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The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's Gender Action Plan and the Gendered Political Economy of Post-Communist Transition

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Abstract

In this article we explore the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development's (EBRD) place in the gendered political economy of Eastern Central Europe's post-communist transition. We document the gendered modalities surrounding the EBRD's policy strategies for post-communist transition suggesting that they help to naturalise certain gendered constructions of neoliberal development and market-building. To elaborate these claims we show first, how the EBRD largely ignored gender until the "global financial crisis" when it discovered gender mainstreaming by mobilising the Gender Action Plan (GAP); and then second, how the 2013 revision of the GAP, the Strategic Gender Initiative extended the EBRD's gender aware activities. Both policies illustrate how the EBRD's understanding and application of gender fit firmly within a neoliberal framework promoting transition as a form of modernisation where gender inequality is always posited as external to the market and reproduces uneven and exploitative social relations.

Introduction

In this paper we analyse the role played by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in advancing the policies and ideas of neoliberalisation in the post-communist space stretching from Eastern Central Europe (ECE) to Central Asia, and increasingly beyond. By drawing upon perspectives from critical and feminist International Political Economy (IPE) (see Shields, *et al* 2011), we argue that the EBRD's recent incorporation of "gender" corresponds to, and facilitates, the EBRD's enlarged role in propelling the further commodification of (re)production in the region. As such, the EBRD plays a pivotal role in reorganising social relations into patterns more conducive to the construction of neoliberal hegemony (Watson 1993).ⁱ

This becomes particularly evident through analysis of how the EBRD has become implicated in the construction and reconstruction of gender norms, identities and relations in ECE since the so-called global financial crisis. As the extant transitions literature demonstrates (more often through its absence), ideas of gender, social construction and historically specific norms of masculinity and femininity, remain at the forefront of neoliberalisation in ECE. Debates on social, economic and political reform, alongside discourses of modernisation and nationalism have centred upon the contestation of the meanings of gender roles and relations (Kuehnast and Nechemias, 2004).

The EBRD's "discovery" of gender provides a robust illustration of the disciplinary aspects of neoliberalisation, especially how determining social reproduction is. Neoliberalisation constructs new forms of social relations wherein gender differences are

both intensified and eroded as women increasingly enter the paid workforce and a rearrangement of the work involved in social reproduction across the state-labour market/family-household nexus (see Bezanson, 2006; Bakker, 2003: 66-7). By representing and promoting an idea of women as individualistic consumers and entrepreneurs and promoting specific reforms in social policy, the EBRD influences the negotiation of how social reproduction is mediated across state, market and household scales to ensure the intensification of exploitation. We understand social reproduction as being constituted by three main elements: the biological reproduction of the species; the reproduction of the labour force; and the reproduction and provision of caring needs (Bakker, 2007: 541).

The argument unfolds in four stages. First, we critically engage with the existing deployment of neoliberalisation in the post-communist transitions literature. The starting point of our engagement is feminist and critical IPE which we utilise as a forceful heuristic to evaluate the discussion of post-communist transitions to dismiss the importance of gender relations in market-building, perpetuating our selective political and intellectual blindness to issues of social reproduction, consumption and patriarchy in the context of transition. In section two we utilise these insights to explore how the EBRD has managed to spend the first two decades of transition prior to 2008 deeply interred in gender blindness. This reading of EBRD activities communicates the part played by the EBRD in proffering three key policy discourses of neoliberalisation in ECE absent of gender. Section three of the paper shows how the EBRD arrived late to gender through analysis of the Gender Action Plan (GAP) in the EBRD's wider market building activities. This constitutes a unique opportunity to analyse the EBRD's understanding of gender in its first explicit formulation. The GAP was first endorsed in 2008 coinciding with the "global financial crisis" and published the year after. Its

appurtenant documentation unveils how the EBRD has translated the wider turn to gender mainstreaming, such an emphatic component of the post-Washington Consensus (Bergeron 2003). Section four offers further analysis of the EBRD's gender blindness by discussing the 2013 revision of the GAP: the Strategic Gender Initiative (SGI). This latter gender imperative demonstrates how the EBRD's understanding and application of gender fits with its objective to promote transition as a form of modernisation where gender inequality is always posited as external to the market.

