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Global Gender Justice and the Feminization of Responsibility

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Abstract

This paper morally evaluates the phenomenon Sylvia Chant calls "the feminization of responsibility," wherein women's unrecognized labor subsidizes international development while men retain or increase their power over women. I argue that development policies that feminize responsibility are incompatible with justice in two ways. First, such policies involve Northerners extracting unpaid labor from women in the global South. Northerners are obligated to provide development assistance, but they are transferring the labor of providing it onto women in the global South and expecting them to do it for free. Second, development policies that feminize responsibility increase women's exposure to sexist domination. These two problems are present irrespective of whether policies that feminize responsibility improve women's basic well-being.

Keywords: transnational feminisms, global feminisms, gender and work, care ethics, global justice, development ethics, gender and development, exploitation

Enthusiasm for "empowering" and "investing in" women has reached unprecedented levels in recent years. Official policy documents increasingly identify gender equality as a key development goal.² Popular media tout women in the global South as the "double x solution" (Kristof and WuDunn 2010, xix) to poverty, portraying them as superpowerful individuals capable of lifting their countries out of poverty (Wilson 2011) This increased attention to women is undoubtedly a product of transnational feminist advocacy. Yet there is reason to worry that something has been, to use Jane Jenson's words, "lost in [the] translation" (Jenson 2009, 179) of feminist ideals into mainstream development practices. Justifications of attention to gender are often instrumental. Women are an "untapped resource" (Narayan 2010),

¹ I benefitted from comments on this paper from participants in the Theoretical Explorations of Exploitation in Practice workshop organized by Monique Deveaux, Meena Krishnamurthy, and Vida Panitch at the University of Guelph in January 2015.

² See, for example, the Millennium Development Goals, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the 2012 *World Development Report* (World Bank 2012).

and gender equality is a way of “increasing the productivity of labor and increasing the efficiency of time allocation” (World Bank Gender and Development Group 2003, 6). Though assertions of women’s intrinsic value increasingly accompany such justifications (due, in no small part, to ongoing feminist interventions), development policies continue to exploit women’s unpaid labor and overlook the significance of gendered power relations.

Sylvia Chant names this shift in the international development agenda, wherein women’s unrecognized labor subsidizes development and men retain or increase their power over women, “the feminization of responsibility and obligation” (Chant 2006, 2008). According to Chant, development interventions demand more work from women without “any discernible increase in rewards or entitlements” (Chant 2008, 176). These policies demand diversification of women’s work without analogous expectations from men (179). In other words, women take on increased responsibility for income generation, while their household labor burdens stay the same, and their domination by men sometimes increases. Men withdraw from responsibility for household and family expenses (179–180), and women emphasize their conformity to sexist gender roles to reduce household conflicts caused by poverty and men’s newfound discomfort with women’s role in earning income (Chant 2008, 181–182; Kabeer 2001). Even development projects that are ostensibly gender-sensitive may actively incentivize women’s acceptance of subordinate roles (Molyneux 2006, 2008; Khader 2014).

One normative question we can ask about the feminization of responsibility, the one typically asked about development policies, is whether it improves the basic well-being³ of the people it affects. Some downsides of the feminization of responsibility do indeed register as downsides if we focus on its effects on individual well-being. Adding to a poor woman’s already grueling work burdens may decrease her well-being below a threshold level, or prevent her from ever coming to achieve basic well-being. For example, one participant in *Oportunidades*, the child health program I will describe below, says that meeting the program’s requirements of attending lectures and taking her child to town for medical visits, on top of working as a mother and a paid domestic servant, is causing her to “lose [her] health” (Luccisano 2006). Assuming debt, as microcredit can cause women to do, is a straightforward cause of poverty. Similarly, losses or deficits in women’s negotiating power can sometimes show up in traditional welfare indicators. Domestic violence

³ Some accounts, such as Martha Nussbaum’s capability approach, understand certain relational goods, like the ability to affect one’s political context, to be constitutive of well-being. Much of this essay discusses potential tradeoffs between traditional poverty indicators like income and health and status indicators, so, for purposes of clarity, I restrict basic well-being to the latter.

or men's appropriation of household income can, for example, cause bad health or poor nutrition.

However, as Iris Young famously argues, evaluative frameworks that focus attention on how well individuals are doing risk placing social relations, including those that produce and sustain deprivation, outside of the scope of normative analysis (Young 1990). Additionally, the justice of forms of relationship matters independently; a set of social relations can be unjust even if it improves the well-being of those within it. Alison Jaggar's work has been pivotal in bringing these insights to bear on normative frameworks used to analyze interventions in the lives of women in the global South. Jaggar argues that we cannot track the status of these women without attention to the vulnerabilities to which interlaced local, national, and transnational factors subject them (Jaggar 2009). She also injects concerns about intergroup fairness, calling our attention to the way in which global structures systematically transfer the value of labor extracted from women in the global South to the inhabitants of the North (Jaggar 2013).

