

Gender-Based Violence of Economic Globalisation in Contemporary India

An Intersectional Approach to Gender and Violence

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Key assumption of my contribution is that gendered violence as a manifestation of power, subordination and social control is intertwined with other forms of violence and domination as much as gender as social category of inequality is inseparable from other forms of inequality such as class/caste, race, or North-South, meaning neo-colonial or neo-imperialist forms of power relations and hierarchisation. Today my focus will be on the intersection of gendered violence with structural violence enshrined in the institutions and processes of economic globalisation. This analysis of the intersection of various power regimes entangles a polit-economic with a gender perspective, and a structural analysis with an analysis of discourses and of subjectivities.

In the past decades, globalisation as economic liberalisation and as a mode of modernisation penetrated societies in the Global South as much as the North and reconfigured production relations and social reproduction, the division of labour, and the private-public divide. Modernisation is not a linear process of eliminating all forms of violence in a society, but it reconfigurates some regimes of power and repression while eventually shrinking others.

My argumentation builds on the concept of structural power as it was coined by the Swedish peace researcher Johan Galtung end of the 1960es (1969). This concept shifts the focus from the individual or collective perpetrators of direct, physical and personal violence to institutionalised violence as root cause of social injustice, discrimination and exclusion, which prevent people from realising human rights and meeting basic needs. Structural violence in the globalised market system e.g. in the labour market, in policies and legal systems enforced by the nation state, is protected by a culture of impunity.

The Case of Labour Inclusion

My first example to illustrate the gendered character of structural violence of globalisation are transnational value chains in the textile sector. The image of the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Bangladesh is the utmost example for this form of violence which took the lives of 1,129 workers and left more than 2500 people seriously wounded, the majority being women. The fatal accident is at the intersection of the following power regimes: transnational corporations as drivers of globalisation and of transnational value chains, local entrepreneurs with their profit interests, the state that regulates - more or less - the economy, and the workers at the lower end of the

production chain who are actors in the social reproductive regime at the micro level of households. Cross-cutting through this intersecting power regimes are the social categories of inequality like gender, class/cast, race, age religion, ethnic origin etc..

The apparel value chains in Asian countries are governed by the international division of labour, by offshoring and a fierce competition between domestic manufacturers and between foreign companies in this buyer-driven production regime, meaning big brands and transnational corporations from Europe or the USA dictate quantity, quality and pace of the production. Domestic manufacturers ensure their competitiveness in the global market by reducing the production costs, e.g. by building factories without much safety regulation by authorities, thus converging with the nation state's interest in a fast growth of the textile industry as an important foreign exchange earning sector. Abundant supply of female migrant labour from the countryside – cheap, unorganised, unskilled - who take up wage work as a survival strategy for their families made this possible. For decades the hegemonic discourse of nimble fingers and of liberation through wage labour informed the integration of young women in production chains (Elson/Pearson 1981; Pearson 1998).

The textile industry has a longstanding history of violation of labour rights and safety standards, and a history of horrible workplace accidents such as factory fires and collapse of factory buildings due to unstable structures. These accidents are a systematic consequence of this growth and accumulation model in which costs and risks are downloaded to the lower end of the value chain in the Global South, in particular on labour in terms of safety and health hazards, and miserable payment. This kind of violence is a hidden, inbuilt structure in this production regime that has been coined “race to the bottom” and gears at growth with jobs but with highly precarious jobs and without rights. Within this regime the gender wage gap is an institutionalised form of gendered violence (Kabeer 2004). This institutionalised discrimination, devaluation and exploitation of women prepares the ground for physical sexist violence. Women workers face verbal and physical abuse as well as sexual harassment both inside and outside of the factories while the management does not ensure any security for them (Alam et al. 2004). These mechanisms make for the industry as a highly gendered production and accumulation system at the expense of women who are constructed as docile and vulnerable. Prevention of trade unionisation is a significant element in this.

