

Women's Labor, Global Gender Justice, and the Feminization of Responsibility¹

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Enthusiasm for “empowering” and “investing in” women has reached unprecedented levels in recent years (World Bank Group 2003). Official policy documents increasingly identify gender equality as a development goal. Popular media depict women in the global South as super-powerful individuals capable of lifting their countries out of poverty (Wilson 2011).² This increased attention to women is undoubtedly a product of transnational feminist advocacy and holds promise for bringing about greater gender justice. 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. Gender equality appears as a way of “increasing the productivity of labor and increasing the efficiency of time allocation” (World Bank Gender and Development Group 2003, 6), and women appear as an “untapped resource” (Narayan 2010). Though assertions of women’s intrinsic value increasingly accompany such instrumentalist notions (due, in no small part, to ongoing feminist interventions), development continues 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 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). Policies demand diversification of women’s work without analogous expectations from men (Chant 2008, 179). Women take on increased responsibility for income generation without any reduction in their household, and other feminized, labor burdens. In many cases, gender disparities and men’s power over women seem

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*.

to be increasing. Men withdraw from responsibility for household and family expenses (Chant 2008, 179-180). Women conform to traditional gender roles to reduce household conflicts caused by poverty, lacks of opportunity, and men's reactions to threats to their household roles (Chant 2008, 181-182, Kabeer 2001).

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-being of the people it affects.³ Some downsides of the feminization of responsibility do register as such if we focus on individual well-being. Adding to a poor woman's already grueling work burdens may decrease her welfare below a threshold level—or prevent her from achieving a threshold level of welfare at all. For example, one participant in *Opportunidades*, 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, in addition to working as a mother and a domestic servant, is causing her to “lose her health” (Lucissano 2006). Assuming debt, as microcredit can cause women to do, is a straightforward cause of poverty. Losses or deficits in women's negotiating power can sometimes show up in traditional welfare indicators, because domestic violence and men's appropriation of household income can cause injury or poor nutrition.

However, as Iris Young famously argues, evaluative frameworks that focus 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). The justice of forms of relationship matters independently; a set of social relations can be unjust even if it does better at promoting well-being than some previous state of affairs. Attention to structures and relationships—and not just individual welfare—is particularly pressing when we examine the lives of women in the global South. As Alison Jaggar argues, gendered vulnerabilities result from interlaced local, national, and transnational factors (Jaggar 2009). Women in the global South perform labor that solidifies Northern domination and patriarchal domination, but this is difficult to apprehend without attending to the relative status of groups of people over long time horizons (Jaggar 2013).

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.

In addition to asking well-being questions, we can ask whether development policies are compatible with justice. We can ask whether policies enable fair gender relations and fair relations between people in the global South and global North. 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 owe development assistance as reparations for harms they have committed and another which does not. Before make 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. (2006, 207-208).

It is the effect of a shift in the development agenda under a particular set of (neoliberal) economic conditions. Though the conditions themselves are a source of harm to women, development interventions themselves also disproportionately burden women with the tasks of improving the well-being of their family members and ending poverty in their societies. Development interventions with such effects are popular largely because of the priorities of Northern development actors, who want to deliver development through "investment" rather than

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.

social spending. Though often described as “women’s empowerment,” development interventions that feminize responsibility characteristically focus on women as vehicle for service delivery to households.. As we shall see, these interventions do not merely take advantage of existing gender roles; they often provide incentives to perpetuate them (Molyneux 2006, 2009, Khader 2014). Two examples can provide a richer picture of the types of interventions in question.

The first, *Opportunidades*, is a conditional cash transfer program that provides money to women for children’s supplemental nutrition and school fees (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, and, because the program is designed to emphasize “co-responsibility,” rather than 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 can amount to a day of lost work per month, and the workshops add to women’s time expenditures (Molyneux 2009, 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, given that the stipend is for child welfare. *Opportunidades* was originally a Mexican government initiative but came to be funded largely by the Inter-American development bank (Molyneux 2006, 196). 50 percent of the Inter-American Bank’s shares are owned by the United States and Europe, and the World Bank now recommends that other countries copy *Opportunidades*. The program has been adopted by other countries, such as Nicaragua, as part of World Bank/IMF Poverty Strategy Reduction Papers (Bradshaw 2008, 196-197).

