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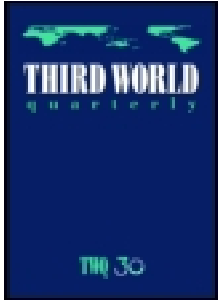

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The Unhappy Marriage between Gender and Globalisation

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The Unhappy Marriage between Gender and Globalisation

TINE DAVIDS & FRANCIEN VAN DRIEL

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ABSTRACT *This article examines the rather awkward relationship between gender and globalisation. In particular, within development studies, doubts and confusion with respect to the coherence and interpretation of gender as a concept underlie this uneasy relationship. We demonstrate how persistent orthodoxies and dichotomous thinking characterise the unhappy marriage between gender and globalisation. Instead of doing away with gender, we elaborate a multidimensional gender approach, which is much needed from a scientific perspective as well as to enhance the political potential of feminist positions and analyses. Our approach situates gender within the global/local nexus; this is illustrated by a case study of gender and political representation in Mexico.*

> At the time I was designing a course called 'Globalization and Culture' and was consistently struck by the two distinct categories into which the texts for the course fell: macro analysis of the history, structure, and expansions of economic forms of globalization and micro analysis of women's insertion into the global economy as workers and members of third world countries.[1]

Although published in 2001, this quotation from Carla Freeman still holds true. In contemporary 'grand theory' and mainstream—mainly macro—analytical frameworks about globalisation and development, gender analysis is mostly absent. At the same time, within gender and development studies, globalisation lacks articulation with gender analysis. The latter is often directed exclusively at the local level, as Freeman states. Notwithstanding elaborate analysis within gender and development studies, aiming to examine core mechanisms of globalisation from a gender perspective in the most dominant debates in this field, globalisation itself is not analysed but is taken for granted.

This leads to the production of orthodoxies that are repeatedly reproduced, in which women are ignored as carriers of globalisation. Within these debates globalisation often appears as a presumption, as a process 'out there' that has devastating impacts on the locally lived realities of women's lives. Within these kinds of polarised analyses women are represented unidimensionally, as local victims of evil global processes, or as heroines

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(supposedly) fighting against or resisting these global processes. Neither of these representations corresponds to the complex lived realities of women or men, nor to the complex nature of (gendered) globalisation processes. The interpretations of these processes are based on dichotomous thinking, representing not only locality in juxtaposition to globalisation but also the local as the female—cultural/traditional—realm opposing the masculine—economic/modern—global sphere.

According to the editors of a special issue of *Development and Change* on gender myths and feminist fables, awkwardness and uneasiness characterise contemporary relations between gender and development.[2] Just as the monolithic and rather essentialist representations of women as better peacemakers, or as less corrupt, among others, figure in the relationship between gender and development in general, within the debates on gender and globalisation one-dimensional representations of women as victims and heroines are evoked. Particularly within the debate on the globalising feminisation of poverty this last representation assumes universal and mythical proportions. In most of these debates it is not gender analysis *per se* that is questionable but rather its absence. A critical re-examination of the relation between gender and globalisation seems, therefore, imperative.

Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead even question the political sustainability of gender:

> Its explanatory power and political salience have come under steady critique in recent years, further fragmenting the possibility of mounting coherent positions in its defence. Our papers also raise acutely the question of whether there is something in the lack of a consistent and coherent version of what 'gender' is actually all about that serves to undermine the political potency of feminist positions. But these doubts have also served to further weaken the possibilities for its use within the development arena as a meaningful tool for sharpening political awareness and mobilizing action.[3]

Three different concerns are raised in this quote: in the first place the question about the coherence of the concept of gender and the consequent need for its re-examination. Second, its explanatory and political power is doubted and third its applicability to the practice of development policies is questioned. In this article we will address two of these concerns, namely the conceptual and analytical power of gender, which in our understanding is intrinsically linked to its political power. We start by scrutinising the practice of feminist development theory, since it seems that we are, indeed, confused about what gender is all about. We do this by exploring the link between gender and globalisation.