At the same time, paradoxically the integration of women into the labour market implies a kind of modernisation of gender norms, roles and chances to liberate themselves from a strict patriarchal regime. Therefore there is a long-standing heated debate amongst economists and feminists how to assess women's labour in transnational production chains on a continuum between exploitation and empowerment or liberation (Pearson 1998; 2007; Pun 2005).

The Case of Sumangali

A specific mode of labour in these transnational value chains is the Sumangali system in Tamil Nadu, called “coolie camp system”, which is actually a new form of bonded labour. It was invented around 15 years back when the mushrooming Tirupur textile industry was keen to attract young and cheap labour. The core of this labour regime, in which presently more than 120 000 girls are working, is the convergence of capitalist interest in profit making and patriarchal interests in raising a dowry, the interaction between integration in a “modern” export production system and a so-called tradition. In particular girls from poor, illiterate and low-caste or Dalit communities such as the Arunthathiyar, a scheduled caste, are targeted by brokers and offered an apprenticeship contract. Advertisement raises false expectations “Internationally famous exporters want you ... Are you ready? (quoted in Veeramani 2013:) or „We request you to bring us the lovely girls you know and make their lives prosperous as a lighthouse“ (quoted in ICN/Somo 2011).

Boarding and lodging on the compound of the mills is offered and work as disciplinary regime constructing the girls as always available just-in-time workers. Some parents are lured with the promise that after three years of work in the spin mills their 12-23 years old daughters would get a lump sum of 30,000-50,000 Rps additional to their monthly allowances and wages; other parents purposely give their daughter to agents in the villages so that they earn their own dowry. This is a neoliberal mode of making already girls entrepreneurs of their self. For this, they pay a high price in terms of violation of human rights, labour rights and children’s rights: such as 12 hours workdays, compulsory overtime, subjugation to a tough disciplinary regime, sexual harassment (54 %), health and psychological problems (Solidaridad 2012).

Asking for the girls’ consent to enter such oppressive work and living conditions it is impossible to draw a clear line between force and freedom of choice. The main reasons for leaving home given are poverty and alcoholism of the father, which both are violent structures (Indianet 2015). As the dowry system actually is an as tradition branded regime of economisation of social relations embedded in the gender and caste hierarchy, the sumangali girls nurture this patriarchal regime which perpetuates the subordination of women. On the other hand, many feel empowered vis-à-vis their family if they are no more a financial burden on them and earn the amount needed to be married off.

This holds even more true for the young educated women who enter the labour world of the IT sector, and do call centre services and data entry for companies abroad. Despite of the modern technological context a main motivation of many young female agents and their families is to comply with the patriarchal, inherently exploitative and violent dowry system.

The Case of Financial Inclusion

My second case study starts with the suicides more than 50 women committed end of 2010 in Andhra Pradesh because they didn't know any way out of their indebtedness caused by microcredits. Other costumers blamed the small credits to be "killing".

The economic background to these tragic incidents is the commercialisation of microfinance after the Indian state liberalised the financial market beginning of the 1990es. 3000 licensed microfinance institutions (MFIs) send thousands of young smart men into the villages to mobilise women, earlier organised in self-help groups into joint liability groups, and to award loans to poor women at the front door. Commercial lending, now dubbed "financial inclusion of poor women", is located at the intersection of neoliberal policies, the financial market, regimes of production and social reproduction and a gender order. Microcredits are gendered instruments of financial inclusion based on the assumption that women have a higher repayment moral than men.

As the services of MFIs are legally confined to credit-lending, MFIs would take loans at the usual interest of 6-12 per cent from Indian and foreign banks and then re-lend the money to women with interest rate and charges up to 40 per cent, thus turning the credit-lending process into a commercial financial service and exposing it to the exploitative mechanism of the financial market. The gap in interest rates implies a high degree of institutionalised violence and exploitation. After a short grace period repayment is collected weekly. The MFI-agents exert a lot of pressure on the individual costumers, which is replicated by the liability group, a mechanism called by Lamia Karim (2011) an "economy of shame" – a double layered structure of violence.

