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(De)constructing the ´Third World Woman´ in International Gender-Equality Development advocacy

A postcolonial feminist discourse analysis of identity constructions in RFSU´s Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights advocacy

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Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), feminist post colonialism, representation, construction/deconstruction, discourse analysis

Nyckelord

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Abstract

This thesis explores the causes and ramifications of representing women in gender-equality advocacy within the realm of International Development cooperation's. This study shows that through representing the issues of development and the people for whom they are aimed - we risk constructing and reconstructing conceptions of what the postcolonial feminist field of studies calls ´third world difference´, meaning differences between ´western´ women and ´third world´ women. Through asking the questions ´How does gender correlate with nationality and ethnicity in the empirical data?,´ and ´In what ways can the images reinforce and/or challenge stereotypical images of gender and ethnicity?´ in analyzing material from the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education´s (RFSU) website; dealing with what the organization sees as the focus issues of promoting gender-equality through working with ´Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights´; issues of representation, discourse, and theories from the field of postcolonial studies are discussed.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background: Portraying the ´third world´ in International gender-equality development advocacy

> At the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994, 179 countries agreed on a new perspective on population issues. The Conference determined that issues concerning population must be linked to sexuality, reproduction and individual rights. According to the ICPD Programme of Action, reducing poverty requires efforts to reduce the social cleavages in society. This cannot happen without investing in gender equality and strengthening women's position in society. Another key outcome of the ICPD was the recognition of young people's rights to sexual and reproductive health.[1]

Promoting gender-equality has proven effective as an essential catalyst for a nation's economic development. From a feminist standpoint, equality among the sexes is also a desirable goal in itself. Increasing pressure from global human rights groups and institutions such as NGOs, the United Nations etc., and the fact that increased equality within a society is good for the overall economic development - working towards increasing gender-equality through various efforts has taken a prominent position in the agenda of international development cooperation's and aid.

The Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) is Sweden´s governmental and tax-payer funded organization which works to improve the lives of the poor through reducing poverty worldwide. Through SIDA approximately one half of all Swedish funded international aid is distributed to the 33 countries that the agency is in cooperation with. [2] The agency funds and cooperates with a variety of framework organizations, both Swedish and international based institutions; in order to

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[1] RFSU (2009) p. 2

[2] SIDA (2012)

effectively reach the international development goals which are to be achieved by Swedish funded international aid.[3]

RFSU was established in 1933 with the vision of fighting for right to abortion, sexual education as part of school curriculum and the decriminalization of homosexuality.[4] Today, the non-profit organization RFSU continues to work towards these original goals on a local level through information for the general public as well as in schools, on a national level through influencing sexual policies, as well as internationally in the form of advocacy and development projects.[5] In 2008 RFSU became one of SIDA´s framework organizations. The cooperation is aimed towards enhancing Sexual and Reproductive health and rights (SRHR) efforts through long-term financing in ten countries.[6] These countries consist of ´less-developed´, ´underdeveloped´, ´developing´ or ´third world´ nations. RFSU´s focus on promoting the overall social and economic development, especially concerning SRHR, means all of the international cooperation's "operations are focused on a gender and rights perspective"[7].

This thesis explores the portrayals/representations of women targeted in international development efforts – portrayals that exist widely as a result of the past decades focuses on a gender perspective in development. Postcolonial feminist theory is the field of study that this thesis is consistently in dialogue with; and therefore I focus not as much on the ways in which gender-equality is sought to be increased through promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, moreover the study aims to analyze the ways in which women are or are not portrayed through *RFSU´s SRHR focus issues[8]* as culturally, ethnically, and/or religiously, traditionally bound subjects of western knowledge. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, which is a postcolonial feminist

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[3] SIDA (2009)

[4] RFSU (2010a)

[5] RFSU (2010b)

[6] RFSU (2010c)

[7] RFSU (2010d)

[8] RFSU (2010e)

theorist that much of this study uses the theories of, suggests that one way of "tracking global feminist discourses includes analyzing the documents and discussions flowing out of the Beijing United Nations conference on women, and of course popular television and print media discourses on women around the world"[9]. This is precisely what this thesis aims out to do through analyzing constructions of the ´third world woman´ in RFSUs gender-equality international development advocacy.

1.2 Objective and questions at issue

Often through advocating for causes that are seen as essential in promoting development in ´less developed´ parts of the world – gendered, nationalized and racialized identities of the ´other´ are continuously reconstructed and therefore contribute to nationalized and racial stereotypes of women. The importance of deconstructing portrayals of the subjects of international development lies in the power that comes with being privileged to be able to send out a message (represent) gendered, racialized, and cultured ´others´.

> Power to represent someone or something in a certain way within a certain ´regime of representation´ (…) includes the exercise of symbolic power through representational practices. Stereotyping is a key element in this exercise of symbolic violence.[10]

My objective is to analyze how representations of national citizenship, class, religion and ethnicity are depicted in the material concerning RFSU´s SRHR focus in international development cooperation's. This thesis is a dialogue with the field of feminist postcolonial studies, where Chandra T. Mohanty argues the importance to critically analyze representations of women in the third world in a homogeneous/stereotypical nature; "the predominant representations of third world women in social-scientific knowledge production. And our representations of Third World women circumscribe our understanding and analysis of feminism as well as the daily struggles women engage in these circumstances"[11].

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[9] Mohanty (2003) pp. 237-238

[10] Hall (1997) p. 259

[11] Mohanty (2003) p. 48

The questions of inquiry, which the analysis is aimed to discuss, are as follows;

- *How does gender correlate with nationality and ethnicity in the empirical data?*
- *In what ways can the images be said to reinforce and/or challenge stereotypical images of gender and ethnicity?*

1.3 Disposition

The ´Introduction´ chapter of the study is designed to give the reader a background to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights as it appears in international development projects for promoting gender-equality. Also, the chapter is meant to familiarize the reader with the field of postcolonial feminist studies, and most importantly – the importance of this field in coherence with promoting gender equality in international development cooperation's; and the aim of this study. Lastly, I have chosen to present examples of research done prior to this thesis that deal with portraying women and promoting gender equality in an international development context.