Following these methodological cues from Jaggar, I argue here that the feminization of responsibility involves *injustice* by actors in the global North, irrespective of whether development projects entailed in it sometimes enhance individual women's welfare.⁴ I offer two distinct justice-focused arguments about the feminization of responsibility, one that presupposes that Northerners are morally obligated to provide development assistance and another which does not. One holds that the feminization of responsibility constitutes exploitation; the other holds that it exacerbates structural injustice. Before making these arguments, however, I offer a clearer picture of the types of interventions and global structural conditions that produce the feminization of responsibility and make explicit some core assumptions in both of my arguments. These assumptions require stating and explaining because sexist and imperialist epistemic biases (or ideologies) occlude the actual effects of Northern-led development policy.

Feminizing Responsibility: Two Examples

According to Chant, the feminization of responsibility has four distinct components: (a) "the diversification and intensification of women's work inputs accompanied by declining inputs from men," (b) "persistent and/or growing disparities in men's and women's household negotiating power," (c) "increasing disarticulation between responsibilities and entitlements," and (d) in some cases, reduction of women's participation in paid labor and/or political participation

⁴ There does not seem to be a general answer to whether interventions that feminize responsibility improve women's basic well-being; in some instances, they do and in others they do not.

(Chant 20016, 208). The feminization of responsibility is the effect of a shift in the development agenda under a particular set of (neoliberal) economic conditions. Though the background conditions themselves are a source of harm to women, now-popular development interventions exacerbate their effects by asymmetrically burdening women with the tasks of improving the well-being of their family members and supporting economic growth in their societies at large. Though often described as a method of “women’s empowerment,” these interventions by design treat women’s existing subordinate roles as enhancing their ability to function as vehicles of service delivery for others. Further, as we shall see, these interventions do not merely take advantage of existing gender roles; they often provide incentives to perpetuate them. Development interventions with this character are widespread largely because of the priorities of Northern development actors, such as pressures to deliver development through “investment” rather than social spending. To give a richer sense of what such interventions look like, we can consider two examples.

The first is the now widely copied *Oportunidades* program. Originally a Mexican government project that came to be funded largely by the Inter-American development bank (Molyneux 2006, 196)—50% of whose shares are owned by the United States and Europe—it has been adopted by other countries, such as Nicaragua, as part of World Bank/IMF Poverty Strategy Reduction Papers (Bradshaw 2008, 196–197). At its heart, *Oportunidades* is a conditional cash transfer program that provides money to women for children’s school fees and to supplement their nutrition that emphasizes “co-responsibility” (Molyneux 2006). Mothers are also expected to participate in a variety of training programs aimed at sensitizing them to children’s needs and their own—but the latter only when they are pregnant or breastfeeding. Additionally, women must take their children (often into town) for regular health checks. Since the program is designed to emphasize “co-responsibility” over dependency on the state, the women must contribute work to the program, usually by cleaning the school building or handling the school’s garbage. Just the travelling and standing in line for health visits can amount to a day of lost work per month, and the workshops and work add to women’s time expenditures (Molyneux 2008, 49) Two gender-related features of the program are worth noting explicitly: the program demands labor of women who are already extremely time-poor, and the program does not compensate them, since the stipend they receive is for child welfare.

A second example of a development program that feminizes responsibility can be found in the microcredit programs in Zimbabwe operated by the Self-Help Development Foundation in Zimbabwe. Though the program grew out of a savings movement originated in Zimbabwe in the 1960s, the program is funded by a German foundation (Mayoux and LaCoste 2005, 2), and similar programs around the world are funded by international NGOs and even private-sector banking institutions. The

organization's model involves groups of 10–30 people forming savings groups that provide loans to individual members. Over 90% of loan recipients are women, who use loans to contribute to established businesses (Mayoux and LaCoste 2005). Though the women involved do tend to use the money to start businesses (which is less common in other regions, such as South Asia) and often experience improvements in certain well-being indicators, the increase in income has had problematic results for women's social status. Over 40% of women in a 2005 survey had become the main income-earner for their household (Mayoux and LaCoste 2005), but men seemed to be reaping many of the rewards. Men very explicitly claimed that they valued women's income because it allowed them more leisure time and absolved them of certain household responsibilities (Mayoux and LaCoste 2005, 15). Researchers also found that women borrowers were much more likely than men to give earned income to the household or their spouse. Responsibility for paying school fees was increasingly conceptualized as women's responsibility (Mayoux and LaCoste 2005, 14). Though the effects of microcredit and income-generation programs directed at women vary, this trend toward male withdrawal from household activities and expenditure is by no means an isolated example (Chant 2008).

Two Background Assumptions

The same phenomenon Chant calls the "feminization of responsibility" is referred to by other commentators as "the double x solution," or even "women's empowerment." Neither of these descriptions is morally neutral, and the latter, positive description has clearly captured the popular imagination in the North. A reason for this sanguine assessment is, in my view, that certain ideological background views frame Northern understandings of the lives of women in the global South. These ideological views concern women's time use and the causes of women's oppression. In calling them ideological, I mean that the views offer a distorted picture of reality that helps perpetuate sexist and neoimperialist domination. My analysis of the feminization of responsibility departs from two assumptions about the facts that contradict these ideological background views, so I spell out the tension between them and my assumptions.

