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## **Towards a Radical Re-appropriation: Gender, Development and Neoliberal Feminism**

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### **Abstract**

*Tracing a complex trajectory from 'liberal' to 'neoliberal' feminism in development, this article argues that approaches to gender which are currently being promoted within neoliberal development frameworks, while often characterised as 'instrumentalizing' gender equality, in fact rely upon, extend and deepen gendered inequalities in order to sustain and strengthen processes of global capital accumulation in several ways. This is explored through development discourses and practices relating to microfinance, reproductive rights and adolescent girls. Drawing on examples from India, the article goes on to reflect on experiences of collective movements in which the assumptions underpinning this 'Gender Equality as Smart Economics' approach are challenged. Finally, it highlights several concepts associated with Marxist, Black, Postcolonial and Queer feminisms and underlines their importance to projects seeking to critically redefine development, arguing for a radical reappropriation of gender in this context.*

‘Greater gender equality can enhance productivity, improve development outcomes for future generations, and make institutions function better’ - World Bank report on ‘Investing in women’s reproductive health’ (Grépin and Klugman, 2013:3)

‘It was observed in this study that in peak period, women agricultural labourers had worked for 14-18 hours (per day) while in lean period it came down to 14-16 hours....The study investigated the leisure time spending of women agricultural labourers ... The interesting part of the study is that the time spent was sometimes non-productive like gossiping, sleeping, playing cards and watching TV... (this time) can otherwise be utilised by making best use of it to earn more and live better’ - Report published by the Government of Odisha, India (Mishra, 2008:56)

This article examines the incorporation of gender as an important category within development discourses, structures and practices, with a particular focus on the selective appropriation of elements of feminist thinking within contemporary neoliberal approaches to development. It suggests that characterizations of these current approaches as ‘instrumentalizing’ gender equality, or as rooted in liberal feminism, are insufficient: in fact,

these approaches rely on, reinforce and extend unequal gendered structures and relations. It illustrates this through discussion of three important development interventions: microfinance and Self-Help Groups; contemporary population policies; and the current focus on the adolescent girl in the global South as the idealized ‘agent’ of development. It then considers some examples of collective movements which directly challenge the neoliberal model of development, within which gender relations have been sought to be redefined in ways which make the neoliberal ‘Gender Equality as Smart Economics’ approach untenable.

Foregrounding the historical and ongoing co-existence of multiple feminisms, the paper argues for a need to go beyond critiques of co-option, and highlights the indispensability of key concepts associated in particular with Marxist, Black, Postcolonial and Queer feminisms to projects which seek to critically redefine development.

For the purposes of this article, I treat critical development thinking in two interrelated ways. Firstly, I use it to refer to critique of development itself as a complex of unequal material relationships and processes which structure engagement between the global South and the global North, as well as the primary discursive framework within which these relationships have been constructed for more than sixty years. Development conceptualized in this way is inextricable from the rapidly shifting and mutating operations of global capital, and should be understood in relation to concepts of imperialism and ‘race’, rather than, as in much development discourse, as an alternative which renders these concepts invisible (Wilson, 2012). At the same time I use the notion of critical development thinking to draw attention to resistance to global capital accumulation and struggles for transformative structural change in these relationships, and to the visions of altogether different forms of development which frequently inform this resistance.

## **FROM LIBERAL TO NEOLIBERAL FEMINISM? HISTORICAL TRAJECTORIES OF GENDER IN DEVELOPMENT**

Standard genealogies of gender and development theory and practice identify two key stages: the drive to include ‘women’, a previously excluded category within development, leading to the establishment of ‘Women in Development’ (WID) approaches; and, via Women and Development (WAD), the subsequent replacement of WID by ‘Gender and Development’

(GAD) which shifted the focus from 'women' to unequal gender relations and from demands for inclusion to gendered critiques of development models themselves.<sup>1</sup>

Although this was a period in which contesting models of development struggled for dominance, the focus of initial feminist critiques was the Cold War modernization approach which was integral to the promotion of US economic and geostrategic interests in the global South. Ester Boserup's seminal study *Women's Role in Economic Development* (1970/2007) questioned the way development theory, policy and practice ignored and marginalized women's role as producers. Even in the context of sub-Saharan African farming systems where women played a central part in cultivation, she argued, colonial and post-colonial administrators assumed women's place was in the home. These preconceptions meant that policies such as those relating to the introduction of cash crops and the promotion of new technology in agriculture 'promoted the productivity of male labour' while excluding women.

This notion of exclusion was the starting point for the Women in Development (WID) approach, which combined equity and efficiency arguments to call for women's inclusion in the processes of modernization. WID advocates suggested that prejudice and stereotyping by development planners and employers meant that women were excluded from participating in the productive sphere, where they could prove just as efficient and productive as men. WID-based initiatives focused on women's education, training and access to technology which would make them more productive and improve their access to the market. In practice this often meant handicrafts and small-scale income-generating projects. As Kabeer (1994) notes, the WID approach is rooted in two interconnected sets of assumptions: those of neo-classical economics in which individuals are utility maximizing and economic growth comes from the exercise of individual choice supported by the institutions of private property and the free market; and those of liberal feminism which emphasizes women's capacity for rational thought and action and seeks equality with men in the public sphere. Thus WID identified discrimination against women within the development process, but did not place it in the context of gendered structures of power, or relate unequal gender relations to those of class, race or imperialism. The challenge to this approach mirrored and extended contradictions within feminist movements globally, in particular the debates between liberal and Marxist

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<sup>1</sup> For a full discussion of the transition from WID, via WAD, to GAD approaches, see Razavi and Miller (1995).

feminists, and the critiques which Black feminists in North America and Europe, and feminists located in the global South, were articulating in relation to the dominant narrative of liberation and 'global sisterhood' (Sen and Grown, 1985).

While most mainstream accounts tend to treat the Women and Development (WAD) approach as a necessary detour, which countered WID's embrace of markets with an emphasis on women's exploitation as intrinsic to processes of capitalism and imperialism but failed to sufficiently critique intra-class gender relations (Rathgeber, 1990), this overlooks some of the complexities of WAD. In particular, the analyses of Mies (1982, 1986), drawing on her ground-breaking study of women lace makers in Central India, explored how both local gender relations which constrained women's mobility and global capitalist characterizations of women's work as unproductive 'housework' generated expanded profits for capital on a world scale. As Bair (2010) notes, this foreshadowed some of the key themes of later feminist analysis of globalization and global value chains.

For WAD theorists, then, it was evident that rather than focusing on inclusion of women in processes of capital accumulation, these processes and their gendered implications must be problematized (Beneria and Sen, 1981). The socialist feminists who participated in the groups DAWN (Development Alternative with Women for a New Era) (Sen and Grown, 1985) and Subordination of Women (Razavi and Miller, 1995) agreed with this. But they argued for more detailed attention to the specificities of particular places and times, suggesting that WAD theorists over-generalized the effects of both capitalism and patriarchy (Kabeer, 1994); this would lead to a shift away from the central focus on capital accumulation on a global scale which characterized WAD.

