

**White Demon Sophistry: Exploring the Gates Foundation's Control over the  
Production of Knowledge of Women of the Global South**

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## I. Introduction

In 2009, the World Bank reported, “The face of poverty is female. She is 18.5 years old. She lives in a rural area. She has dropped out of school. She is single, but is about to be married or given in marriage to a man approximately twice her age. She will be the mother of six or seven kids in another twenty years” (quoted in Specter 2011). A statement like this is not unusual for Developmental aid organizations like the World Bank. In fact, most citizens of the Global North would not question it.

By the World Bank’ standards, I met the face of poverty in a small village in Northern Sierra Leone last year. She was a dropout, working on her family’s farm, newly pregnant, and sure to be married soon. But this was not her only story. As Westerners involved in the large field of Development<sup>1</sup>, we often claim to speak for the “voiceless,” or at least those who do not have a voice in the ways the Global North sees relevant. But at what point do our voices begin to drown out those of the Global South, at what point do they change the story completely?

Although many young African women certainly deal with incredible hardship due to deep structural inequalities, the portraits of poverty presented by Development institutions like the World Bank or Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) like the Gates Foundation can be extremely one-sided. Women are presented as “abject victims, the passive subjects of development’s rescue,” furthering myths and fables about Development and gender (Cornwall 2007). For most Development workers the presentation of such ideas about women is not perceived as flawed; they see “development’ agencies as part of

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<sup>1</sup> I make a distinction between *Development* with a capital D as a historical event and *development* with a lowercase d as an abstract progression.

a great collective effort to fight poverty, raise standards of living, and promote one or another version of progress” (Ferguson 1990: 9). The assumed benevolence of the Development project makes it incredibly difficult to critique because any flaws are inevitably overshadowed by such “good intentions.” When critiqued today, development “is almost always challenged in the name of ‘real development.’ Like ‘goodness’ itself, ‘development’ in our time is a value so firmly entrenched that it seems almost impossible to question it” (Ferguson 1990: xiv). This notion follows Antonio Gramsci’s theory of “common sense” in which ideas become so entrenched in culture that they go unquestioned (Gramsci 1972). Development may be well intentioned but we must be critical of its role as “common sense” in Western culture.

Assuming that NGOs are somewhat benevolent entities, how do they nonetheless unknowingly participate in silencing the complex and real stories of the Global South? In this paper I will conduct a discourse analysis of the Development paradigm to understand how aid workers control the production of knowledge around women of the Global South. In exploring how the development apparatus depicts women, I will analyze the representations of women in real marketing materials from the Seattle-based NGO, The Bill And Melinda Gates Foundation. I am drawing largely on Arturo Escobar and Chandra Mohanty to argue that the Gates Foundation constructs reductive images of women through their roles as mother and farmers, without specificity, credible evidence or historical context, thereby reducing the agency and the complexity of the everyday lives of women from the Global South. These simplistic interpretations have real effects by informing the policy of development workers on the ground.

I have chosen the Gates Foundation because of their Seattle headquarters and enormous global influence. The Gates Foundation is the largest private foundation in the world, with an endowment of 33.5 billion US dollars (Gates Foundation 2011). In Seattle, the Gates Foundation functions as an incredibly dominant voice in how Development operates through funding of local NGOs, academic research and awareness campaigns. Its philanthropic efforts focus largely on global development, specifically healthcare, agriculture and poverty all through out the Global South. Although the Foundation does not have a program expressly focused on empowering women many of its health and poverty objectives target women's needs. The Gates Foundation follows the Gates family's belief in the possibilities of science and technology to bring people out of poverty. In the context of women, an emphasis on science technologizes women's bodies as objects of development.

In following with feminist geopolitics, meaning an analysis of international relations through the lens of gender with a focus on the politics of the everyday and the body, it is critical to this paper that I situate my own knowledge (Hyndman 2004). I am a white, upper-middle class, American female, rooted in Western feminist ideals. In the summer of 2010, I travelled to Sierra Leone to conduct an ethnography on "rural women" and soon realized that the ocean of cultural difference made it almost impossible for me to understand the "Other." When I was asked over and over to explain my time there, I was hesitant to tell the stories of people whom I barely understood with any authority. I became very disillusioned with the role of development in the Global South, especially as a respected source of information about people's lives. But despite this critical standpoint, I cannot discount the role development has had in shaping my own view of the world. It is

difficult for me to ignore the language of a single modernity, or the idea that there is only one acceptable (and proven) way for a society to develop. This project then is an intensely personal undertaking to deconstruct my own relationships with the Global North and the Global South. If anything, it is an ode to my colonial guilt and development angst.