My assumptions are that (a) that women who are not employed in the formal economy nonetheless engage in necessary but burdensome forms of labor and (b) that the intensity of women's labor burdens and the gender division of labor, are, and have historically been, responsive to political and economic conditions. My first assumption denies that widespread analytical tendencies to invisibilize or devalue women's work are appropriate. Among the overlooked and devalued forms of work are cooking and other housework, caring for dependent persons such as children, and, in many cases, care of the natural environment. Though it seems

uncontroversial that women disproportionately engage in these forms of work, standard analytical frameworks rarely count it as economically productive. Yet, as feminist philosophers and economists argue, the formal economy is effectively subsidized by women's nonmarket activities. For example, the tasks of providing care for people in periods of dependency and preparing food are essential to the sustenance and (literal and figurative) reproduction of the paid labor force (Kittay 1999; Schutte 2003; Beneria and Sen 1981; Waring 1988; Folbre 2001).

It is important to note that, for poor women, unrecognized or low-status gendered work activities that subsidize the formal economy often extend beyond the boundaries of the home. This point has been made about poor women and women of color in the United States, who often took on feminized tasks—such as laundry—for pay. In contexts in the global South, differences in family structure and the border between the household and the “productive” sphere, as well as varying degrees of industrialization, enlarge the set of domains in which gendered labor burdens occur (Beneria and Sen 1981). For example, as Lourdes Beneria and Gita Sen note, women in the global South may cook in the home and take it to feed workers in the fields. Further, in many rural areas throughout the world, women have been responsible for food *production* as well as food preparation. Responsibilities for collecting fuel (such as firewood or dung) and water are also tasks necessary for the reproduction of the labor force that are commonly assigned to women.

Acknowledging that such feminized tasks constitute labor requires more than noting that women perform the tasks or giving lip service to the idea that “motherhood is a full-time job” or “women's work is never done.” It requires, at the least, allowing these tasks to figure in analytical frameworks and policy recommendations similarly to the ways other forms of labor do. In the context of assessing development, analytical frameworks must acknowledge women's productivity and the constraints women's labor burdens place on their life opportunities. To explain the latter point a bit further: development frameworks should acknowledge that what women can be and do in their lives is constrained by gendered work burdens. For example, the extent to which a girl can participate in formal education will depend on how much time she spends caring for younger siblings, collecting water, and so forth.⁵ Since the unrecognized work women do is necessary for families and economies, strategies for improving women's well-being and increasing gender equality must reallocate that work rather than assume that women who do not generate income are at leisure.

⁵ There is evidence that increases in women's labor burdens often cause shifts of labor onto children, and onto girls in particular.

Yet a failure to acknowledge this is evident even in feminist-influenced development frameworks. Some imply that women are not working enough, that women are an untapped resource, instead of, as Diane Elson puts it, “an *over-utilized*” one (quoted in Chant 2008, 188). This is particularly striking in the World Bank’s 2012 *World Development Report*. The report, focused thematically on women, devotes pages to discussing women’s time poverty and gender differences in the types of labor expected of women. At the same time, however, the report identifies women’s insufficient productivity as a problem (World Bank 2012, 237). Though the report mentions that women need support for care and housework to enter the labor market effectively, the policy recommendations focus on having women enter the paid workforce in larger numbers without supports for housework and care work. Jaggar observes in her analysis of the report that paid parental leave is recommended as a policy objective only for affluent countries. For women in the South, it focuses on transportation, electricity, and running water, despite the fact that, as Jaggar notes, there is no clear evidence that running water significantly changes women’s time use (Jaggar 2013, 118). As Jaggar further argues, the report stops short of claiming that changes in the *gendering* of responsibilities—that is, increased labor inputs from men—are part of the solution. My arguments about the injustice of the feminization of responsibility will rely on the idea that it adds to existing work burdens in unacceptable ways, but this will be difficult to apprehend if we do not recognize the presence and necessity of the work that constitutes these burdens.

A second assumption from which my argument about the feminization of responsibility departs is occluded by imperialist ideological biases more than sexist ones. This is the assumption that the severity of women’s labor burdens and the gendering of expected labor inputs are responsive to structural conditions, including international structural conditions. Simply put, the extent to which women are responsible for housework, care work, and similar activities changes, and has changed, in response to economic conditions and external interventions. In her work on “transnational cycles of gendered vulnerability,” Jaggar (2009) shows that interlaced national and international structural processes impact what may initially appear to be culturally produced forms of gender oppression. In an application of the work of postcolonial feminist theorists to the Anglo-American philosophical literature on global justice, Jaggar (2005) describes the epistemic habits that cause Northerners to assume that the sexist practices of “others” have only endogenous causes. Drawing on postcolonial feminist theory, Jaggar argues that Westerners seem concerned exclusively with harms to “other” women that can be traced to local culture. This is a convenient focus, in Jaggar’s view, given that the global economy is both harmful and gender oppressive, and given that Westerners bear responsibility for its operations.