It was the Gender and Development (GAD) approach that emerged from these groups which became established as the most influential critique of WID. GAD prioritized the recognition of the sphere of social reproduction which remained invisible or naturalized in WID approaches. For example, income-generating projects targeted at women often increased women's overall work burden by failing to recognize the reproductive labour they were already undertaking. Within this framework, the GAD approach critiqued the tendency of WID initiatives to treat 'women' as a homogeneous category with shared interests, and to promote policies which addressed them in isolation, failing to recognize gender as a socially constructed and dynamic category. GAD analysis of women's participation in the labour

market looked at how gender relations in the household and beyond both affect and are in turn affected by the nature of this participation and the particular conditions under which it takes place. GAD scholarship also focused on the household as an arena of inequality and conflict. Rejecting the neoclassical model of the household as a unit characterized by altruism, in which all members seek to maximize a joint utility function, it highlighted the unequal gender distribution of resources and power within households. It was argued that members of households had differential bargaining power, which depended on the 'value and visibility' of their labour (Kabeer, 1994). Regional differences in gendered labour processes and household structures which shape 'appropriability, control and autonomy at different stages of household resource management' were highlighted (ibid.: 117; Kandiyoti, 1988).

While the language of gender and development and a stated commitment to gender mainstreaming came to pervade development discourse and policy, in practice, WID approaches, which were more compatible with the neoliberal turn, remained dominant within development institutions such as states, the World Bank and other international organizations, and the majority of NGOs (Chant and Sweetman 2012). However, more recently, as we will see, globally dominant development institutions have been promoting a much more explicitly neoliberal approach to gender, epitomized by the World Bank's slogan 'Gender Equality as Smart Economics' (World Bank, 2006; World Bank, 2011) and the current corporate-initiated global development focus on adolescent girls. Smart Economics is premised on the assumption that women will always work harder, and be more productive, than their male counterparts; further, they will use additional income more productively than men would. Therefore it argues that greater gender 'equality', understood as an increase in women's participation in labour markets, will have a significant impact on economic growth. Within these approaches, I suggest here, even the liberal feminist critiques of existing capitalism implied in WID thinking are excised. They do not simply 'instrumentalize' and dilute gender equality objectives and neglect questions of consciousness in favour of an exclusively material understanding of empowerment, as critical GAD researchers and practitioners have argued for some time (Cornwall and Edwards, 2014). Rather, these approaches to gender, and the specific models of material development they are embedded in, rely on, and actively reinforce and extend, existing patriarchal structures and gendered relationships of power.

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As I explain below, neoliberal practices and discourses of gender and development are deeply racialized in their production of hyper-industrious, altruistic entrepreneurial female subjects

who are now represented alongside, while by no means fully displacing, earlier constructions of ‘third world women’ as the passive recipients of development, devoid of agency, which have been a focus of post-colonial feminist critiques (Kapoor, 2008; Mohanty, 1986; Spivak, 1988). The failure of WID and subsequently GAD to challenge the racialized power relations inherent within the project of development (White, 2006) informed these critiques, notably Mohanty’s influential ‘Under Western Eyes’ in which she argued that ‘third world women’ are constructed within gender and development discourses as ‘a homogeneous “powerless” group often located as implicit *victims* of particular socio-economic systems’ (Mohanty, 1986: 338), waiting to be liberated by Western feminists, in a reiteration of missionary women’s narratives of rescue and salvation (Abu Lughod, 2002). The impact of post-colonial feminism contributed to a much greater emphasis on identifying women’s agency in GAD thinking from the late 1980s onwards.

However, as I have argued elsewhere, this came to be subsumed into what was effectively the reinstatement of liberal theory’s rational individual exercising ‘free will’ and maximizing self-interest within GAD. Influential GAD theorists’ growing emphasis on women’s rational decisions and ‘choices’ to conform to gendered expectations or collude in the oppression of other women legitimized the gradual marginalization of questions of both structural violence and the production of gendered subjectivities.<sup>2</sup> Increasingly, gendered compulsions on women to work harder than their male counterparts and to expend more of their resources on their children were instrumentalized and celebrated as ‘efficiency’ rather than being questioned. This made their ideas particularly amenable to incorporation within neoliberal frameworks (Wilson, 2008).

The increasingly ubiquitous citation of women’s agency and empowerment in discourses of development was also consistent with a shift in neoliberal development policy in the 1990s. With evidence of deepening poverty resulting from the neoliberal policies of the 1980s, the World Bank and other institutions sought to address poverty in a way which retained the neoliberal model intact, and in fact could further extend the gains of global capital. This was variously known as the Post-Washington Consensus, the new poverty agenda, or the New

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<sup>2</sup> As Deniz Kandiyoti (1998) argued in a reflection on the widespread adoption of her concept of the ‘patriarchal bargain’ (Kandiyoti, 1988), a focus on ‘subordinates’ rational decisions to conform rather than rebel’ can mean ‘concealing the evidence of hegemony by relabelling its effects’. It is this tendency to ‘relabel’ the effects of hegemony and inequality as ‘choice’ which has made discourses of agency in gender and development thinking so amenable to appropriation within neoliberal models.

Social Policy. In this framework, empowerment and participation were closely related to ideas of individual responsibility and self-help. The growth of cost recovery, co-financing and co-management schemes along with community participation and voluntary work shifted the burden of responsibility onto poor households, and specifically poor women. At the same time, they were directly subordinated to the disciplines of the market in new ways (Molyneux, 2008).

More broadly, the last two decades have seen a growing emphasis on the extension and intensification of women's labour as central to sustaining neoliberal capital accumulation. On the one hand, the global contraction of the share of direct producers in profits is achieved through the intensification of unwaged and waged labour of women through which, increasingly, poor households attempt to survive (Perrons, 2012). On the other hand, the further incorporation of women whom processes of gendering and racialization render 'disposable' workers (Wright, 2006)<sup>3</sup> into global labour markets is seen as an important ongoing source for expanded reproduction of capital. These two processes taken together form the core of a gendered understanding of 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey, 2004; Hartsock, 2006). As we will see, these processes, rather than involving the lifting of gendered constraints on women's time and mobility and the unequal division of household labour, actually depend on these constraints for their perpetuation.

It is in this context that we can understand the emergence of the hyper-industrious entrepreneurial 'girl' from a low-income household in the global South as a central trope of twenty-first century neoliberalism. Just as colonial representations of contented and productive women workers in colonial enterprises 'symbolically affirmed the need for empire' (Ramamurthy, 2003), so these contemporary representations implicitly confirm the 'empowering' potential of neoliberal globalization and erase questions of structural injustice (Wilson, 2011).

## **GENDERING THE 'DESERVING POOR': MICROFINANCE AND SMART ECONOMICS**

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<sup>3</sup> See Wright (2006) also on the use of the labour of male, mainly black, prisoners in the USA.



These processes are particularly evident in the remarkable rise of microfinance as a key development intervention. Over the last two decades, microfinance initiatives have come to be seen as the single most effective strategy for addressing both poverty and gender inequality, despite extensive debate regarding their impact. A large body of studies has established that actual control over microfinance loans to women is often in the hands of male relatives, while debt is ‘feminized’; that the poorest women are often excluded from microcredit groups; and that microfinance loans are rarely sufficient to generate income on a scale which significantly impacts on living standards (see, for example, Garikipati, 2008, 2012; Goetz and Sen Gupta, 1996; Mayoux, 2002; Rahman, 1999; Rogaly, 1996). Those who have remained relatively optimistic about microfinance’s ‘empowering’ potential have distinguished between those organizations which promote ‘social transformation’ through a variety of activities and those which focus exclusively on loans (Holvoet, 2006; Kabeer, 2005). But the former have been increasingly marginalized with growing financialization of the sector as banks and corporates move into the field, integrating poor women deeper into global circuits of capital (Aitken, 2013; Kalpana, 2008; Maclean, 2010).