We therefore need to re-examine the theoretical thinking and assumptions that have given way to universalisms about women that so characterise the debates on globalisation and gender and the unhappy marriage between them, here labelled as global orthodoxies. Different orthodoxies such as the victim–heroine, the global–local and the traditional–modern orthodoxy will be discussed and deconstructed. A critical discussion of these orthodoxies will lead us to the formulation of a different conceptualisation of globalisation

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and gender in contrast to the one displayed in these orthodoxies. We will illustrate the analytical possibilities of this approach by presenting a case from Mexico on the political representation of motherhood in Mexican politics.

Debates and orthodoxies

The first question that comes to the fore is that of what we consider to be orthodoxies. As we will illustrate in deconstructing one such orthodoxy below, it is often dichotomous thinking that lies at the heart of the production and reproduction of these orthodoxies that take on mythical proportions, dichotomous thinking that has turned into what Bourdieu calls orthodoxies representing fixed dominant discourses maintaining the status quo.[4] Orthodoxies have become narratives and texts which, although unwillingly and partly unconsciously, inform our daily science practices of theorising, debating and doing research. As Cornwall *et al* argue, the emergence and persistence of some of these narratives as myths can be explained by the interaction between development bureaucracy and development scientists.[5] This interaction results either in pressure to produce convenient outcomes for policy makers, or in scientific outcomes being all too easily turned into convenient truths by the development bureaucracy. This may explain part of the success, attraction and persistence of such myths.

In the following paragraphs we will briefly discuss some perspectives on the relation between gender and globalisation that we believe are based on dichotomous thinking, and are acquiring mythical proportions in their repetitiveness and claims of universal truth. We explicitly want to emphasise that not all feminist work or gender analysis on globalisation is based on orthodoxies, suffers from dichotomous thinking, or reaches a mythical state. There are many eloquent, nuanced and contextualised analyses that do not reflect this binary thinking.[6]

Nevertheless, one of the early and probably most familiar and widespread orthodox positions on globalisation and gender within development studies is a perspective that depicts globalisation as bad for—mostly Third World—women. Globalisation is studied and described for its supposed effects on the lives of women and its content is defined by diverse processes such as accelerated capitalism or neoliberalism, resulting in international prostitution and trafficking of women, among other things. An example of such an approach to globalisation can be found in Wichterich.[7] In her book women feature as victims, while globalisation figures as the perpetrator, as a nightmare scenario for most of the world's women. At the same time women are called upon to resist these devastating developments. Rowbotham & Linkogle also see women as the agents of change.[8] We do not want to argue against the negative impact for women of neoliberal restructuring or environmental degradation as described by these authors. Many of their findings and the phenomena they describe are accurate and real, and writing about the marginalisation, abuse of and violence against women is absolutely

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necessary. But as real as these phenomena are, it is the representation of gender that is articulated along with it—reducing gender to women only—and the unilinear and top-down approach to globalisation that troubles us. This representation constitutes the central concern of this article.

Emphasising the negative impacts of globalisation tends to produce homogeneous views on categories of victims of macroeconomic relations. One of those categories is produced in the feminisation of poverty debate. Although this debate has received extensive attention in the literature, the premises on which it rests still linger on in the formulation and execution of social policy.[9] Furthermore, most attention within this debate is directed to whether or not a feminisation of poverty actually exists. This is not our main concern in this article, however. Here we will take a closer look at this debate as one example of how dichotomous thinking informs a scientific practice in which, albeit unwillingly, an implicit reversion of gender theorising takes place and gender even evaporates.

Global enemy versus female victims/heroines

The main argument of the feminisation of poverty thesis is that globalisation has accelerated the feminisation of poverty, mostly reflected in the increasing number of households that are headed by women. The following step—to the claim that households headed by women are poor—is then easily made. However, different studies have proved that female-headed households are not poor *per se*, and question the mere existence of the feminisation of poverty itself.[10]

The claim that female-headed households as a category are poor is an implicit reproduction of the male-breadwinner paradigm. Female heads of households combine breadwinning and caring tasks and this combination then appears as a deviation from the norm. The fact that education and care are also labour is thereby moved into the background. Female-headed households are not compared with male-headed households in which the male head does not have a partner and takes on the educational and caring tasks.

