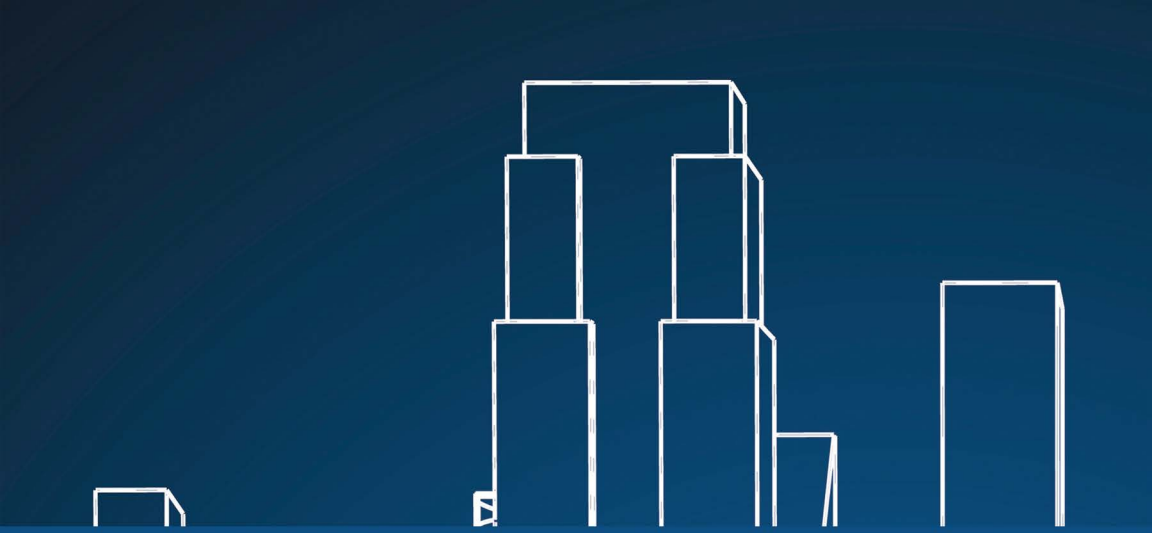

Routledge Studies in Development Economics

NEOLIBERALISM AND UNEQUAL DEVELOPMENT

ALTERNATIVES AND TRANSITIONS IN EUROPE, LATIN AMERICA AND SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Edited by
Fernando López-Castellano, Carmen Lizárraga
and Roser Manzanera-Ruiz

Neoliberalism and Unequal Development

Since the 1970s, neoliberalism has evolved from ideology to political programme, from political programme to public policy and from public policy to constitutional rule. This process of change has been made possible through the endorsement of an uncritical, a-historical and apolitical economic theory that legitimized technocratic despotism, financial deregulation, precarious labour and constitutional–political emptying.

This book examines critical perspectives in mainstream neoliberal development analysis. It examines the neoliberal experiment as a global historical construct through the cases of Africa, Latin America and Europe. The analysis begins in 1980 with the Structural Adjustment Plans in Latin America and Africa, followed in 1990 by Maastricht in the case of Europe and the euphoric shift that took place, typified by the "Africa Rising" narrative, which attempts to promote the idea of an economically emerging continent. It also considers the weakness of the state resulting from neoliberal austerity and fiscal stabilization policies, which have amplified the inability to collectively deal with the social, economic and political impact of the COVID-19 crisis. One of the key features of the book is the extensive comparative analysis between regions, using case studies, including examples from African countries.

The authors connect the different regional perspectives, included in the book, in a clear and coherent way, such that it will appeal to students and scholars interested in the social, economic and political outcomes of globalization and will also be of interest to official development agencies and third sector organizations in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe.

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Section 1

Sub-Saharan Africa

3
Neoliberal programmes in Africa south of the Sahara

Gender-blindness and development "laundering"

Soledad Vieitez-Cerdeño & Teresa Cunha

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Introduction

Neoliberalism[1] has long become an economic faith and doctrine in Africa south of the Sahara, although it has gained clearer momentum since the 1970s onwards. In fact, a glimpse of neoliberal policies was designed and first put into place by the European metropoles to avoid or, perhaps less optimistically, to delay the end of the colonial era (1930s–1940s) in Africa. Thus, several programmes, plans or projects played a relevant part in that process of testing neoliberalism as early as the beginning of the 20th century.

There were several of these experiments anticipating the institutional development framework, following the World War II and the newly formed African states after independence (1950s–1960s) (Robertson, 1984; cf. Marín-Sánchez, Rodríguez-Medela & Vieitez-Cerdeño, 2012). Along the way, women were exclusively made targets of development, whether to add them to the equation, to integrate them (supposedly being considered outside of the economy; or so it was said) or, eventually, intentionally to make them central to a sort of development "laundering" through specific perceptions, discourses and practices on gender equality via institutional gendered machineries, and so on. Along the way, interestingly enough, development discourses and certain practices have acknowledged the multidimensionality of poverty, beyond individual elements, as structural and linked to gender inequality. Yet this more humane rhetoric has not actually introduced new paths towards poverty eradication, gender equality or debt relief, as both continue to coexist alongside the processes of privatization, deregulation, decentralization, export orientation and so on. Of course, several local instances have repeatedly shown relevant contradictions between the neoliberal agenda and the sustainability of life or between such neoliberal policies and gender equality as the ultimate goal. We intend to show some of those contradictions through the cases of Mozambique and Botswana.