While these debates have largely focused on whether microfinance delivers on its promises, other observers have highlighted how, with its vision of women in low-income households ‘making good’ through entrepreneurial hard work, microfinance epitomizes the neoliberal focus on the individual, and on moving up hierarchies rather than collectively challenging or dismantling them. As Karim illustrates in the context of Bangladesh, this potentially undermines solidarities of class and gender. Not only has the spread of microfinance projects reinforced the idea that responsibility for survival rests with the individual poor woman and not with the state, but poverty itself has been stigmatized and is increasingly portrayed as a source of shame and individual failure, rather than a basis on which to make collective claims on the state (Karim, 2008).

However — and this once again reflects neoliberalism’s peculiar ability to appropriate and incorporate critical concepts — microfinance is also based on a reconstruction of the idea of collective action, one which places the self-interested individual at its centre<sup>4</sup> and is

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<sup>4</sup> Frances Cleaver (2007) provides a related discussion of this understanding of ‘individual participation in collective action’ in the context of community water resource management schemes.

increasingly mentioned in the discourse of mainstream development actors.<sup>5</sup> Thus while the microfinance system requires the formation of groups in which all the members share liability for default, and thus effectively police each other, these groups are conceptualized primarily as collections of individual potential entrepreneurs. Further, the emergence of collective solidarity may actually undermine the system, for example if it disrupts the policing function of the group or leads to groups protecting defaulting members. This directly affects the types of relationships and activities which are promoted by microfinance organizations.

According to a comprehensive study of Self Help Groups in India (Sharma et al., 2007) practices of solidarity are replaced with a ‘culture defined more by the maintenance of discipline and distrust as the marker of relationships between the women members’ (ibid.: 117). The study found that, in the relatively rare instances where these groups took up issues beyond their financial activities, there was a limited agenda, mainly related to making demands for the implementation of existing service provision and questioning misappropriation of resources at the local level of the state (ibid.: 51–52). This is in keeping with the neoliberal agenda of ‘good governance’, in which civil society has increasingly become a site of donor intervention and direction: these NGOs did occasionally encourage rural poor women to challenge the state on questions of governance, but did not the operation of markets or the property regime — for example, redistribution of land and resources, or improved wages and conditions for agricultural labourers were not on the agenda (ibid.: 23–9). Significantly, issues of gender relations within the household and domestic violence were generally not considered to fall within the purview of these groups, whose stated objective was women’s empowerment, even when these issues were raised by the women members of the groups. In fact, as we will see, the maintenance of unequal and oppressive gender relations in households is central to the contemporary ‘Smart Economics’ model of gender and development.

Central to contemporary development approaches is a construction of ‘poor women in the global South’ as more efficient neoliberal subjects than their male counterparts, drawing on evidence that women have better repayment rates on loans, that women work harder, and expend less resources on themselves (in terms of leisure time as well as consumption) than

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<sup>5</sup> See for example Oxfam’s ‘Researching Women’s Collective Action’ project which is part of its ‘Gendered Enterprise and Markets’ programme (<http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/our-work/food-livelihoods/womens-economic-leadership>).

their male counterparts, and that increasing women's access to the market and earnings will therefore have a far greater impact on children's well-being.<sup>6</sup> The moralistic overtones of the development literature's oft-cited contrasts between women's 'good' spending (on food, children's clothes, school fees etc.) and men's 'bad' spending (on alcohol, cigarettes, entertainment etc.) are distinct echoes of the Victorian discourses of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, and like them, are deeply racialized in their reinscription of essentialized constructions of men in the global South as inherently 'lazy', irresponsible and preoccupied with sensual pleasure.<sup>7</sup>

What this fails to acknowledge is that these widespread and well-documented gender disparities in the use of income and resources very clearly stem from specific patriarchal structures, institutions and ideologies, notably the almost universally gendered division of responsibility for children, and the various constructions of 'good' wives/mothers/daughters/daughters-in-law as those who 'make sacrifices' for their families. This makes it particularly ironic that women's greater efficiency — as workers, creditors or entrepreneurs — should be so frequently cited and even celebrated by feminists working within gender and development frameworks. In fact the relationship between oppressive gender relations and women's perceived 'efficiency' has been explained quite explicitly by those involved in administering microcredit schemes in India and Bangladesh. Recent studies have highlighted that not only are existing gender relations often taken as given, but the strategies employed in microcredit programmes are actually based on the mobilization and perpetuation of these unequal material relations and ideologies.

Karim explains how notions of women's 'shame and honour' are treated as 'collateral' in ensuring loan repayments in Grameen Bank schemes in Bangladesh, describing how actions which members are encouraged to take against those who default take the form of public shaming and 'do not operate outside of local patriarchy but within it' (Karim, 2008: 19). Similarly, in the Indian context of Self Help Groups (SHGs), Sharma et al. (2007) found this 'underlying gender ideology' to be embedded in the programmes. For example, a state-level official in charge of monitoring and evaluation for the World Bank funded Swashakti SHG

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<sup>6</sup> A large body of evidence from different regions suggests that this is overwhelmingly the case: see for example Agarwal (1994).

<sup>7</sup> While masculinities have been recognized as an important focus of gender and development theory and practice, the role of constructions of 'race' in shaping perceptions of masculinities *within* gender and development approaches is yet to be addressed (see Wilson, 2012: Ch. 4, for a discussion of this).

network was ‘adamant that inclusion of indicators of women’s status would distort the programme. “If we start teaching those things then our whole society will collapse and we will have no values and culture [left]. Whatever we do, it should not destroy our family system”’(Sharma et al., 2007: 102). Again, the schemes ensure repayment by targeting women because, as an official of Sabarkantha in Gujarat put it, ‘women can be located easily... they cannot run away, leaving their homes; they can be persuaded to repay more easily as they feel shame more quickly and consider non-repayment a matter of family honour’ (ibid.: 95).

As these examples suggest, development strategies based on the intensification of rural poor women’s labour (and specifically the idea of women as ‘better’ borrowers) are also dependent upon their relative spatial immobility. Neoliberal economic models are based on the unfettered global mobility of capital and the relative immobility of racialized labour which, through the policing of immigration and borders, both prevents movement and produces migrant workers as more intensively exploitable labour. But access to spatial mobility is also of course highly gendered, depending upon gendered responsibilities and ideologies. In a wider sense, this notion of ‘not being able to run away’ from responsibilities is central to the construction of women as ideal neoliberal subjects and underpins the current focus on the adolescent girl as a reliable future investment.

Gendered prescriptions about women’s use of time similarly underpin these approaches. The assumption that the time and energies of women in poor households in the global South are infinitely elastic, and can always incorporate more income-generating activity, has come to be taken for granted in development discourse and policy (de la Rocha, 2009), even when the notion of a double or triple burden (of productive, reproductive and community labour) is acknowledged. In an example of this approach in which the underlying moralism and paternalism are particularly apparent, a recent study of the conditions of women agricultural labourers in Odisha, India, published by the state government, noted that the women in the study worked for an average of fourteen to sixteen hours per day in the lean season (when domestic work is included), and longer in the peak season, yet still insisted that ‘leisure time’ income-generating activities should be promoted among them, because currently leisure time is ‘sometimes non-productive’ involving ‘gossiping, sleeping, playing cards and watching TV’ (Mishra, 2008:56)!