In chapter two, ´Portraying the ´other´: theories and methods of representation, identity and discursive formation´, as the title of the chapter implies; theories of the practice of social representation and the constructionist approach to deconstructing the elements of representations are presented and discussed. Also, the elements of theory from the postcolonial feminist field of studies will be explained, and a discussion of the importance of postcolonial theory combined with theories of representation and discourse is the general goal for this chapter. The theoretical choices for this thesis are based on their potential of leading a relevant (for the purpose of the study), as well as intertwining with the method of research to explore and answer relevant questions concerning the intersections of identity constructions in the empirical data.

In chapter three, the presented theories of representation combined with postcolonial theory, together give the study a theoretical as well as methodological ´backbone´; that runs through the entire analysis. The analysis consists of applying the theories and methods to the material, which consists of photos and texts dealing with sexual and reproductive health and rights in Swedish international development. Lastly, a discussion of what we have learned through the study takes place.

First, examples of previous research should be seen not as a theoretical framework for this thesis, instead more of a gathering of similar studies to show the reader what has been studied on this specific topic before me.

1.4 Previous research

Many studies, academic journals, etc. have touched an array of themes, terms, issues that are presented in this study. The field feminist postcolonial studies, critical ethnography, cultural studies and media studies, along with others, have treated issues such as representational practices in international development and advocacy. There is an array of published texts dealing with the gender equality development and mainstreaming in national and international policy; a few examples of studies carried out previous to mine deal with constructionist theory, postcolonialism, representation and/or development with a gender equality focus.

´Feminisms in Development´ is the published result of the workshop, "Gender Myths and Feminist Fables: Repositioning Gender in Development Policy and Practice" held at the Institution of Development Studies in Brighton, supported by The Swedish and British governments as well as Sida. One of the central themes in this collection of essays the problem of claiming a universal sisterhood in gender-equality development efforts. In the article ´Battles over Booklets´, author Rosalind Eyben examines advocacy booklets that are produced by the British government development cooperation ministry, promoting policy that relates to their work with woman and development.[12] The author describes the transformative nature of representing the identities and situations of the women in which aid is directed towards; and means that each theme and description of women presented in the respective booklets contain myths that "serve to support and justify the descriptors."[13] Eyben examines the truth element of these myths about women, the myths in the booklets made truth out of what was "still largely imagined."[14] For example, in 1986, the theme ´Women have babies´ emphasized the need to control the birth rate in countries outside of the

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[12] Eyben (2007)

[13] Eyben (2007) p. 72

[14] Eyben (2007) p. 67

industrialized world, the images and text emphasized the traditional role of women in their reproductive role. Year 1989 the theme ´Women as agents of development´ resulted in a challenge for policy makers to find photographs that portrayed women as the active agents of development in the third world.[15]

Likewise, an article published in the anthology by the economic historian Everjoice J. Win, challenges the myth of the poor, powerless, dependent and marginalized (black) African women. Win argues that images of the target of international development aid, being "poor, powerless and invariably pregnant, burdened with lots of children"[16], whoever truth or myth ridden it actually is, sells, and therefore continues to be the stereotypical image of the African women.[17]

In ´Deconstructing the Portrayals of Haitian Women in the Media: A Thematic Analysis of Images in the Associated Press Photo Archive´ Maria José Rendón and Guerda Nicolas examine American medial portrayals of Haitian women in by thematically analyzing photographs published in the press. With a poststructuralist feminist theory they examine the process of knowledge that occurs through photographing and publishing certain images of Haitian women. The tendency for the media to portray Haitian women as victims needed to be rescued by the more powerful others. They mean that effects of such tendencies in media of portraying differences between minorities and majorities and emphasizing "otherness" "not only to the impact of media on dominant gender and cultural groups' perceptions of minorities but also to how people who are socially positioned as minorities learn about the ''scripts'' available to them."[18]

Gaber and Wynne Willson examine the roll that aid organizations and campaigns have on international media (and vice versa) in the formation of the international debate concerning the global "north/south divide"[19]. An important issue that this

[15] Eyben (2007) pp. 72-73

[16] Win (2007) p. 79

[17] Win (2007)

[18] Rendón & Nicolas (2012) p. 227

[19] Gaber & Wynne Willson (2005) p. 95

raises is the constraints of NGO advocacy, meaning that public awareness relies greatly on playing on existing themes, issues, terms, visuals within a discourse. Advocacy with a more southern based approach, or in other words a more aware and responsible approach of representing issues concerning people in the global south, often clashes with the existing western based views and preconceptions of the international media and news. Raising public awareness and challenging preconceptions of the reality of the global south can be done on the level of NGOs own websites etc, but "to influence decision- makers and achieve their campaigning goals, NGOs must (…) engage with international news outlets and agencies"[20]. The article discusses the tension between on one hand raising awareness about important issues and real oppressions, and on the other hand, challenges of responsible representation with a postcolonial awareness (in their particular case study of ActionAid and blood diamonds), in a global media system which is dominated by western perceptions of the third world.

The central theme of these studies is the translusidness of representations. The truth content of representations is not static, universal, or common sense; but rather a culturally specific content of the available discourses on the matter. The power that is possessed by the represented over the represented is "closely connected with knowledge, or with the practices of what Foucault called ´power/knowledge´"[21], which is further discussed below.

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[20] Gaber & Wynne Willson (2005) p. 100

[21] Hall (1997) p. 259

2 Portraying the ´other´: theories and methods of representation, identity and discursive formation

The springboard of this study is the argument that portrayals of a minority, marginalized or sub-ordinate group of people are often subject to represent or reproduce culturally gendered perceptions of what adheres to be the characteristics of the ´other´ in comparison to the power-holding group. Understanding the theories of representation - where knowledge about the world is produced and continuously reproduced through discursive formation and discourse - is the practice that allows the above stated to happen. To understand the meaning of the images and texts in the context they are situated within, as well as how this study has set out to deconstruct the constructions of identity within the material - I have equipped the reader with terms or ´theoretical tools´ that explain the process of representation and the meaning of this practice. As this study focuses on the production of knowledge and the discursive formations/discourse that surround the practice of representing the topics of SRHR and the women that these topics are aimed towards in international development efforts; the theoretical frameworks potential for guiding the reader through the issues and terms that have presented themselves in the studies analysis; lies in their deconstructionalist/poststructuralist approach towards bringing into light gendered, nationalized and racialized subjects that are produced and reproduced through discourse.