## II. *The Literature*

### a. *Definitions*

My method of research is primarily a discourse analysis, drawing on Michel Foucault's notion of discourse as a system of power. Discourse is the language and meanings used to structure and grant power to a certain way of perceiving reality. These meanings function as "dominant knowledge systems" through which they exercise power over people and other knowledge systems (Foucault 1981). In the field of development studies, the mainstream discourse is structured around notions of "underdevelopment" and "Western modernity." Though seen as truth by most people in the West, it is in fact only a perception of the truth, granted power through a multitude of ways (Lawson 2007). Foucault's concept of discourse asks us to look at how such terms function in circuits of power between institutions and people. This paper will explore the ways the language of Development works to manipulate power between the Global South and the Global North. [For a more comprehensive review of Foucault's theories of discourse and power, see Mills (2003).]

In moving forward with this discourse analysis, the terms central to this study must be defined. Much has been written on the concept of Development, as both a *material process* and as a *discourse*; these two factors of Development are in fact interconnected, reproducing each other's existence. The material process represents the physical ways in

which the Development paradigm politically and economically restructures the lives of the Global South. The discourse speaks to the ways in which the language and images of Development have in turn shaped the economic, political, and social relationship between the Global North and the Global South.

Although neoliberalism was not institutionalized until the 1970s, the material process of the modern Development apparatus began in the 1940s, as neoliberal policies emerged to restructure the geopolitical system in the post-WWII era (Klein 2007, Power 2003). Neoliberalism functions as a policy, ideology and means of governance by which lives are restructured around ideas of the individual and private responsibility (Larner 2000, Harvey 2005). As a set of policies, neoliberalism is the promotion of economic institutions that rely on the free market to provide public goods. In the context of Development, the West encouraged countries of the Global South to adopt free market policies in order to “develop” economically (Brown 2005, Stiglitz 2008). This pushed citizens of the Global South to rely on private aid for public goods such as health care and education. Even further, the ideology of neoliberalism institutionalized notions of Development such as “the individual” and “freedom of choice” which deeply informed the way the West saw the needs of the Global South (Larner 2000: 7).

The governmentality of neoliberalism is far more complex in how it works to push people towards “developing” into ideal global citizens. Governance functions in both a top-down and bottom-up fashion by disseminating state policies that encourage neoliberal ideas of citizenship while at the same time requiring a level of self-discipline from people to structure themselves as neoliberal bodies (Foucault 1977, Larner 2000). In the context of Development, health policies centered on the individual have forced citizens of the global

south to renegotiate their identities. Family planning programs in Egypt, for example have forced women to think about their reproductive roles in terms of the individual and not in relation to their husbands and families (Ali 2002). This shift is driven by mainstream Western interpretations of sexual freedom and women's rights that are rooted in neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism, as a policy, ideology and governmentality, has defined the global market since the post-WWII era, officially institutionalized in the 1970s (Klein 2007). Accordingly, capital "D" Development has emerged as a large neoliberal apparatus incorporating policy makers, economists, bureaucrats, academics, and many others in the material process of political, economic, and social change. Although a small corner of the academic field is very critical of Development, "liberal economic theory still defines the agenda in powerful institutions of Development," suggesting that Development policies are primarily influenced by theories of free trade and economic growth (Lawson 2007: 68).

I define lowercase d development as the lived experience of capital D Development, in which people encounter and react to unscripted economic, political and social processes (Lawson 2007). I bring up this definition of development to underline that Development is but one interpretation of how progress works, when in fact there are many ways for a community to develop. Progress is expressed in multiple ways, on a non-linear plane towards infinite modernities, not following a fixed path but instead reflecting a movement through time towards an unplanned goal. I became critical of Development in 2010, when I began to understand that development is merely a community's movement through time, and can be both static and progressive. What is most important to this paper are the ways in which the material processes of Development inform a Development discourse which

then produces and controls knowledge around the lived realities of the development of the Global South. For a more comprehensive overview of the literature in development theory, see Lawson (2007) and Power (2003).

It is also necessary to recognize the role of feminism as a lens of analysis in this paper. Like Development, defining feminism evokes a complex response. The lived experience of feminism varies based on place and time, but at its root feminism is defined as “a diffuse political movement ... that aims to identify and dismantle systemic gender inequality” (Gregory 2010). Of course, defining feminism has prompted much literature: the histories of first and second wave feminism (see Blunt and Wills 2000); interpretations of the personal as political (see Pateman 1989); the sexual division of labor (see Kittay 1999); and feminism as a place of class and racial intersection (see Shih 2002). Many reviews have been written about the intellectual history of feminism and feminist theory, for a more comprehensive overview of feminist theory see Kolmar (2010).