Till 2010 Andhra Pradesh was the most credit-penetrated region in the world: competing MFIs in every village caused an oversupply of microcredits and an overheating of the sector. On an average 8 credits had flown into every rural household, at a time when the state cut down subsidies for agriculture. The women made use of the oversupply for multi-borrowing in order to repay old loans with new ones. That is how the much lauded repayment rate of 95 percent was accomplished, the hegemonic discourse of "female repayment moral" was constructed, and the microfinance industry made huge profits at the expense of poor women (Mader 2013; Wichterich 2012). This cycle of money circulation is structurally violent because the risk that poor borrowers get into debt is high.

A good woman is now a woman who gets microcredits home into the private households as a kind of revenue to subsidise everyday consumption and to make poverty manageable (Batliwala/Dhanraj 2007). Only few women used the microcredit for productive investment, many used it for repayment of the loans their husbands had taken from local moneylenders who ask interest rates of 100 per cent, for emergencies in particular medical costs, or for a dowry. Under poverty conditions the microcredits were normalised as a mode of social reproduction. The provision of microcredits to reliable women channelled a flow of money into the villages as never seen before. Cash

in the women's hands represents an empowerment tool and a revaluation, and at the same time a disempowerment of the male breadwinner who sometimes reacted with physical violence to this loss of authority (Goetz/Gupta 1996). However, more money circulation in communities increases the drive towards consumption and the dowry demands. This results in the paradox that an instrument of empowerment of women is used at the end of the day for the further economisation of patriarchal social relations, which constantly devalue women and use them as vehicles for enrichment and upgrading consumption. Like the sumangali system, women become key agents by financing a system, which perpetuates their own subordination and gender hierarchy.

The Case of Surrogacy

My third example of gendered structural violence is another booming business in the Indian economy, which makes for an annual turnover of US\$ 450 million: surrogacy. The trend towards commercialisation and commodification penetrates biological reproduction and life production. The new bio-economy or biocapitalism expand market principles into areas that have been outside of the market before, a more or less violent process dubbed "accumulation by dispossession" by David Harvey.

Different from most European countries, in India gestational surrogacy is a legal but a highly unregulated sector, which claims to "help" childless or infertile couples and to be a kind of "gift economy". Half of the 25,000 babies produced are ordered from abroad. Thus India has become a hub in the ongoing transnational commercial reconfiguration of reproduction with surrogacy placed at the intersection of the reproductive industry, biomedical sciences, population and biopolitics, and norms and value systems in society.

Acceptance and promotion of surrogacy marks a significant biopolitical re-interpretation of the reproductive capacities of subaltern women, which communities and state aim to control and restrict. The reproductive regime in Indian society is governed by two violent mechanisms: sex selection and the consequent femicide which actually is prohibited by law, and the two-child policy of population control which targets since decades in particular poor, low caste, muslim and adivasi women. The most frequently offered methods of birth control are implant and laparoscopy, both methods that control women's fertility but don't give them choice or control. The fact that in November 2014 once again 14 women died after a sterilisation camp shows the inbuilt violence in population policies regardless of rights and bodily integrity of women.

Agencies and clinics advertise the comparative advantage of surrogacy in India: prices are less than half compared to US\$ 80-100,000 in the US. The key motivation for women to go for a surrogacy pregnancy is the payment, officially around 350 000 Rps. Due to international competition and the absence of regulation, procedure and prices are becoming informalised; muslim surrogates in Mumbai reported a remuneration of 150 000 Rps. only. Just as in other precarious outsourced forms of labour, under neoliberal

conditions, labour rights are violated and women carry the full risk, which meaning they are not insured, and do not receive any payment in case of a miscarriage or still birth.