2.1 Representation and Discourse: constructing and deconstructing meaning

Discourse is the practice of *representing the world*[22]*;* communicating our thoughts with others. The theory of social representation is that our thoughts or ideologies are constructed by the society that we exist within, meaning - what makes communicating in any form whether through words, sound, image etc. *meaningful* is the way in which the ´truth content´ about this word, sound, image etc. has been taught or formulated

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[22] Own emphasis

through the circulation of meaning in society. The process by which meaning is produced (representation) therefore occurs through our use of language (signs, symbols, sounds, images, objects etc.) to negotiate our feelings or ideas to others (discourse). Social representation in the constructionist approach is the theory that "meaning depends, not on the material quality of the sign, but on its symbolic function"[23]. Meaning is what language stands for, *symbolizes or represents* what the language *signifies.*[24] Representation, is the practice of *re*producing meaning; because the discourses tying together meaning of language are already in place within society. According to the constructionalist approach; discourses are the producers of *culture*[25]; *representation being the construction of meaning*[26] through language. Therefore, representations/portrayals are built upon existing discourses and also contribute to the existing ones or *form new discourses*[27] (discursive formation).

Discursive practice is the term that describes to whom, where, in what context, for what purpose, discourse is being distributed.[28] The significance of the messages each person, group etc. sends out has become even more important to consider; Hall explains how mass media has broadened the extent to which meaning is circulated between different cultures.[29] Representation and the element of discursive practice can be powerful agents that lead to real material change, or keeping the social order of things the same; "some texts (images etc.) lead to wars or the destruction of nuclear weapons; others to people losing or gaining jobs; *others change people´s attitudes, beliefs or practices.*"[30] Along with the great power that lies in the practice of representing or constructing meaning through discourse; the position to be able to

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[23] Hall (1997) p. 26

[24] Hall (1997) p. 26

[25] The term ´culture´ as used in the humanities and social sciences concludes a set of social practices and values that are specific to a group of people or a society. (Hall, 1997, pp. 1-2)

[26] Own emphasis

[27] Own emphasis

[28] Fairclough (1992) p. 79

[29] Hall (1997) p. 3

[30] (Fairclough, 1992, p. 79) own emphasis with italics

"represent someone or something in a certain way within a certain regime of representation"[31]gives both symbolic as well as material[32] power.

2.2 Third world difference and the construction of ´culture´

Sexual difference is the term in which biologically determined ´sex´ and socially governed and constructed ´gender´ are combined. Rather than taking for granted the common experiences of struggle shared by ´women´ as a category; ´Third world difference´ describes how sexual difference theory is inadequate "for these ideologies (of ´being woman´) have as much to do with class and race as they have to do with sex"[33];

> "macro social divisions of class, ethnicity, ´race´ and nation (…) in the same way that the boy or girl looking at the mirror would not know that they are male or female unless they have had access to those who are different from them, subjective identities are always situated in relation to others according to all these dimensions, not only the sexual. Otherness, in the concrete social world of the children (…) is rarely dichotomous and/or confined to sex alone. The category ´woman´ can be perceived as a unified category only if all other differences are suppressed."[34]

"While the category of ´oppressed women´ is generated through an exclusive focus on gender difference, ´the oppressed Third World woman´ category has an additional attribute – the ´Third World difference´."[35] The term ´third world difference´ refers not to actual material difference amongst women in the western versus third world, moreover in the ways in which *Third world women are constructed[36]* as victims of their culture, religion, socioeconomic system or "defined in terms of their object

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[31] Hall (1997) p. 259

[32] Material power, therefore representational practices lead to material implications on the existing power relations in society.

[33] Mohanty (2003) p. 55

[34] Yuval-Davis (1997) p. 10

[35] Mohanty (2003) p. 40

[36] Own emphasis

status"[37] (the way in which they are affected or not by certain institutions and systems).

Through representing difference amongst women in specific ways we can also simultaneously reproduce existent notions of ´culture´, and differences amongst ´cultures´. Constructing ´culture´ is therefore a practice of representation which "involves making meaning by forging links between three different orders of things (…), people, events and experiences; the conceptual world – the mental concepts we carry around in our heads; and the signs, arranged into languages, which ´stand for´ or communicate these concepts"[38]. Through representing issues of development, the objects of development efforts, or the subjects that are fortunate to live in a more gender-equal ´culture´; meaning or ´truth´ is given to these positions, sometimes essentializing or ´fixing´ ethnicity, religion, culture etc. in a problematic way. Stuart Hall describes the ´linking or fixing´; where mental images or ideas are given meaning through language (which can be spoken or written words, visual images or bodily gestures).[39] Gender (in) equality is a term seen as the cause for slow or lack of development in the third world. Economic development is measured in terms of comparison to the economic stature of western nations. Gender equality is also measured in comparison to the extent in which the western world is equal. Cultural, racial or gender essentialism risks being produced "in any discourse that sets up its own authorial subjects as the implicit referent, that is, the yardstick by which to encode and represent cultural others. It is in this move that power is exercised in discourse"[40].