To see how the feminization of responsibility is unjust, we will need to see that gendered work burdens can intensify as a result of structural forces and Western interventions, but the attribution of sexism to culture gets in the way of seeing this in two ways. First, as I have already mentioned, the idea that sexist oppression is cultural suggests that gender roles are traceable exclusively to local causes. Second, as Uma Narayan (1997) argues, the idea that gender roles are culturally constituted suggests that they have not changed over time. The notion that cultures do not change is often coupled with the notion that moral progress involves the abandonment of culture. As a result, it may seem that Western intervention could only result in one of two things: leaving existing gender roles intact or improving them by eroding local culture.⁶ Yet Northern interventions have intensified demands on Southern women's labor and increased the sexist character of labor distributions in a number of cases, in the colonial period and contemporarily. For example, British colonial rule in West Africa replaced an economic system in which women and men both cultivated subsistence crops with one in which men migrated or cultivated cash crops and women became responsible for agriculture and became dependent on men for income (Camamert 2016, 30–31). More contemporarily, research in rural Malawi suggests that a family's access to microcredit increases child labor by girls—probably to compensate for losses in household labor performed by women (Hazarika and Sarangi 2008). It is not merely *interventions*, narrowly construed, that can intensify women's labor responsibilities. As Jaggar has consistently argued (2001, 2005, 2009, 2013), neoliberal changes in the global economy have also intensified women's labor burdens. For example, reduced regulations on business often result in environmental degradation that increases the distance women have to travel to access water or firewood (Desai 2002). Cuts to education and health care promoted by economic liberalization have had to be compensated for by women's unpaid work; for example, when health care becomes unaffordable, women are more likely to have to care for the sick in their homes (Desai 2002).

Claiming that women's gendered labor burdens respond to economic conditions and external interventions does not require claiming they are *exclusively* caused by external or structural conditions. The fact that women in the global North continue to contribute more household work, even in cases where they generate more income than their male partners, suggests that cultural factors have a role to play. The important point, however, is that it is deceptive to treat the set of tasks that are feminized and the number of labor hours women spend in unpaid labor as

⁶ For more extended analysis of the ways a focus on endogenous cultural factors and the assumption that the West is an agent of moral progress promote feminist complicity in imperialism, see Khader (2018, 21–36).

fixed. The presupposition that they are fixed makes it impossible to notice intensifications or increasing inequalities in gendered labor burdens. It also makes it impossible to raise questions about responsibility for the gendered structure of labor as belonging to anyone but local “culture” or local men.

The Feminization of Responsibility as Northern Exploitation of Southern Women

Now that we have seen that women’s unrecognized labor is productive and constrains women’s life activities, and that the gendering of labor burdens is sensitive to external forces, we can see the feminization of responsibility for what it is: a phenomenon wherein Northern-driven strategies for decreasing poverty retrench, or risk retrenching the gender division of labor and its disadvantageousness to women. The feminization of responsibility embodies a failure of Northerners to discharge duties of justice for two reasons. The first reason is that it amounts to Northerners extracting uncompensated labor from women in the global South. To function, this argument requires the view that development assistance is something Northerners are morally obligated to provide. Arguments to this effect fall into two groups: arguments that assistance is obligatory and arguments that remediation or rectification is obligatory. Remedial duties are ones incurred as a result of having caused harm. I focus on remedial duties here, though my exploitation argument would succeed even on an assistance-focused analysis.

Development assistance can be thought of as a means of discharging remedial duties people in the North owe to people in the global South. One way of arriving at the conclusion that the North bears such duties is to adopt the position, developed independently by Jagger (2001, 2002, 2005) and Thomas Pogge (2002), that Northerners have historically, and are currently, violating the rights of people in the global South. Among Pogge’s arguments to this effect are that Northerners derive an unfair starting position from the history of colonialism, that Southern poor are unjustly excluded from access to natural resources, and that Northerners impose an unjust institutional order on them (Pogge 2002, 199–205). Among Jagger’s are that the privatization of natural resources from the global South, including the WTO defense of patents on seeds and indigenous medicines, continues to benefit Northern corporations and harm the rural global poor, especially women (Jagger 2001).

Any of these arguments will work to show that development assistance is obligatory, but I further explain Pogge’s argument for illustrative purposes. According to Pogge, it is wrong to impose on others institutional rules that cause severe poverty and inequality when some alternative feasible set of institutional rules would leave them better off. Among the institutional rules he claims play a causal role in global poverty are asymmetrical trade rules that protect Northern industries and deregulate Southern ones, payments to undemocratic governments

in Southern countries to secure national resources from them, and insistence on enforcing intellectual property rights such as drug patents in the global South (Pogge 2002). If it is true that Northerners are violating the rights of people in the global South, Northerners owe both reform of the global order and some form of reparations to the global poor. Presumably, development assistance will be *part* of any scheme of reparations.