What is most important to this project is the relationship between Western feminisms and post-colonial feminisms. I do not mean to imply that either of these is monolithic or distinctly different; each represents numerous interpretations of feminism and work to inform each other. I only seek to emphasize the ways in which Western feminisms, on the whole, have historically dominated the discourse of women’s rights (Mohanty 1991, Shih 2002). In the last few decades, women of the Global South have pushed back, stressing the importance of space in feminist realities. However, in mainstream Development discourse, Western feminism is still hegemonic, participating in a colonization of “the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite singular ‘third world woman’”

(Mohanty 1991: 53, Swarr 2010). Western feminism works within the Development paradigm to control the production of knowledge around women of the Global South.

Beyond these two key terms, it is also important to set out the perceptions of space that set the basis for this study. My geographical framework is based on the mainstream division between the Global North, countries that are classified as economically developed and rooted in Western thinking, and the Global South, countries seen as economically poor and based in more diverse non-Western ideologies. These categories are constructed by the Development apparatus as distinct groups in the world: developed and developing (Escobar 1991). However, they are imagined communities, made “common sense” through the hegemony of Development (Anderson 1991). Although interactions between countries are far more relational and complex, these imagined communities set the background for economic and political actions required by the Global North and the Global South. Though most refer to these groups as “developed countries” and “developing countries,” I have chosen the terms Global North and Global South to address this common imagination of space while abstaining from a label that implies a standard of growth.

*b. Critical development theory*

This paper draws largely on critical development theory in analyzing the representation of women from the Global South in the Development discourse. Critical development theory emerged in the 1990s out of post-modern Foucauldian thought and the fact that forty years of Development had produced few results (Lawson 2007). Arturo Escobar, one of the most influential scholars in the field, explores in his seminal work *Encountering Development* how Development arose as a hegemonic power to define the relationship between the Global North and the Global South (Escobar 1995). Escobar

argues that through the Development discourse, the Global North constructed and naturalized problems with the Global South such as “overpopulation” and “poverty” in order to further their hegemonic power in the world system. Critical development theory sees Development as a source of neo-colonial control that works to delegitimize the lives of people in the Global South.

Escobar’s argument follows Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism, which claims that Europe invented the concept of the “Orient” based on fears and fantasies of the East. The Orient can only exist in relation to 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, meaning it is a concept rooted in historical context and language, not reality (Said 1978). In the context of Africa, V.Y. Mudimbe also explored the ways in which “the idea of Africa” was created through colonial discourses. Mudimbe argues that the image of Africa is rooted in the colonial imagination of Africa as uncivilized. This image of Africa completely informed the West’s interactions with Africa politically, economically and socially (Mudimbe 1994). While colonialism and orientalism have defined the Global North’s perceptions of Asia and Africa in the past, Development discourse largely informs the West’s relationship with the Global South today.

### *c. History of women in development*

In looking critically at the role of Women in Development, we must address both Western women and women of the Global South. The Western feminist movement of the 1970s initially fueled the introduction of Women in Development (WID) to allow women a voice in Development strategies (Saunders 2002). In 1975, the United Nations marked the “Decade for Women,” promising to focus more development strategies on the vulnerability of women in the Global South who were seen to be key in economic growth (Judd 1999).

This initially took form in the Welfare strategy, which provided financial aid to women in relief areas. However, the WID movement grew to be critical of this approach, arguing that relied too heavily on traditional patriarchal structures that perpetuated existing gender roles (Saunders 2002).

In the 1980s, WID shifted to Gender and Development (GAD) in order to address the influence of gender systems, the socio-cultural relationship between men and women, instead of women's roles in isolation. This was seen as a more effective approach because it looked at how Development interacted with complex societal structures (Saunders 2002).

Although WID and GAD were effective in bringing women's issues to the table in development discussions, they still privileged Western women and feminisms over those of the Global South (Judd 1999). Women of the Global South responded to this issue by creating Development Alternatives for Women of a New Era (DAWN), which works to "articulate the desire of the Third World woman" (Saunders 2002).

Despite an emerging post-colonial dialogue about women in development, institutions like the World Bank and the UN continue to reinforce the idea of women as objects of development. Chandra Mohanty argues that "defining women primarily in terms of their object status (the way in which they are affected or not affected by certain institutions and systems)" needs to be challenged (Mohanty 1991). In the twenty years since Mohanty's call to action, however, little has changed. The Gates Foundation is an especially influential NGO that must be held responsible for its actions in global development. Even further, my privileged Western peers and I must address our seemingly benevolent participation in the reproduction of such structural inequalities.