## RACIALIZING REPRODUCTION AND APPROPRIATING REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

The appropriation and transformation of feminist ideas within neoliberal development frameworks is also evident in the contemporary discourse of reproductive and sexual rights and ‘choices’. A number of theorists have engaged critically with this discourse, emphasizing the continuing centrality of the control and regulation of sexualities to global capital accumulation (Lind, 2010), questioning the continuing heteronormativity of gender and development theories and analysis (Bedford, 2009; Jolly, 2011; Pereira, 2009) and highlighting that development policies relating to reproductive and sexual rights are not only gendered but racialized (Briggs, 2002; Wilson, 2012). This section briefly traces the evolution of neo-Malthusian population control policies as a racialized project of capital from the Cold War to their contemporary, neoliberal incarnation.<sup>8</sup>

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As we have noted, women were largely invisible in dominant post-war development discourses, prompting liberal feminist critiques like those which led to the emergence of WID thinking. However, these critiques failed to engage with women’s material and embodied experiences of development. ‘Third World’ women’s bodies, and specifically their fertility, were targeted from the very inception of post-war development by population control policies framed in the context of the Cold War, the reconfiguring of imperialism after formal colonialism, and the challenge to the existing global distribution of wealth and resources posed by communist movements in the global South. A number of writers have traced the centrality of eugenicist concepts of ‘race’ and their intimate and sustained relationship with neo-Malthusian theories about population, resources and the environment in shaping population control initiatives over the course of the last century (see for example, Connelly, 2008; Mass, 1976; Rao, 1994; Ross, 1998). Acknowledging the centrality of always already gendered constructions of race to population control discourse and practice helps us to understand how the violence of population control against women in the global South (Akhter, 1992; Hartmann, 1995; Mass, 1976) and against black and ethnic minority women in the North (Davis, 1982;; Robertson, 1997; Stern and Platt, 2013) was sustained and perpetuated. Population control discourse is marked by its reduction of ‘Third World’

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<sup>8</sup> For an account which explores the conceptual and historical genealogies of population control further back, to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Wilson (2012: Ch. 3).

women to their reproductive organs, and specifically their wombs, which are pathologized as ‘excessively reproductive’ and requiring intervention. However, a consideration of the resurgent focus on population as a development ‘challenge’ in the twenty-first century reveals a marked shift in these discourses in order to incorporate and mobilize feminist notions of reproductive choice.

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Experiences of population control policies in the 1970s and 1980s became one of the key markers of the deep fissures along lines drawn by ‘race’, class and imperialism within the women’s movement. The slogan of ‘a woman’s right to choose’ was mobilized around abortion rights by organizations in Europe and North America which were overwhelmingly white and predominantly middle class, rendering invisible the experiences of women of colour who were often the target of forced sterilization or compulsory use of unsafe contraceptives. Eugenicist ideas have continued to shape policies promoting these interventions and in Europe and North America, and in Israel, Black, indigenous and minority women, women in prison, and women with disabilities continue to be targeted. (Gubrium and Ferrer, 2008; Hallgarten, 2013).

Women in the global South were both denied access to contraceptive methods which were safe and which they could control, and subjected to the acute violence of population control policies in which targets were set by the international development institutions, including the World Bank. Forcible and coercive sterilization of urban and rural poor women took place on a massive scale: in Bangladesh, sterilization was in many cases made a condition for food relief (Akhter, 1992; Hartmann and Standing, 1985). In India, when central and state governments were unable to meet impossibly high targets, local administrations set targets for sterilizations for non-health personnel like teachers and forest officers, stopping salaries for non-achievement of these targets, leading to large-scale kidnappings and forcible sterilizations (Wilson, 1994). Coercive sterilizations have remained central to population policy in India, where sterilization constitutes 75 per cent of India’s total contraceptive use. A report by Human Rights Watch warned that further abuses would result from the effects of India’s commitments to lower fertility made at the 2012 World Population Summit, reporting that ‘in much of the country, authorities aggressively pursue targets, especially for female sterilization, by threatening health workers with salary cuts or dismissals’ (Human Rights Watch, 2012). On a national level, officially recorded deaths caused by sterilization between

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2003 and 2012 translate into twelve deaths a month, on average, and actual figures may be much higher (Wilson, 2015).

Population control programmes also created the conditions for large-scale testing of contraceptives on women in the global South, with minimal or no information being given to the participants in these tests (Hartmann, 1995; Mass, 1976). Where contraceptives were indeed found to have serious side effects, this did not discourage their promotion in the global South as part of population control programmes. In fact for pharmaceutical companies, these programmes have provided massive opportunities for ‘dumping’ drugs which have been banned in the global North, having been found to be unsafe. Injectable and implantable hormonal contraceptives such as Depo-Provera, Norplant and Net-En have been particularly favoured by the population establishment because they are long-acting: it was argued that in contrast to other methods such as the pill or the diaphragm, the woman does not have to ‘remember’ to take it or to insert it herself. This clearly perpetuates racialized constructions of these women as inherently lacking the ability to act responsibly or regulate their own lives.<sup>9</sup>

Until the 1990s, ‘population control’ was clearly distinguished from the notion of the right of individuals to control their fertility. For example, in 1984, the UNFPA’s representative in Dhaka, Walter Holzhausen, wrote a letter to key officials in the World Bank, USAID and other institutions criticizing the notion of ‘voluntarism’ in ‘family planning’ programmes in Bangladesh. The coercive sterilizations already taking place in the country were clearly not enough for Holzhausen, who wanted the government and donors to openly espouse compulsion (cited in [Hartmann and Standing, 1985](#): 38). In the 1990s, however, and particularly after the 1994 UN International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo, population policies began to increasingly be articulated in the terms of reproductive rights and ‘choices’. This shift came in response to the demands of feminist movements which had been opposing coercive population control interventions. It can be analysed as part of the strategic appropriation of feminist critiques within neoliberal development discourses.

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<sup>9</sup> A similar racist argument has been used to deny people in Africa access to anti-retroviral treatment for HIV (Wilson, 2012: Ch. 4).

Thus injectables and implantables are now promoted as methods which give the woman greater ‘choice’ and control over her own fertility (as she no longer has to directly confront potential opposition to contraception from male sexual partners) while, as reproductive justice activists note, in practice they actually shift control over her body to health professionals and population control institutions: the effect of injectables is non-reversible, and removing implants is a complex process which health professionals often refuse to perform when requested to do so by women experiencing debilitating side-effects (Wangari, 2002). In the context of the undermining of already limited health services in many countries since the introduction of Structural Adjustment Policies in the 1980s, the follow-up services required for those using these contraceptives are rarely available (ibid.).

The discursive emphasis on reproductive rights in development has been incorporated into neoliberal policies which have further intensified inequality and further constrained women’s choices on many different levels. It has also been accompanied by the incorporation of new concerns and ‘threats’ into the agenda of population control. In particular, population growth in the global South is now being linked to climate change, shifting attention from the role of corporate capital and the fact that industrialized countries, with only 20 per cent of the world’s population, are responsible for 80 per cent of the accumulated carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, while ‘the few countries in the world where population growth rates remain high, such as those in sub-Saharan Africa, have among the lowest carbon emissions per capita on the planet’ (Hartmann, 2009). Related to this is an intensified emphasis on population control as a counter to migration from the global South to the global North.