But an argument about how Northerners acquire remedial duties need not be as demanding as Pogge's to furnish the conclusion on which my exploitation argument depends—namely, that Northerners are morally obligated to provide development assistance. For example, Christian Barry and David Wiens (2016) argue that remedial obligations are incurred when retaining the benefits one has gained from a harm contributes to the persistence of that harm. This argument on its own may be sufficient for the claim that development assistance is obligatory. The ways in which Northerners need injustice to continue to receive certain benefits are myriad, including ongoing unjust forms of extraction of natural resources such as oil, sweatshop labor for ongoing access to cheap consumer goods, and so on. Admittedly, applying this argument requires tracing specific chains of injustices and benefits to make the case that development assistance is owed to some particular group of Southern women. However, given the pervasiveness of practices through which Northerners rely on injustice to Southerners for benefits and the extremely low amount of development assistance that is actually given,⁷ it is safe to speculate that most women who actually are recipients of development assistance are candidates for being owed such duties.

If Northerners owe development assistance to people in the global South, they are responsible for bearing the costs associated with providing it. The feminization of responsibility then amounts to Northerners requiring Southern women to provide labor that they themselves would otherwise be responsible for subsidizing. As the title of a paper by Maxine Molyneux, "Women at the Service of the New Poverty Agenda," suggests, women increasingly occupy a role analogous to that of paid development workers. The work of sweeping the school, taking care of the school's garbage, and taking children to town regularly to be weighed, is development work—work that fills in gaps in social services. That some of this work is associated with the role of mothering anyway is simply a red herring. It is one thing for a program to take advantage of existing unremunerated labor and another to add new and more expansive labor demands. These programs add to the

⁷ Less than 1% of the United States federal budget goes to overseas development assistance, 54% of which is "tied aid," that is aid that purchases goods and services from US businesses in 2006, according to an Oxfam report (<https://www.oxfamamerica.org/static/media/files/aidnow-tiedaidroundtrip.pdf>).

unremunerated set of labor tasks associated with mothering and actively incentivize women's participation in these tasks. The reason the desired behaviors, such as income-generation and cleaning children's schools, need to be incentivized by development programs is precisely that women are not already doing them—or not doing them in the ways designers of development initiatives would like.

If we accept that the people of the global South are owed development assistance, the conclusion that the feminization of responsibility exploits women will follow on virtually any theory of exploitation. Making someone work without compensation is plainly unfair. If providing development assistance is an obligation Northerners hold, engaging Southern women to do it without compensation is also unfair. If it seems that this concern is blunted by the fact that women consent to participating in the programs, it is worth remembering first that women have been given no option for promoting their own well-being and the well-being of their families that does not rely on their unpaid labor. Jaggar (2013) argues that this option restriction is severe enough to make the labor choices of many women in the global South count as coerced. Additionally, the options faced by poor women in the global South are in many cases so impoverished that “working fewer hours may literally be incompatible with the survival of their families” (Jaggar 2013, 126).

It may be objected that the feminization of responsibility is not exploitative because it benefits women. Many theories of exploitation allow that exploitation can benefit the exploited. Since a lack of decent options is classically what renders people vulnerable to exploitation, such theories are probably the right ones. But my argument that the feminization of responsibility exploits women does not need a beneficial exploitation theory to get off the ground. One reason is that it is unclear that women are generally benefitting from the policies in question. For example, between a third and half of *Oportunidades* participants say the demands of the program are difficult to fulfill and/or conflict with their other responsibilities (Molyneux 2008). Recall the woman who says the program responsibilities are causing her to sacrifice her own health. A second reason is that, if I am correct that development assistance is owed to women in the global South, it is unfair to require uncompensated labor in exchange for access to these benefits.

The wrongness of extracting uncompensated labor obtains irrespective of whether a person benefits. Consider the analogy of one person who steals from another, or of one person who is given an item that has been stolen from a third person who continues to be deceived about the whereabouts of the item. In neither of these cases would we think that it was justified for the thief or the retainer of the stolen object to transfer the labor required to return the object back to its original owner. The analogy is imperfect, and there may be reasons to expect work from people as a part of their relationship with public institutions. But the obvious justifications of expecting work do not apply in our feminization of responsibility

example. It may be argued that such work produces solidarity among citizens. But to be capable of producing solidarity, the work would have to be distributed fairly among citizens, which it is clearly not in our case. Alternatively, it might be argued that requiring work for the receipt of benefits is the only way to ensure that the benefits will actually be received. Absent strong evidence for this empirical claim, it is difficult to see why it should motivate development policy. Additionally, given that the feminization of responsibility aggravates women's social subordination (as we shall see in the next section), justice concerns would likely outweigh efficiency concerns even if it the most efficient way to deliver development was through work.

