-ordination would yield less productivity for the country's development" (Ibid.: foreword), another critical goal was proposed. In this regard the national-level establishment of a central coordinating body (under the Office of the Prime Minister or other related Ministry) would be undertaken in order to provide determination on development approaches regarding women's roles and activities, follow up and evaluation. At the local level, the strategy was to establish development approaches through the mechanism of already existing local units (at the provincial, district, subdistrict and village levels), respectively (Ibid.: 27).

The official announcement of the *Five Year Development of Women Plan (1982-1987)* required all related government units at all levels to put the plan into practice. After

²⁷In the plan, (poor) women referred to in this age group (12 to 44 years) were not only labourers but also "mothers and reproductive groups" (Ibid.: 23). In the 1980s, under government eyes, women were considered an effective 'means' of (industrial) production (with fewer children) which is in contrast to the 1940s policy in which women's role as the 'mothers of the nation' whose contribution to quantitatively and qualitatively (re-)produce new generations was encouraged. So the 'modern' history of Thailand again takes place by silencing women and reducing them to the role of producing, whether its 'producing' the next generation of Thais as human resource or 'producing' products for consumption in the First World in their role as subordinates to globalization.

thirty years (1982-2012) a very substantive quantity of evaluation reports were produced on the various projects which have yet to be assessed. However, the most striking evaluation was provided by Sa-ing, a grassroots farmer from Roi-Et, one of Thailand's poorest provinces. "Sinith", she started off and continued with a metaphor:

The (bureaucrat) women's movement is like a mushroom farm. Big mushrooms overshadow smaller mushrooms. There is no chance for small mushrooms to emerge. Any government ['s activities and funds] pouring into it hardly reaches the smallest mushrooms at the bottom. The problem is [all in the movement are the same women but we are different as] they are the Prime Minister' wife, a minister's wife, a Member of Parliament's wife, a district chief's wife [etc.] (1999: 99).

My 're-reading' (from the perspective of 'colonization within') of the *Five Year Development of Women Plan (1982-1987)* through the process of answering the first initial research question: how has knowledge about women in Thai society been produced, by whom, using what method(s), and what have been the results?, has been presented with special thanks to Sa-ing who clearly and directly provided the answer 'from the field' as to what the results of the plan were. In the following, the link between the 1982 Plan and its effect on Pornpet will be elaborated.

According to Mohanty despite the assertion that "we all are sisters in struggle", the basic analytic principle presented in Zed Books' (Western) feminist discourse on women in the third world, first world feminists have yet to recognize and overcome the power relation between first world and third world women. Instead, their discourse (despite meaning well, i.e. we are all sisters) continues to construct third world women as all categorically oppressed, i.e. the divide between 'we' who are enlightened and have control over our lives and 'them' who continue to be unenlightened, remain oppressed and desperately need 'help' socio-politically and economically. Metaphorically speaking, in the twenty-first century, the historical and global 'burden' of the 'White Man' has

passed on to the 'white woman' to save the non-white women in the third world countries.

At the local level, comprador Thai feminist bureaucrats have internalized the 'first world' discourse that takes for granted the commonly held representation of rural women that is structured by the hierarchical binary dichotomy of 'we who are in control of our lives' and 'they who are oppressed'. However, in the Thai context this dichotomy is further structured into rural:urban and uneducated:educated. The *Five Year Development of Women Plan (1982-1987)* has systematically constructed "rural women difference" as a homogeneous group rather than a heterogeneous group with differing material realities. For instance, Pornpet's (and many women and men's) land in Nakorn Sawan province of central Thailand was expropriated. In regard to the issue of women (and men) and land, during the 1970s in several provinces in the north of the country, Tyrell Haberkorn discusses how many (men and) women tenant farmers and their student allies "... fomented revolution, not by picking up guns but by invoking laws ... as their tool to fight unjust tenancy practices" (2011)²⁸. Government statistics for 1980 shows that of the 4,295,300 women workers in the agricultural sector, there were several thousand women tenant farmers who had to bear the undeserved and unmerited extra-high land rent rates as a fact of their lives. Their cases as well as Pornpet's case were petitioned to different offices and reported through different venues in the media. It should not be surprising that their 'voices' were never 'heard' (and included in the six topics of women's problems elaborated in the 1982 *Development of Women Plan*). As mentioned earlier by the NESDB's secretary that in response to the 1975 and 1980 UN Conferences on women, some 'selective' resolutions 'suited' to Thailand's socio-economic conditions was brought in as a framework to formulate the plan (op.cit.); that is, by referring to (rural) women as a human resource (thereby reducing them as objects in someone else's agenda) crucial to the country's development which should not be *wasted* and *neglected* (Ibid, italics mine) already ignores women and their material realities. This is because the