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Similarly, population growth in the global South is held responsible for the escalating food crises generated by land appropriation by transnational corporations and foreign governments. While population control is being promoted on the basis that it is linked to declining maternal mortality and improved child survival rates, it is unlikely that this can be achieved without a change in the dominant economic model which could make substantial investment in health provision possible. But contemporary population discourse insists that current global economic relationships and structures of power do not need to be changed and World Bank and IMF-imposed policies in which health provision, along with education, sanitation and other essential public services, have been decimated since the 1980s (Rowden, 2011; Stein, 2008) can remain in place. British Development Secretary Andrew Mitchell described population policies as ‘excellent value for money’, citing the example of Tanzania

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which he claims would ‘need 131,000 fewer teachers by 2035 if fertility declines — saving millions of pounds in the long run’ (Mitchell, 2011). The underlying message is that the poor will be taught to become ‘better managers’ of their poverty, while it will be business as usual for the corporates freely plundering sub-Saharan Africa.

Redeploying Cold War fears about ‘young populations’ and the related ‘youth bulge’ theory of security threats developed by the CIA, population growth is now also linked to terrorism, embodied in the racialized and gendered constructions of the ‘angry young men’ it produces and the ‘veiled young women’ who in the future will produce yet more ‘dangerous’ children (Hendrixson, 2004). As Anne Hendrixson writes, ‘The implied dual threat — of explosive violence and explosive fertility — provides a racial- and gender-based rationale for continued US military intervention and US-promoted population control initiatives in other countries, particularly in the South. It also justifies government surveillance of Muslims and Arabs within US borders’ (ibid.). Racialized population control initiatives thus fit in neatly with the twenty-first century development/security paradigm, in which development interventions in the global South, now framed in the discourse of ‘rights’ and ‘choice’, are simultaneously projected as necessary for the ‘security’ of populations in the global North. It is in the context of this discourse for example, that the British Government’s then Minister for International Development Stephen O’Brien asserted that ‘we will not shy away from talking about population — about global population growth and its impacts’, adding without irony that ‘we are proud to be giving more women the choices they crave’ (O’Brien, 2011).

The resurgent emphasis on population control in development has been marked by the emergence of new actors, notably the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which has been instrumental in influencing the British government to take the lead in global population control initiatives (J.P., 2012). At the 2012 London Summit on Family Planning, the Gates Foundation, along with partners USAID, DfID, UNFPA, pharmaceutical corporation Pfizer, and the US NGO, PATH, announced a new collaboration which aims to ‘reach’ three million women in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia in three years with 12 million doses of Depo-Provera (Hendrixson, 2014; Thomas, 2014) Meanwhile, DfID’s recent initiatives include a joint operation with Merck to promote the long-lasting implant Implanon to ‘14.5 million of the poorest women’ (O’Brien, 2011). Implanon was discontinued in the UK in 2010 because trained medical personnel were finding it too difficult to insert correctly, and there were fears about its safety (BBC News, 2011). As well as a series of debilitating side-effects, the

implant was reported as ‘disappearing inside women’s bodies’ (Filar, 2012). Merck has introduced a new version, Nexplanon, which, although almost identical in other ways, is detectable by X-ray, but it has been allowed to continue to sell its existing stocks of Implanon. This, then, is the drug which is being promoted in DfID and UNFPA programmes in the ‘poorest’ countries, despite these countries’ huge deficit of trained health personnel. In fact, in Ethiopia, one of the target countries, mass insertions of Implanon are part of what is referred to as ‘task shifting’ where hastily trained health extension workers are being made to take on the roles of trained doctors and nurses (UNFPA, 2010).

Current population interventions by organizations like DfID, USAID, UNFPA and the Gates Foundation have appropriated the concepts of women’s empowerment and agency, but they are still underpinned by ideas about race, gender and sexuality which serve to dehumanize those identified as ‘targets’ for population control. The Gates Foundation has been repeatedly criticized for its close relationship with pharmaceutical giants, and its role in financing drug trials and vaccine programmes which were found to be unethical and unsafe (Vashisht and Puliyeel, 2012). These include a clinical trial of the HPV vaccine against cervical cancer in India in 2009, falsely claimed to be a ‘post-licensure observational study’, for which 23,000 girls aged nine to fifteen from impoverished communities were selected, and requirements for parental consent were bypassed. The trial was suspended following the deaths of seven adivasi (indigenous) girls (Narayana Kumar, 2014; Sarojini and Sheno, 2010). A government enquiry found that the process of obtaining consent amounted to ‘covert inducement and indirect coercion’ (*The Hindu*, 2011) and expressed concerns over a ‘hidden agenda’ to push the expensive vaccinations manufactured by Glaxo Smith Kline and Merck Sharp and Dohme into India’s Universal Immunisation Programme (Rajalakshmi, 2011). Population control can be understood as an ongoing racialized project of capital. The current emphasis on reproductive choices in population policies being promoted by Northern governments and corporate actors represents an attempt to appropriate feminist ideas and reframe them to be consistent with the contemporary, neoliberal phase of this project, which is marked by an intensification of women’s labour on several levels.

The renewed emphasis on population control is not only geared towards shifting attention from global capital’s responsibility for poverty, climate change and food crises. It is also a part of the process of ‘accumulation as dispossession’ to which the intensification of women’s labour is central, with responsibility for household survival increasingly feminized,

and with more and more women incorporated into global value chains dominated by transnational corporations. As in Puerto Rico in the 1950s, where coercive mass sterilization drives were pioneered as part of one of the earliest experiments in increasing profits by outsourcing manufacturing to low-paid women workers in the global South in ‘Operation Bootstrap’ (Briggs, 2002; Mass, 1976, 1977), a reduction in women’s fertility is being promoted within the ‘Smart Economics’ framework, primarily as it is regarded as facilitating women’s entry into labour markets and enhancing their productivity for global capital (see for example Grépin and Klugman, 2013). Thus it is the drive to intensify and incorporate the labour of women in poor households in the global South, rather than feminist concerns about reproductive and sexual rights, which underpins the now ubiquitous slogan of ‘investing in women’ within population discourse.

**Comment [PB9]:** Not in References (only Mass 1976 in Refs)

## **‘SHE WILL DO THE REST’: REPRESENTING ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN DEVELOPMENT<sup>10</sup>**

Both of the interlinked concerns of neoliberal development which we have identified here — extending and intensifying women’s labour and controlling women’s fertility — are brought together in the current overriding focus on the figure of the adolescent girl as the vehicle for ‘investment’ in future growth and the pre-eminent neoliberal subject of development. The rise of the ‘girl’ in development discourse and policy has been markedly corporate led. Although the idea that girls’ education could be an economically sound ‘investment’ in future reductions in the birth rate can be traced back to a 1992 speech by Lawrence Summers, then Chief Economist at the World Bank (Murphy, 2012), it was the Nike Foundation set up by Nike in 2004 which arguably led the way in focusing on adolescent girls in the global South more generally as the ‘solution’ to the ‘problem’ of development. The Nike Foundation, which was set up in partnership with the Population Council and the International Centre for Research on Women, went on to establish partnerships with the World Bank and DfID. Nike’s notion of the ‘Girl Effect’ has since been adopted and promoted much more widely by international development institutions. In 2007, UNICEF, UNIFEM and the WHO established the UN Interagency Task Force on adolescent girls. In 2008 the World Bank founded its Adolescent Girl Initiative, aimed at improving girls’ and young women’s

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<sup>10</sup> One of the slogans of the Nike Foundation’s ‘Girl Effect’ campaign is ‘Invest in a girl and she will do the rest’.

economic opportunities. In 2010, the UK government announced that it would focus its development aid on girls and women (Koffman and Gill, 2013: 86). This has been followed by campaigns such as the UN's Girl Up, and Plan International's 'Because I am a Girl', as well as corporate social responsibility projects by Nokia, Chevron, Shell Oil, Exxon, Credit Suisse, Walmart, Intel and Goldman Sachs (Murphy, 2012).

