The Uses and Abuses of "Women's Rights" in Contemporary Discourse

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Abstract

Women's rights globally have come into public awareness in recent years in ways we have not seen before, with both interesting and troubling consequences. Today women's rights are being variously depicted as critical to addressing problems of third world poverty. Women's education is being described as an essential component in the fight against global terrorism. Women politicians are seen by some as a key defense in the fight against government corruption. Moreover, women are often said to be the key to peace, environmental sustainability, and many other positive developmental outcomes. While these are not new ideas and are reflective of the persistence of modernization frames, they have increasingly captured the popular imagination, influencing donors, development practitioners, policy makers, journalists, and even military strategists. My paper takes a critical look at these ideas surrounding women and women's rights and their implications for development research. Specifically, it interrogates the ways in which women and men are depicted (the former positively and the latter negatively) in the text and images of foreign donor and international NGO websites and programming. It shows why these embedded assumptions matter in addressing donor priorities, drive the financing of aid, and determine which strategies gain traction for women's rights actors.

Women's rights globally have come into public awareness in recent years in ways we have not seen before, with both interesting and disturbing consequences. This paper explores some of these changing understandings and critically examines their impact. In particular, it explores the ways in which donors, and foreign and local development practitioners draw on archetypes of women in framing their policies. These archetypes are sometimes evocative of earlier colonial and modernization modes of thinking about women in non-Western contexts. By combining insights from psychology and popular mythology, I show some of the consequences of the oversimplifications of complex realities, the uses and abuses of such shortcuts, and the

ways in which they influence donor priorities, drive the financing of aid, and determine which strategies gain traction for women's rights actors. These oversimplifications lend themselves to development strategies that result in technological fixes rather than in accommodating structural change in power relations that come through messy political contestations and cultural transformations.

"The world is awakening to a powerful truth," journalists Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn argue. They say, "Women and girls aren't the problem. They're the solution." Today women's rights are being variously depicted in instrumental ways as critical to overall strategies to address problems of third world poverty. Women's education is seen as key to reduced fertility rates, increasing access to the market and to productivity, and ultimately to reduced poverty and national development. Women are being described as an essential component in the fight against global terrorism and defense of national security. They are regarded often as natural environmentalists. In the case of Muslim women, women's education is being described as an essential component in the fight against global terrorism in books like Greg Mortenson's now tarnished work *Three Cups of Tea* (2007). Gender equality, some argue, serves as the crucible in the clash of civilizations and fight against extremism and Islamic fundamentalism (Norris and Inglehart 2003). Women politicians are seen by some as a key defense in the fight against government corruption (Dollar et al. 2001, Swamy et al. 2000). While these are not new ideas, they have increasingly captured the popular imagination. They are influencing donors, journalists, policy makers, foundations, military strategists, and even women's rights activists, with critical consequences for how women are included in development.

New uses are continually being found for women. Development scholar Mike Moore recently advocated the use of women tax collectors in Africa "partly for their skills, but partly because they can help improve the organisational culture" and because they will improve the efficiency and functioning of central government tax agencies. With women, "taxes can be paid with some degree of dignity and even willingness," he hypothesizes because he found at a meeting of the African Tax Administration Forum (ATAF) that "the best, most focused, succinct, committed and practical interventions came from the three female tax bosses" attending the meeting from Rwanda, Uganda and Nigeria.[1]

In sum, women appear in development discourse as worthy recipients of aid, while men implicitly are seen as undeserving of support. Women's photos overwhelmingly dominate the web pages of donor agencies and international NGOs. This raises questions about how women and women's rights are being used. How should we evaluate the various claims made regarding women and women's rights? What can we learn from history in terms of colonial and imperial projects that sought to remake "the other": to rescue women from their men or from themselves? Before plunging into a discussion of archetypes, it is worth looking at just what aid is focused specifically on women.

Foreign Aid Directed at Women's Rights

[1] Mary Baine, Commissioner General of the Rwanda Revenue Authority; Allen Kagina, Commissioner General of the Uganda Revenue Authority; and Ifueko Omoigui Okauru Chair of the Nigerian Federal Inland Revenue Service and of the Joint Tax Board. http://www2.ids.ac.uk/gdr/cfs/TaxNews/back%20page.pdf

Substantial funds have been directed to programs that focus women's rights and welfare. These range from gender equality initiatives to programs that incorporate gender equality tracking measures but are not primarily women's rights projects. The result has been a proliferation and variety of gender equality measures and earmarks in both donor and recipient countries.