Power is also practiced through discourse for the viewer of the text, photo, painting, is thought to interpret it in a certain way due to his or her own relationship to it. The element of representing someone or something in a certain way is only meaningful; "for a painting to work, the spectator, whoever she or he may be, must first ´subject´

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[37] Mohanty (2003) pp. 23-24

[38] Hall (1997) p. 61

[39] Hall (1997) pp. 17-18

[40] Mohanty (2003) p. 21

himself/herself to the paintings discourse and, in this way, become the painting´s ideal viewer, the producer of its meaning – its ´subject´"[41]. Arguing against the use of analytical categories of women as either third world, non-modern, traditional, religious, uneducated is not to be confused with avoiding speaking of the oppressions that may be a combined result of societal practices within a time or place. On the contrary, the danger of generalizing the oppression of women living in the third world is on one hand that historical and socio-economic differences amongst women in the third world that are crucial to ´finding´ solutions to specific ´problems´ may go unnoticed and therefore also not remedied. The second risk of fixating third world women as (third world) different from (west world) ´us´ is the cultural and/or racial essentialism that becomes the dividing point in which the western world is superior.

Postcolonial feminist addresses gender, race/ethnicity and the production of knowledge, specifically the production of the "third world women". The intersections of ethnicity and gender, and the different power relations in which they entail between different women, are what are examined in this study. The overall theme found in all the formed theories in this study are that they all share a common goal, to deconstruct the elements of a discourse and examine the ways in which discourse is formed.

2.3 Deconstructing portrayals: representation and discourse analysis

This study´s methodological approach has set out to deconstruct the words, meaning and images (the language) in the chosen material. Discourse is not only the grouping of statements that are used in representing a certain topic; discourse "defines and produces the objects of our knowledge"[42]. Apart from the method of analysing representation in images and texts, I have been able to find reoccurring themes through the analysis and in conclude the thesis with a reflection of the overall message in the respective photos and texts, therefore a specific discourse contains similar statements, objects/subjects of knowledge, political theme; and therefore belong to the same discursive formation.[43]

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[41] Hall (1997) p. 60

[42] Hall (1997) p. 44

[43] Hall (1997) p. 44

I have discussed the field of representation in SRHR in Swedish development by analyzing the text and image material on RFSU's website. This study which is aimed towards examining how the category ´women´ correlates to national citizenship, religion and ethnicity; and whether or not these findings can be connected to the broader theoretical discussion around the ways in which ´the third world women´ is constructed and reproduced through for example; representation in International Development advocacy.

2.4 Material

The material consists of ´focus issues of SRHR´, published by RFSU[44] - these ´focus issues´ treat both SRHR activisms on a national level (in Sweden) as well as SRHR as the framework in advocating for SRHR in international development cooperation's. The seven focus issues consist of maternal mortality, the right to abortion, HIV and AIDS, LGBT-persons rights, Access to sexuality education, Sexual and gender based violence, and youth. The issues that are shown to be almost explicitly aimed towards ´developing countries´ in RFSUs international development cooperation´s are the issues that have been selected for analysis – these are ´Maternal Mortality´, ´The right to abortion´, ´HIV and AIDS´ and ´Sexual and gender based violence´. I have found it possible to use the chosen material in order to conduct a diverse analysis with both contradictions and commonalities of gendered, racialized, and ´culturalized´ identity constructions. Contradictions meaning that not all photos linked to the text are built on stereotypical portrayals of ´third world women´ or ´third world/development issues´, the commonalities meaning that there are common themes of inclusion and exclusion due to ´culture´.

2.5 Interpreting the material

In regards to the chosen material which includes the main focus issues of SRHR, each issue presented with a photograph along with an attached informative text; it is relevant to interpret 1. The photograph in the context of the issue, 2. The text in context with the issue, and 3. The combination of the photograph and attached text in context with the SRHR development issue.

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[44] RFSU (2010e)

Not all are explicitly described as ethnically or nationally specific issues; although I have through the analysis sought out to analyze both implicit descriptions of specific issues or explicitly linked to a specific culture, religion, etc. As a tool of deconstruction I have chosen to use an example from Hall (1997) [45], showing an approach for deconstructing the elements of representation in paintings, photographs, advertisements etc;

1. Who or what commands the centre of the photograph/who or what is the main focal point in this photograph?

2. Who or what is the photos ´subject´? Are *1. The main focal point* and *2. The subject* the same?

3. Can you tell that knowledge is being produced here? How?

4. What do you notice about relations of power in the picture? How are they represented? How does the *form* and *spatial relationships* of the photo represent this?

5. Describe the ´gaze´ of the people in the image: who is looking at whom? What does *that* tell us?

6. What do the age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, religious background etc. of the participants tell us?

7. What message do the people in the photo´s body convey?

8. Is there a *sexual* meaning in the image?

9. What is the relationship of you, the viewer, to the image?

These questions act as a template for interpreting the images along with the texts; and will be used accordingly when possible and relevant for the individual analysis. In the first analysis (3.1 - The privilege of safe healthcare), the questions above have been written out and answered accordingly to show the reader an example of how these questions have been used throughout the analysis. I have also used the analytical method of *reversing the stereotypes[46]*, where I have opted to "switch out" a stereotype for another that is someway built on racial, religious, or gendered stereotypes and dominating discourses, or where *difference is appropriated* in some way.

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[45] Hall (1997) p. 54

[46] Hall (1997) p. 270

In the following analysis, I will present and analyze the four respective pictures and following text using theories and methods from the constructionist approach to representation. The act of representing/portraying is a socially constructive practice and therefore the material must first be deconstructed in order to interpret and discuss what these portrayals *mean*[47]. The project of identifying codes or signifiers of language in the material in order to deconstruct assumed "truths" or "reality" of cultural and social life is what will be done in the following analysis and conclusion. In the analysis I have used questions formulated by Hall (2007) based on the constructionist approach to representation method and theory of social representation and discursive formation to deconstruct the images and texts. In this studies conclusion, the theories presented above are used as a tool to understand what the constructions mean; meaning what discourses these constructions take part in.

