SUMMER / FALL ISSUE

FEMINIST FUTURES

Feminist Development Bi-Annual Newsletter



Emerging Conversations in Development: Thinking With Development Differently

Development is often narrated through institutions, policies, funding mechanisms, and measurable outcomes. We ask whether projects succeed, whether interventions achieve their intended goals, whether governance improves, or participation has been adequately secured. These remain important questions. Yet they are not the only questions available to us. Increasingly, a new generation of scholars is asking what becomes visible when we begin somewhere else—not with development as policy, but with the relationships through which development is lived, negotiated, contested, and reimagined.

The essays in this issue were solicited from emerging development scholars and do not offer a single answer to what development is or ought to become. Instead, they invite us to think with communities, organizations, infrastructures, and forms of knowledge that exceed many of the categories through which development is commonly understood. Although each contribution emerges from a different empirical context, all three ask us to reconsider where we locate politics, power, and possibility.

Yohanes Damaiko Udu begins in Poco Leok, Indonesia, where Indigenous women challenge the assumption that renewable energy projects are inherently progressive. Rather than treating land as a resource awaiting development, they understand it as the conditions through which life itself is sustained. Their resistance is therefore not simply opposition to a geothermal project; it is a political claim about care, reproduction, territory, and the worlds that development risks unsettling in the name of sustainability.

The second essay turns to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, where the digital transformation of the public transportation system offers a different way of thinking about development. Here, technological modernization does not simply introduce new infrastructures. It reorganizes labor, authority, and gendered relations in unexpected ways, revealing that "smart" urbanism is as much about changing social relations as it is about technological innovation.

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The final essay asks a different question altogether. Drawing on long-term ethnographic engagement with Khmer feminist, the author considers what becomes visible when governance is understood not only through bureaucratic institutions but also longstanding ethical relations of obligation, reciprocity, and care. Rather than reducing organizations to compliance or resistance, the concept of tribute grammar explores the continual work of translating between donor bureaucracies and relational worlds that cannot be fully rendered into indicators, reports, or metrics.

Taken together, these essays suggest that development sociology may benefit from asking different questions. They remind us that development is never simply implemented. It is lived through relationships—with land, technologies, institutions, communities, and one another.

It is my hope that this issue contributes to these emerging conversations, not by resolving longstanding debates, but by opening space for new questions, new concepts, and new ways of thinking with the worlds that development seeks to transform.

Sarai Richter



Meet Your Editor:

Sarai Richter,
Arizona State University

Sarai Richter is a Ph.D. candidate in Sociology at Arizona State University. They hold bachelor's degrees in Anthropology and Political Science and a master's degree in Human Rights and Social Justice. Through ethnographic and participatory research, they develop relational approaches to development, governance, and feminist practice that begin from the everyday work of sustaining relationships rather than the institutions that seek to govern them.

Meet the Feminist in Development Council

Sophia Boutilier, Ph.D. - Co-Chair



Sophia is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at California State University, Fresno. She began her career in international development, working on gender equality and education projects in Kenya and Ghana. Wanting to better understand the effects of burnout and cynicism she witnessed among development workers, Sophia earned a PhD in Sociology at Stony Brook University.

Her research examines how promising approaches to social change often fail to reach their potential. She unpacks the limitations and unintended consequences of policies ranging from affirmative consent to sexual contact, the promotion of Information and Communication Technologies amongst women's groups in the Global South, to the declaration of international solidarity as a feminist development principle by a bilateral aid agency.



Roksana Badruddoja, Ph.D. Co-Chair

Dr. Roksana Badruddoja is a sociologist, writer, and professor of Critical Race and Ethnicity Studies and Women's Studies. Their work examines how histories of power are lived through the body and carried across generations, with particular attention to migration, family, inherited trauma, race, gender, and embodiment. They are the author of National (un)Belonging: Bengali American Women on Imagining and Contesting Culture and Identity and several other publications on race, gender, family, and culture. Their current work explores silence, memory, and the intimate afterlives of historical violence across generations and diaspora.



Aarushi Bhandari, Ph.D. - Treasure / Secretary

is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Davidson College. Her book Attention and Alienation: The International Political Economy of Information and Communication Technologies describes the complex evolution of the attention economic system and related forms of alienation through social media and emergent communication technologies. Her NSF: CAREER winning project "Individualized and Organizational Solutions to the Globalized Risk of Mental Illness" evaluates cosmopolitan wellness trends as they intersect with the attention economy.

Meet the Feminist in Development Council



Sarai Richter - Outgoing Student Representative

Sarai is a Ph.D. student in Sociology at Arizona State University. Their research, Khmer Feminist Ecologies: Co-Mentoring as a More-Than-Human Entanglement, investigates how Khmer feminist NGOs practice co-mentorship under donor constrained neoliberal governance structures.