Development Assistance Committee (DAC) member countries[2] committed $23 billion per year to gender equality between 2007 and 2009. Almost one fourth was in the health sector. DAC aid to gender equality in economic and productive sectors was $4.6 billion on average from 2007-08 (about one-fifth of total aid in the sector). This aid mainly went to agricultural and rural development (almost $2 billion). Some donors focus most of their aid in the agricultural and rural sector on gender equality (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Sweden). Gender equality as the central or core programmatic theme received only $115 million in support. Of this, 43% was aimed at the education sector and 42% towards health, while only 21% was allocated for economic and productive sectors.

One-third of all development aid to banking and business sectors prioritizes gender equality and women's empowerment (about $1 billion per year). Denmark, Japan and Spain focus most of their aid to banking and business to gender equality. Activities in this sector usually include micro-credits, financial sector (not micro-credit), and business services (private sector support). About one-third of activities in the latter two sub-sectors have gender equality as a target. Little of the aid spent on infrastructure and energy has a gender focus. About one-third of DAC members' aid to

[2] The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) is a forum for the world's major donors.

fragile states targets gender equality as a principal or significant objective ($4.4 billion). Only 15% of that figure had gender equality as a significant goal, i.e., not the main objective.

Of all the aid targeting gender in fragile and conflict-affected states, two-thirds goes to social infrastructure and services (education, health, sanitation, water, etc.). In the sub-sector of peace and security, only 20% of aid had a gender dimension. Over one-third of aid to the governance sector in fragile states addressed gender. Within governance, however, sub-sectors like human rights typically have a focus on women.

Female Archetypes of Development

One way of understanding how these aforementioned priorities in aid are shaped is to look at the uses of female archetypes and frames in development that influence how we think about needs. Archetypes are widely shared understandings of a person, personality or type of behavior associated with someone. These characters appear in mythologies, story telling, books, films, art, and other forms of cultural expression, in popular discourse. They can be shortcuts to describing a type of person and like myths, they give order to our understanding of the universe. They draw on familiar images and tropes, on deeply held values and norms, and they tap into our emotions. Like myths, archetypes cannot be proven or disproven. They are regarded as taken for granted and self-evident. In development discourse, they become popular dogmas (de la Rocha 2008, 47). They are generally ahistorical, apolitical and decontextualized (Mukhopadhyay 2004, 95). They are essentialized distillations of character. But rather than being ascribed to an individual, as they are in mythology or in psychology, in development discourse they are used to describe collective groups of

individuals. Women of various kinds come to represent entire archetypes rather than subsets of women or individual women.

We are familiar with female archetypes from Greek mythology like Hera, long suffering wife of Zeus; Penelope, the dutiful wife; Athena, a woman in charge, and the seductress Sirens. In medieval Romances, women are often maidens, wives, mothers, whores, or old crones. In the Western culture we have become accustomed to female archetypes such as the damsel in distress, the servant, the survivor, the diva, the witch, dumb blonde, the free spirit and many others.

In development discourse we have a whole other set of archetypes that often underlie development actor agency. These include the victim, survivor, saint, the mother provider, the group member, natural environmentalist, and peacemaker. These tropes matter because they are formed and reinforced within a system that distributes resources, defines political interventions, and directs foreign policy. The dynamic field of development relies on particular, but shifting, ideas about women that are currently infusing the kinds of resources, policies, and relationships we see emerging regarding everything from war to water. In this context, the framing of women is particularly potent but too often unexamined.

Some archetypes are particular to regions. For example, there is the "supermadre" in Latin America who, according to Leslie Schwindt Bayer (2006), sees her involvement in political office as an extension of her role as mother and wife and thus feels a responsibility to focus on issues related to family, education and health care. There are other oversimplifications that are reflected in this discourse based on cultural, racial, ethnic, religious, and other such differences. "Muslim woman," for example, stereotypically conjures images of a veiled, silenced, and uneducated woman

devoid of personal or political autonomy. The heteronormativity of the development discourse is also striking. This paper focuses on the archetypes that appear on the webpages, brochures and programming of development agencies and foreign donors and looks at the consequences of such simplifications.

While the development archetypes of women today are mostly positive, they are nevertheless a form of reductionism. It was not that long ago that the development enterprise in the form of colonial state and missionary modernization efforts drew on their own set of gendered tropes rooted in popular culture, anthropological accounts, fictional writing (e.g., Rider Haggar's Africa), missionary accounts, travel books (e.g., Gérard de Nerval or Edward William Lane), journalism, art (Jean-Léo Gérôme) and advertising (de Groot 1991). The archetypes evident in these mid-nineteenth century sources included exotic dancing women in Middle Eastern harems, African women witches, sexually available Polynesian women, the downtrodden wife, and ignorant rural midwife. Sexually charged depictions of slave girls could even be found in abolitionist pamphlets. In spite of women's rights struggles for suffrage, peace, education for girls, and other issues back home, colonial regimes rarely paid attention to women's welfare in the colonies. Yet they had enormous anxieties when it came to women's morality and governing women's sexuality. Women thus became objects of colonial rescue, particularly from practices having to do with the body: female genital cutting in Africa, foot binding in China, and sexual morality more generally. Through community development and schooling, colonial and mission schools provided women with hygiene and domestic science training in order to "civilize" them.