This imposed neoliberalism, despite its obvious faults and failures, and recurrent crises over the last 40 years (or more), has led to impoverishment and to precarious labour relations worldwide. State weakness and its all but disappearance in the process have been demonstrated, and the shift in position as regards markets, among other things, became evident. If, between the 1950s and the 1970s, the objective was to achieve free markets as the solution for all evils, since the end of the 1980s, markets appear to be failing rather than solving "everything". Either way, policies have remained exactly the same: unrestrained urbanization and industrialization, with women as the secondary labour force; those mainly responsible in the field of reproduction work; largely involved in precarious and temporary employment or the so-called informal economy; and who occupy two-thirds of agricultural production jobs across the continent, south of the Sahara. In fact, throughout history, women have always been more negatively affected by economic crises, and Africa is no exception. After all, "gender and development paradigms, even gender mainstreaming, have had little effect in the hegemonic neoliberal economic model of development" (Tsikata & Kerr, 2000).

Thus, "neoliberal globalization weakens social bonds, setting unmoored persons adrift" (Mate, 2015: 17; cf. Tshabalala, 2015; cf. Manzanera-Ruiz, 2009; cf. Marín-Sánchez, 2006). It signifies an intentionally programmed overthrow of pre-existing institutions and rules, as well as the dismantling of social relations. Weakening social bonds and obscuring old customs behind new facades has been made key; "sociality underlined by consumer logic", consumer choices becoming the accessible replacement for feminism (Mate, 2015: 17) or even neoliberal/market feminisms (cf. Akinbobola, 2019). Gender analyses or specific impacts on women are almost entirely absent and likewise, in general, the relevance of gender in economics. Gender relations, as well as women's individual/collective actions, memories and knowledge have remained largely ignored and invisible. Why not learn from them and incorporate these specific lessons and experiences in a more inclusive economic global system (as some female strategies and feminist claims have been co-opted anyway)? Here is a good opportunity to transform, to improve the economy for all people. However, gender relations and roles have continued to be subordinated, always secondary to the idea of a male "breadwinner" or provider (the infamous "family wage"), even nowadays. The World Bank report, *Engendering Development* (2001), is quite eloquent, offering its market-led approach, yet hardly making any concessions to the gender approach of neoliberal policies.

One must wonder whether neoliberalism allows for gender equality at all, especially when such political agendas on gender equality have clearly not been fruitful in the so-called developed countries. Why have such political programmes continued been turned into public policies and eventually into constitutional rules? Have not recent crises (global financial crisis of 2007–2008, COVID-19 and so on) shown clearly enough that alternatives based on real scientific data derived from the Social Sciences (Anthropology, Economics, Sociology) are needed, and demand application? Policies must, in fact, be connected to particular social and cultural arenas, including scientific findings, and be geared towards "solving" social, economic and political problems, that is, to address people's daily problems and real needs, increasing options for them. In fact, both gender inequality and women's empowerment should be contextualized (in a specific location, history, politics, space) to make sense at all (Cornwall & Anyidoho, 2010). Policies and constitutional rules must incorporate knowledge on such sociocultural factors, and the rights acquired through social and women's movements (cf. Manzanera-Ruiz & Lizárraga, 2017; Vieitez-Cerdeño, 2017; Manzanera-Ruiz & Lizárraga, 2013). In our respective field experiences, we have faith in such claims by African women, since they never remain passive, but are relevant actors for social, political and economic change (Cunha & Casimiro, 2017; Cunha, 2015; Cunha, 2016). Additionally, a revised concept of economics is needed to incorporate the many apparently non-economic factors: local institutions, often described as informal, local agencies and strategies, as well as reactions and resistances (cf. Cunha, 2015). The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, better known as the World Bank (WB), was well aware of this when introducing the notion of social capital, for instance, in the 1980s.

In this chapter, we address mainstream neoliberal development policies as experiments in Africa south of the Sahara, such as those of the structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s, and their negative effect on women and gender equality (Vieitez-Cerdeño, 2001; Kipkemboi Rono, 2002), but also others within the relatively more recent (and counterproductive) "Africa rising" narrative at the turn of the 21st century. Thus, economically emergent and democratic African countries have been praised for their improved governance, mid-to-high single-digit economic growths, rising incomes, emerging middle-classes as beneficiaries of these incomes and so on (Mahajan & Gunther, 2009; Taylor, 2014; Brooks, 2018). The African Rising Conference, organized by the International Monetary Fund, declared its aim "to take stock of Africa's strong economic performance" (IMF, 2014). Some countries have been made successful examples of such neoliberal processes: Mozambique and Botswana, located in Southern Africa, and both considered "exemplary models" of democracy and economic growth. "Mozambique had a liberalized economy and was at the forefront of numerous accounts of Africa's rise in 2014" (Brooks, 2018), serving "as an important figurehead for the wider Africa rising narrative" on a continental scale (IMF,

2014). On the other hand, Botswana has been praised as a growing investment destination, along with Uganda and Kenya. In Christine Lagarde's own words, as Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, they were named the "African lions", roaring loud (IMF, 2014). Botswana is considered a middle-income country where, through domestic private enterprises, investments will grow partly, financed with bank loans. As with Nigeria and Kenya, Botswana has designed planned fiscal adjustments in anticipation of potential shocks (*Ibidem*). Development success was based on the emergence of an African middle-class, despite the fact that poverty levels have remained high and impoverishment is prevalent.