Different processes of exclusion take place here. Globalisation itself is not analysed as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon but is merely studied in its (assumed) effects. The same holds true for a gender analysis: gender mechanisms are not analysed as a set of intersecting and complex power relations but merely as certain effects on women and on women only. What is left unquestioned is the fact that women are captured in the repetition of a discourse in which gender differences are indirectly represented via an image of femininity in juxtaposition to the masculine breadwinner ideal. The complex relations between processes of gender and globalisation by contrast are not addressed at all.

It is obvious that questions of whether female-headed households are poorer and what the causes of this poverty might be are generally addressed in economic terms. The fact that female-headed households are often better off emotionally, socially or even economically is not discussed. The same

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applies to the fact that women within male-headed households can be worse off, despite their households being headed by men, because, for example, they are subjected to violence or lack access to resources if the latter are controlled by men. As Jackson states, what is lacking is a nuanced and context-specific understanding of how households embody both separate and shared interests, and both conflict and co-operation; these intersections are absolutely critical to the workings of gender.[11]

As a result, women are made into the instrument of the fight against poverty on the basis of such clichés, both nationally and internationally. In connecting female-headed households in a linear manner to the feminisation of poverty and by characterising the latter as a result of globalisation and as a global phenomenon, unilinear and universalistic representations of both women and globalisation are formulated and reproduced as global orthodoxies. Instead of deconstructing this essentialist stance on gender relations, it is actually reinstated.[12]

This is but one example of an analysis in which globalisation appears as the enemy and women as its victim. As described above, different studies portray women as victims without agency, but at the same time they are still often called upon to awaken and resist globalisation. A strange phenomenon occurs because these orthodoxies seem to reproduce a kind of black box. They do not give any clue how women will turn from being victims into heroines since they are, as this conceptualisation of globalisation suggests, positioned outside the processes of globalisation itself. As such these orthodoxies diminish the political power of feminist analysis and positions since they mystify the way that women's resistance should be understood and conceptualised in relation to specific power relations.

Moreover, this black box rings a familiar bell from the past: defining women both as problem and as solution to problems that are beyond their control. If we recall the first feminist debates on Women in Development (WID), the parallel with the critique of these early debates becomes clear.[13] The contemporary debates on women and globalisation still tend to mirror the premises that women are somehow positioned outside the system, suffering its consequences, albeit as outsiders, and leaving no room for the idea that women can also be carriers of the system.

Besides the fact that this seems to bring us back to studying women, instead of studying gender relations, the way in which power relations are portrayed in this debate also evokes former paradigms of thinking in dichotomies between oppressors and oppressed, as in the more Marxist and socialist informed Women and Development (WAD) debates, except that now globalisation replaces (patriarchal) capitalism. Global orthodoxies such as the one described above reproduce the male-breadwinner paradigm and, thus, implicitly the status quo. Therefore, in our view, it is not a *failing* gender analysis that gives rise to universalisms and unilinear thinking about women and globalisation but rather the *absence* of gender analysis. As we have tried to make clear above, these orthodoxies are rather based on an analysis of women as a category and on an unproblematic notion of globalisation, and much less on gender and globalisation, let alone on the

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relations between the two. Addressing 'women's issues' is, as Carol Pateman wrote, not the same as engaging with feminist theory, however tempting this might seem.[14] Moreover, following Pateman, addressing globalisation in terms of 'women's issues' runs the risk of being silenced in debates on development and globalisation theory, since these matters are dismissed as peripheral to the 'core businesses' of globalisation theory. They do not pose any challenge to mainstream arguments since they are not considered to constitute distinctive problems of their own that can not be solved or addressed by mainstream theory.

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Global versus local

Representing globalisation solely as bad processes that victimise women inherently evokes other orthodoxies, such as thinking in global spheres versus the local realm, as already indicated above. It is not only studies that focus on women and globalisation that display this conceptualisation, many of the studies that do apply a gender analysis, ie which go beyond the category of women, also lean heavily on this way of thinking. As Moore states, the dichotomy between the global and the local is a construction that figures as a truth that is not questioned, let alone theorised and conceptualised.[15]

This global–local dichotomy underpins quite a few feminist analyses of globalisation. Here global processes often appear as masculine economic processes of international production invading the feminine local cultural domain of consumption.[16] For example, Bayes, Hawkesworth and Kelly are of the opinion that globalisation fundamentally challenges the public/private divide, and that women are confronted with contradictory gender ideologies locally.[17] Their point of view is that global processes of change have local consequences, although they believe that people can mediate these changes. Nevertheless, they still represent globalisation in its locally top-down effects.