The legacies of this mentality remain with us to this day in modern-day thinking about development through the need to do something about women's bodies,

particularly bodies that experience female genital cutting, bodies that are covered by burqas, or display other signifiers of culture and identity. Contemporary development tropes replicate some of these simplistic notions about women in non-Western contexts, revealing not only anxieties about bodies (which creates the need to control them), but also of victimhood (which necessitates rescue and the need to act for them), and ignorance (hence the need to enlighten "them"). The difference with the older tropes is the more recent portrayal of women who are empowered, presumably because they have already been rescued and have benefited from external inputs.

It is important to note that women themselves sometimes draw on these oversimplifications when it is advantageous to them. They do so in order to gain political support, to appeal to donors, and to elicit public sympathy at home and abroad. Women may depict themselves as mothers who are natural peacemakers and leaders in order to be granted their rightful seat the peace negotiating table or claim leadership. For example, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who was the first female elected president in Africa and was recently reelected, drew on this trope quite actively and is known in Liberia as "Ma Ellen." A Johnson-Sirleaf campaign T-shirt read: "All the men have failed Liberia—Let's try a woman." As she explained in an interview:

> I believe that there are certain attributes in a woman that give her some advantages over a man. Women are usually more honest, more sensitive to issues and bring a stronger sense of commitment and dedication to what they do. Maybe because they were mothers, and being a mother you have that special attention for the family, for the young, for children… All in all I am glad I am a woman and I think in Liberia today, it is time for women to show what they can do (Dukulé 2005).

While it may be advantageous for women in a variety of contexts to draw on some of these archetypes to advance a particular objective or to advance themselves as leaders, this can be a risky strategy because it can also be turned around to exclude women as much as to include them.

My focus is not on individual tropes and debunking them, or even in showing that they based on faulty understanding of the realities that they are attempting to depict. I am more interested in the frames themselves and the consequences of drawing on them. Having once worked as a donor at the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, I fully appreciate the reasons these various simplifications and shortcuts are used because it is challenging to encapsulate complexity and ambiguity in compressed explanations of funding priorities. Nevertheless it is important to be aware of the consequences of drawing on these simplistic representations of women and men in the way we present our ideas.

"Woman as Victim"

The most dominant trope in popular discourse still seems to still be one of victimhood, one that necessitates empowerment and the rescue paradigm on the part of the Westerner. The headline of a 2009 *New York Times Magazine* article was "Saving the World's Women," evoking the need for rescue. Journalists Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn (2010), for example, have made the powerful argument in their book *Half the Sky* that saving the world's women from sex trafficking, bride burnings, female genital cutting, and mass rape is the paramount moral challenge of this century, in the same way slavery was in was in the 19th century and totalitarianism in the 20th century.

The "woman as victim" trope has evoked some of the most troubling forms of

intervention. Here it is important to distinguish within the development industry between various actors, some of which have taken these tropes to an extreme as they draw on Western sympathies to address problems confronting women in developing countries. This discursive environment has both legitimized activities by mainstream development agencies, but it has also spawned a morally reprehensible subset of the industry, which draws on some of the same intellectual tropes to advance their causes. Here I am referring to the ethically questionable activities taken up by organizations like U.S.-based Clitoraid, which encourages people to "adopt a clitoris" online in Burkina Faso to fund surgeries to reverse the damage of female genital cutting. Although one might endorse such surgeries, referring to African women's genitalia in this way is demeaning and humiliating, as Wanjiru Kamau-Rutenberg has argued in her blog Can?We?Save?Africa?[3] Another campaign promoted by the Girls Store depicts young girls for sale asking customers "Buy a Girl Her Life Back" to prevent her from being subjected to marriage or sex slavery. The fundraising campaign verges on the pornographic and uses the language of slavery and trafficking to fight the very same evils.