1. Post-communist transition and neoliberalisation

As an initial cut at the gendered dimensions of the knowledge constructed by the EBRD within a broader framework of neoliberal development and post-communist transition we want to reflect on the existing deployment of neoliberalisation in the post-communist transitions literature. In particular how this is articulated in the role of the “international” in configuring successful transition. However, we also make a further theoretical move intimating that scholars have often been too quick to dismiss the importance of gender relations in reflecting on the role of global governance institutions in market-building. Thus perpetuating our selective political and intellectual blindness to issues of social reproduction, consumption and patriarchy.

Post-communist development is represented as a relatively straightforward division between internal domestic/factors and external/international factors; the latter especially driven by specific institutions (Dimitrova & Pridham, 2004; Linden, 2002). Following an initial focus on the IMF and World Bank (Stone, 2002), an ever-expanding literature has

progressively directed its gaze to the EU, crowding out other institutions. The impact of external conditionalities and their associated norms on internal, domestic national polities (particularly those employed by the EU) feature often (O'Dwyer, 2005) amid ideas related to 'passive' forms of leverage (Vachudova, 2005). The seminal contribution here is Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier's (2005) assessment of EU membership conditionalities. More explicit accounts based in IR/IPE scholarship includes Epstein's social constructivist account of international institutions driving Poland's liberalisation (2008), and Appel's (2004) meso-level focus on the external fiscal pressures driving privatisation. Despite some difference in explicating the balance between domestic/factors and external/international factors, the majority of approaches are informed by Area Studies predilections focused on how best to achieve the practical transformation of the construction of functioning democracies and antediluvian planned economies. The EBRD remains a curious absence considering its activities in the region.

The relationship between domestic and international changes relies on an Area Studies methodological nationalism that conflates society with state and national territory as the unit of analysis (Pradella, 201: 181). In one of the few developed critiques of methodological nationalism, Gore shows the isolation separates 'internal and external factors as determinants of national economic performance, with primacy being given to the former' (1996: 79). The analysis of transitology is disciplined via the construction of narratives which maintain the coherence of a field of study as it is already constituted: 'social amnesia should not be allowed to masquerade as scientific knowledge' (Hawkesworth, 2009: 285).

The key implication then for analysis of post-communist transition is how the relationship between the local, the national state, and regional and international institutions promulgates a particularly closure around divergent paths to development. The rescaling of transition development is not merely to be understood as the benign influence of multilevel governance extended from the munificence of the EU. Instead this closure affects a new form of neoliberal authoritarianism where power is transferred to, and increasingly locked in to institutional and juridical arrangements (see Cammack 2007; Gill, 1995; Jayasuriya, 2004; Swyngedouw, 2000). Neoliberalised institutions marshal the interests of capital to posit developmental beneficence in open, competitive markets, and the application of such strategies produces new institutional and regulatory landscapes supported by new functional logics and political imperatives (Peck and Tickell 2002). Rather than any monolithic single form of policy, neoliberalisation should be interpreted as a:

Hegemonic restructuring ethos, as a dominant pattern of (incomplete and contradictory) regulatory transformation, and not as a fully coherent system or typological state form. As such, it necessarily operates among its others, in environments of multiplex, heterogeneous, and contradictory governance. (Peck et al. 2010: 104).

There are three main aspects: first, the economy, with scales from the global to the body; second, the state, the national scale; and third, the socio-cultural scale, from the home to the locality. This is where fundamental forms of class, gender and racial oppression are configured (Mitchell, 2001: 149). We operationalise this at the nexus of social relations to expose gendered power relations in the social reproduction of a key institution of global governance and post-communist transition, reiterating Peterson's claim that patriarchy's

enduring legacy is a binary construction of gender that casts women and femininity as essentially different from and inferior to men and masculinity.ⁱⁱ Why does this matter? If as we claim, there must be a distinct gendered component to the reproduction of capitalist social relations, then the reproduction of gender must also be scalar. We therefore have a constructive template to reflect on the behaviours of sub-state actors, states and international institutions that highlights the imbrication between the social relations of production and the gendered relations of reproduction (Marston, 2000: 219).