Rita Jalali, Ph.D. - Member at Large

Rita is a Senior Scholar in Residence in the Department of Sociology and in the Center on Health, Risk and Society at American University. She received her M.A. and Ph.D in Sociology from Stanford University. Her research has focused on cross-national issues of race and ethnicity, social movements, disasters, civil society, gender inequalities, water and sanitation deprivation, and menstrual health and hygiene. Her primary field work has been in various regions of India and Turkey. She has published in numerous peer-reviewed journals. Her most recent publication, "Global Health Priorities and the Neglect of Menstrual Health and Hygiene: The Role of Issue Attributes," was published in *Sociology of Development*.

Marilyn Grell-Brisk, Ph.D. - Member at Large



Dr. Grell-Brisk is an interdisciplinary scholar who examines historical and long-term roots of global structural inequality. She studies the connections between the local and global imaginaries of power and hierarchy, racism, and the legacies of colonialism that lead to contemporary asymmetric appropriation of global wealth and power. Dr. Grell-Brisk is particularly interested in how these affect Black and Indigenous peoples across the diaspora, as well as how they inform the possibilities for Black and Indigenous futures and how folx resist, and persist under the conditions of modern racial capitalism. Her current research projects center Black and Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding the world, as well as Black and Indigenous futurity pursued through community-building and place-making.

She is a faculty member in the Organizational Studies Field Group and Faculty Director of Community Engagement at Pitzer College, a member of the Claremont Colleges Consortium. Her most recent publications in collaboration with the 2024 AnDINA cohort are titled “With knowledge comes responsibility: increasing conservation scientists’ impact in a time of global crisis” published in Conservation Letters and “Strengthening responsibilities to face global crises: A call to ecologists, environmental scientists, and their societies” published in People and Nature. She also recently published a chapter in in the Oxford Handbook of Climate Action edited by Paul Almeida titled, “The Logics of Antiblackness and Coloniality in the Push for Climate (In)Action”

Meet the Feminist in Development Council

Sara Bruene, ABD. - Student Representative



is a Ph.D. candidate in Sociology at the University of California, Riverside. Her research interests include the political economy, labor, and immigration. Sara's previous studies have explored social movements and labor rights of Los Angeles street vendors, immigrant agricultural workers in California, and the food deserts throughout California. Her current work explores the cultural wealth of nations. As an undergraduate student, Sara studied abroad in Hamburg, Bangkok, and Bangalore and backpacked over 30 countries which has helped contextualize the impacts of globalization and develop on social change, such as migration. She is a Chancellor's Doctoral Incentive Fellow and Oskar Morgenstern Fellow.



María Ximena Dávila - Member at Large

is a Ph.D. candidate in Sociology at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research examines the interplay between gender, development, violence, and the politics of care and welfare in Latin America. Her dissertation specifically asks how risk and violence become woven into the intimate domains of reproduction, motherhood, and the family. Drawing on ethnographic and historical research, she traces how domestic life, gender roles, and everyday forms of risk management are reshaped by dispossession, environmental collapse, and the aftermath of armed conflict.

María is also a human rights lawyer and has worked extensively on women's rights in the Americas, with a focus on advancing sexual and reproductive justice.



Catherine van de Ruit - Member at Large

Catherine health care workers and organizations. Her teaching and research on health organizations and systems in both the United States and Southern Africa focuses on the ways in which racial and gendered health disparities are reproduced through health policy and the structure of health care systems. She is an associate professor of sociology at Ursinus College. Catherine is currently working on a book project titled Outsourcing obligation: The Organization of South African AIDS care, and is a Co-Principal Investigator on a project titled: Biosocial Factors and Perinatal Care for Patients Living with HIV in Philadelphia funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Health and in collaboration with Drexel University's College of Medicine.

Emerging Scholarship

1. “When Development Wounds the Mother” by Yohanes Damaiko Udu

2. “Gendered Transportation Sector” by Dr. Zhiyi Wang

3. “Tribute Grammar” by Sarai Richter

Yohanes Damaiko Udu

Yohanes Damaiko Udu is a graduate student in the Master of Arts program in social justice and human rights at Arizona State University. Trained in philosophy, his research focuses on environmental justice, Indigenous land rights and development politics in Eastern Indonesia. Through advocacy-based research, ethnographic fieldwork and public scholarship, Yohanes examines the social and environmental impacts of extractive industries and tourism development while amplifying community-led resistance and envisioning more just and sustainable futures.



When Development Wounds the Mother

“Tana hitu ende dami.”
The land is our mother.

I first encountered these words not as a metaphor, but as a political theory. In Poco Leok, an Indigenous community in Flores, Indonesia, women use them to explain their opposition to a state-backed geothermal project financed through international development capital. They do not speak of land as an abstract resource. They speak of it as one speaks of a mother: as the source of life, nourishment, memory, belonging, and obligation.