Product RED campaign, launched by rock star Bono and Bobby Shriver in 2006, invites consumers to "save Africa," particularly women and children with AIDS, by purchasing products from companies like American Express, Apple, Converse, Dell, Emporio Armani, Gap, Hallmark, and Windows, and Starbucks that support the Global Fund to provide antiretrovirals to those suffering from HIV AIDS in Africa. According to Jungar and Salo (2008) the campaign implies that one can purchase virtue and can be fashionable and altruistic through the same means. The culture of celebrity is actively

[3] savingafrica.wordpress.com/

promoted through their campaigns and consumers are invited to buy like celebrities in order to save Africa. This campaign has been interrogated in detail a recent book by Lisa Richey and Stephano Ponte, *Brand Aid: Shopping Well to Save the World.*

Evoking mental images of the imperial carving up of Africa in 1884-85 in Berlin, the celebrity impulse to save Africa has resulted in a new "carving up" of Africa by American celebrities, with Oprah claiming South Africa, Madonna Malawi, Clooney Darfur and southern Sudan, etc. (Gibson 2010).

While these examples represent an extreme manifestation of the rescue paradigm involving African women, as well as men, they draw on many of the same tropes, frames and intellectual soup of ideas that development practitioners draw on. And although HIV-AIDS, sex trafficking, FGM, violence against women, and other such ills are real and should not be minimized, it is also interesting to note the revival of the colonial preoccupation with the body in the selection of issues to focus on regarding women. It is worth asking why do some issues gain more international attention than others. It also necessitates the protection of "bodily integrity," as Andrea Cornwall puts it, where women's virtue has to be protected, often at the expense of recognition of women's sexual agency or of sexualities that go beyond what is regarded as heternormative. It reifies the development institutions as the rescuers, and gives them agency in the face of women who are veiled, trafficked, and mutilated.

One of the main problems with the "rescue paradigm" is the way in which it often overlooks local actors and their activities, in part, because of the focus on the neediness and backwardness of others. Concern about such ethnocentric attitudes has been especially raised by organizations in Africa who are fighting to abolish the practice

of female genital cutting. Western organizations and individuals have often sought to champion this cause in ways that disregard and trivialize local efforts. Seble Dawitt, a Somali lawyer and filmmaker Salem Mekuria pointed out that FGM is often regarded in the west as "the gender oppression to end all oppressions":

> It has become a powerfully emotive lens through which to view personal pain—a gauge by which to measure distance between the West and the rest of humanity. . . Superior Western attitudes do not enhance dialogue or equal exchange of ideas.

Mekuria explained further in a longer essay on the same subject argues of FGM that :

> African women subjects are presented as a collection of helpless bundles of mutilated creatures, stereotypes who are far from being living, dignified human beings. They are pitied and patronized, instead of being cherished, nurtured, and invested with faith as human subjects potentially capable of understanding and changing the conditions that dehumanize them.

The rescue paradigm makes too much of differences between "us" and the "other." Such an approach refuses to recognize not only the common humanity of women but also the commonality of experiences of gender oppression despite the differences. One sometimes gets the impression that some Westerners exist above culture and without oppression, whereas women in other parts of the world are steeped in oppressive cultures. Not only does this lead to fantasies of rescue that exaggerate Northern women's power and freedom but often also to an inability to see local feminists and activists as active, intelligent, competent advocates for their own causes.

"Woman as Survivor"

The "woman as survivor" trope captures the ever-resilient and industrious woman who perseveres in the face of all odds, e.g., as a small entrepreneur in the face of economic crisis, war, structural adjustment and other such hardships. She takes on the burdens of her household and community, working harder in the face of economic strain, stretching resources, and cleverly producing even more as a result, thus contributing to the economic well being of her family and nation. She shoulders multiple burdens. She serves as a safety net for failing state welfare institutions and her carework sustains the sick, elderly, young and other vulnerable family members in the face of neglect by the state and male household members. Women are frequently depicted as working harder than men.

The consequence of this trope is the impulse to place even greater responsibility on women because they have often pulled more than their own weight. Industrious women are rewarded with more responsibility and work and ever more is asked of them. Ironically, women's labor and contributions to economies have been largely ignored within development economics until recently. However, as the World Bank and others attempt to bring women's production and labor into the equation, they position women as the ultimate survivor without addressing the conditions that create the *need* for survival.

"The Mother Provider"

Related to the "survivor woman" is the "mother provider," whose impact extends well beyond her own person. Supporting the mother provider has multiplier effects. One hears for example, from UNIFEM in the case of in Mali: "If you help a man you help one person, but if you help a woman you are helping the whole family and the

community."[4] TV talk show host Oprah Winfrey has said repeatedly on her recently concluded show: "If you educate a women, you educate a nation." The International NGO CARE has on its website: "Help 1 woman out of poverty and she'll bring 4 others with her. . . . Put simply, educating women and girls provides the single highest return on investment in the developing world. . . Despite the inequality they face, women are able to unite families and whole communities. When CARE sees a woman we see unlimited potential.[5] Many other donors and development agencies have repeated these same types of claims. Women are often said to be more likely to take care of their households if they obtain funds rather than fritter it away on drinking, debts, and women as men are sometimes accused of doing.