A second objection to my claim that the feminization of responsibility is exploitative is that, even if women in the global South are owed remediation for poverty, they are not necessarily owed remediation for gender equality. A preliminary response to this objection is just to recall Jaggar's analysis of transnational cycles of gendered vulnerability and the more general fact that global poverty, militarism, and inequality exacerbate gender inequality. More importantly, however, objecting to the feminization of responsibility does not require the claim that development should aim at remediating past gender inequalities. My view is that worsened gender inequality is a result of structurally induced poverty, as well as Northern-led attempts to remediate it. The primary argument is not that Northerners have failed in their remedial duties if they do not work against gender inequality; it is that the way that they are attempting to discharge remedial duties related to poverty involves treating women in ways that are independently morally unjustifiable.

The Feminization of Responsibility as Exacerbating Structural Injustice

A second justice-related criticism of the feminization of responsibility does not require the assumption that development assistance is a remedial duty. It requires only the more modest views that women deserve access to equal social decision-making power and that it is wrong to avoidably worsen the situation of others when one interacts with them. Though the data are mixed, the feminization of responsibility may be increasing women's exposure to domination. To make sense of this second criticism, we need to understand domination as a distinct form of deprivation, one that is ultimately not reducible to poverty. Poverty is traditionally understood as a lack of access to resources and taken to impact people's lives primarily by undermining their ability to achieve functionings constitutive of very basic well-being, such as health and safety. Domination, in contrast, is a deprivation wherein people lack equal abilities to determine the courses of their lives and to impact social processes (Young 1990). Two contrasts

between domination and resource poverty are worth noting.⁸ First, as Young (1990) argues, domination is not well understood as a function of the distribution of resources. Though resource distribution can produce and reinforce domination (as in cases of poor people who have little political influence because they are poor), the structure of decision-making processes, symbolic and cultural forces, and distributions of labor can also work to exclude people from decision-making or reduce their decision-making power. Second, domination is a relational notion while poverty is not. Whether a person is dominated is ultimately a question of how one stands relative to others, whereas we can know a person is poor without knowledge of how well others are doing. For a person's level of domination to be reduced, her position must not only be enhanced; her position must be closer to that of others.

The important upshot for our discussion of the feminization of responsibility is that it is possible for a person's poverty to decrease while her domination remains, or is even worsened. As long as more income is confused with "empowerment," it will be difficult to apprehend the potential harms of the feminization of responsibility. As I have already noted, some women involved in development programs that feminize responsibility experience increases in well-being indicators such as income and health and others do not. Both groups are potential victims of increased domination, however. As Chant puts the domination concern, it seems that development programs are "more preoccupied with addressing the *condition* of poor women than their *position*" (Chant 2008, 186). The feminization of responsibility threatens to worsen women's subjection to sexist domination by exacerbating the gender division of labor, by decreasing women's household negotiating power, and by creating a political context in which women have difficulty representing themselves as sources of self-authenticating claims. It is worth noting that these forms of domination are not reducible to demands for increased labor time from women. Though the feminization of responsibility undoubtedly increases the amount of labor women do, effects on decision-making power are not reducible to effects on time use.

First, the feminization of responsibility exacerbates the gender division of labor by widening the domains of life in which women are expected to serve men and making the fulfillment of feminine gender roles more costly to women. New numbers and *types* of tasks become associated with femininity. In the conditional cash transfer case (*Oportunidades*), we have the association of motherhood with taking one's child to town, adopting certain nutritional practices (and being seen adopting them), and also cleaning the school. In income-generation cases (such as the Self-Help Development Group case), we see women taking on what have

⁸ For an argument that domination should be seen as constitutive of poverty, see Deveaux (2016)

recently been male-gendered responsibilities for bringing money into the household. These constitute, in Chant's terms, a *diversification* of women's work inputs (Chant 2006, 2008). Using data from her own studies in three countries in combination with a much larger data set, Chant notes that, even when women take on previously male-gendered tasks, they typically do not gain the social prerogatives associated with performing these tasks. Instead, this type of diversification seems in many cases to amount to attributing an ever-widening set of responsibilities and work burdens to a subordinate role. In two microcredit programs in Uganda, some men began leaving all household expenditures to women (Mayoux 1999, 972) To put it differently, income generation, paying for children's school fees, and other tasks are being feminized and turned into tasks performed by subordinates—rather than the feminine gender role disappearing.