Crafting institutional development

Development has been the framework to discuss African data since the last gasps of colonialism, and thus globally linked to poverty in the world order, an indignity for "underdeveloped" countries. These notions of frugality, sense of community and even sufficiency were widespread until 1940, and poverty as material deprivation became key for evaluating well-being, thus justifying social intervention (Escobar in Schech & Haggis, 2002). Soon enough impoverished people, women included, were made the target, and not coincidentally, institutions that have been "taking the reins of the world", such as the International Monetary Fund (previously named Stabilization Fund), the World Bank, the United Nations, appeared immediately afterwards. Meanwhile, the history of Africa and the African contributions to the world have been kept well hidden from Western eyes for centuries, thus the negative legend of the "people without history". The way it was built has a lot to do with the fixed ideas of the continent, and the persistence of experiments to "develop" her, most, if not all, unsuccessful. We often forget that the first and longest development project in the world was set in Africa: the Gezira land-leasing scheme, introduced by the British in the 1920s, aimed to control local labour and secure cotton exports in Sudan (cf. Barnett, 1977). This project has experienced many changes in course, after more than a century of existence. Clearly, there have been many other experiments (Welfare Laws; Health, Education and Nutrition Programmes for the "natives", etc.). British colonial government, for instance, exchanged the *Colonies Development Law* for the *Colonies Development and Welfare Law* in 1939, as with others, making African women the focus of welfare.

For instance, in the final throes of colonialism, and in an attempt to delay the unavoidable end of colonialism, the Portuguese government introduced very paternalistic educational reforms for women, such as the *Promoção Social da Mulher Nativa* (the social promotion of native women programme). These reforms were part of the attempt to "humanize" the relationship with colonized Africans after the *Régimen do Indigenato*[2] and the legitimate claims to the "indigenous" education system for the class, gender and race barriers that it imposed on African peoples (Casimiro, 1986). The first studies on Mozambican women were also promoted by the colonial government and the Catholic Church at the time. They emphasized women's role in agriculture and their role as socializers of future generations within the family (Liberman & Casimiro, 1990; Manzanera-Ruiz, 2011). Thus, the education of girls was made a central point by most, if not all, colonial regimes south of the Sahara. Programmes for the promotion of women's education in the Belgian colonial Congo included the opening of "special" schools for girls, although many more male schools were created. As early as 1892, for instance, the Sisters of Charity started the first colony school for girls, where they applied the whip, chained their students and even used a sort of straightjacket. Women were thereby prepared to become wives and mothers, aimed at establishing families for labourers, soldiers, administrators and so on. Other specific programmes taught women basic rules of childcare or hygiene. The idea was, of course, to make the "good black" woman (Depaepe & Kikumbi, 2018; cf. Manzanera-Ruiz, 2011). Similar "civilizing" programmes were established elsewhere in Africa south of the Sahara, not to make African women identical to "white women" (since this was conceived as almost impossible), but to make them less lazy and more trustworthy (or whatever stereotype they had in mind at the time). In summary, African people, and women, in particular, were to be made more malleable and devoted to colonizers, and supposedly happier with their lot in life. Educating "third-world girls" to end poverty (the "girl effect") has since become a common practice in crafting development. With pilot projects in Ethiopia, Nigeria and Rwanda, claiming to promote gender equality and female empowerment, so-called girl effect has achieved rather the opposite, thus reinforcing the subordination of women (Boyd, 2016). Boyd does, in fact, define "the girl effect paradigm" as the second wave of neoliberalism, much the same as the first female-led development period (1980s–1990s), which was, after all, an "alibi of economic growth" (*Ibidem*) by making women fit market expectations.

Women were thus placed at the centre of the development focus and, thereby of economic planning, primarily through education, while nevertheless being considered absent from or in need of integration. A glance at the path of development discourses and policies for women since the 1950s is very revealing, specifically when looking at the place they give to women/gender. The Women in Development (WID) approach (1970s), based on Ester Boserup's classic work, *Women's Role in Economic Development*, opts for modernization, the transformation of agrarian societies into industrialized economies and urbanized societies. "Boserup made the argument that women had unacknowledged and untapped productive potential and that their purposeful integration into development programming would benefit the process of development" (Anyidoho, 2020: 6). The prospect of women entering the "market" was thus made central to women's advancement, while traditions or local customs presented a real obstacle to development, and were considered adverse. In this context, women were excluded due to their ignorance, either for being "peasants" or not accessing capital or both; in other words, it was their problem and their fault. Ultimately, they were poor, in poor families, lacking resources, and with low living conditions, thus a sector to "modernize" and to include in the market.

However, as they equate to half the population and were filled with economic potential, women were, in fact, efficient productive "resources", and promoting their "domestic" capabilities to fight poverty was vital. Many African governments, south of the Sahara, uncritically embraced this ideology in a context of the Cold War, particularly in the first decades after independence, despite the ideals of African socialism with regard to local peasantries playing a relevant role, and audacious alternative political and economic models (cf. Akyeampong, 2018), under the leadership of Ahmed Sékou Touré (Guinea-Conakry), Julius Nyerere (Tanzania), Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana) or Modibo Keita (Mali) in the 1960s, and Amílcar Cabral (Guinea-Bissau) or Samora Machel (Mozambique) in the 1970s. "African socialism was a search for an indigenous model of economic development for a generation that was justifiably ambivalent about capitalism, but wary of being put in the communist camp in the Cold War era" (Akyeampong, 2018: 69). Julius Nyerere was well known for his persistent opposition to structural adjustment policies and his socialist alternatives, including *ujamaa* as a specific way of life (cf. Manzanera-Ruiz, 2009).