Not only does this "mother as provider" trope lead to possibly unwarranted assumptions about men in all situations, it may also harm efforts to engage men more fully in finding solutions to the problems being raised. By reifying the maternal, it ignores women who don't fit neatly into this gender role and the assumptions that go along with the trope of being motherly, nurturing, and heterosexual, e.g., women who are single with children; women without children; women who are lesbians without children; sex workers. It also does not fully appreciate the self-sacrifice women engage in while supporting other household members, e.g., denying themselves food, healthcare, and sleep. Women themselves need support. They do not simply need to be supported so they can do more for their families.

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[4] http://www.beta.undp.org/undp/en/home/ourwork/womenempowerment/successstories/engines_drive_womensempowermentinmali.html

[5] http://www.care.org.au/Page.aspx?pid=626

"Woman as Saint"

There are widespread beliefs that women elected to parliament will fight corruption, promote women's rights, have more concern for welfare issues, and be more inclined not to go to war (Caprioli 2001), lending themselves to depictions of women as virtuous beings, often in contrast with men.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was cited in an interview as saying, "Microenterprise is uniquely designed to empower women because . . . women are much greater at investing in future goods than the men who have participated in microcredit have turned out to be. And they are also very reliable in paying back, because they are so eager to have that extra help and recognition that microcredit provides." (Landler 2009).

UN Women's website claims that "higher numbers of women in parliament generally contribute to stronger attention to women's issues."[6] Women politicians are also said to pay attention not only to women's issues but welfare concerns more generally. Unlike many of the other claims mentioned here, there is substantial and growing scholarly evidence from around the world to back this claim (O'Reagan 2002, Schwindt-Bayer Jones 1997; Swers 2002; Taylor-Robinson and Heath 2003, Thomas 2002).

Several empirical studies have found that women are more trust-worthy and public-spirited and more likely to sacrifice for the common good than men. One study by a group at the World Bank, Dollar et al. (2001) found that the greater the representation of women in parliament, the lower the level of corruption in a large cross-section of over 100 countries as measured by International Country Risk Guide's

[6] http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/democratic_governance/

corruption index (CORRUPT). Anand Swamy, Stephen Knack, Young Lee, and Omar Azfa (2000) also found that in hypothetical situations women were less likely to condone corruption, women managers were less involved in bribery, and countries which had greater representation of women in government or in market work had lower levels of corruption. They argued that these differences were not due to some essential, permanent, or biologically determined difference between men and women, but rather, the gender differences they observed they believed were attributable to socialization, differences in access to corruption networks and knowledge of how to engage in corruption. Another Inter-Parliamentary Union survey of female politicians in 65 countries found that the majority felt that increased female representation renewed public trust in government.

These and other studies have prompted efforts to enhance female representation in parliament because they will do good.[7] However, it is entirely possible that the causal arrow points in the other direction: those societies that are more gender equal tend to be more democratic and less corrupt. Women simply have not had the opportunities to engage in corrupt behavior in less democratic societies. If this is the case, then the expectations regarding women's lack of corruptibility may be unwarranted and one would have to specify more precisely the conditions under which they might hold.

There is growing evidence to support this latter claim. Anne Marie Goetz (2008) argues that the ways in which women are recruited into leadership restrict opportunities for engaging in corrupt activities since they have been left out of male

[7] http://www.usaid.gov/stories/burundi/s_bu_women_fightcorruption.html

patronage networks and they can't negotiate corrupt deals with men because of the impropriety of working with non-kin males.

Daniel Stockener (2011) similarly found that corruption itself acts as a constraint on female parliamentary representation. Because corruption perpetuates reinforces traditional patronage networks and prevents women from gaining human and financial resources, Daniel Stockener found that in highly corrupt African countries there was less chance that women would increase their representation in parliament. Hung Sung (2003) argued from the Vietnamese context that corruption hampered human rights and increased gender inequalities where women were denied property rights, inheritance and child custody. They lacked the important preconditions for seeking public office, namely education, resources and support.

Corruption also restricts women's access to political parties and public sector jobs. Thus, under-institutionalized parties in countries such as Nigeria or Angola are organized on the basis of personal connections and lack transparent rules of candidate selection (Randall and Svasand 2002). In such situations, political seats can be bought. Public officials are elected based on access to male-dominated clientelistic networks, making it difficult for women to gain the connections through which to gain seats in power. Thus, rather than women leaders being more virtuous it is entirely possible that women tend to rise to positions leadership more easily in societies that are already less corrupt to begin with.