Although in this kind of analysis the concept of gender is not reduced to women only, as systems of masculinity and femininity are also encompassed, once again the paradigm of the WAD debates seems to be repeated, especially when calling upon women to resist globalisation. In particular, Chandra Mohanty takes an outspoken position in the debate.[18] In a revision of her well known essay on ethnocentrism within Western feminism in the mid-1980s she states that it is mainly black women who are the victims of masculine globalisation. The reorganisation of gender is part of the global strategy of capitalism, according to Mohanty, and this gender reorganising is racialised.[19] To complicate the monolithic globalised representations of women, however, she also argues that images of victimised women and empowered womanhood negate each other.[20] If, as Mohanty suggests, we have to overcome the monolithic view of women as victims, how can we have a political project that addresses globalisation only in its apparent negative and one-way local consequences?

More authors confirm that both globalisation and gender should be considered as complex phenomena that include as well as exclude women (and men) as players in those processes and consider gender to be an integral

part of globalisation.[21] Marchand and Runyan's call for reinstalling the global–local nexus as a dynamic relationship is important because thinking in the global–local dichotomy does not stand on its own. It is often accompanied by other dichotomies such as the economic versus the cultural, the traditional versus the modern, and the West versus the rest. Global–local dichotomies almost automatically lead to thinking exclusively in convergence or divergence paradigms, not opening up the possibility of also conceptualising globalisation in terms of hybridisation or creolisation and thus of considering globalisation in terms of trans-, alternative- or multiple modernities.[22]

In other words, the above-described orthodoxies fall short not only on the complexity of gender but also on the complexity of globalisation. What is required is a reconceptualisation of globalisation that reinstates it as being simultaneously social, economic, political and cultural. The cultural is particularly essential since it is considered to be one of the key features of modernity that has globalisation at its heart, by altering the way in which meaning is attached to place.[23] As a consequence, globalisation directly interferes with local and cultural systems of giving meaning, transforming modernity as well as tradition.[24] Globalisation therefore has to be considered as inherently modern without automatically implying 'Western' but rather as 'a metaphor of new means and ends, of new materialities and meanings' referring, almost everywhere, to 'transformations, indeed, that have made the very idea of "the global" thinkable'.[25] Local cultures can persevere, combining, adapting and transforming different elements, trends and traditions simultaneously.[26] Since these mixtures of elements can be old or new, modern or traditional, at the same time, the existence of 'other' modernities has to be recognised, not as mere reactions to Western modernity but as grounded in recognisable, distinct historical processes.[27]

In order to grasp globalisation as complex and multifaceted processes and to avoid orthodoxies, the global–local nexus, as a dynamic process, has to be central to understanding the relation between gender and globalisation. Instead of considering global movements as separate from or opposed to the local realm, we need to rethink them as linked and interconnected, as part of embedded, situated and particular contextualised practices and social realities.[28]

However transnational or global these practices may be in their consequences or aims, their interconnectedness is not inherently universalistic as is often assumed or claimed, but always embedded in some kind of locality, even if this locality is not necessarily bound to one geographical space, as defined by Appadurai.[29] It is, in particular, through this inherently assumed universalism that representations of globalisation reach their mythical status. Breaking with these myths and orthodoxies implies, in our view, the deconstruction of global discourses as universal. Processes of globalisation need to be de- and reconstructed as multidimensional discourses, encompassing both discursive and institutional practices as well as the dimensions of negotiating the individual subjectivity of real life actors.

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What we need is a gendered reconceptualisation of globalisation, whereby local forms of globalisation are understood not merely as effects, but also as constitutive ingredients in the changing character of globalisation processes.[30] This implies a gender analysis that focuses neither exclusively on women nor exclusively on global systems, and results in situating the local in juxtaposition to the global. If the global is constantly being produced, instead of ready-made and primordial, so is the local and with it different contents and meanings of gender.