A second example is the microcredit programs operated by the Self-Help Development Foundation in Zimbabwe. The Self-Help Development Program operates according to a model which 10-30 people form savings groups that provide loans to individual members. Over 90 percent of recipients are women, who use loans to contribute to established businesses (Mayoux and LaCoste 2005). Though the women 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 areas of well-being, the increase in income has had problematic results for women’s social status. Women and men in Shona society lead somewhat parallel lives because of men’s need to migrate

for labor, but over 40 percent of women in a 2005 survey had become the main income-earner for their household (Mayoux and LaCoste 2005). Yet 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 is increasingly conceptualized women's responsibility (Mayoux and LaCoste 2005, 14). Though this particular program grew out of a savings movement that 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 effects of microcredit programs directed at women vary, but this trend toward male withdrawal from household activities and expenditure is documented in a number of countries (Chant 2008). Additionally, microcredit programs focused on women are often justified by claims that women will invest in their households, especially their children, in ways men will not..

Two Background Assumptions

The same phenomenon Chant calls the “feminization of responsibility” is referred to by other commentators as “the double x solution,” (quoted in Narayan 2010, 282) or even “women’s empowerment.” Neither of these descriptions is morally neutral, and the latter, positive, description has captured the popular imagination in the North. The reason for this sanguine assessment, I think, is 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 neo-imperialist domination. Northerners cannot see the case that the feminization of responsibility is unjust if they remain unconsciously in the thrall of these ideological background views. My analysis of the feminization of responsibility departs from two assumptions that contradict them.

My assumptions are, first, that women spend much of their time in nonmarket and informal sector activities that contribute to the economy and constrain women’s opportunities; and, second, that the intensity of women’s labor burdens and the gender division of labor, are, and have historically been, responsive to social conditions. The first assumption contravenes

analytical tendencies that invisibilize and devalue work socially assigned to women. Such work includes cooking and other housework, caring for dependent people, and, in many cases, agriculture and care for the natural environment. Though it is widely acknowledged that women disproportionately perform such work, standard analytical frameworks rarely see it as *economic* activity. Since women's work was traditionally unpaid and occurs in the West in a "private" sphere, it is often seen as unproductive. Yet, as feminist theorists argue, the formal economy is subsidized by women's nonmarket activities. For example, dependent care and food preparation 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).

For poor women, unrecognized and low-status gendered work activities that subsidize the formal economy extend beyond the boundaries of the home. This point has been made about poor women and women of color in the United States, who have historically taken on feminized tasks—such as laundry—for pay. In the global South, differences in family structures and conceptualizations of the border between the household and the "productive" sphere, as well as varying degrees of industrialization, can widen the scope gendered labor performed outside the home (Beneria and Sen 1981). For example, as Lourdes Beneria and Gita Sen note, women may cook in the home and take it to feed workers in the fields. Responsibilities for collecting fuel (such as firewood or dung) and water are also non-domestic reproductive tasks 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 both analytical frameworks and policy recommendations in ways that are similar other forms of labor. Hours spent in wage labor are recognized through pay, are accounted for in measures of national wealth such as GDP, and are not assumed to be available for other types of activity. Hours spent in many forms of gendered work receive none of these forms of recognition. Even feminist-influenced development frameworks assume that women who are not formally employed or who are formally underemployed are not working or not working enough. One study of poor women laborers in India recommended, after discovering that they were spending 14-18 hours a day in paid and unpaid labor, that "non-productive" time could be "used to earn more and live better" (quoted in Wilson 2015, 803).

The World Bank's 2012 thematic *Human Development Report*, on women, offers a similar prescription. It devotes pages to discussing women's time poverty and the 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. As Jaggar notes in an analysis of the report, paid parental leave is recommended as a policy objective for affluent countries. However, it focuses on transportation, electricity and running water as policy supports for Southern women, and 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. It has become common to refer to women as an “untapped” resource (Narayan 2010), but feminist analysis [reveals this characterization is distorting](#). As Diane Elson puts it, “women are an *over-utilized* and not *under-utilized* resource” (quoted in Chant 2008, 188).