"Woman as Peacemaker"

Yet another trope popular today is the notion of women as peacemakers. One of the most common observations in the literature on gender and conflict/peace has to

do with women's affinity to peacemaking and their reluctance to endorse violence and, in particular, state violence to resolve conflicts. Women are not just less violent than men but they want peace more than men, or so the trope is depicted. This is said to be related to women's inclination to support collective or consensual approaches to solving problems.

A DANIDA website states the claim quite clearly: "Women are soldiers too, and responsible for violence, but mostly women play a positive part in conflicts. In many situations, women are alone in providing and protecting their families, perhaps under extremely difficult conditions in the village, the refugee camp, or as internally displaced. They can act as mediators in a conflict-filled community, and experience has shown that their involvement should be the centre of any peace-building initiatives and reconstruction."[8]

Perhaps the most common trope in popular discourse relies on connections between women's peacemaking and their essentialized roles as mothers. Some see motherhood or women's potential for motherhood as a basis for women's engagement in peace activism (Naples, 1998; Rupp, 1997). For some the gender gap regarding the use of force in international conflicts is based on gendered physiological differences, which for women is based on their natural reproductive ability (Daly, 1984). For others like Sara Ruddick (1995), it is the act of mothering (by men or women) that lies at the basis of the connection between women and peace, because it makes people more caring and empathetic of others. Some have argued that women use motherhood strategically, to give their movements greater leverage and credibility and to broaden

[8] http://um.dk/en/danida-en/activities/strategic/gender/peace/

their base of support (Swerdlow, 1993; Taylor, 1997). There is often a stereotypical belief that women are less threatening than men, thus allowing women greater room to maneuver in public spheres, and emboldening them to transform their private suffering into public protest (Sharoni, 2001: 92-93; Giacaman & Johnson, 1989: 162).

Variants of the maternal peace argument have come under criticism by those who find that it is not supported empirically. For example, mothers' and fathers' attitudes towards militarism and war in the U.S., for example, do not differ significantly from non-mothers and non-fathers (Conover & Sapiro, 1993: 1087). Others, however, criticize the conflation of women and motherhood with the idea that women are by nature peaceful. They point out the many ways in which motherhood has been used to serve racist practices and sinister forms of nationalism, for example, in Nazi Germany (Koontz, 1997). Some women have been willing accomplices in nationalist or ethnic propaganda campaigns idealizing women and mothers of a particular group in ways that may serve to foment conflict (Waller & Rycenga, 2000). Motherhood, according to Cynthia Cockburn, thus skirts dangerously close to patriarchal definitions of women's role that can be co-opted by nationalisms propagating that very ideology (2004: 38).

Designing policy around the assumption of women's peacemaking ignores critical ways in which women also perpetuate violence. It runs the risk of ignoring men's contributions to peacemaking, and eclipses local realities and local solutions to conflict. Women's peacemaking proclivities need to be studied to understand more precisely under what conditions women mobilize for peace or hold more peaceloving attitudes, as well as what gives rise to such correlations where they exist. Clearly this is not something that can be assumed as something essential or natural about women in spite of the prevalent tropes that suggest otherwise.

"Woman as Natural Environmentalist"

Scholarship has largely debunked the notion popularized in the 1980s that women have a special affinity with the environment and along with it the archetype of woman as the natural environmentalist. In its place new discussions of women have emerged in relation to property rights and access to and control of resources. Women's roles in the household were seen at one time as giving them particular interests in natural resources, particularly in food and fuel sources. Ecofeminist writings gave salience to these connections but attributed them to links between women, biology and nature rather than women's household tasks. Maria Mies, for example argued that women's own bodies like nature were productive and creative. Vandana Shiva went so far as to draw from a notion of the feminine principle in Hindu cosmology to argue that all third world women were connected to this feminine principle, which could be rediscovered.

Conversely when women exhibit "non-environmentalist" activities, they may be regarded as traitors to their natural tendencies. For example, indigenous women can get funding as long as they are in the right garb and seem close enough to nature, but the same woman in non-indigenous clothing might be considered "too modern." This natural environmentalist trope may serve to keep women frozen in time. In spite of the critiques of such views as essentialist and static, there has been little done to reconceptualize and reframe these old tropes and look at women's relationship to the environment in more politicized terms (Leach 2008). With the new interest in global climate change, one has to wonder which trope will inform how women are brought into these discussions. Will they be regarded as vital decision makers or will they be an afterthought in policies that consider them part of "nature"?