The gender lens

This brings us back to the question of what gender is about, to discussions addressing differences and diversity that are relevant to unequal power relations and to flexibility. An analytical approach that offers this kind of flexibility is what we have called the gender lens.[31] This analytical approach is grounded in the constituting elements of gender discourses and involves three dimensions of gender construction.[32] These three dimensions are situated and interconnected in such a way that helps us understand the mechanisms at work within different discourses and related practices. It is the interconnection of subjects, institutions and practices, ideas and images that shape this multifaceted perspective.

More importantly, this approach contains the necessary ingredients to link discourses with lived realities, and vice versa.[33] In other words, the gender lens offers the methodological tools to observe phenomena from multiple points of view and perspectives. The facets of symbolic representation, institutional practices and subjects, which in social reality constantly interact and which are distinguished here for analytical clarity, constitute this multidimensional approach.

In this analysis the symbolic dimension stands for representations, stereotypes, norms, values and images. This dimension of symbolic order represents the discursive ingredients that can solidify into very persistent cultural texts and stereotypes, such as the representation of masculinity in the (idealised) image of the male as breadwinner or the representation of female heads of households as poor. Although hierarchies are represented in this discursive dimension, often as dichotomies, as in 'the woman' and 'the man', they can also be contradictory and conflicting. Persistent categories are created that are no longer questioned, on the one hand, or heavily contested, on the other hand, so that the nuanced distinctions among multiple axes of difference disappear.[34]

Especially when applied to the phenomenon of globalisation, distinguishing a symbolic dimension in this phenomenon can help us understand that the ideas and symbols are not authentic, but constructed out of all kinds of regional, local, national, global, religious and historical notions. However, we must not leave the analysis at this level. These ideas, stereotypes, images, differences and hierarchies not only figure at a symbolic level or dimension, but are also reflected in socially institutionalised practices, ie the more practical dimension and material aspects of discourse. In this dimension

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differences are multiplied, reshaped and reinterpreted and, equally importantly, performed in different practices such as marriage laws and arrangements, labour regulations and division of labour, household composition, and so on.

Within this second dimension the differences articulated in the symbolic dimension become institutionalised and embodied in the organisation of everyday life. Differences within the symbolic dimension are represented as the differences between 'the woman and the man' or between 'the homosexual and the heterosexual', 'the black and the white' etc, whereas differences in an institutional dimension become diversified. Since social groups coalesce around a variety of circumstances that form the basis of a sense of shared identity, diversification can be based on categories of class, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, rural/urban divides, age, religion, among others. Categories of class give colour to other identity markers such as ethnicity and gender and vice versa. In this dimension such categories become people of flesh and blood and women and men become poor or rich, black or white, Muslim or Christian, among others.

So, if we turn back to our analysis and deconstruction of the debate on feminisation and poverty, we can see with hindsight that, in the symbolic dimension, the dichotomous representations of men as breadwinners and women as caregivers are being reproduced without being questioned. Or, even more accurately, what is left unquestioned is how the practice of household organisation is informed and constituted by notions of masculinity, femininity, heterosexual normativity and the power relations at stake. In other words, the dynamic relations between the discursive symbolical dimension and the institutional dimension of practices are not taken into consideration.

Negotiating the symbolic ground rules not only depends on structural positioning and on identities that are ascribed to people, but also on the individual agency of actors and groups. The third dimension is this dimension of subjectivity, in which individuals shape their own identities and juggle all kinds of contradictory representations within institutional and practical limits. This dimension refers to the process of identification of individuals and (collective) actors with the multiple, often contradictory identities or aspects of ascribed identities in creating room to manoeuvre. It is this dimension that addresses the way actors negotiate (dominant) discourses, often resulting in the decentralisation and deconstruction of the symbolic dichotomies presented as truth. These symbolic dichotomies are seldom lived as such. The subjective realities experienced by individual men and women are left completely out of sight in the feminisation of poverty orthodoxy, since how people deal with such institutionalised ideas and practices and the meaning attached to them varies, of course, indefinitely. It is through analysing multiple dynamics between these different dimensions that the way discourses get (re)produced, (de)constructed and reconstructed through real life experience is made intelligible.