As scale is a social relation there is a politics to its production, related to the reconstitution of capital in general. Scale becomes a set of economic strategies for states but also bodies, localities, sub-state regions, and global cities, to follow. Different spaces of engagement translate specific policy interests into the general interest across a range of concrete gendered, social and political processes, strategies and struggles. By interrogating dominant conceptualisations of global/local relations in the theory and practice of neoliberalisation, feminist IPE demonstrates how gender operates at multiple scales across the global political economy from the level of ideology and representation, social relations, to the body (Marchand and Runyan 2000: 8).

How then might this help us to reflect on the role played by the EBRD in advancing the policies and ideas of neoliberalisation in post-communist transition (beyond noting its absence from exiting academic debates)? The diffusion of gender equity concerns into global governance institutions constitutes one of the major trends of the post-Washington Consensus. Feminist IPE's critique of mainstream development thought has been essential in

bringing about and enacting this transformation. To make gender more palatable to organisations operating within liberal conceptual frameworks “gender equity” has been framed congruent to the objectives of economic growth, where equality between the sexes and women’s empowerment are means to overcome macroeconomic inefficiency (Elson, 2009). Since this inclusion of gender in development is predicated upon an understanding of men and women as fundamentally different, with women seen as essentially reproductive and nurturing, “gender equity” is reproducing rather than challenging gendered power relations:

Contemporary development policy-making struggles to conceive of incorporating gender considerations beyond improving women’s access to markets (local and global). Women should be educated to this purpose, receive better healthcare to be fit to do so, should be sufficiently Westernised and socially “empowered” to prevent men impeding their access to market opportunities. Little work is done to encourage non-market based behaviours (Elson, 2009: 115).

In contrast to much transitology literature we consider gender as pivotal to any understanding of the relation between the international, neoliberalisation and post-communist transition.ⁱⁱⁱ If one aim of the article is to highlight how neoliberal discourse and policy is a powerful, though contested, force in reconfiguring gender norms to fit the contemporary development project of market-building (on the latter point see Carroll 2012 in general), our focus on the EBRD offers a powerful interrogative of the variegated gendered practices of neoliberalisation that often appear contradictory and inconclusive (both in and beyond ECE) as the next section begins to explore.

As Ferguson (2010) argues, the study of social reproduction opens up the potential to analyse global processes as everyday processes, where local, domestic, and national actors are not passive recipients of top-down imperatives but are co-constitutive and reproduce its varied forms. Underpinning the allocation of the paid and unpaid work involved in social reproduction are gender norms, assigning different roles and responsibilities to men and women. By exposing the gender division of labour, where women are concentrated within low-pay, low-status sectors of the economy, and undertake a disproportionate share of unpaid work, feminist scholarship tenders a crucial challenge to the claims of universality and objectivity underpinning neoliberal development policy. The concomitant “free” market populated by rational actors instead conceals and perpetuates inequalities (Rai, 2004: 582-4). Neoliberal restructuring brings about a masculine bias by its tendency to assume that social reproduction accommodates macroeconomic changes. Gender norms that ascribe responsibility for reproductive work to women thus serve to facilitate a particular type of post-communist transition.

Given the commitment of the EBRD to neoliberalisation, in the next section the paper interrogates the role of the EBRD in the refinement of neoliberal strategies to maintain the disciplining power of capital. We do this by exploring the EBRD’s participation in configuring three discursive shifts of transition. The first based on market construction from the early 1990s, the second based on reconfiguring institutional arrangements in ECE associated with EU accession, and third, the neoliberal promotion of competitiveness after EU membership.