Their words unsettle one of development’s most persistent assumptions: that renewable energy is inherently progressive, that infrastructure necessarily represents improvement, and that communities opposing “green” projects are obstacles to national progress. Listening to the women of Poco Leok raises a more fundamental question: development for whom, and at whose expense?
The geothermal project arrives carrying the language of the future. It promises clean energy, economic progress, and a transition away from fossil fuels. Yet for Indigenous communities whose ancestral territories are targeted for drilling, the language of sustainability can conceal an unequal political economy. Customary lands become energy infrastructure. Ancestral territories are recast as objects of state planning. Indigenous knowledge is subordinated to technical expertise. Consultation risks becoming a procedural substitute for meaningful consent. What appears from the perspective of the state as a green transition is experienced locally as dispossession.

This contradiction is precisely where a feminist analysis becomes essential. Conventional development frameworks often count what can be measured: megawatts of energy, investment, infrastructure, and economic growth. What they frequently render invisible is the labor required to sustain life. Feminist political ecology instead asks how environmental change is mediated through unequal relations of gender, power, labor, and knowledge (Sultana, 2021).

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In Poco Leok, the question is therefore not only who owns the land or who benefits from geothermal energy. It is also: who carries the costs when land, water, and ecological systems are disrupted? The answer is often found in the quiet, repetitive work of everyday life. Women cultivate land. They secure food and water. They sustain households, transmit cultural knowledge, and maintain relationships between generations. Much of this labor is so ordinary that development policy often fails to see it. Yet when the environment is transformed, the consequences enter precisely these intimate infrastructures of social reproduction.

Environmental destruction does not remain "environmental." It enters the kitchen. The garden. The water source. The household. The village. The future. When Yunung, a Poco Leok Indigenous woman, says, "Ketika tanah terluka, kami para ibu juga ikut terluka" (When the land is wounded, we mothers feel that pain in our hearts), she is not offering a sentimental image. She is making a political claim about the material conditions of life. Land is not simply a factor of production. It is the basis of food, care, cultural continuity, spiritual belonging, and collective survival.

Yet this claim must not be romanticized. Indigenous women do not resist because they possess an essential or inherently feminine connection to nature. Their political agency instead emerges from historically situated relations to land, labor, care, and community. The same responsibilities that can reproduce gender inequality can also become sources of political consciousness and collective mobilization.

This contradiction is central to the ethnography. The women of Poco Leok lead demonstrations, confront state officials, challenge project personnel, communicate with journalists and human rights organizations, and participate in jaga beo (collective village guarding). Their activism is not simply domestic responsibility carried into the public sphere. It is a transformation of gendered knowledge into political power.

They know what happens when a spring is disturbed. They know which fields sustain a household. They know what it means when ancestral land is redrawn on a government map. They know that a decision made in an office can eventually arrive at the doorway of a home. Their knowledge is not merely experiential. It is political.

At the same time, their activism unfolds within a patriarchal social order. Their resistance confronts multiple structures of domination: gender hierarchy within the community, state authority within development institutions, and corporate power within the political economy of energy extraction.

Their struggle also exposes the limits of participation as a development ideal. Meetings may be held, documents circulated, and signatures collected. Yet participation without meaningful information, deliberative power, or Free, Prior, and Informed Consent can become a technology of legitimation rather than a redistribution of power. A community may be invited into a meeting while remaining excluded from the decision.



Figure 1. Poco Leok Indigenous women display crops harvested from farmland targeted for geothermal development. Photo: Yudi Onggal, a Poco Leok community member.

A closer ethnographic engagement reveals another dimension. The women's resistance is simultaneously material, political, and cosmological. Their defense of lingko (customary land) is also a defense of a social world in which territory, kinship, labor, ancestors, and future generations are inseparable. The mbaru gendang (the customary house) and the surrounding ancestral domain constitute a living social order. To appropriate the land is therefore not merely to alter property relations. It is to disturb relationships, unsettle collective reproduction, and place Indigenous sovereignty under pressure.

This is why the women of Poco Leok offer feminist development sociology more than a case study of resistance. They pose a methodological and political challenge. They ask us to move beyond the question of whether women are included in development and toward a more fundamental question: what if the development model itself is the problem?

Their struggle suggests that a feminist politics of development must interrogate the political economy of extraction, the unequal distribution of environmental risk, the invisibility of reproductive labor, and the colonial assumptions embedded in the language of progress. It must also take seriously Indigenous epistemologies that refuse the separation of economy from ecology, body from territory, and present survival from ancestral obligation (Rodríguez & Inturias, 2018).