### *III. The Gates Foundation: A Discourse Analysis*

As the largest philanthropic foundation in the world, the Gates Foundation works in multiple arenas of Development based on its assessment of global needs. The Gates Foundation functions mainly as a financial backer to individual NGOs by providing grants to projects that are in line with the Gates Foundation's goals and ideologies. The grant-making priorities are based on strategies developed by the Gates Foundation for each topic of importance (Our Approach to Giving 2011). The Gates Foundation rarely does direct work on the ground, instead setting the policies of every NGO applying for funding. Considering the Gates Foundation's large financial resources, numerous NGOs, whether consciously or subconsciously, fit their goals and projects to the Gates Foundation's Development ideology. The Gates Foundation thus sets the policy for an entire network of Development workers beyond Seattle.

In analyzing the rhetoric of the Gates Foundation, I looked at the "Strategy Overview" reports for each of their Global Development and Global Health topics. These reports are annually written by the Gates Foundation for NGOs, academics, policy makers and anyone interested in Development. This paper will draw mainly from the "Maternal, Neonatal, and Child Health;" "Agricultural Development;" "Nutrition;" and "Family Planning" strategy overviews because these are the only reports that directly address women. Within these reports, the Gates Foundation enumerates their priorities, challenges, and strategic goals for each issue. Since they represent the Gates Foundation's global strategy, the topics were not specific to any country, but focused on "people living in the developing world," often citing Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia as particularly important regions (Agricultural Development 2011: 1).

In the previous sections, I have established a background literature and scope of the subsequent analysis. In the following sections, I will explore the rhetoric of four of the Gates Foundation's reports to show how they construct the idea of *women of the global south* through their roles as mothers and farmers. I will further examine how the organization's power is constructed through their lack of specificity, evidence, and historical context. . In doing so, I will show how the Gates Foundation elides the individuality of women to construct a reductive image of women as a homogenous group lacking power in the eyes of the West – and, therefore, in the policies of NGOs.

*a. Women as Mothers*

Central to the Gates Foundation's health platform is women's role as mothers, an idea clear in the strategies targeting maternal health, infant nutrition and family planning. The rhetoric in the reports surrounding these topics is largely problematic in how it homogenizes the category of women. There is no differentiation based on space, race, class, age; women are a category based on their shared biology. Mohanty notes this same phenomenon in Western feminist writing of the 1990s as the "crucial assumption that all of us across the same gender, across classes and culture, are somehow socially constituted as a homogenous group" (1995: 56). Mohanty goes on to argue that women as a category of analysis is even further complicated by the assumption of shared oppression. Despite the emergence of feminist geography and post-colonial feminism, the Gates Foundation parallels this process by constructing an incredibly simplistic image of "poor women" through their common experience as mothers.

There are pictures throughout the Gates Foundation website of pregnant women, mothers and newborns and mothers breastfeeding without socio-cultural context. In fig. 1,

a brown-skinned woman smiles while holding a child and in fig. 2 a brown-skinned woman holds a baby while it receives a vaccination; neither of these women are identified by name or location (Gates Foundation 2011, See Appendix). Without referencing individual identities, the Gates Foundation establishes a collective image of mothers of the Global South, defined by their brown skin and rural background. By eliding individuality, the women are not placed in relation to the West but as a distinct and separate “Other.” The construction of this homogenized group therefore inhibits the West from taking responsibility for (the complexities of) individual women’s lives.

Even further, this construction of “women as mothers” limits the agency of all women of the Global South to their reproductive status. Women have traditionally operated in the realm of reproductive labor, but the emphasis the Gates Foundation places on women’s role as mothers reproduces the gender binary (McDowell 1999). To clarify, reproductive labor not only constitutes biological “but also socially reproductive – the maintenance of the well-beings of those located within the boundaries of the household,” such as childrearing, sustenance farming, homemaking and cooking (Doyal 1995: 28). Men too can participate in reproductive labor but have traditionally dominated the realm of productive labor, which constitutes any labor that produces a profit. The image of women broadcast to the West is defined solely by their reproductive agency, thereby concealing the agency of women in other spaces.

In relegating the West’s interpretations of women to the private sphere, this image has major implications in limiting women’s ability to be publically political. It both omits women’s complex power in productive labor and further deems reproductive labor as politically unimportant. For Development workers on the ground, this image significantly

affects how policies are enacted on gender systems, often restructuring traditional labor systems to fit this interpretation of women and political spaces (Escobar 1991).

Most important to the Gates Foundation's philanthropic platform is the harnessing of "advances in science and technology to save lives in poor countries" (Gates Foundation 2011). The report on maternal health consistently recommends new technology as "proven solutions that can halt the majority of conditions causing maternal and neonatal deaths" (Maternal Health 2009: 1). Such dependence on the power of science is common of the Development discourse reflecting theories of modernization in which control over nature provides "a sense of direction and significance" to society and creates an "ethics of innovation, yield, and result" (Escobar 36). For the Gates Foundation, emphasis on women's lack of technology underlines these women and their societies as lacking "direction and signification," essentially labeling them as backwards. This feeds into a discourse of modernity that is inherently colonial, contrasts women of the Global South as dependents as well as benefactors of Western technological advancement, and ignores the personal and cultural knowledge women have of their own body and reproductive process.