Herein also lies the political potency of this analytical approach. Not only does it provide leeway to describe, deconstruct and analyse dominant

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discourses, it seeks to localise and understand the way in which such discourses are negotiated within different practices. It is in the momentum of negotiation that the marginalised, the unspoken, the subaltern interferes—and is sometimes articulated—with dominant discourses. If we want to resist, decentralise, or alter dominant and exclusive discourses, we must constantly move from the centre to the margins and look for the moments and ways in which these discourses are performed and negotiated, allowing us to understand the grounds and limits of women's and men's room to manoeuvre. In the next section we will discuss an example of how working with a multilayered gender lens may be helpful for understanding these dynamics in their complexities.

An example

When working on gender and political representation in Mexico, the multilayered conceptualisation of gender helped us understand the individual subjective strategies of, in this case, predominantly right-wing politically active women. In particular, it helped us understand their negotiation of political discourses, while including the working of such discourses at a more national and global level. In Mexico, at different moments of time in history, femininity has tended to be represented through an (ideal) image of motherhood in political and national discourses. This image is a very persistent image or archetype that tends to resurface at times of key shifts in history. Moments of democratisation of authoritarian systems can be considered as one of such keyshifts. From the first struggles for suffrage on the continent—for Mexico dating back as far as 1916—until the more recent democratisation of Latin American states, global processes of modernisation and democratisation have shaped the outcome of the struggle for women's rights at the national political level. The ideal image of motherhood resurfaces in these democratisation processes, as happened at the beginning of the 20th century in establishing a modern Mexican state, where suffrage became an issue. Both moments reflect the fact that women's citizenship was considered a vital part of the creation of modern Mexico, with its image of democracy, progressiveness and economic stability.[35] Hosting the first UN international women's conference in Mexico in 1975 and the more recent installation of a quota system in 2002, in which no more than 70% of the candidates on the lists of political parties for the senate and the parliament can be of the same sex, has to be seen in that light.

While during suffrage struggles the image of motherhood was part of the discursive repertoire mainly targeted at excluding women from the formal political arena, more recently the same repertoire has been targeted at including women in public life and politics. Within the more recent processes of democratisation, for example during the regime change of the 1990s, when for the first time in more than 70 years of ruling the country the dynasty of the Partido Revolucionario Institutional (PRI) showed signs of cracking, the urge to incorporate more women into Mexico's political system has to be understood as the outcome of years of feminist and women's struggles but

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also out of the need to uphold a democratic image. Free trade accords such as NAFTA were in the making and Mexico's national policies were aimed at making it a suitable partner in this modern neoliberal world. Within these modernisation and democratisation processes the image of motherhood resurfaces and sets the limits of women's inclusion in politics. Especially within the discourse of the right-wing Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), a former opposition party that has won the past two presidential elections, this image figures in articulating (anti-corruption) morality with politics as part of a reformulated national political identity.[36]

The PAN promoted—and to a certain degree still does—an idealised image of modern motherhood by simultaneously combining modern notions of working and politically participating women with traditional notions of femininity as motherhood, in the end the ultimate fulfilment and destiny of all women. Or, as one of their female Members of Parliament once said: 'the country can do without female lawyers and politicians but not without mothers'.[37] Speaking with different politically active women within the PAN, in particular members of parliament, it seemed that these women reproduced this rather essentialist discourse without altering it. A closer look at and analysis of their life histories, however, revealed that, in reproducing this discourse and negotiating this ideal image of femininity in their own day-to-day life as politicians, these women were able to create manoeuvring space by combining quite opposite values and spheres.

Since politics is still a masculine domain, entering it while upholding an identity predominantly as wives and mothers made it possible for the women MPs to be a politician and not lose their femininity or, even more importantly, their decency. Even a well known and respected MP, who was at that time single and without children, fiercely propagated this ideal image of femininity. As a result, she reproduced this image as a moral notion of motherhood instead of a biological one, which could be acted out by any woman. This moral image helped individual female politicians to 'smooth over', as it were, the discrepancies between private lives—often running a family—and the public life of being a professional, in which politics is still mainly conceived as a man's business.