For the women of Poco Leok, these separations do not hold. The body remembers the territory. The household depends on the land. The present remains indebted to the ancestors. Perhaps this is why the most powerful critique of development does not come from a policy report. It comes from women defending the conditions through which life is sustained. It comes from those who understand that a territory can be measured in hectares and still contain a world.

When they say, "Tana hitu ende dami" (The land is our mother), they are not speaking poetically. They are making a political-economic argument. Any development that transfers benefits upward while transferring ecological and social risks downward – and, in doing so, wounds the conditions of life – cannot be called development at all.

A mother is not a resource. And when she is wounded, the wound does not remain in the soil. It travels through bodies, households, communities, and generations.



Figure 2. Poco Leok Indigenous women perform a customary ritual to purify and protect the spring. Photo: Yudi Onggal, a Poco Leok community member.

Move with Smartness: Reshaping the Urban Transportation Sector

Zhiyi Wang

Zhiyi Wang received her PhD in Anthropology from the University of California, Riverside. Her research focuses on smart urbanism, transport infrastructure, and planning in Southeast Asia. Her dissertation explores the development of the Phnom Penh City Bus system in Cambodia and the everyday practices through which technology-driven planning initiatives take shape and weave into the multiplicity of urban rhythms.



Gendered Transportation Sector

The transportation sector is generally regarded as a domain of masculinity, one of the primary reasons being the established stereotypes linking man with physical strength, mechanical skills, and technologies (Christensen et al. 2024). As a result, we take the male drivers in various transportation fields for granted and sometimes even become suspicious when we encounter female drivers when we take a taxi, the bus, or the metro. This is also true for Cambodia. Entering the “smart” era, however, we are witnessing increasing representation of female workers in the transportation sector, along with the emerging technologies such as Mobility as a Service (MaaS), which includes ride-hailing platforms, delivery, and a combination of other modes of mobilities.

While female drivers start to join the labor force of Phnom Penh’s bus system since 2019, a more implicit, but no less profound process is ongoing. Rooted in the “modernization” reform of the bus system, which relied heavily on applications of information and communication technologies, this process gave rise to new forms of gender dynamics within the City Bus Authority (CBA). The introduction of cashless payment and the Bus Operation and Management System (BOMS) allowed bus drivers to operate on their own, and hence resulted in the re-assignment of the previous bus conductors to other management positions, who were mostly female. Today, many female employees at CBA, either office workers at the depot or dispatchers at each terminal, were former bus conductors.

Reversing the Power Relation

Such arrangement contributes to the "closing of the gender gap" (Christensen et al. 2024, 122) within the public bus system, which is now an increasingly integral part of Phnom Penh's transportation sector. At the same time, it also complicates the gendered labor relationship inside the public transit system. Cambodia follows a patriarchal social structure, although scholars recorded the relatively higher status of Khmer women in the household due to their management skills and responsibilities (Lilja 2008; Beban 2021). At the frontline of the public bus service, the female dispatchers are in charge of the daily operation of the buses, giving real-time orders for departure to the drivers, who are mostly male, and older than them.

It further challenges the age hierarchy that is still foundational in the Khmer society. In the transportation sector, this hierarchy is interrupted by the introduction of technologies and the generational gap in digital literacy. The educated young women, with their competence in digital devices and technologies, become key nodes within the new organizational structure of operation. Simultaneously, the still limited smart capacity, especially of the aging male drivers, hinders the broader application of available technologies, such as the promotion of the mobile app of BOMS among drivers, according to the system's developer.

Smart City in the Making in the Global South

This is a time of smart urbanism – and Cambodia does not want to be left out. Following the formation of the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Smart City Network in 2018, Cambodia senses an urgent need for strengthening national technological capabilities and improving innovation performance as critical to the nation's economic development. In 2020, the Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation (MISTI) was established, and the Science, Technology and Innovation Roadmap 2030 was published the next year, of which the citizens' smart capacity building makes one of the five pillars.

The public bus system has been part of Phnom Penh's smart city plan since the beginning. Although interrupted by COVID-19, the conclusion of the Project for Improvement of Public Bus Operation in Phnom Penh (PiBO) in 2022 marked a critical stage of digitalization of the system. From the end of year 2024 on, CBA has been implementing new technological solutions, including its launch on Google Transit, the updated City Bus Official App, and the most recent installation of digital signages for the Airport Express Line in July 2026. It remains to be seen how these new applications can ease the use of the public transportation and encourage participation into the transit-oriented development (TOD).

While featured the driving role of technology, Phnom Penh's smart urbanism does not neatly fit the prevalent metaphors of "test-bed" for technological novelty (Baykurt 2026). Instead, as a "smart city in the making," it invites us to decenter the "established framings" (Alizadeh and Prasad 2024) of smart city, and to focus on the actual process of new division of labor, power reproduction, and how individuals become integrated into the changing technological urban landscapes.