2. Where were the women? EBRD from Shock Therapy to neoliberal competitiveness^{iv}

In the preceding section we outlined a conceptual framing for engaging with post-communist transition. This involved locating our critical engagement with the existing literature in critical and feminist IPE. We take that heuristic in this section and utilise it to reflect on the apparent absence of gender in the EBRD's formulation of what constitutes appropriate policy choice during the post-communist period. Of course just because the EBRD does not acknowledge gendered aspects of its reform programme does not mean that the EBRD is not reproducing gendered knowledge. Gender equality may well now be considered one of the EBRD's integral activities; this was not always the case.

In the next section we will explore the EBRD's commitment to gender equality across its investment and donor-funded activities, unravelling how gender equality became a core component of advancing sound business management and sustainable economic development. For now though it is salient that the EBRD's gender commitment emerges most forcefully from 2003. Prior to 2003, however, various departments in the EBRD had shown some awareness of women in transition. For example the Financial Institutions Small Business Team promoted access to credit for women entrepreneurs but the silence on the matter from the 1990s onwards remains instructive.

Before we get directly to this the paper interrogates the three central shifts in the EBRD's policy discourse. The paper does this to expose the political and intellectual blindness to issues of social reproduction, consumption and patriarchy in the context of transition. These discourses provide ideological coherence, legitimacy and technical solutions

to the problems of transition aimed at completing reform: first, the initial post-communist construction of the market; second, the configuration of the “correct” institutional framework to facilitate transition; and third, the promotion of neoliberal competitiveness.

The initial discursive formation consolidated neoliberal thinking around a single legitimate route for transition. This is the pragmatic, stylised Washington Consensus “toolkit” so familiar elsewhere in the global political economy from the 1970s. This Shock Therapy mapped out the parameters of the reform debate for the first half of the 1990s embedding transition within an uncompromising anti-communist and pro-Western normative framework. The EBRD had three distinct undertakings: 1) an explicit commitment to political transformation; 2) a clearly defined emphasis on private sector development; and 3) a strategic role as the first pan-European institution linking the ECE states to the West (Smith, 2002). The EBRD blueprint for transition supplies a clear set of definitions and uncontroversial set of goals, while simultaneously offering expertise as a means of implementation (Shields, 2012: 24).^v What is clear from this first period of transition is that women are absent. This contrasts with the IMF and World Bank who were already developing gender mainstreaming dimensions to their policies. As Siemienska (1996) relates, women might well have been involved in the movements that contributed to the collapse of state socialism but after 1989 the *construction of a whole new society* means that women’s concerns are secondary, to be dealt with at an appropriate time (see also Einhorn, 1993).

The second major shift in EBRD policy discourse was from the market building of the early 1990s and aimed to complete the transition process and open up institutional frameworks

and practices that had been captured by oligarchic and exclusive interests. The EBRD was cognisant of this problem from as early as 1991:

The countries of [ECE] have shown themselves determined to create new democratic market economies. The linkage between the political, economic and social components of the changes have become increasingly clear. A market economy requires an adequate legal and democratic political framework to foster the spirit of enterprise, individual rights and institutional stability necessary for sound investment (EBRD, 1991: 26).

The harm done by rent-seeking in the early stages of transition was further illustrated in the EBRD's key annual publication, the 1999 Transition Report: 'building institutions that support markets and private enterprise remains a fundamental challenge of transition, but establishing the appropriate laws and regulations is not sufficient' (EBRD, 1999a: 9).

The need to open up key sectors of the economy to competition (especially the highly masculinised coal, ship building and steel sectors), to promote entrepreneurship, and remove existing distortions in the post-communist labour market, impeded the supply and development of quality human capital. The necessity to complement liberalisation and privatisation with the development of institutions and behaviour that support the functioning of markets and private enterprise was recognised. The policy shift from economic Shock Therapy to an *institutional* Shock Therapy was clear at the EBRD who averred,

the next period of the transition must be led by high-quality investment ... with the right kind of institutions, leadership and partnership, the private markets in

these countries can deliver the quality investment which is necessary for successful economic growth (EBRD, 1995: 8).