Not only is girls' education instrumentalized as Smart Economics (Chant, 2015) but, as in the case of microfinance, the 'Girl Effect' model is predicated on the continuation rather than the challenging of gendered compulsions to be hardworking and altruistic. It produces a similarly historically inflected subject whose seemingly infinite capacity for labour (now recast within the framework of entrepreneurship and choice) is both racialized and gendered (Murphy, 2012; Wilson, 2011). This is made explicit in the mobilization of unverifiable statistical 'facts' such as 'when an educated girl earns income she reinvests 90% of it in her family, compared to 35% for a boy' (Nike Foundation, 2006). As Murphy argues, 'the figure of the racialized, "third-world girl" — typically represented as South Asian or African, often Muslim — has become the iconic vessel of human capital. Thoroughly heterosexualized, her rates of return are dependent on her forecasted compliance with expectations to serve her family — her ability to be thoroughly "girlled"' (Murphy, 2012).

In fact, it is notable that while the Girl Effect consistently portrays girls as at risk from 'cultural' practices such as early marriage and from highly racialized figures of predatory men in their own communities, while invisibilizing the structural causes of poverty (Wilson, 2011), the discourse rarely questions the existing gender division of labour even as it relates to girls' lives in adolescence itself. In a recent Girl Effect animated video entitled 'Smart Economics', a hypothetical girl in rural Ethiopia is portrayed as having to do 'five times as many chores' as her brother, at the expense of her studies. This situation is then shown to be mitigated simply by the provision of a fuel-efficient stove (with no redistribution of 'chores'), and we next see her simultaneously cooking and studying, symbolically embodying the racialized hyper-industrious and entrepreneurial female subject (Girl Effect, 2014).

I would argue that the advent of the adolescent girl as the agent of development marks the transition from liberal to neoliberal feminism in development,<sup>11</sup> in which responsibility shifts entirely onto the individualized figure of the girl after the initial investment in her human capital: ‘she will do the rest’ (Nike Foundation, 2008) and any critique of structures is rendered irrelevant. Even liberal feminist critiques that sought to highlight discrimination which ostensibly prevented markets from functioning effectively are now marginalized. The focus on the pre-reproductive, pre-labouring years is thoroughly neoliberal in that intervention via education is constructed as necessary only to produce the idealized neoliberal subject who can negotiate unfettered and unregulated markets with ease, while simultaneously assuming full responsibility for social reproduction.

In this sense, the Girl Effect and other similar campaigns interpellate their largely young and female target viewers in the global North in new ways too, since they are constructed as no longer helping, or even saving, but effectively *creating* new agents of development through their transformative interventions before the beginning of their adult lives. As a number of writers have noted, the ‘girl’ in these discourses is in fact crucially always understood in relation and in contrast to her already empowered Northern counterpart, mobilizing post-feminist discourses which assume that gender equality has been achieved in the global North (Koffman and Gill, 2013; Switzer, 2013). Koffman and Gill highlight the way in which ‘girls’ in the global North are directly addressed by extensive social media, ‘roadshow’ and merchandising campaigns such as the Girl Effect or the UN Foundation’s ‘Girl Up’ campaign launched in 2010 (Koffman and Gill, 2013). These campaigns reinforce post-feminist notions that women in the global North no longer experience gender inequality, oppression or violence: girls in the North are invited to endorse feminism but only in relation to the South. They themselves are represented as ‘more educated, socially connected and empowered than ever before’ (ibid.: 92).

This interpellation also, I suggest, further highlights the ways in which contemporary constructions of agency within development are racialized, with the capacity for collective

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<sup>11</sup> Rottenberg (2014) describes ‘neoliberal feminism’ directed at elite professional women in the global North in which ‘other classic liberal feminist goals, such as fair treatment, equal institutional access, and women’s full integration into the public sphere are expediently elided, while climbing the power hierarchy ultimately becomes *the* feminist objective’ (2014: 425-6) Such accounts, however, do not acknowledge that this elision has already taken place in the feminism incorporated in neoliberal development discourses centred around poor women in the global South.

and transformative, rather than entrepreneurial, agency being displaced onto apparently homogeneous publics in the global North (and young people in particular), who are increasingly invited by development institutions using the language of ‘revolution’ to mobilize around agendas which are consistent with the needs of global capital. This difference is also marked in the representation of sexuality, where post-feminist constructions of the ‘global girl’ as sexual subject and self-commodifier (McRobbie, 2008) stand in marked contrast to constructions of the ‘localized’ girl in the global South whose sexuality can only be a threat to the global order and who is understood solely in terms of racialized constructions of ‘dangerous’ and ‘excessive’ fertility, which also potentially undermines her productivity for the global economy (Switzer, 2013).

### **COLLECTIVE MOVEMENTS CONFRONTING ‘SMART ECONOMICS’**

The appropriation of the ideas which emerge from movements with a transformative agenda and their incorporation into dominant narratives — a practice central to the construction of hegemony in a Gramscian sense — is also always a strategy to undermine and defuse critical concepts which challenge the basis of the existing order, and to derail or marginalize resistance which is informed by them; it also implies the possibility of counter-hegemonic interventions. This section explores the implications of this for feminism and critical development thinking. I first look at some examples of collective movements in India, within which the neoliberal model of development is directly challenged, and which seek to redefine gender relations in ways that make the ‘Gender Equality as Smart Economics’ approach untenable. My focus here is not on development interventions, but on those social movements which are rendered invisible within dominant neoliberal development discourses, and which challenge the unequal distribution of resources, the operation of markets, and the violence of the neoliberal state. I consider how, through sustained struggles waged both externally and within these movements, women have confronted the very structures and discourses of gendered power which underpin the production of the ‘poor woman/girl as efficient neoliberal subject’.

One example of this can be seen in the experiences of the mainly Dalit women agricultural labourers who have been at the forefront of a movement led by a revolutionary left party, the CPI(ML), organizing around questions of land redistribution, living wages and an end to caste, class and gender-based violence by powerful landowning groups in Bihar in eastern

India (Wilson, 1999). As I have described in detail elsewhere (Wilson, 2008), collective engagement in these struggles<sup>12</sup> has led women to challenge, in particular, the gender division of labour and unequal gendered access and rights to time and to public spaces which are central to the operation of microfinance and, more broadly, the intensification of women's labour as a key strategy of contemporary capital.