Aside from medical and scientific technology, the reports on maternal health as well as nutrition significantly promote "optimal breastfeeding," which requires women to initiate breastfeeding within one hour and exclusively breastfeed for the first six months of a newborn's life (Nutrition 2011: 2). The Gates Foundation concedes that while most women of the Global South do breastfeed, they do not do so "optimally," which leads to poor nutrition in children. Although this may be an effective way to improve nutrition, in repackaging this "natural act" in scientific terms and rhetoric, the Gates Foundation reclaims breastfeeding as a new technology, thereby reinforcing the image of these women

as backwards and dependent on Development. Even further, the policy on breastfeeding constructs an idea of a “good mother” contingent on technology and Western knowledge; it places motherhood in mechanized and industrialized terms (Rothman 2000). This disregards women’s power over their bodies and forces them to reconstruct their identity as a mother by Western standards.

Beyond purely maternal and pediatric health, a major topic of the Gates Foundation’s global health platform is family planning. Family planning is never specifically defined by the Gates Foundation, but refers to contraceptive use and birth spacing (Family Planning 2011). There are many problematic aspects of this section, largely because this topic bridges a gap between disease-specific health targets, such as polio or AIDS, and projects aimed more explicitly at the health issues related to socio-cultural structures. Within the report, the Gates Foundation ignores the reasons for large families and the role of men in family planning. Even further it goes on to construct a Western model of motherhood that takes the Gates Foundation beyond “Development aid” to social governance.

Family planning is deeply entrenched in local cultural and economic realities that dictate how a woman makes decisions about her birthing (Doyal 1995). For example, in Sierra Leone, children function as markers of cultural status. They represent women’s fertility and provide free labor for family farms and businesses. The Gates Foundation’s single-minded policy, however, elides the place-specific factors at play in determining family size.

Even further, the report never mentions the role of men in the process of family planning. This is problematic in that it reinforces a gender binary in which women are

relegated to the private sphere for family planning. However, it also disregards the fact that the distribution and use of contraceptives in the Global South is often mediated through men (Doyal 1995, Frost 2009, Ali 2002). By solely targeting women in family planning programs, the Gates Foundation constructs an image of women's reproductive lives based on neoliberal understandings of the individual, not the relationality of gender systems (Brown 2005).

By identifying family planning as a health issue, the Gates Foundation also sets a standard of motherhood that is linked to family size and sexual freedom, and looks down on women who do not follow Development's guidelines (Ali 2002). Although to Western feminists (myself included) these seem to be "good" goals, constructing the concept of an ideal mother that is explicitly Western continues a process of reifying women of the Global South as, simulatenously "bad mothers," dependent on foreign intervention and abject victims of sexist regimes. As mentioned before, in Egypt, Ali found that women were forced to renegotiate their reproductive and sexual identities in neoliberal terms that were in direct opposition with their own society (2002).

Through global health policies like family planning, the Gates Foundation works to intervene and restructure socio-cultural processes by Western standards. This is a form of neoliberal governance, which places women in conflict with multiple interpretations of lowercase d development. In neoliberal governance, individuals are constructed as "*homo aeconomicus*... all dimensions of human life are cast in terms of a market rationality" because states in the modern system no longer have the responsibility to provide public goods (Brown 2005: 40). With neoliberal citizenship defined by personal responsibility in every aspect of life, citizens are identified more as independent actors in direct relation

with the market, lacking strong relationality to spouses, ancestry, land, or other previous labels (Brown 2005). This impedes community building in the name of the individual and market rationality.

Through family planning, neoliberal concepts of governance directly affect societal structure and women's identities, therefore reaffirming the power of the Gates Foundation. This goes beyond the Gates Foundation's message of humanitarian aid to direct social control. Neoliberal governance through the paradigm of "Global Health" thus satisfies a number of goals: a drive to 'feel good' about capitalism (see Kingsly 2008); a form of geopolitical control through programs of security (Duffield 2007); and a feel-good response to international economic policies of the 1970s and 1980s (see Stiglitz 2008). Ultimately, the Gates Foundation is looking to expand capitalism to the Global South by structuring societies along neoliberal lines through concepts of healthcare and motherhood. This is done under the "good intentions" of giving the Global South new tools, such as better health and more individual control, to take advantage of the free market.