No hint then of a critical assessment at the same time that indicated how women ‘[constituted] a significant proportion of the poorest, most disadvantaged sectors of society; they [formed] a majority of the unemployed and a minority of those being hired’ (Molyneux, 1994: 293).

Progress in transition remained protracted (EBRD, 2004: 1; see also World Bank, 2004) and from the early 2000s a third shift occurred emphasising the promotion of competitiveness. The 1999 *Transition Report* identified the first two shifts in policy discourse already noted above and foreshadows the third: the centrality of competitiveness to transition. It claims change must be:

embodied in the social norms, practices and behaviours of both government and the private sector – institutions need social capital and social foundations. The experiences of the first ten years of transition point to the ways in which both formal institutions can be built on firm foundations and social capital accumulated. Of particular importance are: (i) the experiences of liberalisation and privatisation, (ii) the demands for good governance from entrepreneurs and civil society, and (iii) the forces of competition (EBRD 1999a: 9).

It is perhaps here, in the turn to competitiveness, where we can begin to see gender first explicitly emerging in the EBRD development discourse. If the juridical construction of the market and getting the correct institutions in place is insufficient for successful completion of transition then the alternative is to turn to the region’s population and explore options to improve their entrepreneurial capacities.

Since the emergence of the competitiveness agenda, the EBRD has acted as a vehicle for what Carroll terms market-building, a programme of an ‘all-encompassing technocratic agenda being operationalised in the name of development’ (Carroll 2012: 351) at the intersection of the financial sector and civil society. In effect the competitiveness shift is internalising Shock Therapy, a set of policies and ideas that guided the discursive construction of a neoliberal agenda for competitiveness. Labour market reform was an essential component of this strategy, and its principal objective, as elsewhere, was the creation of a “flexible” labour force. It is perhaps not that surprising when the following discursive shift towards more gender aware development strategies explores how a whole segment of the population’s entrepreneurs had been ignored.

Yet, the EBRD’s shifts in discourse should not be interpreted as a progressive reorientation. It is instead another way for the EBRD to seek to reconstitute itself as a legitimate actor in the global political economy. Each permutation from the 1990s onwards should be understood in relation to the failure of the EBRD’s neoliberal transition project to overcome recurrent crises of production and social reproduction. While the policy and rhetoric (on markets, institutions, competitiveness and gender) signify important departures for the EBRD, all continue to be subsumed to the overarching objective to generate profit for the EBRD, as potential additional opportunities through which the EBRD might pursue the neoliberal project.

In asking where were the women, the EBRD has been too focused on an undifferentiated question of capitalist production. It has paid insufficient attention to social reproduction and consumption. It has therefore, rather like many critical IPE scholars, privileged the urban and regional scales and neglected the household as a key scale in capitalism (Steans & Tepe, 2010; Waylen, 2005). The next section of the paper therefore communicates how the EBRD's recent policy and rhetoric on gender signify an important departure from its standard neoliberal prescriptions for post-communist transition. The turn to gender is situated in a wider process of macroeconomic review that gained impetus following the 2008 financial crisis.

3. How the EBRD discovered gender matters: The 2009 Gender Action Plan

The shifts in the EBRD's discourse noted in the preceding section were primarily aimed at the consolidation of neoliberal strategies of accumulation. The post-communist state was at first rolled back, then later rolled out, and then further subjected to ever more vigorous exhortations to improve its competitiveness. The wide range of co-opted social forces had one silence: the absence of a self-conscious gendered dimension. In this section the paper explores how the EBRD began to take gender seriously in its policy advice. We explore how the GAP is focused on gender but simultaneously articulates a new discursive strategy of neoliberalisation. We do not suggest that the GAP fell fully formed from the sky in 2008. There are a set of internal policy shifts at the EBRD. The EBRD's first meaningful and formal engagement with the gendered dimensions of transition and development occur when it declares support for gender equality when the EBRD becomes a signatory to the third Millennium Development Goal in 2003. The EBRD would later note how it had

committed to launching and implementing a Gender Action Plan in the Bank's countries of operations, to actively promote greater opportunities for women – increasing the economic participation of women in the private sector, including in decision-making roles, through EBRD projects, staff and clients – and to mitigate gender inequalities in the region (EBRD, 2008a: 3).