²⁸ <https://uwpress.wisc.edu/books/4798.htm>, retrieved February 19, 2017.

bureaucrats' ability to 'hear' the real lives of rural women is systematically structured so that Pornpet's issue was already structurally blocked out as the agenda was already dictated by the neo-imperialist global forces and implemented by its subordinate -- the Thai government.

Additionally, it is interesting to learn that there was much conflict over the content of the 1975 UN Conference on Women in Mexico City²⁹ where the participants were significantly split into two separate groups; that is, those women who were from the so-called 'developed' world and those from the so-called 'developing' world. One such conflict was critically discussed by Nawal el Saadawi, Fatima Mernissi and Mallica Vajarathorn:

The women from industrially developed countries focused their attention on the oppressive conditions of women in developing countries; the causes of oppression became secondary. For example, discussion about the effects of so-called "development" and "modernization" on the degrading economic conditions of women in developing countries was not linked to economic/ political factors such as the role of multi-national corporations. When Third World women tried to attract attention to the role of the multinationals, they were accused of being

²⁹ At this point, Mohanty elaborates in footnote 8 that

A number of documents and reports on the U.N. International Conferences on Women, Mexico City, 1975, and Copenhagen, 1980, as well as the 1976 Wellesley Conference on Women and Development attest to this. Nawal el Saadawi, Fatima Mernissi and Mallica Vajarathorn in "A Critical Look At The Wellesley Conference" (*Quest*, IV [Winter 1978], 101-107), characterize this conference as "**American-planned and organized**," situating third world participants as passive audiences. They focus especially on the lack of self-consciousness of Western women's implications in the effects of imperialism and racism in their assumption of an "international sisterhood." A recent essay, by Pratibha Parmar and Valerie Amos, is titled "Challenging Imperial Feminism," *Feminist Review*, 17 (Autumn 1984), 3-19. Parmar and Amos characterize Euro-American feminism which seeks to establish itself as the only legitimate feminism as "imperial" (op.cit:355, bold mine).

nonfeminist; 'imitating' the male in his political games; and “splitting the spirit of sisterhood in the Women’s Movement” (1978: 103).

It should not be surprising then that such a critique would not be taken into consideration by the Thai elite feminist bureaucrats. Despite geographically and politically being considered ‘Third World’, in terms of class and ideology they could more comfortably and readily relate to the ‘First World’ white women than the rural poor women in their own country.

At this point, we should revisit the critique of ‘colonialism within’ and related issues we discussed earlier. For instance, in the 1940s Thai elites 'copied' aspects of Western culture and power in part through the dress code in order to be seen as modern and legitimate both by their own people and the West. In the 1970s in order to appear ‘politically correct’ and modern on the global stage, women’s issues were considered a priority by Thai elites despite neglecting serious and substantive agency to promote women and women's lives.

In regard to white feminists (at least those identified by Mohanty that have a tendency to objectify so-called 'Third World Women' through homogenizing representations³⁰), it seems to me that they mean well (although deeply misguided) in that they want to see women in control of their lives, whereas from the Secretary’s statement, there is no real concern about women except in their usefulness as human

³⁰ While a number of First World feminists objectify the so-called 'Third World Women' in their writing as studied by Mohanty, there are a number of scholars who critique it. For example, Mitu Hirshman concludes in her provocative article, “Women and Development: A Critique” that

... [I]t is time that we rethink and reconstitute feminisms’ as well as WID’s relationship to “poor Third World women,” not by casting them as victims who need help, not by asking “What can we do for them?,” thus implying that they have the privileged insight into as well as the only true story about their conditions (1995: 52).