2.6 Epistemological discussion

As it is important to analyze and challenge the representations of the issues and people that these issues touch; it is just as important to read my and any other ´knowledge´ in any form, as *situated*[48] and therefore never being fixed or finished. I do not intend to espouse total objectivity in my analysis "promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully".[49] I as the interpreter of the material am not exempt from the element of fault; therefore I do not intend to give an interpretation of the material that stands for universal truth in any way. Also, my interpretations are meant to be continuously challenged by others interpretations. The questions I aim to answer through the analysis being; 1. How does gender correlate with nationality and ethnicity in the empirical data? 2. In what ways can the images be said to reinforce and/or challenge stereotypical images of gender and ethnicity? The second question can ultimately lead to an all too narrow analysis and conclusion without the necessary steps to be taken to eventually find contradictions in the material; meaning although the answer to one of the questions may be "yes" in some instances, it may be "no" if interpreted in a different way.

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[47] Own emphasis

[48] Haraway (2004)

[49] Haraway (2004) p. 89

The aim of the analysis is not to deny the privileged position of being a citizen in of the western world where I have access to, for example - health care institutions and resources. Nor do I stand against that much work that is done promoting these issues in international development cooperation's is important. However, I do hope to open up space for the analysis of representational practices by examining how different identities are produced and reproduced in advocacy campaigns through texts and images, and the consequences which this practice can have. Through critically examining representations through the media, and the way in which way things and people are portrayed through these practices, production of knowledge and the systems of power can be brought into light – and therefore open to be challenged.

> If we pay attention to and think from the space of some of the most disenfranchised communities of women in the world, we are most likely to envision a just and democratic society capable of treating all citizens fairly. Conversely, if we begin our analysis from, and limit it to, the space of privileged communities, our visions of justice are more likely to be exclusionary because privilege nurtures blindness to those without the same privileges.[50]

Questions that will be continuously asked throughout the analysis are; *what is not said about the issues and the specific relationships between western and eastern nations in the pictures and text? Why are women in the most effected parts of the world more prone to be the victims due to the lack of rights that are being advocated for? What lacks there that exists here?* These sorts of questions are important if we are to think of the "local in/of the global and vice versa without falling into colonizing or cultural relativist platitudes"[51].

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[50] Mohanty (2003) p. 231

[51] Mohanty (2003) p. 229

3 Analysis and conclusion

3.1 The Privilege of Safe Healthcare

Maternal Mortality

Every day 1000 women die of pregnancy related causes. That makes 358 000 women per year. 99 percent of the maternal mortality cases worldwide only affect women in developing countries. Moreover, 1 out of 26 women in Africa die from pregnancy related complications. In Sweden the risk is less than 1 in 17,400. The UN has declared family planning a human right. Goal 5 of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) aims to reduce maternal mortality by 75 percent by the year 2015. Yet, several studies show that goal 5 is showing the least progress out of the 8 Millennium Goals. Only one fourth of developing countries are on their way toward reaching this goal.[52]

- *Who or what commands the centre of the photograph/who or what is the main focal point in this photograph?*

The woman in the photographs stomach is what I interpret to be the main focal point in this photograph.

- *Who or what is the photos ´subject´? Are (1. The main focal point) and (2. The subject) the same?*

The photo´s subject is the person in the picture, being that she is obviously pregnant and that the photographer has chosen to zoom in on the pregnant belly - gives the sense that her pregnancy is the main focus of this matter. When the text caption is seen in relation to the photograph, as well as the title of the issue being ´Maternal Mortality´, the subject of pregnancy is linked to "women in developing countries", and specifically "women in Africa" (see text).

- *Can you tell that knowledge is being produced here? How?*

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[52] RFSU (2010e) ´Maternal Mortality´

Knowledge is produced through this photograph and the header that states the subject of this photograph. The woman being pregnant, in the context which the information is situated in, namely gender-equality through promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights; informs me that this is an issue that hinders the promotion of gender-equality developments in the third world, particularly African nations.

- *What do you notice about relations of power in the picture? How are they represented? How does the form and spatial relationships of the photo represent this?*
- *Describe the ´gaze´ of the people in the image: who is looking at whom? What does that tell us?*

The main issue of gender (in) equality is that "1 out of 26 women in Africa die from pregnancy related complications. In Sweden the risk is less than 1 in 17,400."[53] In Africa it is less safe and more common for a woman to die during child birth than in Sweden, where the risks of this are very low.

- *What do the age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, religious background etc. of the participants tell us?*

The age of the women is somewhere between late teens-late thirties, I am assuming this because of this age period generally being a time where a (if there are no reproductive complications or other health factors) female body is able to reproduce. Being that "99 percent of the maternal mortality cases worldwide only affect women in developing countries" and the specific statement of "1 out of 26 women in Africa"[54] dying in pregnancy complications – I interpret that the women in the photograph is African or any other geographical location in the developing world.

- *What message do the people in the photo´s body convey?*
- *Is there a sexual meaning in the image?*
- *What is the relationship of you, the viewer, to the image?*

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[53] RFSU (2010e) ´Maternal Mortality´

[54] RFSU (2010e) ´Maternal Mortality´

The assumed audience to this photo being a Swedish person means that the issue of maternal and infant mortality is not an issue personally affecting me. The information is therefore meant to inform me about something; possibly about the privilege I have of not having to worry about dying while giving birth, because the risks in the western world are minimal, especially in comparison. On that note, the information can also act as a reflection over my own privileged situation of not having to worry about this issue, and that no one should have to – and therefore why the issue is an important one in a development context.

Having demonstrated how I use the questions as a tool for identifying the subject of the information, how knowledge is being produced, and to whom the expected audience is; I can discuss the issue of ´Maternal Mortality´ with theories from the postcolonial field. The issue I choose to focus on is the reasons behind the lack of prenatal care and the (lack of) existence of quality maternal ward; meaning healthcare resources in many African nations. The lack of economic resources to keep staff within the nation leads to medical professionals seeking work in hospitals in the ´western world´ where wages are generally higher, as well as living standards. This problem of (lack of) maternal healthcare is very much a (post)colonial remnant. The fact is that what has happened up to now (for example the industrialization - growth of the service sector which occurred in Sweden during the 1800 and 1900´s) and advances in much of the ´western world´ have much been able to occur because of the long history of colonialization in many countries that today are called ´third world´ or underdeveloped countries, through for example the exploitation of natural resources, and the colonialized (cheap labor force).