“Woman as Group Member”

Women are often depicted as primarily operating in groups and organizations and of having little if any individuality outside of the group. One consequence of this is that grants and micro-finance loans are allocated largely to women in groups, not to individuals who might be large or small-scale entrepreneurs. This impetus for funding groups may be positive, but it also may be a less efficient use of resources in cases where it might be more appropriate to fund successful or promising individual entrepreneurs rather than opportunistic groups formed for the sole purpose of gaining access to donor funds.

“Woman as Mother”

Embedded in many of the tropes mentioned above (peacemaker, provider) is the archetype of woman as mother, generally a virtuous one. There are many problems with this equating of woman with mother apart from the obvious ones, e.g., not all women are mothers and not all mothers are virtuous. For some, the archetype evokes images of carework at the expense of appreciating their roles as economic producers within the informal economy, agricultural sector and labor force more generally. It also may conjure images of mothers participating in a unitary household in spite of the reality that many households are non-pooling and consist of multiple and often divided goals and economic strategies.

“Women as Child”

We see women and children frequently lumped together in a “womanandchild” trope. This still continues in spite of a long history of critiques of this trope (Sylvester 1998).

The notion linking women and children in the West and many parts of the world has its origins in the idea that women and children are property of the men, who as fathers and husbands are responsible for providing for them.

Nowhere is the “women as children” trope more evident than in the development agendas that connect women and children’s health. We see for example in NORAD’s program the elision of women and children in a thematic area entitled: “Maternal, child and women's health.” The UN Secretary General Bank Ki Moon launched a “Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health” in 2010 supported by WHO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNAIDS and the World Bank. Several countries lump women and children together in one ministry as in India with its Ministry of Women and Children Development.

By equating women and children in this way, women are infantilized and seen almost as childlike. This trope regards women as helpless, dependent, innocent, and small, like children. By pushing the adult women into girlhood and diminishing them in this way, one does not have to think about them as major economic or political actors. Micro-credit is seen as appropriate for women, regardless of the size of their business and their capacity to absorb capital. Women can play small or side roles in government, in peace talks, in business, and in other arenas.

Of course the trope is problematic for children as well: some fight in wars, many support households through their businesses, some are married at a young age and bear children themselves, but that would deserve its own separate essay. On the one hand, “women and children” highlights the relationship between women and children, which is evident in the case of maternal mortality and in women’s role in providing for children.

Girls can be seen as future women and can be linked in this way, e.g., the education of girls who become educated women, or female genital cutting of girls, which has lifelong implications for women. But girls cannot simply be equated with children in the "womanandchild" trope. While there is a connection, there is no more link between the child and future woman than the child and future man. Perhaps there is a connection in that women's welfare (e.g., access to credit) impacts their ability to take care of their household, including children. But this is the case for men as well, although in different ways and to different degrees depending on the context. Thus one can no more assume a "womanandchild" entity as one can "manandchild." By collapsing women and children, we lose attention to the specific needs of both and to the rights of women in particular.

UNFP features on its webpage quotes from world leaders regarding women and children's health:

"The Government of Rwanda is committed to improving child and maternal health as an integral part of its health-care system and poverty-eradication program."
— H.E. Paul Kagame, President, Republic of Rwanda

"... we are emphasizing the health of women and girls. Through the Global Health Initiative, we will provide integrated and essential health services for women and their children".
— Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State of the United States of America

"Investing in the health of women and children ensures that families, communities and nations thrive."
— Melinda French Gates, Co-Chair, The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

"It is unacceptable that women and children are excluded from the benefits of progress, just because they are vulnerable."
— Naoto Kan, Prime Minister, Japan

"On our part, we remain committed to getting the most out of every dollar invested to improve the health of Ethiopian women and children, and ensure the future development of our country."
— Meles Zenawi, Prime Minister, The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

CONCLUSIONS

The essay has explored some of the potential pitfalls in utilizing the various development related archetypes. They are suggestive of how persistent the modernization frame has been regardless of all the various permutations gender and development frames have undergone. Women in Development (WID) emerged in the 1970s and the proponents of this modernization frame argued that women should have equal access to education, training, and technology to make them more productive and more engaged in markets like men. Although Gender and Development (GAD), which emerged from the 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing introduced notions of the social construction of gender and the intersectionality of gender, race and class, as well as a new discourses on empowerment as a result of pressures from Southern women's movements, the liberal WID discourse still persists through the various archetypes discussed in this essay.