Additionally, she further cites Spivak (1988: 179) in her pointedly ironic criticism of mainstream feminism: “[C]orrespondingly, we grieve for our Third-World sisters; we grieve and rejoice that they must lose themselves and become as much like us as possible in order to be ‘free’; we congratulate ourselves on our specialists’ knowledge of them” (Ibid.: 55).

resource for industry and manufacturing (in the guise of seeming to want to help women, they in fact only want to 'modernize' and to plug women into this process; however, with modernization we get profound displacements geographically, economically, culturally, socially and psychologically).

In this regard, there are at least two vectors which could be considered critical to the 1980s 'colonization within' project of writing (and implementing) the National Development Plan in response to the needs of the Thai elites' economic agenda of becoming another Newly Industrialized Country (NIC). One of these vectors, officially (as well as nationally), is in regards to how the complexities and conflicts of (rural) Thai women's lives have been appropriated and codified as a homogeneous inferior and illiterate group who needs 'training' in order to be able to become efficient and productive workers in the (modern) labour workforce. The other vector, politically (as well as practically), includes how the material and historical heterogeneities of rural women's experiences, problems and desires have been overwhelmingly silenced at an immeasurable level.

Metaphorically and somewhat ironically, we can imagine the Prime Minister's Office gate and fence as a ridgeline. Behind the gate there were Thai (feminist) bureaucrats writing (and speaking) about (the constructed as) illiterate (rural) Thai women in their colonial project and proclaiming that the **one** 'so-called' National Plan was for the benefit of all. On the other side in front of the gate was Pornpet, a rural woman, who had been '*structurally silenced*' not only by the regional and central (mal) administrative bureaucracies but now also by the hegemonic process of writing the (first) National Women and Development Plan, despite having inscribed streams of petitions and related documents asking the Prime Minister to solve her land case problem. In summary, from the standpoint of a 'third world feminist academic'³¹ let me end this study

³¹ Moreover, as a feminist archivist, inspired by Marlene Kardar's phrase that "archives are a complex and incomplete site of feminist knowledge" (2001), I have learned that many different kinds of materials in women's daily lives (receipts, daily notes, cookbooks, buttons and etc.) have their own meaning and can provide critical insight into understanding more about women's lives

with Spivak's challenge (as elaborated by Hirshman that "[I]nstead of patronizing and romanticizing them, we"...)

must learn to learn from them, to speak to them, to suspect that their access to the political and sexual scene is not merely to be *corrected* by our superior theory and enlightened compassion ... in order to learn enough about Third World women and to develop a different readership, the immense heterogeneity of the field must be appreciated, and the First World feminist must learn to stop feeling privileged *as a woman* (Spivak, 1988: 136-137, Ibid.:52).

and culture as well as provide the material for building up a body of knowledge for women who have been marginalized and left out. However, at the same time, through the process of (re-) reading the First Thai Government's Women and Development Plan, I have realized that the **state archives on women**, (in particular, women from marginalized groups) are another document source that can no longer be ignored. Moreover, we urgently need to thoroughly critique and deconstruct such archival documents since their dominant political effects and wide ranging implications have lasted well beyond 1982, the beginning year of the first plan. In other words, the hegemonic writing relation between the Thai bureaucrats and (rural) poor women can be compare to the Western feminist writing on women in the Third World, as asserted by Mohanty

Western feminist writing on women in the third world must be considered in the context of the global hegemony of Western scholarship, i.e., the production, publication, distribution and consumption of information and ideas. Marginal or not, this writing has political effects and implications beyond the immediate feminist or disciplinary audience. One such significant effect of the dominant "representations" of Western feminism is its conflation with imperialism in the eyes of particular third world women (op.cit.336).

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Appendix

The relationship between "Woman" - a cultural and ideological composite Other constructed through diverse representational discourses (scientific, literary, juridical, linguistic, cinematic, etc.) - and "women" - real, material subjects of their collective histories - is one of the central questions the practice of feminist scholarship seeks to address.



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1984, p. 334

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