3.2 Constructing Religious Difference

Right to abortion

Since 2008, RFSU has been running a broad campaign to reduce maternal mortality with a focus on how the lack of safe abortions is a contributing factor to maternal mortality. The aim of the campaign is to increase the general publics' knowledge and commitment related to the reduction of maternal mortality and the right to safe abortions. Moreover, RFSU strives to put pressure on politicians and decision makers to change legislation and provide more resources for the education of healthcare workers in methods of safe abortions, and medical abortions as well as healthcare after complications caused by childbirth. The campaign is also a concrete way of raising awareness about RFSU's international work and of demonstrating the importance of working with SRHR issues and human rights in developing countries. According to WHO close to 20 million unsafe abortions are carried out each year, which is equivalent to 48 percent of all abortions. More than 70,000 women die every year from unsafe abortions and most of those women come from the poorest parts of the world. An unwanted pregnancy can cause a person to drop out of school, and lose their possibility to work and earn a living. Consequently, many young girls choose unsafe and dangerous abortions that can seriously injure or cost them their lives. Unsafe abortions are mainly performed in countries where access to safe abortions is limited, either because they are illegal or because they conflict with tradition and religion. Women must have the possibility to decide over their own bodies, sexuality, and reproduction if they are to have equal access to education, work, healthcare, and opportunities for participating in social and political life.[55]

A spatial or social relationship between myself, the viewer, and the women in the photograph, the subject; can be defined from in relation to the information on who and who is not affected by the (lack of) right to have a safe, professionally done, legal abortion; (unsafe abortions are) "mainly performed in countries where access to safe abortions is limited, either because they are illegal or because they conflict with

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[55] RFSU (2010e) ´Right to abortion´

tradition and religion"[56]. The point where this statement is interpreted to be in direct correlation with religion, specifically Islam, is in coordination with the photograph. Islam as a religion that denies women of the right to abortion is thereafter the most significant message that I as the viewer take away from informing myself on the focus issue of ´Right to abortion´.

When Islam is presented as a "religion as the cause of gender inequality just as it is made the source of underdevelopment in much of modernization theory (…), feminist discourse on women from the Middle East and North Africa mirrors that of theologians' own interpretation of women in Islam"[57]. The result of religious reductionism in this way is the deprivation of Muslim women´s self, reducing them to passive victims of their religion. Because of the fact that a physical spatial relationship between the women in the photo and the viewer cannot be determined from the information given, Muslim women are represented as victims of oppression, regardless of their class position within their society, geographical location, ethnicity or age; only due to the fact that they are a female with the faith Islam; "women, regardless of their differing positions within societies, come to be affected or not affected by Islam. These conceptions provide the right ingredients for an unproblematic possibility of a cross-cultural study of women"[58]. What is the essence of truth in the Islam and anti-abortion connection, if taking into account the links between other religions and anti-abortion ideologies?

If perhaps the choice had been made to portray a white woman with a cross or other religious distinguisher of Christianity, a different message would be sent out from the information. Taking into consideration the ´islamofobia´ and racist right wing movements in much of the western world, the implications of portraying the issue with Islam feeds into the already established negative stereotypes that are used in ethnic projects;

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[56] RFSU (2010e) ´Right to abortion´

[57] (Mohanty, 2003, p. 29) Marnia Lazreg (1988) cited by Mohanty (2003)

[58] (Mohanty, 2003, p. 29) Patricia Jeffrey (1979) cited by Mohanty (2003)

> Differential social positioning, however, as well as identity of the ´other´ and
> the specific traditions and collective memories which are associated with the
> specific ´others´, affect the contents of specific racisms which take place as
> well as their intensity.[59]

By *Reversing the stereotypes*; taking a negative stereotype (within a specific society) and replacing it with a positive (or more positive) will not necessarily succeed in actually reviving the negative stereotype of the "the complex dialectics of power and subordination" that have formed the binary positions of the negative contra the positive stereotype. Moreover reversing temporarily escapes *the grip of one stereotypical extreme*[60], being the definition of Islam as a reason for underdevelopment, therefore the specific religion keeps in place traditional gender roles; and challenges the other extreme, being Christianity as linked to development, therefore promoting modernization in comparison to Islam, therefore not inhibiting gender equality efforts.

I argue that the material implications of Christianity as well as Islam have very different material effects on women within specific societies depending on whether specific institutional forms correlate specifically with religious faith; "these (religious) social divisions (would then) have organizational, experiential and representational forms, which can have implications for the ways they are linked to other social relations and actions"[61]. With the above said - it is an effective solution as stated for RFSU "to put pressure on politicians and decision makers to change legislation"[62]. If the reason for lack of abortion rights is the specific legislation in place that causes women who want an abortion and cannot legally have one to undergo dangerous illegal abortions; then the problem is the legislation. I therefore ask the question - then why portray Islam in the photograph? Portraying a specific religion as the main factor for hindering women's right to abortion (which I interpret the photograph linked to the text to do) is saying that Muslims oppress women

[59] Yuval-Davis (1997) p. 49

[60] Hall (1997) pp. 270-272

[61] Yuval-Davis (1997) p. 3

[62] RFSU (2010e) ´Right to abortion´

because of their religion – and also that this homogenous oppression is written into legislation in nation states with a population of Muslims. Islam, in other words, is made the culprit in this way. "The law sees and treats women the way men see and treat women. The liberal state coercively and authoritivley constitutes the social order in the interest of men as a gender, through its legitimizing norms, relation to society, and substantive policies. (…) (Laws) legitimizes itself by reflecting its view of existing society."[63] This described relationship between social practice (discourse) and social structure is what constructions call discursive formation, meaning, "on one hand, discourse is shaped and constrained by social structure in the widest sense and at all levels: by class or other social relations (…) by various norms and conventions (…) specific discursive events vary in their structural determination according to the particular social domain or institutional framework in which they are generated"[64].