The development establishment clearly needs women to fulfil its goals and succeed. The Women in Development (WID) approach actually made women's work and production more visible, and contributed to initiating all kinds of debates on household and domestic organization, as well as "informal" economies in the 1970s and especially in the 1980s. Thus, an improved perspective and critique of WID, the Women and Development (WAD) approach, pointed to colonial and neo-colonial structures of power as key to understanding global inequalities, including the subordination of women vis-a-vis men. In fact, it was not that women had not been a part of development, but that they had just been placed in the worst part of it (unpaid or precarious labour, limited access to land and so on); structural inequalities both locally and globally became important for the predicament of African women.

The development world only starts to refer to gender and gender relations in the 1980s, with the Gender and Development (GAD) perspective, a fact that is revealingly meaningful in itself. Aiming at participatory, equal and sustainable development, women's subordination was due to the unequal structural position of women in (re)productive economic, social and political relations, that is, patriarchy. Gender relations were finally placed at the centre by GAD, giving rise to the importance of gender "mainstreaming" in development interventions thereafter. In other words, development must include gender, that is, men and women, and not just women as targets. However, the paradox of successfully including men into the Gender and Development approach without further marginalizing women also had to be addressed (Datta, 2004), and it was not an easy problem. Even so gender mainstreaming became the operational strategy at all levels of development (tasks, policies, accountability). Other inequalities (age, class, ethnicity, etc.) were also central to unequal relations of power, but women's needs were considered specific, being separately acknowledged to promote efficiency and identify opportunities and to improve wealth redistribution by gender. The criticism of apparently "neutral" development policies also comes along

with the Gender and Development (GAD) approach, a necessary emphasis to challenge the existing gender differences in roles and relationships.

Structural adjustment programmes (SAPs)

Structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) marked a second postcolonial era and reinforced African economic failure in the first decades after independence. These adjustments were sine qua non-conditions for granting credit. Thus, "neoliberal capitalism arrived in Africa via World Bank- and IMF-prescribed structural adjustment policies (SAPs) in the early 1980s" (Tamale, 2017: 80, nota 8). Gendered machineries had also been put into effect in many African countries by then, given the limitations of the capacity of African governments to intervene in economic affairs, and the World Bank's substantial influence over their policies. Tanzania's apparent successes in tourism and mining were due to increasing foreign direct investment. Tourism has, in fact, become the second largest source of exchange after agriculture in the country. Still Tanzania remains one of the least developed countries in the world, also highly indebted (Neumann, 2008: 8). Despite the World Bank accounts of adjustment success in the case of Ghana under Jerry Rawlings, these adjustments have shown negative effects in most African countries, such as Kenya (Kipkemboi, 2002).

Being primary agricultural producers in most of Africa, women have carried the burden for increasing subsistence production to feed the growing rural (and urban) population, and to support and subsidize low-paid male migrant labour in industrial and commercial farming areas. Women have also greatly contributed to expanding cash crop production for export, but the focus on male landowners and the difficulties in accessing land or obtaining land titles has remained a hindrance. Traditionally, women have become major suppliers in the production of goods for domestic consumption and trade. In short, women have been subsidizing economic development and corporate profits through their agricultural production, trade and so on (cf. Sparr, 1995). Trade and marketing have been central, for instance, in West Africa for centuries, expanding women's operations very successfully up to the present time. Nevertheless, increasing labour informalization poses challenges to feminist politics in Africa, locking "women in low-paying, low-skilled, exploitative and temporary forms of work", and African governments have to be accountable (Ossome, 2015: 20).

One of the negative effects of the structural adjustment programmes has to do with rural land reforms, tenure insecurity and land accumulation. Since the beginning of 1990s, countries such as Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, Uganda or Zambia (among others) had new land tenure laws (Fay, 2008: 205). Since then, a neoliberal policy context has set the pace, limiting the ability of African governments to intervene in rural land affairs and giving a considerable influence over land policy to the World Bank. The land question in Africa has produced a great deal of confusion and discontent in the population, along with competent authority over land in the wake of a series of insufficiently financed and half-finished reforms.

In 1987, the Mozambican government applied structural adjustment programmes, under the supervision of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The Economic Recovery Programmes and Socioeconomic Recovery Programmes were introduced as part of the structural adjustment, entailing major budget cuts in education, health and welfare, removal of farm subsidies, unemployment and job losses, factory closures and so on, which have struck rural households hardest. Since 1983, the steady privatization of land and businesses has further disempowered rural people, especially female farmers whose land is allocated through customary law. Investment in eco-tourism, commercial farming and food-processing industries were some highlights of this apparently successful "development" approach in Mozambique. Projects such as the Food Corridor (agribusiness), stretching all the way to Angola, prove how, under structural adjustments, large portions of land and businesses are being "handed over" to foreigners, particularly, although not exclusively, to white South Africans. I have argued elsewhere that structural adjustment programmes have exacerbated the previously existing rift between commercial farms – controlled by either Mozambican men or South African farmers and family farms – mainly managed by Mozambican women. This socioeconomic and political bifurcation has no doubt increased the economic marginalization of rural women and created a landless rural proletariat for the first time in Africa's history. Needless to say, structural adjustment programmes also resulted in a more indebted Mozambican government (Vieitez-Cerdeño, 2001).