*b. Women as Farmers*

In 1991, Escobar wrote that the "invisible female farmers" are forgotten by Development because of sexist perceptions of men being the most productive members of society. Men were therefore the primary focus in the field of agricultural development, the main recipients of training and new inputs. Despite the fact that the Food and Agriculture Organization estimated that 50 percent of the world's food supply was produced by women in 1991 (the same number holds true today, Holt-Gimenez 2009), agricultural development programs worked to hide women's work and reclassify it within the male domain (Escobar 172). Even further, that number obscures how many women are working to produce food

versus men; women are usually involved in small-scale subsistence agriculture not large export oriented farming.

In the last twenty years, feminists have succeeded in slowly inserting women into the dialogue of agricultural development (Saunders 2005). To the Gates Foundation's credit, their agricultural platform significantly emphasizes women's work. However, despite this advance, the rhetoric of the ideal "female farmer" only furthers a reductive discourse that overemphasizes technology and normative gender assumptions.

The agricultural development platform of the Gates Foundation puts "women at the center of [their] work," providing half of a page to a text box on the importance of women farmers (Agricultural Development 2011: 3). Similar to the health campaign, the rhetoric of agricultural development homogenizes female farmers into one single group despite divisions of space, class, race and age.

Of the four pictures featured in the report, three are of female farmers, all brown-skinned and smiling. Fig. 3 shows a smiling woman in Rwanda sitting with her children, four young boys and their maize yield. Fig. 4 is a picture of three Indian women walking through a rice field with wicker baskets on their heads, presumably full of crops. These images are exotic and yet familial, constructing the women as different but nonthreatening. They follow Said's concept of Orientalism, in which images of the "Other" are constructed to influence the opinions of the West, in this case to assuage their fears but also heighten their interest (1978).

Of the males pictured, only one is a man, the rest are young boys. Young boys are generally feminized because of their innocence and lack of involvement in productive labor. Though male, young boys participate in reproductive labor, such as sustenance farming and

cooking, thereby removing them from normative ideas of masculinity. Later in the report, despite the use of gender neutral pronouns through out their official documents, the Gates Foundation uses female specific pronouns to describe the small farmer – “where *she* lives, what *she* grows, and how much *she* earns” – thereby distinctly feminizing rural agricultural (Agricultural Development 2011: 6). Such a significant shift towards women and away from men represents a paradoxical change in the gendering of agriculture that is both progressive for the Development discourse and normative in the context of gender stereotypes.

Although the report recognizes women’s agricultural roles, the report emphasizes a gender binary in which women are “an icon of indefatigable efficiency and altruism” (Roy 2010: 69). Men have been the traditional recipients of aid and are therefore synonymous with the failures of traditional aid: corruption and inefficiency. Women however, imply a “good” and “altruistic” character because of their relationship with the home, which has long indicated a normative identity of “caring” and “responsible” (Kittay 1999). Subscribing to these gender identities only furthers normative and homogenized judgments of women of the Global South. It creates an image of the female farmers as productive but also altruistic and therefore docile, lacking the power to manipulate the system.

The sentiment of women lacking agency, even in the realm of agriculture, is only furthered by the importance the Gates Foundation continues to place on technology. According to the Gates Foundation, “yields on women’s plots are typically 20 percent to 40 percent less than men’s” and that “the reason for this gender gap is that women have less access to improved seeds and other inputs, training, and markets” (Agricultural Development 2011: 3). By framing women as lacking the agency to acquire farming tools,

the Gates Foundation participates in “the construction of ‘third world women’ as a homogenous ‘powerless’ group often located as implicit victims of particular socioeconomic systems” (Mohanty 1991: 57).

This section may seem to contradict my earlier argument that the Gates Foundation limits women’s roles to their reproductive function. Although the Gates Foundation does allow women power in the agricultural realm, its rhetoric implies that these roles (mother and farmer) are not connected. A women’s ability as both a mother is deeply influenced by her role as a farmer and vice versa. By separating these two roles, the Gates Foundation constructs a concept of an ideal women operating in two separate realms of productive and reproductive labor that is unrealistic. This simplistic image further reduces women’s complex agency in the private and public spheres of health care and farming.

*c. Where are the details?*

Although I have already touched on the problematic homogenization of “women of the Global South,” it warrants a second look. The category of women, both as mothers and farmers, is constructed by the Gates Foundation as a monolithic category that relies heavily on reader’s assumptions to make judgments. In utilizing this vague discourse, the Gates Foundation establishes a relationship between the Global North and the Global South that is nebulous, lacking context, details and human stories. This institutionalized production of knowledge around women “plays an important role in the production of certain sorts of structural change” that can be detrimental to the lives of women of the Global South (Ferguson 1990: xv). Furthering this discourse, which is instrumental in developing policy, advances Development projects that disregard the multitude of differences within women of the Global South.