3.3 Constructing Cultural Difference

Sexual and gender based violence

Gender based violence exists all over the world and affects mostly girls and women. Often it is used as a tool for controlling women's sexuality and it is closely connected to girls and women's low status in general. Gender based violence is included in some traditions and cultural customs and is often practiced, in the name of honour, against LGBT-persons. It can also be used as a weapon of war. Sexual violence can also lead to unwanted pregnancies, injuries, and sexually transmitted diseases.[65]

Gender based violence is stated to exist all over the world, but later in the text it is stated that it can be due to "some traditions and cultural customs"[66]; that can theoretically mean any place in the world. The photograph shows the words "sexo ≠ violencia", alternatively "sexo Y violencia"; the first meaning "sex does not equal (or is not equivalent with) violence," the second "sex and violence". As these words are

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[63] MacKinnon (2004) p. 169

[64] Fairclough (1992) p. 64

[65] RFSU (2010e) ´Sexual and gender based violence´

[66] RFSU (2010e) ´Sexual and gender based violence´

painted onto some sort of structure (building, wall), showing what I interpret as a statement against gendered and sexual violence.

I interpret that this photo is showing the viewer a social resistance towards sexual violence in a Spanish speaking country which I interpret to be in South America (Bolivia is the only Spanish speaking country which RFSU works with) – and therefore refers to the machismo culture that serves as a merely ´cultural´ explanation behind any violent acts towards women by men;

> Machismo: Exaggerated pride in masculinity, perceived as power, often coupled with a minimal sense of responsibility and disregard of consequences. In machismo there is supreme valuation of characteristics culturally associated with the masculine and a denigration of characteristics associated with the feminine. It has for centuries been a strong current in Latin American politics and society.[67]

The main issue in under this focus issue is the construction of culture or "culturization – that is, ´the colonialization of the social by the cultural´"[68] that it contributes to. In the same way that a certain ´religion´ cannot be to blame, neither can a specific ´culture´. (See discussion on legislation, last paragraph 3.2)

Second, what is the point in trying to make a difference and improve specific gender relations if ´religion´ or ´culture´ is seen in such a ´fixed´ way that it can be presented as the ´problem´ behind inequality? (Culture) "perceived not as a reified fixed ´thing´ but rather as a dynamic process, continuously changing, full of internal contradictions which different social and political agents, differently positioned, use in different ways."[69] ´Culture´ is not fixed nor is it a material thing – it is produced and continuously reproduced through representation and discourse. Representing cultural differences between the own collectivity and that of the others "play crucial roles in the continuous (re)construction of collectivities and collective identities and the

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[67] Merriam-Webster online dictionary

[68] Yuval-Davis (1997) p. 66

[69] Yuval-Davis (1997) p. 67

management/control of their boundaries"[70]. "Identities – individual and collective – are specific forms of cultural narratives which constitute commonalities and differences between self and others, interpreting their social positioning in more or less stable ways."[71] Ethnic projects use culture (religious, historical, geographically specific traditions) to form *imagined communities*[72] which often include specific relations of gender class, political, religious and other commonalities or differences within the specific ethnic project.[73] When ´culture´ defines the main characteristics of the beliefs, behavior, values of a person from or within a specific geographical region; ´culture´ can then be used, when politically useful, for the inclusion and/or exclusion of people imagined to exist within their certain cultural community. There are true material consequences of defining and thereby using ´cultural difference´ as a determining factor in defining difference between people, where ´culture´ is used to explain sexual violence in one part of the world – the ´culture´ from which the text is produced (here being Sweden) can be inexplicitly interpreted to free from the cultural production of gender relations that cause sexual violence.

> In different situations and ethnic projects the collectivity boundaries might include some ´others´ and exclude others. In contemporary Europe a ´other´ could be, for example, a migrant, a black person, a member of a ´old´ or a ´new´ minority, somebody from another religion. (…) In other words, any culturally perceived sign could become a boundary signifier to divide the world into ´us´ and ´them´.[74]

Differentiating between ´us´ and ´them´ due to differences in ´culture´, can (and has) lead to that "people can be constructed in different ethnic-racist political projects in (for example) Britain to be ´Pakis´, ´black Asians´, and ´Muslim fundamentalists´"[75]. ´Cultural communities´ has been used to ´gather´ people in the aim for common goals;

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[70] Yuval-Davis (1997) pp. 66-67

[71] Yuval-Davis (1997) p. 43

[72] Term minted by Anderson (1983), cited by (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 47)

[73] Yuval-Davis (1997) pp. 44-45

[74] Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) cited by (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 47)

[75] Yuval-Davis (1997) p. 45

although this unity can be seen as a positive tool for bringing people together, this same unity can just as easily be used to divide people and create conflict.

3.4 (Post) colonialism and Globalization

HIV and AIDS

Today, 33 million people live with HIV and every year 2.7 million people are infected. 45 percent of those infected are young people between the ages of 15 and 24, and the majority of them live in poverty stricken countries. Particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, girls and women (to a larger extent than men) live with HIV and AIDS due to poverty, the lack of equality and sexual violence. Most people who live with HIV have been infected through sexual contact. Therefore, efforts to curb the HIV epidemic must include sexuality education, the use of condoms, and gender equality initiatives. Views toward HIV have changed with the establishment and availability of more effective inhibitor drugs. In Sweden HIV is now seen as a chronic incurable disease. A person that is infected with HIV today can live a long, rich life. Despite this, those who are infected with HIV live with a severe stigma. Relatively few HIV infected persons choose to be open about their situation. The stigma that still surrounds HIV is demeaning for those living with the disease, which is a threat to prevention. An important step toward prevention is decreasing the stigmas associated with HIV and to working against the shame and guilt that many HIV-positive people feel today. The picture of HIV-positive people, that both the Swedish law on communicable diseases and the media put forth, makes it more difficult for HIV positive persons to talk about their illness and to get tested.[76]

