

The neoliberal feminism of international development

Kalpana Wilson (Birkbeck)
**Feminism, Queer and Neoliberalism -
Critique, Complicity and Complexity**
14 June 2018

- Racialisation as well as gendering is central to an understanding of how neoliberalism selectively appropriates and transforms feminist ideas
- Neoliberal feminism as racialised violence
- Feminist ideas around empowerment and agency have been used to facilitate and legitimise an intensification of women's labour and its mobilization for global capital accumulation



In both, the representation of women as contented and productive workers is used to provide legitimacy to the existing global order...

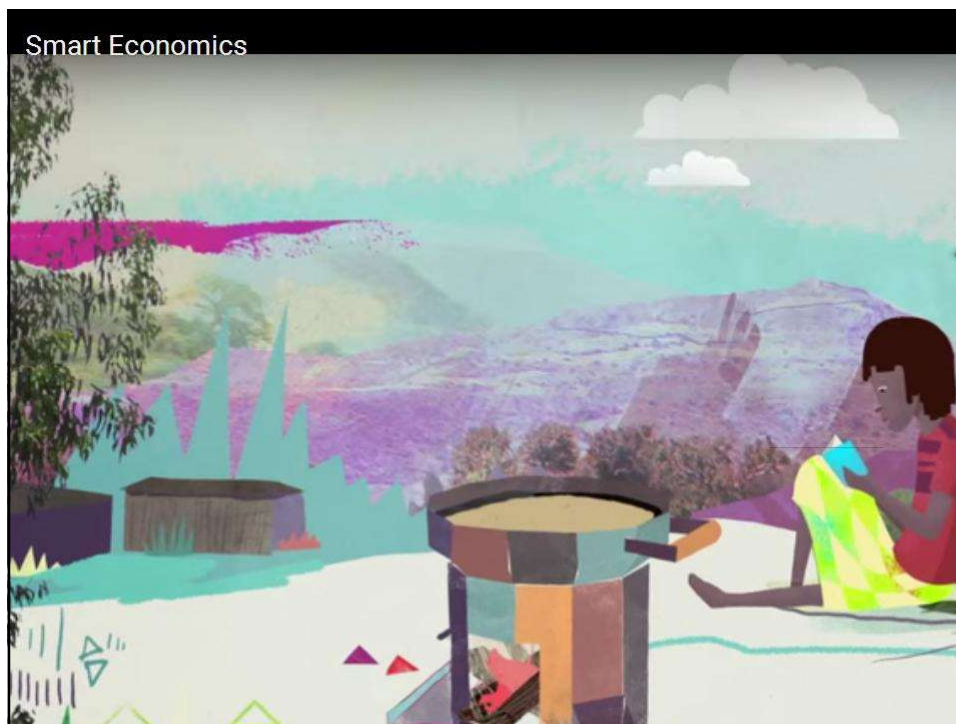
...and works to render resistance invisible

Gender Equality as Smart Economics

- Neoliberal feminism epitomized by World Bank's Gender Equality as Smart Economics; the Girl Effect
- Fits in with needs of capital in a neoliberal global economy in 2 interlinked ways –
 - Intensifying women's productive and reproductive labour as a strategy for replacing state provision
 - Women are seen as key 'resource' for continued and expanding profits for global capital –

Neoliberal feminism in development

- 'The advent of the adolescent girl as the agent of development marks the final stage in a transition from liberal to neoliberal feminism in development, in which responsibility shifts entirely onto the individualized figure of the girl after the initial investment in her human capital: 'she will do the rest', and any critique of structures is rendered irrelevant. ...intervention via education is constructed as necessary only to produce the idealized neoliberal subject who can negotiate unfettered and unregulated markets with ease, while simultaneously assuming full responsibility for social reproduction' (Wilson, 2015)



(Symposium "Feminism, Queer and Neoliberalism", Centre for the Study of Women and Gender, University of Warwick)

- New gendered/racialised binary of the 'deserving/undeserving poor'
- Racialised representations of masculinities in development – sustainable development discourses increasingly revolve around representations of men in the global South as a racialised threat to the security of the global North(Wilson, 2017, *Globalizations*)



(Symposium "Feminism, Queer and Neoliberalism", Centre for the Study of Women and Gender, University of Warwick)

21st century population control

- Women and adolescent girls simultaneously understood as disposable labouring bodies and as dangerous reproductive bodies marked by 'excessive' fertility
- 21st century population policies: a neoliberal feminist discourse of reproductive rights and individual choice masks racialised and gendered embodied violence.
- Population growth linked to migration, terrorism and climate change in mainstream sustainable development discourses
- Supply of women's labour will be increased if fertility declines

FP2020

- FP 2020 Launched at the Family Planning Summit in 2012 – hosted by the British government and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- Aims to get 120m more girls and women in the poorest countries to use voluntary family planning by 2020.
- FP2020 focuses exclusively on the promotion of long-acting implantable and injectable hormonal contraceptives
- Promoted through what is called 'market shaping' : private and government donors work with pharmaceutical corporations to shift market dynamics – provide 'volume guarantees' - market driven form of targets
- Injectable and implantable contraceptives e.g. Implanon, Depo-Provera, Jadelle/Norplant are specifically being promoted as suitable for use in contexts where health provision has been decimated.

FP2020

- Implanon
- Sayana Press
- Coercive mass sterilisations

15 women died in November 2014 after undergoing sterilisation surgery in camps in Chhattisgarh (India). These women were all in their 20s and 30s and from Dalit, Adivasi (indigenous) and OBC (Other Backward Classes) communities. Most of them were from landless labouring households

- Coercive sterilisations as embodied racialised and gendered violence

Multiple feminisms and transnational solidarity

- Neoliberal feminism is not only one strand but also actively makes others invisible.
- Need to not simply adopt the notion that feminism is a Western imposition but rather recognize the existence of feminisms in the global South which often are less visible precisely because they challenge the neoliberal model.
- For example in India, one section of feminist activists are demanding reproductive justice