The changes in women's work responsibilities seems in many cases to be encouraging men to instrumentalize women and freeing up men to take further advantage of privileges that women do not have (Mayoux 1999 Chant 2006, 2008). Men can now spend more time socializing with other men. There is worry that women's increased work also frees up men to engage in financially risky activity, such as gambling and the consumption of sex work. Women discuss the extent to which seeking a wife has now become analogous to seeking a servant (Chant 2006, 207) and worry that conditions are now such that "unless a woman [can] bring in an income a husband will leave her" (Mayoux 1999, 174). There is evidence in South Asia that men sometimes see women's access to microcredit in terms similar to those in which they see dowry (Hoffman and Marius-Gnanou 2007; Khader 2014) In contexts where polygyny is practiced, men can now use extra disposable income to seek additional wives—and having additional wives is now a source of even more income (see Chant 2008, 177–178; 2006; Mayoux 1999, 974). This increased attachment to masculine prerogatives is undoubtedly a product of a number of factors, including, in many cases, lack of opportunities for men, the fact that women are preferred wage workers in many cases because they will work for less than men do, and the tendency of antipoverty programs to focus only on providing economic opportunities to women. But the lack of opportunities for men has not translated into a decrease in men's social power over women; instead, work that was previously masculinized seems simply to be losing its status as a marker of power (Chant 2006, 176). Chant summarizes the current state of affairs as follows: "investments are becoming progressively detached from rights and rewards, and conceivably evolving into a new and deeper form of female exploitation" (Chant 2008, 77).

A second way the feminization of responsibility heightens women's domination is by reducing their household negotiating power. Many bargaining models of intrahousehold behavior suggest that women have low negotiating power

because of the perception that they are noncontributors to the household (Sen 1990). It thus might seem that women accessing income, and even women accessing the recognition associated with being a “good, modern” mother, would increase women’s household decision-making power. There is some evidence that women are increasingly exiting relationships and forming women-headed households, at least as a result of income-focused interventions (Chant 2008, 182). But many women do not exit, and, as Naila Kabeer argues, the desirability of exit varies, not only with what a woman’s economic prospects are but also with the extent to which male patronage is a source of access to other benefits (Kabeer 1999).

Women who do not exit are left to manage the intrahousehold tensions their increased labor burdens create. Microcredit participants in sub-Saharan Africa discuss increased fears of domestic violence (Mayoux 1999). A common management strategy involves acting in the household in ways that reaffirm subordinate feminine behavior, and that demonstrate men are still in charge. Importantly, this may be a reason women continue to do large shares of unrecognized household labor; continuing to be a “good wife” or “dutiful daughter” can be a way of minimizing household tension. Some *Oportunidades* women describe themselves as making sure the household work is finished before going on to perform program tasks to avoid angering their husbands (Adato et al. 2000, xiii). Pointing out that this falling back on feminine norms of sacrifice and subordination is agentic or tactical, though accurate, is beside the point. If the actual effect of these acts is to reinforce the idea that the energies of wives and daughters ought disproportionately to go to serving men, it is desirable to stop supporting policies that make such uses of agency women’s best option. Kabeer argues that, in cases where microcredit increases domestic violence, intrahousehold tensions are signs that gender equality is improving (Kabeer 1998), but this assessment, in my view, rests on the Panglossian notion that equality *just is* the natural long-term outcome of women gaining power (see Khader 2014). Chant’s work suggests that it is just as likely that the long-term outcome will be a new femininity in which women take on some masculine roles without the social recognition and power traditionally associated with them (as in the income-generation cases), or in which feminized responsibilities increase without increased power attached to them (as in the *Oportunidades* cases).

Third, the feminization of responsibility risks creating a political environment in which women cannot be sources of self-authenticating claims. John Rawls (1996) treats being seen as a source of self-authenticating claims as a basic requirement for an individual’s possession of equal social standing. Self-authenticating claims have weight in social and political processes *merely because they belong to some individual*. Rawls’s own example of the person who is not a source of self-authenticating claims is the slave whose political demands matter only insofar as she

is useful to other people. The feminization of responsibility participates in creating local and transnational political contexts in which women's claims to the benefits of cooperation rests on their instrumental value to others. The programs and discourses that feminize responsibility give women a special role in development *because* women discharge feminine roles. The issue here is deeper than women being expected to fulfill stereotypes. It is that the *content* of the stereotypes is noxious because of how it conceives women primarily as bearers of instrumental value. A glaring case of this is of course the *Oportunidades* program's focus on women when they are pregnant or breastfeeding. Jenson (2009) notes that the Millennium Development Goals generally focus on adult women only in the goal of maternal health. But not all examples of such instrumental valuing are so literal. When women are treated as loci of entitlements primarily because women are a fulcrum for other forms of social investment, especially when these entitlements are as basic as health, their claims to basic well-being are treated as needing to be authenticated by others. Absent more than lip service to gender equality for its own sake, it is unclear that women matter more *in their own right* now than they would in policy contexts that simply ignored them.

Though the gender and development community sees women's well-being and gender equality as intrinsically valuable, these justifications are not the ones that have received the most uptake from mainstream development actors. Instead, there is a precarious alliance between the gender and development community and the larger development community, as poverty-focused development actors are most likely to take gender on board as an efficiency concern (Chant 2008, 183). Political contexts shaped by the feminization of responsibility do not merely portray women as vehicles for the well-being of others; they provide incentives for women to represent themselves as such. Molyneux argues that the *Oportunidades* mothers have now increased their investment in motherhood as a means to social recognition; where they already saw sacrifice for their children as worth engaging in, they now see "their publicly reaffirmed status as mothers" as a path to empowerment and self-esteem (Molyneux 2008, 33). Molyneux also suggests that women may be encouraged to internalize views about their instrumental value, since the program is "binding women [to oppressive notions of motherhood] ever more closely, aspirationally, and materially" (Molyneux 2008, 54). Additionally, Sarah Bradshaw argues that women who do not participate in *Oportunidades* because they prefer to earn money for their households are socially punished (Bradshaw 2008, 201).