As previously mentioned, structural adjustments were not the only economic alternative in Africa south of the Sahara. Many governments tried different approaches, as did several transnational and transcontinental institutions. The Organization of African Unity, today's African Union, developed strategies against adjustments from the 1980s, such as the Lagos Plan and Final Act of Lagos (1981), the Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery (1986– 1990), the African Alternative Framework for Structural Adjustment for Social and Economic Recovery and Transformation (1989) and the African Economic Community (AEC) in Abuja (1990), all aimed at addressing economic difficulties in cooperation with regional economic communities. In fact, the AEC proposed an African alternative to the World Bank adjustments that were not adopted by African policymakers, since the WB agenda was mostly driven by foreign development assistance. Part of why this did not come to fruition was the ostensible weakness of civil society in most countries (cf. Adedeji, 1993), but this is strongly debatable, given the degree of female and social organizing in the continent. The lack of political and economic transcendence given to women's actions was more likely the reason, since most social and women's movements were not acknowledged as such until the turn of the century (*Feminist Africa*, 2017; cf. Vieitez-Cerdeño, 2017; Rodríguez-Ochoa & Vieitez-Cerdeño, 2017; Manzanera-Ruiz & Lizárraga, 2017; Cunha, 2015; Cunha & Casimiro, 2017; Manzanera-Ruiz & Lizárraga, 2013).

Thus, the development of "laundering" subsequently took place (to be discussed in the next section). In fact, the cuts in social programmes and services took a toll on African governments' finances, but austerity and adjustment programmes resulted in an increase in the number of NGOs in Africa, in order to fill the political and economic vacuum. The provisioning of services has been linked to the spread of NGOs, whether for health care, education or agricultural extension, among others. However, we find that it was rather the opposite: many people were already organized, and the 1980s events merely contributed to an already emerging phenomenon. Our extensive field research in the region of southern Africa has allowed us to confirm the vast number of such organizations and networks, specifically those dealing with African women's inequality issues (gender violence, family and marriage issues, etc.), associations driven by female initiative since the time of the Nairobi Women's UN Conference in 1985 onwards (Vieitez-Cerdeño, 2017; Rodríguez-Ochoa & Vieitez-Cerdeño, 2017; Manzanera-Ruiz & Lizárraga, 2017; Manzanera-Ruiz & Lizárraga, 2013). Last but not least, the shift to market economies (i.e. the liberalization of cash crops, such as coffee and tomatoes) has deepened preexisting unequal gender relations, for instance, in Tanzania, causing women to strengthen their collective actions and organization (Manzanera-Ruiz, Lizárraga & Mwaipopo, 2016).

Gender-blindness and development "laundering": One for all, all for one

Historically, protest and demonstration have been key female strategies to address difficulties and to deal with their predicament in Africa. Thus, women have fought neoliberalism in Africa but have they been really included in the process? We strongly believe that they have not, as we have sought to show. One reason stems from the fact that development has been an apparently "gender-neutral and gender-blind endeavour", and therefore has offered very low "gender-sensitive responses" (Kelleher, 2017: 130; cf. Elson, 1992). With Assata Zerai, we believe that "leaving African women out of the conversation may be partly responsible for the pervasiveness of neoliberalism today" (2019: 4), although it is not only African women who have been excluded but also neoliberal policies that have failed to include women everywhere. Gender-blindness refers here to "not explicitly recognizing the existence of gender differences" (concerning both productive and reproductive roles by men and women) whether by researchers and analysts, policymakers, project/programme designers and implementers. More precisely, the criticism on gender-blindness started in the 1990s, exposing the gender-blindness of mainstream development policy (Elson, 1992; Sparr, 1995) and structures, and it is clear that implementations by African institutions such as the African Union, NEPAD and the Pan-African Parliament are also gender-blind. Regarding economic and political policies, this phenomenon is widespread, even within the realms of research.

The subdisciplines in gender subject matters, emerging in the 1960s and 1970s, and later consolidated as Anthropology or Sociology of Gender (among others) in the developed world, show the intricacies of the distinction between women's and gender studies on the one hand, and feminist studies on the other hand. It is a fine line that distinguishes them; however, it is a distinction that undeniably exists and that is certainly becoming clearer. Thus, carrying out research in the area of gender or women's studies does not make a person a feminist, despite gender clearly being her/his field of knowledge, and making visible or giving value to women themselves through their research, which is, in itself, unarguably an extremely important goal. In the development context, there was a clear mistrust, on the part of the interviewees, of policymakers being able to incorporate gender issues into policy. Quite often gender teaching and research is very isolated from activism, thus also contributing to the gender-blindness of policy in society (Vieitez-Cerdeño, 2017; Rodríguez-Ochoa &Vieitez-Cerdeño, 2017; cf. Cole, Manuh & Mieschner, 2007). The so-called neoliberal/market feminisms also present a blatant risk in African countries, such as Nigeria, due to the high levels of unemployment and poverty, and lack of opportunities for empowerment that have fostered an individualized entrepreneurial mindset, more aligned in part with that kind of feminism, although problematic (Akinbobola, 2019). Female empowerment, and even some feminist discourses, has thus been made instrumental to neoliberalism as entrepreneurship development, stripping it of the important struggles and the rights already achieved.