Analysing the rearticulation and reproduction of this idealised motherhood at an individual dimension, as political subjectivity, showed that the meaning of the ideal of motherhood did not have to be as essentialist and biologically deterministic as seemed the case in its symbolic dimension. In an individual subject dimension this ideal had been reformulated into a moral notion. This moral notion could be stretched in multiple directions, such as offering different women the possibility of surviving in a masculine domain and of integrating themselves more easily in the higher party ranks.

However, although stretching the meaning of this ideal, the women simultaneously rearticulated a very bourgeois and heterosexual notion of femininity. When analysed in the structural dimension where, as described above, categories of ethnicity and class, etc intersect, it becomes clear that these women are only able to practice this ideal thanks to their socio-economic—class—status, which permits them, for example, to have domestic

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help, while still claiming to be in charge as mothers and wives, performing their—ideal(ised)—roles. Further analysis of this structural dimension of institutional practices shows how this bourgeois notion of idealised motherhood is used within the political party's practices as a very convenient notion for incorporating large groups of women from the popular classes who did not form part of the party's traditional constituency, since it had a more middle class and elitist image and identity. 'Doing politics from behind the kitchen sink' as one of the PAN leaders once formulated it, seemed to appeal to a lot of women, especially in opposition to the then ruling party, the PRI, where politics was presented as situated far from the private sphere. Moreover this notion also appeals to local sets of cultural values, a secularisation of the image and archetype of motherhood: la virgin de Guadalupe, Mexico's coloured version of the Virgin Mary.

It is also a convenient image because it is not competitive with the image of men as providers and protectors. Modernising this traditional notion of femininity seemed to be rather vital in articulating a 'new moral and democratic political order', as opposed to the corrupt reputation of the PRI, during the time the PAN was still an opposition party. Promoting women to enter the political realm in their capacity as gatekeepers of morality and family tradition was part of a discursive strategy to formulate such a new moral political order and formulate a national identity along the way, combining tradition with neoliberal politics.

Analysed in its symbolic dimension an articulation of global, national and local elements is at stake. The traditional idealisation of private motherhood, of providing family care and nursing, is articulated with the modern, the public, the working and participating in politics. In the extension of motherhood to the national level, in the sense of the Mexican mother nursing '*la Mexicanidad*' (Mexicanness) it is articulated with the international—or global—in the sense of democratisation and liberal labour participation, since free trade agreements such as NAFTA were speeding up processes of democratisation and modernisation. The way in which this image of gender figures in these processes is thus as much a reinvention of modernity as it is of tradition.

In other words, this particular political practice has been simultaneously produced as traditional and modern, as global and local at the same time. Symbolically the image of motherhood is very suitable for representing the national as well as the international and global as a constitutive element of interconnectedness and transformation, since motherhood refers both to the ethnic specificity of the homeland but is also international—global—in the sense that it is an internationally recognised phenomenon and institution. Mexican modernisation as part of its globalisation process, if analysed through the gender lens, is a specific form of modernity with simultaneously national, regional and global features and is, at least as far as its process of democratisation is concerned, fundamentally gendered.

In applying this gender lens, as in the example above, we see that globalisation—understood as a process of complex interconnectedness—produces different meanings at local, national and international levels as well

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as in a symbolic and individual subjective dimension. It manifests itself locally in the way that individual right-wing political women have become carriers of globalisation as they have to relate to and negotiate—at an individual subject dimension—this hybrid (symbolic dimension) representation of femininity—the simultaneously modern and traditional image of motherhood—as part of a survival strategy enabling them to enter the public and masculine domain of politics. They are negotiating certain discourses that position women solely in the private sphere of the home. Their sexuality is at stake when entering the public domain of politics. However, in choosing the strategy of moral motherhood as legitimising their political participation and protecting their decency, they subscribe to other conservative and exclusive discourses. These discourses as part of political arrangements and practices can be targeted at incorporating women, but at the same time may be very discriminatory for women who do not fit the image of moral motherhood. Lesbian and feminist women, who do not claim motherhood as the essentialist value of their femininity, are excluded (structural/institutional dimension).