Sarai Richter

Sarai Richter is a Ph.D. candidate in Sociology at Arizona State University. They hold bachelor's degrees in Anthropology and Political Science and a master's degree in Human Rights and Social Justice. Through ethnographic and participatory research, they develop relational approaches to development, governance, and feminist practice that begin from the everyday work of sustaining relationships rather than the institutions that seek to govern them.

Tribute Grammar

Development sociology often assumes that NGOs face a straightforward choice: comply with donor expectations or resist them. Compliance becomes evidence of capture by the nonprofit industrial complex; resistance the evidence of autonomy (Ebrahim 2003; INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence 2007; Jalali 2013). Yet after nearly a decade working alongside Khmer feminist organizations in Cambodia, I have come to suspect that this binary obscures more than it reveals. Through a single ethnographic case, I ask what becomes visible when one organization is taken seriously on its own conceptual terms. The argument advanced here offers a conceptual intervention grounded in one organizational world, leaving open the question of how similar dynamics might unfold elsewhere.

Khmer lead organizations submit reports, complete indicators, and attend donor meetings. But the governance that sustains their work is often located elsewhere—in shared meals, reciprocal obligations, merit-making, relationships with elders, communities, monks, and everyday practices of care. These practices constitute forms of relational governance. Development sociology has too often treated them as the cultural context of governance rather than governance in its own right.

Within the dominant bureaucratic architectures of contemporary international development, governance is frequently imagined as something that begins when an NGO receives funding. Accountability is organized through reporting systems, measurable outcomes, institutional transparency, and project cycles (Merry 2011; Power 1997; Strathern 2000). Within these bureaucratic funding arrangements, donors often become positioned as the architects of governance while NGOs become their implementers.

Khmer Buddhist–animist social worlds locate governance within the ethical relations through which authority, obligation, care, and responsibility are continually enacted. Within traditions of merit-making, governance cannot be reduced to institutional administration. It is a relational technology through which obligation, care, protection, and responsibility circulate among people, ancestors, spirits, land, and community (Ledgerwood 1995; Chandler 1996; Scott 1976; Tully, 1996). These ethical infrastructures predate NGOs, the USAID withdrawal, and exceed the metrics used to evaluate them. My fieldwork suggests that, within one Cambodian organization, bureaucratic structures entered ethical worlds already governed by relational logics.

Although this relational mode of negotiating external authority is rooted in much older histories of Cambodian sovereignty and relational obligation, its contemporary form has been shaped through decades of engagement with colonization, international development, and transnational human rights politics. From Angkorian mandala polities, where rulers negotiated overlapping spheres of authority rather than singular territorial sovereignty, through French colonial administration, where Buddhist institutions, kinship networks, and ritual obligations continued alongside colonial law, Cambodia has long sustained multiple systems of governance simultaneously. Authority rarely operated as an absolute (Chandler, 1991, 1996; Thompson, 2004; Tambiah, 2013). Instead, it circulated through layered obligations, negotiated relationships, and tributary forms of recognition.

Seen genealogically, today's donor regimes are not a rupture but another encounter with external authority. Khmer feminist organizations inherit relational traditions that long predate international development even as they continually rework them through donor bureaucracies, transnational feminism, and human rights politics. Governance is not created anew; it is renegotiated under new political and economic conditions.

My ethnographic question changed. I stopped asking how donor governance was implemented and began asking how different forms of governance were negotiated in everyday organizational life.

At Gender and Development Cambodia, those negotiations rarely appeared where development literature would lead us to expect them. Conversations certainly included the familiar routines of NGO life—reports due at the end of the quarter, indicators to update, donor meetings to prepare for, another grant cycle already on the horizon. Paperwork never held the conversation for long. It kept returning to relationships: with women's and LGBTQ organizations, local communities, monks, and one another. Attention settled on a different question: how would those relationships endure long after the report had been submitted?

Following the reinstatement and expansion of the Mexico City Policy—commonly known as the Global Gag Rule—by the Trump administration in January 2017, foreign NGOs receiving U.S. global health assistance were required to certify that they would neither provide nor actively promote abortion as a

method of family planning, even using non-U.S. funds. First introduced by the Reagan administration in 1984, the policy has been repeatedly rescinded and reinstated by successive U.S. presidents along partisan lines (Moss, & Kates, 2026). These conversations became even more urgent. Staff continued to submit reports and fulfill donor obligations while deliberately investing in relationships they believed would outlast any single grant. Years before the withdrawal of USAID funding, the organization had intentionally diversified its funding base so that USAID constituted only approximately five percent of its operating budget when the cuts occurred in 2025.