Why do we speak of "development laundering"? The widely known expression "money laundering" refers to the conversion of money of illicit or illegal origin, considered "dirty", into "clean" money that can be used in the legal financial system. "Development laundering" alludes to the process by which the development establishment appropriates transformational strategies or "recipes for social change" first envisioned and put into action by women's collectives and movements from the developing world; particularly, given that many other development proposals since the 1990s have failed. We explicitly refer, among others, to empowerment[3] or female non-profit ventures, such as *xitique*[4] (Cunha, 2015; cf. Cunha, 2016) or *kivaty* (Manzanera-Ruiz, 2009), used by women to alleviate the negative effects of structural adjustment programmes and other neoliberal policies all over Africa south of the Sahara. The connection of gender equality with the development of countries places women at the centre of this crossroads (gender-blindness and development "laundering"), with all the implied repercussions. "Critiques of the global development project contend that African womanhood has been pathologized in service of development practice", denying the very real possibility of women (as everybody else) of being simultaneously empowered and disempowered (Anyidoho, 2020).

Hegemonic "developmentalism" often leads both practitioners and policymakers to condense issues of development to donor and economic-related concerns; scholarship on relevant matters or priorities for African women also escape the agenda (Lewis, 2005). There are many instances of these in the development literature, like the conversion of practical/strategic interests into needs (cf. Manzanera-Ruiz, Lizárraga & Mwaipopo, 2016), very much linked to empowerment, a "magic bullet" of sorts, leading to women's empowerment, poverty alleviation and so on, despite the fact that it has been almost completely depoliticized (Batliwala in Cornwall & Eade, 2010).

Development discourses and practices are filled with such buzz/fuzzwords (cf. Cornwall & Eade, 2010). Empowerment, with a huge semantic range and great potential for ambiguity, is one of those strategies for what we call "development laundering" to increase the level of women's opportunities and to fight gender inequalities in participation; almost forgetting that it is also context-specific (cf. Cornwall & Eade, 2010). For instance, Kelleher (2017) has critically discussed African women's empowerment in the context of neoliberal economic policies. Thus, we have made her words ours: "feminist positions on women's economic empowerment and justice traditionally contest the free-market neoliberal orthodoxy that dominates economic development assistance" (Kelleher, 2017: 129), and that places "all responsibility for addressing gender issues on national women's machineries and civil society" (Kelleher, 2017: 130). Empowerment policies were aimed at political, economic and social issues, whereas redistributive policies (wealth, powers, responsibilities) were focused on human rights, political freedom and democracy, but once depoliticized, empowerment loses all its potential for economic and social transformation. Moreover, women have been using these traditional and reinvented strategies of empowerment through non-profit ventures, production groups, etc., defined as part of a collective action (cf. Manzanera-Ruiz & Lizárraga, 2013) since colonial times.

Regarding globalization and neoliberalism so highly in African countries, and those of the rest of the world, is paradoxical. The lack of international responsibility given to "developed" countries for "leading" in specific directions (such as development "laundering") regarding gender equality is, therefore, even more astounding (Cotonou Agreement, 2000–2020). In fact, governments constantly coopt collective actions and movements by (although not limited to) women, and appropriate their strategies and creative resistances for their own benefit.

The cases of Mozambique and Botswana, praised as exemplary in terms of peacebuilding, democratic transition and economic growth, and at the main core of the "*Africa rising*" narratives, are quite paradigmatic.

Mozambique

Mozambique

> experienced high GDP growth, had held regular elections, had undertaken a series of economic and political measures with the support of international financial institutions, had a former president win the Mo Ibrahim Prize for African leadership and recorded a marked drop in its level of absolute poverty between 1996–7 and 2003–4.
>
> (Sabaratnam, 2017: 15)

In terms of peacebuilding and development, Mozambique became a success story. However, the thin border between war and peacebuilding as a result of counteractive and imposed liberal policies has also become a fact, and such policies of intervention (development) have not addressed relevant social issues nor helped diminish poverty or insecurity, rather the opposite (cf. Sabaratnam, 2017). Thus, at the turn of the 21st century, Mozambique is one of the highest ranked countries for the exploitation of gas worldwide, while simultaneously considered one of the less advanced or developed countries. Oil and charcoal are exploited in the Northern provinces as well, and agribusiness is widespread throughout Mozambique. In fact, inequalities in income distribution match inequalities between urban and rural areas, concentrating the poorest population in rural areas.

> In Mozambique, for instance, the mean share of the lowest 20% of the population is only 5.2% of total income while the mean share of the top 20% is about 51.5%. The percentage of the rural population that is poor is higher in rural areas (56.9%) than in urban areas (49.6%).
>
> (AfDB, 2012: 5)

Mozambican women have responded to the social and political change that has taken place in the southern African region since the Revolution with the Women's Detachment (1967) that contributed militarily to independence in 1975, and with the political project of gender equality that was implemented by the first Marxist government of the FRELIMO[5] party, which remains in power after winning all elections held to date in Mozambique. Historically, women's movements are not a new concept in the country: the Women's League (LIFEMO or *Liga Feminina de Moçambique*), working in exile since 1962; the constitution of the *Organização da Mulher Moçambicana* (OMM) as the right arm of FRELIMO in 1973 and, in a very relevant way, the proliferation of other women's, political and feminist organizations – already detached and independent from the State – from the last decade of the 20th century onwards. The *Fórum Mulher, Coordenaçao para a Mulher no Desenvolvimento*, a Mozambican network for the promotion of women, composed of public and private organizations, associations, think tanks and national and international donors, created in 1992, attests to this proliferation of female collective action: the *Associação Moçambicana de Mulheres Empresárias e Executivas* (ACTIVA), the *Associação para Promoção do Desenvolvimento Económico e Sócio-Cultural da Mulher* (MBEU), the *Associação Moçambicana para o Desenvolvimento da Mulher Rural* (AMRU), the Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) or the *Associação Mulher, Lei e Desenvolvimento* (MULEIDE), to name just a few. It is important to highlight the appropriation of the Mozambican feminist project by the FRELIMO party, first, through the in-