The lack of details in the reports even extends to the Gates Foundation's recommendations for "intervention." Within their maternal health platform, the Gates Foundation advocates for "stimulating demand for quality maternal and neonatal health care among families" as well as researching "effective channels to communicate messages and negotiate behavior change" (Maternal Health 2009: 2). Although shifting health standards and care involves a level of societal and behavioral restructuring, the vagueness with which the Gates Foundation promotes social change are problematic.

The phrase "stimulating demand for quality ... health care" implies that there is no desire for good health care to begin with, which ultimately assumes that women of the Global South are unaware (read: uneducated) of quality (read: modern, Western) health care. This statement explicitly engages the Gates Foundation in a material process of restructuring society to fit the Gates Foundation's ideal image. Although this is in line with the overall implications of "global health," which stems from a move for social control and governance, it moves far beyond the goal of "saving lives in poor countries" (Gates Foundation 2011). Even further, such rhetoric implies that women of the Global South are in need of "behavior change" more in line with a Western (read: better) model. This rhetoric continues the Gates Foundation's foray into neoliberal governance, in the hopes of restructuring societies of the Global South to better utilize the free market (Larner 2000). The Foundation influences a process of self-discipline within women and within Western interpretations of women that make Development seem necessary (Brown 2005). Beyond Development, such rhetoric makes neoliberal ideas of freedom and health seem necessary and ideal. This works to further the reach of neoliberal governance and affirm the hegemony of "*homo oeconomicus*," citizenship built around the free market, thereby

sustaining the power of the Development apparatus as a necessary institution for public goods (Brown 2005: 40, Escobar 1991).

*d. Where is the evidence?*

Throughout the Gates Foundation's strategic overviews, there is a noticeable lack of evidence and sources to back up their claims. Although most statistics or scientific facts in the health section are backed up with a bibliography, the Gates Foundation does not provide evidence for causal relationships stated through out the document. For example, the statement that "family planning also enhances social development by alleviating poverty; improving the environment, agriculture, water, and sanitation; and increasing access to primary education" relies largely on demographic interpretations of data (Family Planning 2011: 1). It does not speak to the actions of the state, civil society or family, which control the distribution of such resources regardless of population size.

The report on agriculture development continues to make numerous statistical and causal claims without citing any sources. The statement that "yields on women's plots are typically 20 percent to 40 percent less than men's" is not confirmed by any other report (Agriculture Development 2011: 3). The Gates Foundation then links this statistic to a gender gap in access to seeds and other inputs, dismissing cultural factors like gendered differentiation between crops and farm labor that often relegates women to smaller plots and less productive crops (Holt-Gimenez 2007).

This lack of evidence works to affirm the power of the Gates Foundation by constructing the organization as a preeminent source for knowledge about the Global South. By disregarding sources for causal relationships and even some statistical claims, the Gates Foundation assumes authority over the knowledge of the needs of the Global

South. Such claims to authority go unquestioned thus strengthening the Gates Foundation's position in the Development discourse and furthering their influence over Development policy. It also underlines how Development acts as the preeminent lens through which citizens of the Global North view the Global South.

Even further, the rhetoric employs an "objective" tone in order to portray a sense of institutionalized power. The Gates Foundation's reliance on scientific rhetoric follows the idea that science is objective, despite the fact that science is merely another epistemology influenced by cultural norms and values (Loustaunau 1997). In establishing this objective tone, the Gates Foundation also uses organizational categories such as "small farmers," "women farmers," or "African girls" to distribute people across labels that are easily simplified for the Development paradigm to aid and address. This use of scientific categorization furthers this objective rhetoric, thereby promoting the Gates Foundation as a source of power in the world of Development. Escobar sees this categorization as a "bureaucratization of knowledge about the third world" in order to establish "client categories" that are "consistent with the creation and reproduction of modern capitalist relations" (1991: 106).

Such "bureaucratization of knowledge" is consistent with the Gates Foundation's goals to incorporate the private sector through market incentives, which further necessitates an objective and authoritative voice to attract Western business interests (Kinsley 2008). This is in line with the post-Washington Consensus, which aims to extend governance in the Global South due to poor economic policies of the 1970s and 1980s that have prevented Southern nations from participating in the free market (Stiglitz 2008). The post-Washington Consensus is built around the fundamental belief that "there is no

theoretical underpinning to believe that in early stages of development, markets by themselves will lead to efficient outcomes,” and that some governance is required for development (Stiglitz 2008: 43). Such governance ultimately comes in the form of international Development which provides Western standards of health care, education, and citizenship to fit the people of the Global South to the operations of the free market thereby increasing the consumption and production of goods and services (Brown 2005).