This reflected more than prudent financial management. It reflected a long-standing recognition that aid is inherently political. The bilateral and multilateral funding relationships with which GADC engaged brought distinct forms of governance, accountability, and epistemological authority alongside financial resources. These varied across funders, but all required organizations to become administratively legible in particular ways. Staff spoke openly about these shifting political landscapes and understood that donor priorities could change with elections, administrations, and geopolitical interests. Their ethical obligations therefore could not be anchored to institutions whose commitments were always contingent. They remained accountable first to the relationships that would continue long after any donor departed. The work they understood as most essential rarely appeared within the documents meant to evaluate it (Fieldnotes, GADC, 2016–2025).

Leaving those conversations, I realized that the reports were real, and they had unquestionably reshaped organizational life. But they were not the organization's governance. They were translations: bureaucratic renderings of a relational grammar with much deeper histories. Governance remained rooted in obligations that neither began with development nor disappeared when development withdrew.

This also casts the development discourse of sustainability in a different light. Across diverse institutional funding arrangements donor agencies routinely evaluate projects according to whether governance structures will endure once funding ends. That assumption carries an important implication: governance is imagined as something established through the intervention itself. While these institutional capacities undoubtedly became part of organizational life, they were layered upon ethical relations of obligation that neither originated with development nor disappeared when development funding ended.

The institutional capacities that development agencies seek to sustain are frequently layered upon forms of relational governance they do not necessarily evaluate as those relations exceed the administrative categories through which sustainability is typically assessed. When projects conclude, longstanding ethical relations continue through kinship, merit-making, community obligation, and reciprocal care. Donor-created institutional capacities become only one layer within that broader ecology of governance. Development withdrawal therefore does not necessarily reveal the failure of sustainability but may actually reveal a prior misrecognition: not because donor bureaucracies failed to shape organizational life, but because they came to be mistaken for the entirety of governance rather than one historically specific modality within a much broader ecology of governing relations. A different question emerges: Did development ever recognize the governance on which enduring sustainability already depended?

This misrecognition is not simply empirical; it is epistemological. Development institutions are trained to recognize governance where governance becomes administratively visible: constitutions, strategic plans, monitoring systems, financial controls, indicators, and institutional procedures. Relational obligations are consequently interpreted as culture,

informal practice, or social context rather than governance itself. Relational obligations rarely disappear from development practice; they disappear analytically, translated into the language of context, local knowledge, stakeholder engagement, or community participation rather than recognized as constitutive forms of governance. The problem lies in the concepts themselves. They render some forms of governance visible while making others almost impossible to perceive. This asymmetry of recognition makes another phenomenon visible: organizations translate enough to satisfy bureaucratic demands while allowing ethical worlds to remain governed according to different logics.

What emerged from these conversations was not simply a distinction between bureaucratic and relational governance. What mattered was the continual work of translation. Existing concepts explain governance. They have much less to say about the work of moving between different forms of governance without collapsing one into the other. Translation became the work itself.

I call this tribute grammar. Tribute grammar describes how organizations become legible enough to secure resources while protecting forms of life that cannot—and should not—be fully translated into donor metrics. Reports, budgets, and indicators become tributary offerings: sufficiently legible to satisfy external oversight while leaving intact ethical worlds that exceed institutional recognition. I use the language of grammar deliberately. A grammar does not determine what can be said; it organizes the conditions under which different worlds become mutually intelligible without becoming identical. Tribute grammar therefore names the patterned work of rendering organizations sufficiently legible to bureaucratic regimes while preserving ethical meanings that remain irreducible to them. In doing so, it makes possible an ethical orientation I call remaining in relation. Remaining in relation cannot be reduced to either resistance or compliance because organizations cannot simply disappear from donor regimes. Donors continue to control resources that materially affect the communities with whom they work, making exit neither always possible nor necessarily desirable Remaining in relation is less a strategy than an ethical orientation toward sustaining relationships understood as constitutive of collective life. Reports, negotiations, adaptations, and even compromises matter because they allow relations of obligation that endure changing political and institutional conditions. The analytic question consequently shifts from how organizations preserve themselves to how they preserve relations they understand as ethically irreducible.

Existing concepts largely explain how organizations negotiate institutions. Remaining in relation asks a different question: how do ethical relations negotiate organizations?

Thus, my argument builds upon Scott (2009) while shifting the analytic problem. Scott asks how communities preserve autonomy by limiting incorporation into state projects. Khmer feminist organizations cannot organize primarily around avoidance because institutional funding remains materially significant. Tribute grammar asks how organizations continue governing themselves through relational obligations while simultaneously participating in institutional regimes that also seek to govern them. Reports, budgets, and indicators are not straightforward capitulations, nor are they acts of deception. They are partial translations between ontologies of governance. They render organizations sufficiently legible to remain in relation while preserving ethical worlds that exceed institutional recognition. What remains opaque is not hidden because organizations seek secrecy (Glissant 1997). It remains opaque because relational governance cannot be exhausted by bureaucratic description.