This point that women lose status as self-authenticators may seem based on assumptions that undermine the feminist project of socially valuing caregiving roles. Eva Feder Kittay (1999) argues that the idea that people are sources of self-authenticating claims gets in the way of caregivers' ability to make claims for society

on behalf of their charges. Without taking a stance about whether the ability to represent oneself as a source of self-authenticating claims is *sufficient* for equal standing, it seems clear that the ability to be seen as a source of self-authenticating claims is at least *necessary*. When claims to goods like health care and basic income are treated as owed contingently upon the performance of self-sacrifice, it is difficult to see how women can count as independent individuals at all. A context in which women can represent themselves politically primarily as wives and mothers and men can represent themselves as independent individuals creates nonreciprocal conditions of social recognition that seem paradigmatic of domination. It is built into the design and justification of many programs that gender matters primarily insofar as it enables service delivery to entire communities.

Admittedly, intensification of sexist domination is possible only because of existing sexist domination. But we should be careful not to let this fact absolve Northerners of responsibility for reducing women's ability to count as self-authenticators. Even if there is an explanatory role for local factors, it does not follow that they are exclusively responsible. I mentioned earlier that sexist domination in the global South that preexists the feminization of responsibility has often already been heightened and shaped by colonialism and structural economic factors. Even more directly relevant to our current discussion, however, is that worsened gender inequality is not an accidental result of Northern-shaped development (and economic) policy. As I have mentioned at a number of points, the programs in question perpetuate women's subordination *by design*. Women need to be especially altruistic in order to be efficient development investments. Further, it is not as though Northerners could not have anticipated the ways the dominant style of development intervention would affect women's status; some elements of the feminization of responsibility are present in the North as well. The speed with which women's "empowerment" has been assimilated to "targeting women" and/or "increasing their access to income" can, after at least 30 years of gender and development advocacy pointing this out, be understood as a concerted failure to acknowledge the basic fact that gender is a relational phenomenon—and thus that doing something about it means changing men's roles and self-conceptions as well as women's.

The pervasiveness and intransigence of sexist domination may trigger a related worry that any imaginable intervention in women's poverty—or poverty in general—would end up increasing domination. Increasing women's income and subsidizing women's role as mothers both increase domination, the worry might go, so sexist domination is just the cost of doing the business of poverty alleviation. It is worth clarifying what this objection actually says: that worsening many women's lives, as increased labor burdens and sexist domination undoubtedly do, is morally acceptable. Though it is possible for harms to be justified by very important

benefits, we need to be clear that the objection hinges on justifying *harm*, not keeping an existing condition intact, or the failure to provide some luxury good. The objection that worsened domination is just the cost of doing business is based on an unsubstantiated empirical claim. We do not have evidence that poverty-alleviation programs are incapable of reducing gender inequality. Nor do we live in a world where resources are too scarce to do research into the prospects of other types of development interventions. Evidence we do have suggests that high levels of male investment in household expenditure are positively correlated with nutritional and educational outcomes for children, so encouraging men's household contributions and involvement in parenting may hold promise for improving both children's well-being and gender equality (Barker 2006). Additionally, a variety of interventions aimed at changing notions of masculinity that are harmful to women are beginning to be practiced, such as requiring time in day care centers as a part of vocational training, encouraging men to accompany women to reproductive health care visits, consciousness-raising groups for fathers, and media-based campaigns about involved fatherhood (Barker 2006, 66–67). Even in the *Oportunidades* case, there is evidence that explaining the program aims to men reduces intrahousehold tensions (Adato et al. 2000). Additionally, the objection may be nearsighted. For even if increasing gender domination were the only way to decrease poverty in this generation, it is unclear that this form of poverty alleviation would be stable over time.

Conclusion

Popular media and mainstream development representations notwithstanding, focusing development interventions on women is not the same thing as empowering them. I have argued that development interventions that rely on women's labor to improve the well-being of families and communities both threaten to worsen women's exposure to sexist domination and involve Northerners taking unfair advantage of women in the global South. To see these injustices, however, Northerners need to resist ideological temptations to ignore the onerousness of many poor women's unpaid labor burdens and to treat gender inequality as only locally caused. Northerners also need to see that questions about justice, and not merely questions about individual well-being, are relevant to the normative assessment of the development agenda, and the international economic order more generally. Mary Wollstonecraft (1996, 72) famously wrote, that it was "justice, not charity, that [was] wanting in the world." An adequate normative analysis of the feminization of responsibility requires attention to the local gender relations and the North-South relations it creates, not just its potential effects on poverty.

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