*e. Where is the history?*

The lack of specificity and evidence throughout the Gates Foundation’s reports reinforces its institutional power, fueling a mainstream development discourse in which underdevelopment of the Global South is a problem to be fixed by the Global North. Embedded in such rhetoric is a denial of the history and reasons for the political and economic divergence between the Global North and South. The reasons are extensive, but in recent history, colonialism and imperialism played a major factor in establishing the economic dynamic of today (Harvey 2005).

The rhetoric of the Gates Foundation however, looks to erase this colonial history by linking health topics to purely scientific causes and not social inequalities. The maternal health report states:

“The majority of maternal and neonatal deaths are due to a limited number of conditions. Hemorrhage, hypertensive disorders, sepsis, and obstructed labor account for 59 percent of all maternal deaths; preterm birth, severe infections ... and birth asphyxia account for 76 percent of neonatal deaths” (Maternal Health 2009: 2).

While scientifically, these conditions may be the cause of many maternal and neonatal deaths, this statement ignores the social conditions that have allowed high rates of maternal mortality in the Global South. It works to erase colonial histories, thereby

establishing a “problem” that exists within a vacuum and which is purely scientific and therefore fixable. With fixable solutions, the Gates Foundation establishes itself on a winning team, possessing the technology that will be an easy solution to global health. This furthers a discourse of Development that emphasizes technology, quick solutions and positive outcomes, while the more complex issues of social inequality are elided, obscured against a backdrop of notions of Development.

#### *IV. Conclusion*

By conducting a critical discourse analysis of the Gates Foundation, I have found that the organization constructs a reductive image of women through their roles as mothers and farmers, by emphasizing scientific solutions, normative gender roles and neoliberal interpretations of citizenship. This image lacks specificity, evidence or historical context, thereby advancing a homogenized interpretation of women while also reaffirming the Gates Foundation’s power in the Development apparatus. Even further, the Gates Foundation engages in a process of large-scale governance along neoliberal lines, working to restructure communities around the global market.

This paper does not refute the fact that deep structural inequalities have significant implications in the distribution of resources and power across the globe. It also does not refute the Gates Foundation’s good intentions or the positive effects of much of their work. Rather, it is meant to deconstruct the ways in which the Gates Foundation talks about these structural inequalities in relation to women. As the largest philanthropic foundation in the world, the language used by the Gates Foundation has a direct impact on how Westerners see and interact with the Global South. Even further, it has real implications for Development policy on the ground. James Ferguson came to a similar understanding during

his fieldwork in Lesotho, arguing that “the institutionalized production of certain kinds of ideas about Lesotho has important effects, and that the production of such ideas plays an important role in the production of certain sorts of structural change” (1990: xv).

Ultimately, it is crucial to social change that we be critical of how the Development discourse elides the complex realities of the Global South. We must look beyond good intentions to see the ways in which women’s lives and bodies become subtly co-opted for larger purposes, therefore putting them in conflict with multiple interpretations of development. More personally, we must be critical of how the Development discourse influences our own understandings of the Global North and the Global South. This paper is primarily meant to disrupt the normative ways many Westerners view the Global South, such as “backwards,” “primitive,” “powerless” ... etc.

To some extent, this concept might seem simple. To say that citizens of the Global South have agency, based on multiple intersections between race, class, space, gender, is not revolutionary. However, utilizing that knowledge to be critical of Development, “a value so firmly entrenched that it seems almost impossible to question,” and the ways in which it negatively effects citizens of the Global South as well as poorly informs the West’s perceptions of global citizenship, can be controversial (Ferguson 1990: xiv). It is important to recognize that many of the scholars I cite in this paper, such as James Ferguson, Arturo Escobar, and Chandra Mohanty, were writing about Development in the early 1990s and yet much of what they said remains true today. Development is so institutionalized, and the language through which it works is so pervasive, that the hegemony has only strengthened in the last twenty years.

Academics, activists, and concerned global citizens, however, can begin to shift the dialogue towards a language that does not elide complexities but rather recognizes the relationality and individuality of women of the Global South. Even further, Westerners can examine the ways in which they reproduce the structural inequalities that make Development seem so necessary. Ultimately, this paper is a testament to the possibilities of looking beyond good intentions to the gritty reality of international Development. We must recognize that the project of D/development is not about a North/South binary but rather a complex interplay of ideas and assumptions rooted in history and dependent on *global* structural change. It is time to think outside of imaginary divides so that we can begin to image an alternative world.



*Fig. 1: A women and her child in a health clinic. From the Gates Foundation Website.*



*Fig. 2: A women holding her baby while it receives a vaccination. From the Gates Foundation Website.*



*Fig. 3: A smiling women in Rwanda with her family and their maize crop. From the Agricultural Development Strategy Report.*



*Fig. 4: Women walking through a rice field in India. From the Agricultural Development Strategy Report.*

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