Some of these contestations can be understood through an analysis of the appropriation and transformation of the concept of *izzat* (honour or respect). Within the dominant upper caste ideology, *izzat* is a feudal patriarchal concept which is closely linked to property ownership. While women can easily damage or destroy it if they do not conform to prescribed behaviour, it is essentially seen as 'belonging' to the patriarchal, property-owning family and its male members.

*Izzat* has become a site of struggle on several levels. Among some sections of the Dalit communities, there has been an attempt to claim *izzat* in its existing form through the adoption of upper caste practices associated with women's subordination, such as dowry and (where possible) withdrawal of women from labour outside the home.<sup>13</sup> However, the *izzat* fought for by women collectively resisting the sexual violence they face as women workers in the fields is conceptualized differently by them: this gender and class struggle over *izzat* changes its meaning. The dominant discourse of *izzat* dictates that men must protect women from contact with 'outside' men in order to preserve family honour. In contrast, these struggles imply that a woman who leaves the 'protection' of the home and moves freely in public spaces has the right to *protect herself*. Thus *izzat* can 'belong' to a woman independently. This change becomes explicit when women demand *izzat* within the family in the context of campaigns against domestic violence.

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<sup>12</sup> I have written elsewhere in more detail about the process through which these demands and desires for change were formulated and articulated, suggesting that it was catalysed by the experience of collective struggle, and of being able to challenge authority and bring about change (Wilson, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that, given their conditions of work and the attacks they face, women may themselves prefer to withdraw from paid labour. A similar point was made by black feminist writers critiquing the liberal feminist assumption that waged work is by definition liberating (see for example hooks, 1982). At the same time, since it is usually younger women, and in particular young married women, who are withdrawn from this work, this can also be seen as resulting in greater control over them by both men and older women.

As well as confronting the domestic violence through which compliance to gendered expectations is often policed, women involved in the movement repeatedly questioned the gender division of labour and responsibility within households which results in women's primary responsibility for children's welfare, and the absence of even the limited leisure time which men have, both of which affect women's ability to participate fully in political activity (Wilson, 2008). The question of whether gender relations within the household should be a priority remained a contested one within the movement at a local level, and as I suggest elsewhere (ibid.) an important factor in putting these issues onto the agenda has been the presence of a relatively autonomous women's organisation linked to the CPI(ML). In Bihar and elsewhere, women activists at the village level — particularly younger women with young children — who travelled widely, addressed public gatherings, assertively confronted officials and other powerful figures, and on occasion spent several nights away from home, were challenging dominant notions of the 'good' woman, not only in terms of space (by voluntarily entering public spaces for reasons other than direct economic compulsions) but in terms of time (in expending time on activism which would otherwise have been spent on domestic labour or income-generating activities). This was in many cases a continuous source of conflict with family members and viewed as an unresolved dilemma by the women themselves. Nevertheless, these women are involved in the process of formulating alternatives to norms of behaviour which are shaped by patriarchal ideologies and material structures, and are currently being reinforced, instrumentalized and extended by neoliberal development interventions. In these dynamic contexts, the assumptions about women's behaviour on which 'Smart Economics' depends begin to irretrievably unravel.

In a somewhat different, although related, context, the massive anti-rape movement which emerged in Delhi in the wake of the horrific gang-rape of a twenty-three year old student in December 2012 became a site of contestation between different approaches to sexual violence — contestation in which these assumptions were once again at issue. The approach which emanated from one section of the protestors and was taken up by the state and the media focused on the demand that the paternalistic state fulfil its obligations to 'protect' women on the streets from violence, and on the demand for the death penalty in rape cases. This left intact a discourse in which women survivors could be blamed for any perceived violations of gendered restrictions around public space, time and behaviour. Significantly, young women fulfilling the requirements of the neoliberal economy by working at night in 'call centres and the media' (Krishnan, 2013), were specifically highlighted as those



deserving protection from the state. The mobilization of ideas of ‘protection’ simultaneously facilitated the demonization of working class migrants to Delhi as those who perpetrated sexual violence (Dutta and Sircar, 2013). This ‘othering’ is inextricable from wider patriarchal discourses in which poor, oppressed caste and religious minority men are constructed as a ‘threat’ to control over women of the dominant group by family, community and nation and is exemplified by the current campaign being waged against Muslims by the Hindu right in India around the myth of ‘love jihad’ (Dixit, 2014). But this was countered by a discourse which emerged largely spontaneously from the movement which directly challenged ‘victim blaming’. Kavita Krishnan, an activist who was involved in the protests from their inception, recalls how:

Right from the start in the movement there were these slogans which were coming out in the movement quite spontaneously, alongside the death penalty slogans and posters. There were many posters hand made by women, most of them were first time participants from schools or colleges, young women working or studying in different parts of Delhi. ...posters saying, ‘don’t teach us how to dress, teach men not to rape’ and others saying, ‘your gaze is the problem so why should I cover myself up’. This anger had clearly stopped being about this one rape case and punishment, it was actually raising larger questions about why women are put in the dock every time there is a case of sexual violence. (Freedom Without Fear Platform, 2013)

Some commentators have suggested that these slogans remained consistent with what was perceived as the ‘middle class’ character of the outrage and empathy generated by this particular case, which continued to invisibilize the relentless sexual violence faced by poor and marginalized women in India (John, 2013; Roy, 2012). The problems with this critique go beyond the fact that the composition of the protests was much more heterogeneous than they imply, or even the fact that these slogans and the ideas they embody, far from being restricted to an urban elite, have had a remarkable resonance among women in very different contexts across India.<sup>14</sup> What is perhaps most problematic about this approach, which

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<sup>14</sup> For example Krishnan notes that:

In rural Siwan, Bihar, 500 women gathered in February 2013 to protest Asaram’s visit there [Asaram Bapu, a ‘godman’ close to the Hindu right], incensed by his suggestion that the December 16<sup>th</sup> rape could have been avoided if only the woman had called the rapists ‘brother’..... Closer to home in Siwan, both Hindu and Muslim panchayat leaders had competed to issue ‘bans’ on women’s using mobile phones or wearing jeans or skirts. The women protestors not only came armed with eggs and tomatoes for Asaram; they gave speeches there declaring that if anyone tried to impose a ban on women wearing jeans, they

suggests that the movement had little relevance to broader agendas of social transformation, is its failure to take account of the ways in which the patriarchal regulation and disciplining of women seen as ‘belonging’ to dominant communities — whether around dress, entering public spaces, or choosing a partner — are inextricably tied to the legitimization of violence against those women who are represented as the ‘other’, in terms of religion, caste or class. In the current Indian political context, the enforcement of these patriarchal controls through often violent ‘moral policing’ is central to the discourses and practices of the Hindu supremacist forces which, particularly since the May 2014 electoral victory of Narendra Modi, are simultaneously extending and intensifying neoliberal policies. This should not be surprising in the light of the many ways in which neoliberalism, including neoliberal development discourse on gender, draws upon, reinforces and is sustained by unequal gender relations.

Further, while the protestors’ emphasis on ‘victim-blaming’ has been relatively well-publicized and debated, there has been less acknowledgement of the way this led to an extension of the perceived locus of gendered violence from the street, in two directions: into the home and into the apparatuses of the state.