My argument that the feminization of responsibility is unjust will be difficult to apprehend without a clear understanding of the fact that families and economies depend on women's gendered and unpaid labor and the related fact that responsibility for such labor constrains what it is possible for women to do and become. 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. This fact is obscured by a set of Western epistemic habits, theorized by Narayan, that might be collectively referred to as “culturalism”. Culturalists, who are typically Westerners, appeal to a different explanatory vocabulary to analyze the sexist practices of others than to analyze their own. When called upon to explain sexist practices in Western contexts, the culturalist may refer to variables such as historical changes, conflict among varying political forces, or struggle between elites and nonelites. When called upon to

explain the practices of “others,” in contrast, the culturalist assumes that the practices are caused by an ahistorical phenomenon called culture, one that keeps the societies of “others” more “primitive” and patriarchal than the West. Sexism just is what “others” do, and have all been doing, since time immemorial. The background perspective of culturalism is complicit in imperialism in a number of ways. For example, the ideas that “other” men are culturally disposed to oppress women was used to justify direct colonial rule 19th and 20th centuries. **Contemporarily**, **the** idea that culture causes sexist oppression elsewhere protects Northerners from recognizing their own impacts on the gender oppression of women in the global South. It promotes the view that the main Northern effect on the lives of Southern women is a benevolent one that saves them from their cultures and their men (Narayan 1997).

Culturalism offers a particular causal story about the gendered labor burdens faced by women in the global South, one in which sexist labor expectations are timeless and locally caused. But this narrative is simply untrue. In many cases, Northern interventions have intensified demands on Southern women’s labor and intensified the gender injustice of labor distributions. This was true in the colonial period and remains true now. For example, British colonial rule in West Africa replaced an economic system where women and men both cultivated subsistence crops with one where men migrated or cultivated cash crops, and women became responsible for agriculture and dependent on men’s 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 gendered labor burdend. Neoliberal changes in the global economy also play a role. For example, weakened business regulations can result in environmental degradation that increases the distance women have to travel to access water or firewood (Desai 2002). Gaps education and healthcare promoted by economic liberalization are compensated for by women’s unpaid work; when healthcare becomes unaffordable, for instance, women are more likely to have to care for the sick in their homes (Desai 2002).

It is one thing to claim that women’s gendered labor burdens respond to changes in economic conditions and external interventions and another to claim that they are caused *exclusively* 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 fixed and unaffected by external forces. 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 “culture” or local men.

The Feminization of Responsibility As Northern Exploitation of Southern Women

Now that we have seen that women’s unrecognized labor subsidizes the formal economy and places constraints on what women can become, and that gendered labor burdens are sensitive to external forces, we can see the feminization of responsibility for what it is.. Northern-driven policies attempt to improve the welfare of people in poorer societies through means that risk retrenching the gender division of labor and other forms of gendered disadvantage. The feminization of responsibility embodies a failure of Northerners to discharge duties of justice for two reasons. First, it amounts to Northerners extracting uncompensated labor from women in the global South. To go through, this argument requires showing that development assistance is something Northerners are morally obligated to provide. Arguments to this effect fall into two groups: assistance arguments and reparative or remedial arguments. . Remedial arguments, the ones I focus on here describe obligations incurred because of having perpetrated, or continuing to perpetrate, injustice.

Development assistance can be thought of as part of the package of reparations Northerners owe to people in the South. One argument for how Northern harm triggers reparative duties is Thomas Pogge’s well-known argument that Northerners have historically, and are currently, violating the rights of people in the global South. He offers a number of arguments to this effect. Among them are that Northerners derive an unfair starting position from the history of colonialism, that the Southern poor are unjustly excluded from access to natural resources, and that they are victims of an unjust, Northern-imposed institutional order (Pogge 2002, 199-205). I explain the last in more detail. According to Pogge, it is wrong to impose institutional rules that cause severe poverty and inequality on others when some alternative feasible set of rules would leave them better off. Institutional rules that play a causal role in global poverty include asymmetrical trade rules that protect Northern industries and deregulate

Southern ones, payments to undemocratic governments in Southern countries to ensure access to their natural resources, and unrelenting enforcement of intellectual property rights such as drug patents in the global South (Pogge 2002). Though not mentioned by Pogge explicitly, Structural Adjustment Programs are also Northern-imposed rules that play a causal role in severe poverty and inequality—and additionally exacerbate gender inequality. Regardless of which specific causal story or combination of causal stories we appeal to however, the moral argument is that harm triggers duties to remediate..