Second, the EBRD's work on gender was set in motion through an internally driven revision process on the impact assessment criteria for EBRD funded projects. Initially redrafted from the Environmental Policy, the 2008 Environmental and Social Policy (E&SP) advocated the EBRD's initial efforts to integrate gender concerns. This was formulated at the level of impact mitigation, the policy speaks to gender issues by highlighting women as one group made potentially more vulnerable to displacement following large scale EBRD projects (EBRD, 2008: 36).

The E&SP forced social issues into the spotlight by compelling the EBRD to mainstream social and environmental concerns through all activities. This meant the reformulation of operational assessment criteria for funding. The bulk of the E&SP addresses labour standards, working conditions, and community impact, gender is only mentioned in relation to work place discrimination and the relocation of indigenous people (EBRD, 2008b). However, this shift concretely situates these policies within the EBRD investment mandate. In addition the E&SP also committed the EBRD to comply with EU standards for employment, including non-discrimination on the grounds of gender (EBRD, 2008: 23). Since publishing the E&SP the EBRD has developed further guidelines on gender impact assessments, equal opportunities and implemented or begun the consolidation of fifteen projects with a formal gender component (EBRD, 2013: 8). Two years later in 2010, the

EBRD Board of Directors officially endorsed the GAP (EBRD, 2010a: 4). The GAP itself contained three parts: 1) The impact of economic transition for women; 2) The EBRD's efforts to promote gender equality; and 3) the EBRD's Gender Action Plan. We consider each in turn.

The impact of economic transition for women

The initial stage of the GAP explored the divergence of women and men's experiences of transition in terms of opportunities and access to resources including health, education and political power. It also assessed the following areas: labour force participation, qualitative modifications in employment (i.e. types of jobs), wage equality and access to finance. The GAP noted how women had been adversely impacted in labour force participation due to societal discrimination and increased caring duties following the neoliberalising roll-back of state provision. Discriminatory access to finance is particularly exaggerated in the CIS where 'financial development and competition are less advanced' in comparison to ECE. Such discrimination stems from path dependent cultural, historical and institutional starting points that can be stripped away through the increased participation of women in a 'more competitive financial market (EBRD, 2010a: 7).

The EBRD's efforts to promote gender equality

The second component of the GAP indicates how, despite not having explicitly targeted gender concerns, the EBRD had already inadvertently managed to exert positive influence. The GAP offers a number of key illustrations of its accidental effectiveness. This is primarily

through the existing influence of the E&SP, but the EBRD also had a track record in supporting women's access to finance, small business funding, offering technical assistance and advice to women, and through encouraging board-level appointments of women, and even through the EBRD's Women in Business Awards.

The EBRD's Gender Action Plan

The final component of the GAP then was the plan itself. This set out specific initiatives and policy priorities for the EBRD over the following two years. The main indicator of successful achievement of its aims would be the number of women in managerial positions in the private sector. Georgia, the Kyrgyz Republic and Romania would pilot improving women's access to credit and business opportunities, while the EBRD would develop improved impact assessment tools inclusive of gender through further collaboration with civil society and other IFIs. The GAP's focus on women in Central Asia as drivers of economic growth formalised and embedded gender equality into the EBRD's policy discourse.^{vi}

It would be churlish not to partially welcome the benefits of the GAP as part of a move toward recognising the role of gender and women's unpaid labour in post-communist transition. As the GAP itself acknowledged

The Bank's mandate to support transition, economic growth and sustainable projects accompanied by the accelerated economic growth witnessed in the region has helped to improve the overall quality of life, improved the overall infrastructure, whether it be through increased communication, transport,

clean water or access to energy. For women, who are often at home in the countries of operations, such improvements have a clear positive impact (EBRD, 2009a: 8).