corporation of LIFEMO's proposals during the revolution and, second, through the creation of both the Women's Detachment and the OMM itself, the official and governmental women's organization until 1990. Following this "divorce" between OMM and FRELIMO, the latter has continued to interfere as a ruling party – as has been the case in other African regimes such as Uganda – by controlling the election of women politicians over the past decades. In fact, OMM and FRELIMO seem to have "married" again since 1996 (cf. Vieitez-Cerdeño, 2002).

Since 2017, Mozambique has faced a severe conflict attributed to Al Shabaab in Cabo Delgado (estimated population: 2.3 million), resulting from several factors such as, among others, vested interests around the exploitation of natural resources, poverty and discrimination especially against the youth, and a negligent and absent national state (Cunha, 2021). Along with around two thousand registered deaths (people killed in combat or assassinated), tens of thousands have died from disease, famine or ill-treatment of all kinds resulting from the war.

The impact on women has been great, although completely silenced in research, social media, press or government reports. Most of the population is rural (83.2%), and women are mostly peasants working in the family sector or engaging in fishing or informal trade. The war is taking away their farms, access to water, firewood, fish and natural medicines, which has serious impacts on their survival and that of their families. A large part of women's authority and legitimacy within their families and communities is related to the use and cultivation of the land, the production and processing of food, their knowledge about the use of plants for medicines or spells, their role in the various rites of passage for which the knowledge of the forest/wood is vital, and their maternity and care work with young and old. The destruction and abandonment of their lands and living places make them even more vulnerable to all kinds of violence and discrimination. It also isolates them and eliminates all the neighbourhood and support networks they had in their villages and towns (Cunha, 2021).

In the last few years several natural disasters, such as Cyclones Idai and Kenneth (2019), destroyed thousands of hectares of cultivated land and impacted the food security of over a million and half people. The effects of the COVID pandemic (since 2020) are yet to be thoroughly assessed, although food and health insecurity are already two major concerns that, together with the violence of war, make the situation exceptionally serious. The war has made women poorer, but female bodies have also been turned into a weapon of war, and a battlefield for the enemy's humiliation. In addition, women have been subjected to sexual slavery, abuse, prostitution, kidnapping and rape. Nevertheless, women have developed strategies such as the following: reorganizing their lives to welcome those who need it most; creating groups of volunteers to take care of arrivals (shelters, families or resettlements); acting as doctors, nurses and other health professionals; providing emotional and psychological, as well as spiritual support to those who ask/need it; organizing savings groups; giving interviews despite all risks, and publicly condemning the wrongdoings; actively participating in the dissemination of information through the means at their disposal, particularly by phone, risking their lives or being arrested; arranging campaigns both inside and outside the affected areas to collect and distribute basic necessities; acting as journalists (local newspapers and radio) in independent press; participating in webinars to discuss specific issues, giving testimony and analysing the causes of the war (while making proposals to achieve peace); designing campaigns to denounce human rights violations; talking on TV programmes; working in schools, hospitals, stores and supermarkets, and for the districts; doing research or teaching; and last but not least, joining the military and going to the battlefront (Cunha, 2021).

Botswana

Since the 1970s, Botswana has been considered one of the world's faster growing economies with a status of medium-high income (on a level with Namibia). Its stability has been highly acclaimed, particularly by the neoliberal "development" agencies, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank (WB). Having achieved a high level of development by 1981, and being acknowledged by then as a middle-income country, Botswana did not qualify for financial assistance by the IMF and did not require the implementation of structural adjustment policies.

Though having a mineral-based economy (diamonds), the country seems to have avoided the "Dutch disease" and the "curse of having resources", by creating and expanding sectors such as commerce and industry, despite its continuing economic dependency on the Republic of South Africa (a labour reserve for mines, factories and farms, along the lines of Mozambique and other surrounding countries). The World Bank has regarded Botswana's liberal economy and democracy as a model of success, that is, an example of economic growth for its African counterparts. However, Botswana is one of the most unequal countries in the World (cf. AfDB, 2012), and women (as the majority of its population) are more negatively impacted by the exploitation of this mineral-based economy. The country is also described as one of the most unequal in the southern Africa region. As the African Development Bank observes: "This therefore, provides a very worrying picture and shows how crucial the inclusive growth agenda is for Africa (AfDB, 2012: 3). But, inclusive when, how, for whom …? Gender equality cannot be dissociated from it!".

Botswana has also played a relevant part in regional politics, such as those of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Continental Free Trade Area, where several countries (Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and eSwatini)[6] shared a Common Monetary Area. However, rapid urbanization and growing/widening economic inequalities are (have to be) part of the story, particularly for women. Botswana did not experience a liberation movement and socialism as did Mozambique. Yet the celebrated lack of corruption and stability can be easily overshadowed by a very questionable one-party democracy (synonymous to the Democratic Botswana Party in reality) in power from 1966 until 1980 (Van Allen, 2010). There has been an active women's movement in Botswana fighting for party quotas, and challenging political structures in general by placing poverty and social inequality at the centre of the political agenda. Emang Basadi and the Women's Manifesto (since 1994) adopted an electoral strategy to support political candidates who embrace gender equality, and not only (or exclusively) female candidates for political office. Emang Basadi worked on gender sensitization for the 2009 election (Van Allen, 2010).