But weaker arguments than Pogge's can furnish the view that Northerners have remedial obligations to provide development assistance. For example, Christian Barry and David Wiens (2016) argue that remedial duties are incurred when retaining the benefits one has gained from a harm contributes to the persistence of that harm. To apply their argument to development, we can begin by noting the myriad ways Northerners retain benefits through continued injustice to people in the global South, such as ongoing extraction of natural resources such as oil under unjust worker conditions, sweatshop labor for ongoing access to cheap consumer goods, and so on. These injustices from which Northerners benefit are often themselves gendered. For example, 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 (Jaggar 2001). Admittedly, applying Barry's and Wiens' argument requires tracing specific empirical 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, we can speculate that many women who actually are recipients of development assistance are candidates for such duties.⁵

If Northerners owe development assistance to people in the global South, they must bear the costs associated with providing it. Seen in this light, the feminization of responsibility amounts to Northerners requiring Southern women to provide labor that themselves would otherwise be responsible for subsidizing. As the title of a paper by Maxine Molyneux, “women

⁵ Less than 1 percent of the United States federal budget goes to overseas development assistance, 54 percent of which was “tied aid,” that is aid that purchases goods and services from U.S. businesses in 2006 (Oxfam 2009).

at the service of the new poverty agenda” suggests, women increasingly occupy a role analogous to that of paid development workers. In the *Opportunidades* case, 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 a red herring, for 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 pile of uncompensated tasks associated with mothering, and actively incentivize women’s performance of them. 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.

If women in the global South are owed development assistance, the conclusion that the feminization of responsibility exploits women will follow on virtually any theory of exploitation. We do not need a very specific theory to conclude that forcing someone **to** work without compensation is unfair. If it seems that this exploitation concern is blunted by women’s consent to program participation, it is worth remembering first that these women usually have no superior alternative for promoting their basic survival and the survival of their families. 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 also be objected that the feminization of responsibility is not exploitative because it benefits women. Many theories allow that exploitation can benefit the exploited. This should be unsurprising given that a lack of decent options is classically what renders people vulnerable to exploitation. If development assistance is owed to women in the global South, it is unfair to require uncompensated labor in exchange for access to whatever benefits they acquire. Consider the analogy of one person who steals from another, or 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 the 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 for expecting women to 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 the labor requirement were efficient. But it is unclear that women even generally benefit from the policies in question. For example, between a third and a half of *Opportunidades* participants in Mexico say the demands of the program are difficult to fulfill and conflict with their other responsibilities (Molyneux 2009), and, as we have already discussed some see the program demands as compromising their health..

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 owed remediation for gender inequality. A preliminary response to this objection is just to recall my above discussion of the culturalization of gender roles: there is substantial evidence that the harms of colonialism and neoliberal globalization include the exacerbation of gender inequality. But more importantly, my argument is not primarily that Northerners have failed in their remedial duties if they do not attempt to reduce gender injustice. It is that projects owed as reparation for poverty are imposing unjustified costs on women, by burdening women with excessive labor and worsening gender relations. The ways in which the feminization of responsibility can be said to exacerbate gender injustice will be discussed in the next section.

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 increase 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 that impacts 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 poverty are worth noting. First, as Young famously argues (1990), 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 lacking political influence because they are poor), the structures of decision-making processes, symbolic and cultural forces, and distributions of labor can also work to reduce decision-making power. Second, domination is a relational notion where 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 other's are doing. For a person's level of domination to be reduced, her position must not only be enhanced; **her status must approach that of equal.**

The important upshot for our discussion of the feminization of responsibility is that it is possible for a person's poverty to decrease while remaining, or becoming further, dominated..As long as income and health are confused with "empowerment," it will be difficult to apprehend all of the potential harms of the feminization of responsibility. As I have already noted, some women involved in development programs that feminize responsibility experience well-being increases in terms of indicators such as income and health and others do not. But both groups are potential victims of increased domination. 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. All of these means of entrenching domination amount to more than women experiencing an increase in labor time demanded of them.