The Indian state supports the reproductive industry like medical tourism with tax and tariff reductions just as it does with other export industries. The reproductive-medical process is subject to the market rationale of efficiency: in order to multiply the chances of an embryo to nest in the surrogate mother's uterus, normally five embryos are transferred after an IVF. Therefore, a twin or triplet pregnancy is quite common. If the commissioning parents only want one child or twins, the other embryos are aborted regardless the surrogate mother's desire. She has to function as a vessel only. (Vora 2013)

Like export workers surrogate mothers are required to live under permanent control in a hostel within the clinic's compound. Her body and her mind are disciplined to care for a successful pregnancy and a healthy baby, meaning a high quality product for somebody else without emotional bonds. She gets prepared to give birth and to accept the immediate separation from the child - an extreme form of psycho-social, bodily and emotional alienation. This is however framed by a discourse of women as caring, sacrificing themselves, and a narrative of a gift economy and help for other women.

Amrita Pande (2014), who conducted ethnographic research for eight years on surrogacy in India, calls this outsourced and alienated form of transnational reproduction "neo-eugenics". Women from the Global South serve the reproduction of mostly white, more wealthy people from the Global North, while at the same time inequalities among women and the stratification of reproduction are growing. This is embedded in a new discourse on reproductive technology as an emancipatory tool for the commissioning woman - to overcome infertility or childlessness - and for the surrogate mother as an income generating activity, entrepreneurship of her own body and mode of revaluation. Thus, couples from the global middle class can realise their reproductive rights as part of their "imperialistic" mode of living, meaning based on resources from the Global South (Brand/Wissen 2012).

Structural Violence and Culture

In all the three cases, women are integrated under the auspices of globalisation into "modern" markets - labour and financial -, which are supposed to be contract based rather than force and violence based. They are included not excluded. The state facilitates and legalises markets and the private sector, and has its own interests in trade and export of goods, in earning foreign exchange and reducing the political burden of poverty reduction by shifting social responsibility in a neoliberal way to the poor themselves.

Inclusion of young women into various markets is highly paradox: it disciplines them to become a sort of “rational man” and entrepreneurs of themselves in a highly unequal system. It subjugates them to new forms of gendered discrimination and hierarchisation while at the same time implies potential for empowerment and emancipation. Interplaying with gender norms, the money economy in many places fuels and strengthens patriarchal „traditions“ as well as structural violence against women such as prenatal sex determination and dowry systems.

The political-economic perspective on women as (wage) workers in a globalised and structurally violent economy highlights agency, and recognises the emergence of new subjectivities while gendered, class/caste, racial and ethnic inequalities sustain. This perspective of agency opens as well alleys to explore options of possible empowerment within an exploitative context, and of resistance against violation of rights and violence. A post-colonial critique linked to a political-economic analysis counters a strong societal and academic discourse on violence against women as cultural representation as it is often adopted in the case of India.

An intersectional approach to gendered violence results in a more comprehensive understanding of the root causes, and of the interplay between culture as framing and informing the economy, and the economy determining and inventing culture and tradition. An intersectional perspective allows us to perceive physical sexist violence embedded in different interacting and intertwined power regimes and contest cultural reductionism. It allows to analyse how the individual perpetrator is backed by societal institutions and value systems, and is actually encouraged by a complex system of gender discrimination, othering and hierarchisation. Personal as well as structural violence are societal mechanisms of doing and redoing gender as social category of inequality and asymmetric power.

An intersectional approach suggests as well different strategies against sexist violence. Politics of protection are necessary as immediate response to physical violence but they are – same as the death penalty for rapist murderers - not able to change structural violence and hierarchical relations, moreover they divert attention from these root causes of physical violence. A broader perspective has to be adopted to address in parallel structural and institutionalised violence in intersecting power regimes, which create an enabling context for sexist violence. From this perspective other perpetrators have to be targeted by a naming and shaming strategy: big brands could be taken to court under the New York Convention or powerful actors on the financial market like leading Banks like Goldman Sachs and Citi Group.

Feminist scholars and activists manage to overcome the hegemonic perspective of victimisation by referring to human rights, and by highlighting agency as well as survival of violence. The rights perspective constructs women – how vulnerable whatsoever – as rights bearers while democratic states are the key duty bearers with regard to respect, protection and enforcement of rights. Both, the rights and agency perspectives allow to

strategically think beyond the powerlessness of vulnerable women, and the disempowering impact of structural and personal violence.

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