Thus modernisation and democratisation as part of globalisation processes can be considered as both shaping opportunities for women as well as posing restrictions. It may be clear that for women from other political parties these possibilities and restrictions are different, corresponding to their different party discourses, although the image of motherhood is not completely absent in the symbolic dimension of some of these other discourses. Moreover, at a national level the motherhood image figures in the search to safeguard a national identity that both differentiates Mexico from the rest of the world as well as connecting it with the rest of the modern, neoliberal world, in particular with Latin America and its neighbour, the USA. Mexico's cultural repertoire of gender seems to figure prominently in fixing certain national as well as personal identities against the background of a constant global flow.

Conclusion

We hope to have made clear that gender is all about multiplicity. We therefore argue that the concept of gender offers no universal explanatory causes, as that would suggest some sort of primordial meaning and content of gender, leading us back to the formulation of a grand old theory. Gender acquires meaning only in its specific context and discourses and through the performance of specific actors. We need complex and multilayered conceptualisations of gender in order to overcome and avoid dichotomous and rigid thinking. However, this does not mean that it is impossible to compare and theorise the workings of gender mechanisms without ascribing a predefined meaning to gender, as happens in the feminisation of poverty debate.

Using the gender lens, it still is striking how crucially gender constructions figure in the fixing of global flows. To put it differently, representations of femininity and masculinity figure prominently in shaping differences, and it is not so much the meaning of gender that is constant within globalisation

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processes, it is rather the way in which it functions that offers similarity. Gender often figures in the articulation of the global with the local in such a way that it is a border marker in fixing the flow.

Thus, we would like to reinstall the analytical power of the concept of gender, as we have explained above. The strength of this type of analysis lies not so much in its explanatory function, but rather has to be considered for its attributed value as an analytical/methodological tool. This helps to guarantee the conceptualisation of gender as encompassing power structures and discourses as well as the agency of actual men and women without being narrowed down to either one. If we were to study gender only in an individual subject dimension, narrowing it down to studying women, or men for that matter, we again would simplify gender, depoliticising feminist analysis and positions, with all the consequences explained above. If we only studied and deconstructed discourses in a symbolic and discursive dimension, we would lose track of women's and men's agency, conceptualising gender as not to be embodied, and would run the risk of being captured in a gender versus sex dichotomy.

The gender lens will help—if used flexibly, by reinstating women's and men's agency—to conceptualise globalisation processes, without encoding essentialist notions of gender. This agency should not be confused with the mythical belief in female autonomy or endlessly flexible survival strategies of poor women as discussed in Cornwall *et al*.[38] The analysis of the global–local dynamic defines women's or men's agency not in terms of autonomy but in terms of a limited manoeuvring space. This limited space is the outcome of the dynamics between discourses acted out in practices and the negotiating power and possibilities performed by actors. It therefore leaves room for considering women (just as men) to be carriers of globalisation without losing track of the power relations involved. These power mechanisms are constantly at work and are negotiated in all kinds of different practices in which they operate. It depends on the context as to which power relations are privileged, based on class, gender, and ethnicity or otherwise.

The political power of conceptualising gender as multilayered lies precisely in the awareness that discourses are always deconstructed and reconstructed by real life experiences. We should seek to understand these momentums of negotiation. Instead of positioning women outside processes of globalisation, it is within the conceptualisation of these momentums of negotiation that women's resistance can be understood.

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Notes

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14 C Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989, p 2.
15 HL Moore, 'Global anxieties', *Anthropological Theory*, 4 (1), 2004, pp 71–88.
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18 CT Mohanty, '"Under western eyes" revisited: feminist solidarity through anticapitalist struggles', *Signs*, 28 (2), 2002, pp 528–529.
19 *Ibid*, p 525.
20 *Ibid*, p 528.
21 See H Afshar & S Barrientos, 'Introduction: women, globalization and fragmentation', in Afshar & Barrientos (eds), *Women, Globalization and Fragmentation in the Developing World*, London: Macmillan Press, 1999, pp 1–17; MH Marchand & AS Runyan, 'Introduction: feminist insights of global restructuring: conceptualizations and reconceptualizations', in Marchand & Runyan, *Gender and Global Restructuring*, pp 1–22; and B Young, 'Globalization and gender: a European perspective', in Kelly *et al*, *Gender, Globalization and Democratization*, pp 27–47.
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30 Freeman, 'Is local:global as feminine:masculine?', p 1013.
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