The stylized facts and assertions about women lend themselves to utilitarian modernization solutions, e.g., educating women leads to economic growth, a reduction of terrorism, end to conflict, promotion of environmental sustainability and many other goods. On its website, even UN Women claims that gender based violence must end because it "not only violates human rights, but also hampers productivity, reduces human capital and undermines economic growth."[9] Moreover, supporting women is often depicted as having multiplier effects throughout the household, community and nation.

One must ask, can't women can be supported because THEY require education,

[9] http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/

health and a life free of violence, not simply because they are sources of national security and economic growth? Why is it not sufficient to promote women as leaders to advance gender equality as a matter of fairness and justice, rather than a means to end corruption or advance other social goals?

The UN Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health Strategy document says the initiative is the "right thing to do" because it reduces poverty, stimulates economic productivity and growth, is cost effective, and helps women and children realize their fundamental human rights. Nowhere does it say that it is intrinsically good for women (and children) to be healthy or that it helps *them* live full lives and fulfill their own objectives.[10]

Many of these tropes result in technical fixes rather than changes in power structures in the home, society or state. As Batliwala and Dhanraj (2004, 13) argue: "The neo-liberal rules for the new woman citizen... are quite clear: improve your household's economic condition, participate in local community development (if you have time), help build and run local (apolitical) institutions like the self-help group; by then, you should have no political or physical energy left to challenge this paradigm."

Moreover, many development solutions are depoliticized. Yet empowerment is a political process. Empowerment is a relational concept that involves changes in social relationships, which generally take place through conflict, contention, and collective action (see work of Sardenberg 2009 and Romano 2002). Yet these female tropes that prevail suggest that "power is something that can be given or bestowed, something men have *in excess* and that women are *lacking."* Women become the deserving recipients of development assistance, while men appear to be a waste of

[10] page 5-6, http://www.un.org/sg/hf/Global_StategyEN.pdf

resources. Women are to become agents of change through microfinance or by giving them a quota of seats in the local council (Cornwall, lecture UW-Madison 2011).

Women are framed as morally superior to men in dangerous ways. Men appear in these tropes as more selfish, corrupt, inattentive to their families, and lazier than women. They drink too much, are engaged in violence against women, and are conduits of HIV/AIDS. Little attention is given to masculinities in development policy debates or to the gender relations within households, communities and society more generally. The assumptions about men are often degrading and unproven, yet they are simply assumed and asserted. Little effort is made to understand under what conditions the claims about men might be true, and the assertions end up being little more than unfounded stereotypes. There is even less effort made to understand why men or women behave the way they do. It is curious that there is so little response to these framings from men in the development community and more generally, especially those in the south. Certainly the power relations embedded in North-South relations must be at play.

Sexuality falls out of these frames and women are portrayed primarily as careworkers in the home or as economic or political actors. Women who do not conform to the sexual norms of society (e.g., sex workers who voluntarily choose their profession, lesbians) are absent from these tropes or are regarded as “bad women,” according to Cornwall (2011). They don’t fit the heroine-victim binaries that are so prevalent within these development archetypes, which are meant to reify particular characteristics of people rather than highlight the complexity, contradictions, and ambiguities in human nature.

We need more studies that interrogate the implicit claims embedded in the archetypes and examine under what conditions the tropes hold. For example, with respect to the claims regarding education and women, Buvinic et. al (2008) in a study of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) regarding gender parity found that "82 of 122 countries for which data are available achieved the official MDG3 target of gender parity in primary and secondary enrollment by 2005… [but] in general, progress in expanding women's opportunities has lagged behind progress in expanding women's capabilities." They found that when one expands the set of gender indicators to include things like under-five mortality rates by gender, contraception use, teen pregnancy, labor force participation, or wages, there was considerably less progress for women.

With respect to claims about microcredit dampening domestic violence, a quasi-experimental survey taken in 69 villages in Bangladesh (2006-2007) found that female borrowers who have less or no control over the use of the given credit, face significantly more domestic violence compared to the non-borrowers (Aktaruzzaman and Guha-Khasnobis 2008). It is these kinds of studies, both within particular contexts and carried out comparatively, that can help demystify the archetypes and show under what conditions they may or may not hold.

Finally, we need to rethink power from a more structural perspective, as Andrea Cornwall has argued, so that we clarify the gendered dimensions of power and show what it takes to transform power relations. Micro-credit and education are important but are insufficient to change power relations. Development projects and policy changes similarly may not be enough when we are talking about structural changes. We need to rethink gender beyond limiting binaries and pervasive heteronormativity and reimagine assistance – from "helping" and "rescuing" to

solidarity and support for with those forces trying to change structures and impediments to their empowerment. Much more attention needs to be paid to those forces within each society that are already engaged in promoting changes in gender relations.

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