First, the feminization of responsibility exacerbates the gender division of labor by expanding the range of *domains* in which women are expected to serve men. More and more *types* of tasks become associated with the feminine, subordinate role. In the *Opportunidades* case, we have the new 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 micocredit cases, women take on what have, until recently, been male-gendered responsibilities for bringing money into the household. Yet when women take on traditionally male-gendered tasks associated with generating income they typically do not gain the power and social prerogatives of men. Instead, diversification of tasks seems in many cases bring an ever-widening set of responsibilities and work burdens under the umbrella of the subordinate role. Tasks like income generation and paying for children's school fees and food have become women's responsibilities. In two microcredit programs in Uganda, for example, some men began leaving all household expenditures to women (Mayoux 1999, 972). Women face more types of labor, and these forms of labor are recoded as service to the household.

Changes in women's work responsibilities even seem ,in many cases, to be freeing up men to take further advantage of the privileges of their gender (Mayoux 1999, Chant 2006, 2008). Women generating income means men can spend more time socializing with other men. Some worry that it also frees up men to engage in risk-taking activity, such as gambling and sex work, whose negative impacts are borne disproportionately by women. Women discuss the extent to which seeking a wife has now become analogous to seeking a servant (Chant 2006, 207) and claim that conditions have changed 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 see women as points of access to microcredit in the same way they may see them as points of access to dowry wealth (Hoffman and Marius-Gnanou 2007, Khader 2014). In contexts where polygyny is practiced, injections of capital from women's work can free men up 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 embrace of masculine prerogatives clearly results from multiple factors, including, in many cases, lacks of opportunities for men,.Women are preferred wage workers in many cases because they will accept lower pay, and many anti-poverty 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 it 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 intra-household behavior suggest that women have low negotiating power because of their (perceived) lack of contribution (Sen 1990). It thus might seem that women earning income, or even accessing the recognition associated with being a "good, modern" mother as in *Opportunidades*, would bolster women's household decisionmaking power. There is some evidence that women increasingly exiting relationships to form women-headed households 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, in a given society, male patronage is a source of access to other benefits (Kabeer 1999). Women who do not exit are left to manage the intra-household tensions that their increased labor burdens create. Microcredit participants in sub-Saharan Africa discuss increased fears of domestic violence (Mayoux 1999). A common conflict avoidance strategy involves enacting a traditionally feminine household role, to help men believe they are still in charge. Indeed, conflict avoidance may be a key reason women continue to do large shares of unrecognized household labor despite changes in their mobility or access to income. Being a "good wife" or "dutiful daughter" can be a way of minimizing tension with one's partner. Some *Opportunidades* 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 tactical, or *an exercise of agency*, is beside the point if the actual effects of these acts reinforce the idea that the energies of wives and daughters ought to go disproportionately to serving and placating men. Kabeer argues that, in cases where microcredit increases domestic violence, intra-household tensions are signs that gender equality is on the rise. (Kabeer 1998). This assessment, in my view, requires the sanguine notion that equality *just is* the natural long-term outcome of women gaining access to income (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 microcredit cases), or in which feminized responsibilities increase without increased power attached to them (as in the *Opportunidades* cases). Instead of "empowered" women who earn income and share household responsibilities with their male partners, we might see earning

money, taking one's children to and from town, and cleaning their schools as extra expectations of wifehood and motherhood, where the expectation of one-sided service and self-sacrifice goes unchanged.

