Development and gender equality in the State of Kuwait: seeking new imaginaries through the lens of the Nationality Law 1959

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Abstract

This important and ambitious symposium seeks to address many overlapping issues: development, developing countries, sustainable development, the past, present and future of development, the ‘Third World’, the global ‘North’ and ‘South’, justice, social justice, gender justice, human rights, and the links between and within these concepts. There are multiple issues and so many angles from which the issues could be addressed. When moving from the research to the writing phase of this paper, the perennial problem of ‘where to start’ was more daunting than usual. Where to start? Should I explain why I, a citizen of New Zealand - a country that is physically located in the southern hemisphere but paradoxically part of the ‘global North’ - am focusing on Kuwait (a high-income country with perhaps one tenth of the world’s oil reserves), which is located in the northern hemisphere but arguably part of the global ‘South’? Or should I begin by explaining why I think gender equality is possibly the most important of the United Nations’ Development Programme’s new Sustainable Development Goals? Or should I start by explaining why equal rights to citizenship is the most fundamental human right which, especially for women and children, should logically come before all other aspirational goals can be realized? Or should I start with some interesting findings from my survey in Kuwait, for example, the finding that, when asked about their citizenship rights, many educated women do not feel entitled to, and do not even seek to aspire to traditional notions of “gender equality”? Where to start? I shall take a leaf out of Lewis Carroll’s book and take the advice of the King: “Begin at the beginning….and go on until you come to the end: then stop.”

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