Tribute grammar reveals the labor required to survive systems that demand legibility while extracting value from worlds they cannot fully recognize (Sassen 2006; Power 1997). Many contemporary development accountability frameworks mistake translation for transformation, assuming that what becomes measurable is therefore what is most important.

When governance is imagined only through metrics, audits, and institutional permanence, donor withdrawal appears as collapse. Viewed through the circulation of ethical obligation, a different picture emerges. What persists after projects end is not simply "resilience." Governance continues according to a grammar that development evaluations were never designed to recognize—and therefore cannot fully capture.

The familiar compliance/resistance question misses something more fundamental. A more productive question asks which forms of governance remain invisible because our concepts were never designed to see them. Tribute grammar names one possibility. The sociological task extends beyond rendering these worlds more visible within existing frameworks of accountability. It also requires questioning why our theories have so often confused legibility with governance itself. Until we do, development sociology will continue to misrecognize the very relations that have allowed communities to endure long before development arrived—and that will continue long after.



The Body as Archive: Trauma, Power, and Decolonial Repair in Academia



FREE EVENT

60-Minute Decolonial Repair Hour (Virtual)

This Decolonial Repair Hour is a space for truth, and belonging. We have been conditioned to survive in systems of oppression that does not ask for performance, yet we are invited, collective practice for undoing harm and acts of repair within institutions, while honoring our humanity.

For many of us, the body—learning to override fatigue, "professional," pressure, and be productive, and individual failure to manage time or stress is not self-indulgence, but survival carried in the body. We will explore how mercy—starting with our breath—is not self-indulgence, but liberation. The body will be approached as archive, healer, and ancestral knowledge, not problem to solve.

This session is not a workshop to "fix" you. There is no expectation to share. You are welcome exactly as you are. What matters is presence, not performance.

Dr. Roksana Badruddoja

BIPOC Liberationist Urban Shamanic-Akashic Practitioner

FemDev-Decolonial Repair Hour

Tuesday, November 3 · 3:30 – 5:00pm PST

Google Meet joining info

Video call link:
https://meet.google.com/avo-nrue-upw

Or dial: (US) +1 669-220-6348 PIN: 856 322 756#

More phone numbers:
https://tel.meet/avo-nrue-upw?pin=8459059162634

Call for Papers: Special Issue of Sociology of Development

After USAID: Assessing the Blast Radius and Envisioning the Future

Sociology of Development invites submissions for a special issue, *After USAID: Assessing the Blast Radius and Envisioning the Future*, guest edited by Dr. Sophia Boutilier (California State University, Fresno), Christina Gordon (Independent Scholar) and Liliane Boch (Paris Institute of Political Studies/Sciences Po). Sophia Boutilier is an Assistant Professor of Sociology whose work centers on gender, development, solidarity and emotions. Christina Gordon is a development practitioner based in the Washington, D.C. area who specializes in human rights and gender equality. Liliane Boch is a Master's candidate at Sciences Po in Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid with a background in political science. For the last year, they have been researching the intersection of USAID's dismantling with the targeting of 'gender ideology.' They look forward to compiling the latest scholarship and practitioner perspectives on the emergent state of the field. All questions related to the Special Issue can be directed to Dr. Sophia Boutilier at sophiaboutilier@csufresno.edu.

Dismantling the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has been called one of the most consequential actions of Trump's second term in office (Flavelle et al. 2025). With the disappearance of the world's largest source of Official Development Assistance, 14 million preventable deaths are expected by 2030 (Cavalcanti et al. 2025). Specific sectors are especially vulnerable: work supporting gender equality (UN Women 2025) and the environment (Perry 2025) have been targeted through executive orders (e.g. White House 2025) and deregulation (EPA Press Office 2025), compounding the effects of the cuts. Our research has shown that many development practitioners and organizations have chosen to sacrifice targeted programs in hopes of saving funding for less stigmatized initiatives. This raises the question of whether norms, practices, and efforts to advance gender equality, sustainability, and social inclusion in international development and humanitarian aid will persist or perish.

The ripple effects of the decision to dismantle USAID are still unfolding. Many organizations have been forced to close (Limaye 2025, Stroup and Hadden 2026), while those remaining watch other nations follow America's trend of cutting aid (Hale and Duangdee 2025, Mednick et al 2025, OECD 2026, O'Sullivan 2025), shifting their investments to defense (Erickson and Jones 2026) or 'trade over aid' (Pamuk 2026). Across the industry, an estimated 280,000 people have lost their jobs worldwide (Smith 2026). With fewer jobs available, many foreign aid workers are being forced to move to other sectors, withdrawing valuable expertise and experience from government and civil society. These impacts reverberate globally and across domains, contributing to threats to democracy (Hubbard and Hussain 2026), increases in morbidity and mortality (Cavalcanti et al 2025, Enrich 2025), and economic instability (Anderson et al. 2025, Byrnes 2025).