The Women's Affairs Division started in 1981 in recognition of female contributions to development, namely women's action groups and informal collectives, but became a Department (within the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs) in 1996 (Rathapo, 2000: 303). Botswana's 7th National Development Plan included research on women and gender issues, and the creation of a Library to collect those findings. The Women's Affairs Division had passed its Policy on Women in Development a year earlier (1995). Women's NGOs, such as Emang Basadi's Women Association since 1986, Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) since 1989 or Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF), with a Botswana chapter established in 1994 (to mention but a few) have also played an important role in raising women's status and political participation, and also in empowering women. The Women's NGO Coalition (umbrella organization created in 1993) coordinated actions for and after the Beijing Conference, and so, contributing, for instance, to the 8th National Development Plan (Rathapo, 2000: 303–307).

Thus, Botswana has been presented as a success story, based on the limited effects of British colonization (Bechuanaland Protectorate) on the precolonial institutions, socio-ethnic (homogeneity) and political stability (qualified leadership). In fact, the government is strongly confident in the free market as a vehicle for development and prosperity. We cannot enter into the discussion of all these issues here, but how does this affect women? Lesetedi (2018) acknowledges the remarkable advancements made in terms of economic and social development in the country, or how gender has been made central to the development process; yet women have remained more vulnerable to poverty and make up the majority of the unemployed in Botswana. Thus, women and female-headed households are poorer than men and have less access to and control over economic resources and skill training.

Final remarks

At first, women were made a target of development in the form of "outsiders" who needed to be included in the process. There have been many policies, programmes and plans for women, mostly educational or income-generating, since colonial times. Development remains gender-neutral when, in truth, it is not, and women are still considered as "outsiders" from economies and development. Gender equality has thus become a part of development "laundering" in Africa and world-

wide, or as a popular Spanish saying describes it: same dogs, different collars. Narratives and socioeconomic experiences of women, subjectivities representing action, at the social and economic bottom in their countries, are important, whether as street vendors, store saleswomen, leaders of local and popular associations, leaders of women's and cooperative associations, domestic workers and informal sector entrepreneurs (as they describe themselves) (Cunha, 2015: 12). Female strategies of empowerment predated development discourses and neoliberal policies (even after structural adjustments), and have been depoliticized and co-opted from women's and social movements as part of those development discourses. Keheller has stated the need for debunking what she has called the "silver bullets", that is, the gender myths making women instrumental to development policies and programmes; all those still in place and operating as a panacea to achieve gender equality (Keheller, 2017: 133–134). Neoliberal policies have no doubt impacted very negatively on women, even middle-class women. As Judith Van Allen stated long ago, modernization has made women more dependent on men, precisely because of a more clearly defined economic role and sphere for women (Van Allen, 1974). Moreover, as Sylvia Tamale has stated, motherhood as a symbol of nationalism, relevant in nation-building, has become even more important in "globalized neoliberal capitalism" and restricts women to their roles as transmitters of culture and reproducers (Tamale, 2017: 69–70).

No doubt, the actions of women's movements in Africa are to be considered as social development actions, aligned with the needs of local populations (Manzanera-Ruiz & Lizárraga, 2013; Manzanera-Ruiz & Lizárraga, 2017). There are many instances of gender networking to fight inequality and patriarchy in times of neoliberalism. Marjorie Mbilinyi (ROAPE, 2017; cf. Mbilinyi, 2015) discusses the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP) as one of few explicitly "committed to a struggle against patriarchy *and* neoliberal globalization". Thus, following Mbilinyi, we highlight the great importance of understanding how gender, class and imperial/race relationships actually operate, so that real transformation is made possible, since only with "a culture of collective decision-making in strengthening the process of collective struggle" (ROAPE, 2017) can real transformation be made possible.

Notes

1 In this chapter, we do not discuss the polysemy of the term "neoliberalism" but acknowledge the ongoing debate surrounding the concept (cf. Molyneux, 2008; cf. Cornwall, Gideon & Wilson, 2008).

2 Between 1928 and 1962, Salazar established this regime that separated the assimilated, that is, the acculturated Africans, from the rest of the Africans in a way similar to apartheid.

3 "Empowerment is a process of elimination or multidimensional reduction of inequality and injustice through which people define what is important to them according to their own experiences (Rowlands, 1995; Sen, 1999). A source of empowerment, the agency of women, includes the processes of decision-making, negotiation, and cooperation necessary for the ownership and use of resources (Cornwall & Eade, 2010; Kabeer, 1998, 2001; Sen, 1999)" (Manzanera-Ruiz, Lizárraga & Mwaipopo, 2016: 143).

4 A common economic and financial practice of money and gift exchange by women in Mozambique to collectively and strategically fight structural poverty and neoliberal policies. Sociability and complex social relations, ethics and aesthetics are intertwined with *xiticar* (Cunha, 2016).

5 FRELIMO stands for *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*, the Socialist party that gained the country's independence (1975), through a revolution against the Portuguese in the 1960s and which remains in power in 2021.

6 Officially, the Kingdom of eSwatini (also written Eswatini), formerly known as Swaziland (and commonly known as such).

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