Firstly, the protestors drew attention to the presence of sexual violence in domestic spaces, where gendered surveillance, control and violence, far from becoming anachronistic, are now central to the production of the altruistic neoliberal female subject. Krishnan describes ‘slogans like freedom from the Khap Panchayats, then immediately we had girls saying “freedom from brothers, fathers, not just freedom from the clan body”. All these were challenging the notion of “the home as the safe haven”, as opposed to the unsafe streets. So it was also trying to make visible the violence of everyday patriarchy’ (FreedomWithout Fear Platform, 2013).

Secondly, a significant section of the protestors went on to highlight the state as both a direct perpetrator of sexual violence as well as a protector of powerful perpetrators (Sengupta, 2013). Slogans and placards demanded an end to rapes by the Army and an end to the

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would beat up men who wore shorts (a reference to the RSS uniform), pants, shirts, or anything but ‘dhoti and khadaun’ [loincloth and wooden clogs]. Subsequently, Asaram himself has been arrested for raping a 16-year-old girl in his ashram. A comrade told me recently that in his village in Begusarai, Bihar, the Laxmi Puja pandals included figures of Asaram with women beating him up with footwear. (Krishnan, 2013)

immunity provided by the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in its occupations of Kashmir, Manipur and elsewhere in the North-East, and the vast tracts of Chhattisgarh targeted by mining corporates. They invoked the names of Dalit women raped and murdered by powerful landowners with state backing, and of Muslim minority women targeted in state-sponsored violence by Hindu right-wing organizations. Migrant women domestic workers who participated in the protests spoke of the violence they face in the middle-class homes where they are employed. These interventions directly confronted the dominant discourse in which only rapes of women who were represented as 'belonging' to the nation were made visible. They also challenged the neoliberal conceptualization of gender inequality in which gender violence is perceived as an anomaly which can be mitigated by intensified criminalization (Bumiller, 2008; Richie, 2012)<sup>15</sup> and individual empowerment via the market, rather than as a systemic characteristic of market, state, household and community structures of power, which can only be resisted through collective movements with an agenda for transformative change.

## **RECLAIMING FEMINISM?**

The sustained project of appropriation of discourses of gender equality by neoliberalism renders concepts developed within feminism, and in particular, Marxist, Black, Postcolonial and Queer feminisms, all the more essential to critical development thinking and material and discursive practice. In this concluding section, I briefly highlight the continuing indispensability of three such concepts: social reproduction, heteronormativity, and intersectionality. At the same time I indicate the ways in which these feminist concepts too are highly contested ones which, if understood in isolation from each other and from the movements for social transformation from which they have stemmed, are inevitably themselves subject to processes of appropriation, incorporation and transformation, suggesting that 'reclaiming feminism' from neoliberalism is not a finite endeavour but an ongoing struggle.

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<sup>15</sup> These positions were also reflected in the process of attempting to bring about changes to the law on rape in India. While the Justice Verma Committee set up to make these recommendations in the wake of the December 2012 Delhi rape case adopted many of the arguments of feminist organizations (for example, against the adoption of the death penalty for rape and in favour of the repeal of AFSPA), many of the recommendations were not ultimately not incorporated in the new legislation.

The emphasis which Marxist and socialist feminists have placed on the sphere of social reproduction as a site of gendered and embodied labour essential to capital accumulation (Hartsock, 2006) continues to be essential in order to displace the neoliberal claim to inclusion with a call for structural transformation and gender justice. The concept of social reproduction has been central to the project of developing a gendered critique of the political economy of global capitalism. It underpins analysis, firstly, of the gendered impacts of policies of economic liberalization and Structural Adjustment Programmes from the 1980s onwards which drastically reduced social provision, significantly increasing women's reproductive labour as well as their responsibility for income generation (Elson, 1991) and, secondly, of the mobilization and consolidation of gendered divisions of labour by global capital in the 'feminization of employment', understood as encompassing processes of casualization, flexibilization and informalization, as well as the relative growth in the service sector and care work (Perrons, 2009; Sassen, 2000). It is also key to confronting policies informed by the 'Gender Equality as Smart Economics' approach which, as we have seen, relies on and extends precisely the same complex of gendered structures of inequality which feminist theories of social reproduction expose.

**Comment [PB10]:** This is a very long sentence! I have added 'firstly' and 'secondly' to try to identify its component parts, but if you are not happy with this, perhaps you could find an alternative. Or perhaps we could split the sentence into two...

In this context, it is also crucial to recognize and expose the heteronormativity of neoliberal development interventions (Bedford, 2009; Pereira, 2009) in order to resist further appropriations of feminist ideas. For example, Kate Bedford (2007) has described how, drawing on the now considerable body of work on masculinities in GAD, some World Bank initiatives have promoted greater involvement of men in household work in order to facilitate women's incorporation into global labour markets. This is occurring in the context of even greater shifts away from state and corporate responsibility for social reproduction, with the promotion of the heterosexual nuclear household perceived as the only possible locus of survival for poor people. The heteronormativity of development is obscured, rather than challenged, however, by the rise of 'homonationalism' in which the notion of 'tolerance' of homosexuality is incorporated within imperialist civilizational and developmental discourses (Butler, 2008; Ekine, 2009; Haritaworn et al., 2008; Puar, 2004). This renders invisible the colonial history as well as the global political economy and geopolitics of current onslaughts on LGBTIQ people (Petchesky, 2014; Tamale, 2010).

**Comment [PB11]:** Not in Refs, see above

Clearly, it is impossible to make sense of the processes discussed above in the absence of an intersectional analysis. I use intersectionality here to refer not primarily to the term coined by

Crenshaw (1989) and since developed in several directions, but to the much longer history of theorizing and political practice developed in the context of Black women's struggles in relation to gender, race, class and sexuality in North America, Britain and elsewhere (Davis, 1982; hooks, 1982; Lorde, 2007). Day-to-day embodied experiences of the political economy of disposability, of racialized policies, discourses and practices informed by 'Gender Equality as Smart Economics' and the 'Girl Effect', and of neo-Malthusian population control policies, can only be understood through approaches which problematise the notion of 'women' as a homogeneous category. Further, such approaches can be seen as always having been integral to the political practices we have highlighted in examples from India which (along with many others) counter the appropriation of feminism, and in which gender is experienced and understood as inseparable from structures of class, caste and community in particular.

Comment [PB12]: Not in References

Yet increasingly development discourses on gender are reducing intersectional approaches to a multivariate 'tool' for 'measuring cumulative disadvantage', in which form they have recently been espoused by the World Bank (2013) in an example of what Menon (2015) calls 'the governmentalising of intersectionality and its attachment to funding-driven agendas and policy for the global South' (2015:41). Although the ideas of intersectionality have been cited more convincingly in recognition of difference and the importance of location by some gender and development scholars, this is not sufficient for the project of exposing and undoing the co-option of notions of 'gender equality' within neoliberalism. As Mohanty (2003) argues in a reflection on the impact of her earlier, highly influential intervention 'Under Western Eyes' (Mohanty, 1986), attention to multiple differences must be combined with acknowledgement of the existence of the overarching transnational structures of global capital and imperialism and how these are racialized as well as gendered. Mohanty (2003) calls for a 'race-and-gender-conscious historical materialism' which she argues must be at the core of effective transnational feminist solidarity which connects struggles across locations while recognizing inequalities of power and privilege. It is only within such a framework, I suggest, that radically reappropriating 'gender' from the neoliberal development project becomes a real possibility.

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