While we witness this devastation, it cannot be forgotten that USAID was a flawed institution, subject to political constraints (such as the Hyde Amendment (Library of Congress n.d.)), geopolitical and ideological incentives (Daigle 2022, Essex 2013), and extensive bureaucratic protocols (Greenstein and Heinzel 2025) that limited its adaptability and effectiveness. The closure of such an influential agency opens space for new development paradigms.

- This issue seeks empirical and theoretical research focused on the following:
- What are the contours or defining characteristics of the post-USAID development landscape?
- How are models of development funding and programming changing?
- How are agencies, partner organizations, and rights holders responding?
- What consequences are unfolding, and how? How do these vary by social and geographical location?
- What norms are (re)emerging or being reinterpreted, and what can we expect in the future?
- What opportunities has the destruction made way for?

We welcome traditional academic manuscripts and comment-style essays from both academic and practitioner standpoints. Traditional manuscripts between 6,000-8,000 words should contribute to the empirical and theoretical understanding of emergent changes and challenges to the sociology of development.

Comment pieces can advance a novel argument and/or take stock of the development field. Approaches can vary, ranging from tales from the field, theoretical reflections, analyses from the perspective of applied sociology, or editorial-style commentary. These may vary in length between 1000 words (editorial style) to 3000-4000 words (longer arguments).

Submissions need not be centered on USAID, nor confined to US politics alone, but should contribute sociological perspectives to how the field is responding to the shutdown and changes to American foreign aid policy. Please submit completed manuscripts to Dr. Sophia Boutilier at sophiaboutilier@csufresno.edu by October 15th, 2026. Submission of a manuscript does not guarantee publication. All submissions will be reviewed through a double-blind review process. Please submit a blind copy of your manuscript and a separate cover page including corresponding author name and contact information, declaration of conflict of interest, and disclosure of AI-use.

Call for Papers:
Advances in Gender Research

Feminist Engagements with the United Nations

We are excited to invite proposals for chapters in Feminist Engagements with the United Nations, part of the Advances in Gender Research series with Emerald Publishing. The volume examines feminist engagement with the United Nations, including how feminist movements have shaped global gender governance, how that engagement operates across local and global scales, and the roles scholars play in these processes.

We especially welcome submissions from scholars in the Global South, practitioners, activists, and advocates, as well as junior scholars and graduate students. The series has a history of mentoring emerging feminist scholars, and we plan to continue that with contributors to this volume.

Full description of the volume and instructions on how to submit proposals is in the attached call. Abstracts are due November 30, 2026, and authors of selected abstracts will be invited to submit full chapters.

Please share this call with colleagues and networks who might be interested!

We're happy to answer questions--you can reach out to us at

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Natascia Boeri
Bloomfield College of Montclair State University
Marcia Texler Segal, AGR Series Editor
Kristy Kelly, Columbia University

Call for Participants:
Advances in Gender Research

Seeking Professors of Sociology

Jennifer Krebsbach, a graduate student at the University of California, Davis, is conducting a study on how restrictive, external government-led policies are shaping the individual decisions made about teaching and research for early-career sociologists– and how university administrators are working to support their faculty. She is seeking two groups of participants for her study: assistant professors of sociology and administrators within colleges that house sociology programs– must be working at R1 institutions. Participation involves a 10-20 minute survey. Assistant professors have the additional option of being interviewed at a regional sociological conference in the upcoming year.

To participate in this research as an assistant professor, please click here.

To participate in this research as a sociology Department Chair, or as an administrator (Dean, Assistant/Associate Dean) of the college that oversees a sociology department, please click here.

If you have any questions about the research project or want to know more, please contact Jennifer M. Krebsbach, jkrebsbach@ucdavis.edu.

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Member, L&S Community and Inclusive Excellence (CIE) Committee

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New York, New York

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recent publications

Crinall, S., Koro, M., Richter, S., Alleham, S., & German, C. (2026). Decentring human emergences with bodyplace brut. Qualitative Research Journal. DOI: 10.1108/QRJ-06-2025-0195

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Call for Submissions!!

Submissions can include any of the following:

Upcoming conferences, calls for papers,
special issues of journals or grant opportunities.

Recent publications or promotions.

Profiles of graduate students who are on the job market –
contact info/website, photo(optional),
dissertation abstract 200-300 words,
biographical information 100 words.

Online resources applicable to Sociology of Development or
Feminist Pedagogy, such as blogs or
other relevant electronic resources for research and teaching.

If you have other relevant materials, please let us know!
We are always happy to make space for new
and innovative contributions and
contributors!

Please email the newsletter editor by:
Winter/ Spring Newsletter due date is Dec 10th
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