Third, the feminization of responsibility risks creating a political environment in which women cannot be sources of self-authenticating claims. John Rawls (1996) argues that standing as an equal in one's society requires being seen as a self-authenticating claims. Self-authenticating claims have weight in social and political processes *merely because they belong to some individual*. Rawls' own example of the person who does not appear in society as a source of self-authenticating claims is the slave. The slave cannot make claims of his/her own; her rights and well-being matter in social processes only as instruments for the rights and well-being of actual self-authenticators. The feminization of responsibility participates in creating domestic and transnational political contexts in which women's claims to the benefits of cooperation rest on their usefulness to other members of their households. Projects and discourses that feminize responsibility give women a special role in development *because* women discharge subordinate roles. The issue here is deeper than that women are expected to fulfill stereotypes. The *content* of the stereotypes is particularly noxious in attributing social standing to women primarily when they serve others. Jenson (2009) notes that the Millennium Development Goals focus on adult women only as the object of maternal health policy. Recall also that *Opportunidades* offers women medical services exclusively when they are pregnant or breastfeeding. Not all examples of this need for others to authenticate women's claims are so literal, however. The most common reason for targeting income interventions at women is that they invest in their children. Absent more than lip service to gender equality for its own sake, it is unclear that women matter *for their own sake* more now than they would in policy contexts that ignored women altogether.

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 to political and social institutions this way. Molyneux argues that the *Opportunidades* 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 "their publicly reaffirmed status as mothers" as a path to empowerment and self-esteem (Rawls 1996, 33). She suggests that women may be encouraged to internalize views about their instrumental value, since the program is "binding women ever more closely, aspirationally and

materially” (Molyneux 2009, 54). Additionally, Sarah Bradshaw argues that women who do not participate in *Opportunidades* because they are more interested in wage labor are socially punished (Bradshaw 2008, 201).

This point that women lose their 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, the ability to be seen as a source of self-authenticating claims seems undeniably necessary. When claims to goods like healthcare and basic income are treated as owed contingently upon the performance of feminine social roles, it is difficult to see how women can count as sources of self-authenticating claims 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. 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 pre-exists the feminization of responsibility has often already been heightened and shaped by colonialism and structural economic factors. More directly relevant to the feminization of responsibility the fact that that worsened gender inequality is not an accidental result of Northern-shaped development policy. As I have mentioned at a number of points, the programs in question perpetuate women’s subordination *by design*. Though the gender and development community sees women’s well-being and gender equality as intrinsically valuable, these justifications have received very partial uptake from mainstream development actors. Instead, poverty-focused development take gender on board as an efficiency concern (Chant 2008, 183). Women’s “efficiency” just is their tendency to prioritize the interests of other members of their households. Nor can the entrenchment of gender domination be understood as an unforeseeable consequence of prevailing styles of development intervention. The speed with which women’s

“empowerment” has been assimilated to “targeting women” and “increasing their access to income” can, after at least 30 years of gender and development advocacy, be understood as a concerted failure. For at least as long, gender and development theorists have been pointing out the basic fact that gender is a relational phenomenon—and thus that moving toward gender equality means changing men’s roles and self-conceptions as well as women’s.

The pervasiveness and intransigence of sexist domination may trigger the related worry that any imaginable antipoverty intervention would end up increasing sexist domination. Increasing women’s income and subsidizing women’s role as mothers both increase domination, the objection might go, so sexist domination is just an unfortunate side effect of the poverty alleviation business. It is worth being less euphemistic about what this objection actually says: namely, that worsening many women’s lives, as increased labor burdens and sexist domination undoubtedly do, is morally justified—because of its benefits to others, or in some cases because status concerns are less important than material ones. 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 the failure to provide some luxury good. The objection that worsened domination is just the cost of doing business rests on an unsubstantiated empirical claim. We lack 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 incentivizing men’s household contributions and involvement in parenting may hold promise for improving children’s well-being and gender equality (Barker 2006). Additionally, a variety of interventions aimed at changing the harmful elements of masculinity 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 *Opportunidades* case, there is evidence that explaining the program aims to men reduces intrahousehold tensions (Adato et al. 2000).

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 unpaid 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 famously wrote, that it was "justice, not charity, that [was] wanting in the world" (Wollstonecraft 1996, 72) Understanding the normative dimensions of the feminization of responsibility requires attention to the local gender relations and the North-South relations development projects create, not just their potential effects on poverty.

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