There are two main issues that I interpret are mediated in the information regarding HIV and AIDS. The first being the high amount of HIV/AIDS effected people living in Africa south of the Sahara. The reason that this is an issue in a development context especially regarding development efforts to support gender-equality efforts are 1. The detrimental effects HIV and AIDS have on the population, healthy, able bodied people being an essential resource in development. It is stated that development work to "curb the HIV epidemic must include sexuality education, the use of condoms, and gender equality initiatives"[77]. The other issue is the stigmatism towards the illness and

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[76] RFSU (2010e) ´HIV and AIDS´

[77] RFSU (2010e) ´HIV and AIDS´

people that carry the illness and the life threatening status of living with the illness; "the picture of HIV-positive people, that both the Swedish law on communicable diseases and the media put forth, makes it more difficult for HIV positive persons to talk about their illness and to get tested"[78]. The two statements together make representational practices that are included (discourse) and contribute to new discourses (discursive formation) of HIV and AIDS a tool for either contributing to the stigmatism or changing the stigmatism in order to increase the use of condoms and increase the population that gets tested.

The other solution that I find important to discuss is the availability of effective inhibitor drugs. It is stated the stigmatism that affects people living with HIV/AIDS has decreased in Sweden, with the medical advances and public awareness that when treated properly an infected person can live a long and healthy life. Steps towards reducing the stigmatism in Africa may then also be to increase the availability of inhibitor drugs. The problem here that is a great hinder to a better life with less discrimination and power over one self (health is equal with ability to generate income etc.) is then actually to make drugs available.

To date, the transitional period which has granted temporary exemptions on the Intellectual Property Laws (meaning patent laws); has made critically needed HIV/AIDS drugs available in the masses needed to sustain AIDS epidemic; by allowing generic copies of the patented drugs to be produced, cutting the cost and therefore increasing availability. The transitional period, or temporary exemption from some parts of the Intellectual Property Laws, ends as of July 2013; where after coming upon the agreement year 1995; developed countries (where these pharmaceutical companies that make the brand name drugs) have "generally seen it as extra time for the least developed countries to build up the ability to comply with the TRIPS Agreement"[79].

 "A brand company holding a patent in either a supplier or consumer jurisdiction could potentially block the generic production, import, sale, offer to sale, or use of a

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[78] RFSU (2010e) ´HIV and AIDS´

[79] WTO: 2013 NEWS ITEMS

patented drug."[80] The ´block´ on the production of affordable generic inhibitors is companies exist within countries such as the U.S. etc. These are also countries that give aid to these many African countries south of the Sahara – this by itself paints a contradictory picture.

The discussion on western nation´s monopoly on drugs that if supplied in their generic form could drastically improve the development issues can be linked to what Mohanty argues is necessary for seeing the "capitalist hegemony and culture as a foundational principle of social life"[81]. The capitalization, through privatization (private based on class, national citizenship, etc.) of "ideas of public good, collective service and responsibility, democratic rights, freedom, and justice"[82] is one of the factors to blame for the "hold" on generic HIV inhibitors.

3.5 Conclusion

In conclusion I will round off the theoretical, methodological and lastly, analytical findings, with a dialog with the feminist postcolonial field of studies – which the thesis in large extent also has been. Central to all of the issues in of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in an international development context, in the way that I have conducted the study (with the theoretical and methodological choices) is "the centrality of gender relations and sexuality for the cultural construction of identity and difference"[83].

This thesis has ´(de)mystified´ through ´(de)construction´; meaning, I have analyzed the representations by interpreting the unwritten or not clearly stated by cross examining the language and images in the context which they are situated within. The act of constructing women into binary groups, and therefore contributing to the already existing constructions (discourses) of ´women in the western world´ and ´women in the third world´, is made possible through the "power of cultural

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[80] Chien (2007)

[81] Mohanty (2003) p. 183

[82] Mohanty (2003) p. 184

[83] Yuval-Davis (1997) p. 67

relativism in cross-cultural feminist scholarship and pedagogies"[84], or in other words-
the discursive effects of drawing comparisons between an imagined homogenous
´third world culture´ (that enables oppression of women), and imagined homogenous
´western culture´ (that enables more gender-equal relations).

What I have shown throughout this thesis is that the production of knowledge through
representing the world is "clearly an important discursive site for struggle (…) After
all, the material effects of this knowledge production have ramifications for
institutions (e.g., laws, policies, educational systems) as well as the constitution of
selves and of subjectivities"[85].

The other central theme that arose in the analysis is the impact of globalization and
the prominence as well as power holding transnational institutions such as the World
Trade Organization; and the limited space this leaves for nation states self
governance;

> Economically and politically, the declining power of self-governance among
> certain poorer nations is matched by the rising significance of transnational
> institutions such as the World Trade Organization and governing bodies such
> as the EU, not to mention the for-profit corporations.[86]

Development which aims to improve the lives of the most marginalized and promote
gender equality therefore most effectively begins with an anti-imperialist/anti-
capitalist struggle.

> In fundamental ways, it is girls and women around the world, especially in the
> Third world/South, that bear the brunt of globalization. Poor women and girls
> are the hardest hit by (…) privatization of services and deregulation of
> governments, the dismantle of welfare states, the restructuring of paid and
> unpaid work. (…) Corporate capital has redefined citizens as consumers – and

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[84] Mohanty (2003) p. 230

[85] Mohanty (2003) p. 76

[86] Mohanty (2003) p. 229

> global markets replace the commitments to economic, sexual and racial equality.[87]

In other words; if the goal of advocating and working towards "empowering" the most marginalized people globally (which I argue are females in postcolonial nations); then the ´culprit´ causing ´underdevelopment´ or lack of social and economic development is globalization and privatization of resources such as legal, medical, educational institutions. The welfare state that prioritizes these institutions is very much contrary to the ideologies of the capitalist global market we exist within. Cultural and religious difference is not the culprit of underdevelopment; and portraying issues that hinder gender-equality development on ´cultural difference´ only reproduces notions of the oppressed ´third world woman´ and the empowered ´western woman´ without discussing the actual global structure that makes this oppression of third world people possible.

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[87] Mohanty (2003) pp. 234-235

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