However, we also sound a crucial note of caution that despite these proposals offering a form of gender mainstreaming at the EBRD, entirely absent from the GAP was any discussion of what gender might actually be. Rather than taking seriously issues of power relations gender is ontologically flattened into the homogenous category of women.

The GAP made the case for gender equality in its first sentence: ‘Gender equality is an important component of the development and transition processes in particular to better leverage the untapped potential of women in emerging markets.’ (EBRD, 2010a: 4). Later it suggested that women have positive impacts on market expansion through consumption and their contribution to better governance through less tolerance for corrupt practices. It is clear that gender sensitivity at the EBRD is ultimately to further proletarianise, commodify and socialise the population of ECE:

A key contribution of gender equality to growth is through labour productivity and the efficient allocation of human capital. When women have equal access to education, training and employment opportunities, companies are able to tap into a larger and more diversified workforce. (EBRD, 2010a: 11)

The GAP’s continued focus on private sector participation and entrepreneurial activity continued to marginalise women’s various productive and reproductive roles, hence the dearth of proposals concerning the imbalance of paid and unpaid labour. The individualising commodifying discourse of the Women in Business programme relaxes the familiar

construction of *homo sovieticus* becoming *homo economicus (sic)*, women need to ‘change their mind set in order to become more entrepreneurial’ (Greenberg, 2010: 18).

Given the EBRD’s previous discounting of the role of gender as part of its mandate this change perhaps indicates a crucial shift in emphasis. The unfolding of the 2008 “global financial crisis” opened up policy space for the EBRD to begin to incorporate more advocacy for gendered understandings of transition. At first blush this might appear to be a positive step forwards. Certainly in liberal terms it might. Under the varying titles of ‘transnational business feminism’ (Roberts, 2012), ‘postfeminism’ and ‘market feminism’ (Kantola and Squires, 2008), the growth of a business-oriented, pro-capitalist form of feminism is endemic to this current formulation of gendered global governance. Discourses on women and gender equality have played an important role in the response to the global financial crisis. By invoking a series of assumptions on women’s biological and social characteristics, women have been portrayed as better financial managers and a key group of consumers who in turn may increase corporate profitability. Yet the translation of such an instrumental understanding of formal gender equity inserted into policies promoting female entrepreneurship exhibits a tension with social reproduction (Elson, 2009: 38-42). This instrumentalist reading of gender continues to subjugate gender analysis within the broader overdetermination of neoclassical understandings of the economy. The EBRD’s discovery of gender is thus predicated on equality of opportunity, premised upon foundations of the individual’s responsibility to seize economic opportunity and fails to consider how to women’s social reproductive work can be accommodated.

This resonates with Penny Griffin's pioneering work on the World Bank (2009: 113) that reveals how gender is a part of discourse in two ways. As this section illustrated there is first, the official formulation of gender policy, which is articulated in EBRD documentation. Second, gender is an unacknowledged part of the EBRD's conceptual framing of the problems of post-communism and is implicated at the heart of EBRD praxis. Put simply, it is not that prior to 2008 the EBRD failed to have an implicit understanding of gender. Rather that the EBRD offered its social policy prescriptions and investments with no sensibility of the effects of policy on gender relations and social reproduction (see Bacheva et al, 2006). Since the GAP the EBRD may well be more gender aware but that gender analysis is utilised as an investment tool replete with ideas on women's natural role in the economy (EBRD, 2010b: 5). Such concerns were unimportant for the reconstruction and development of post-communist societies. In the next section the paper brings the investigation up to date exploring how the EBRD has engaged with gender issues since the GAP.

4. Reproducing neoliberalisation at the EBRD after the GAP: The 2013 Strategic Gender Initiative

From the preceding sections it should be clear that the EBRD is committed to neoliberal forms of market building and development strategies. This may not be so remarkable, but in contrast to many other regional development institutions the EBRD is fully committed to economic *and also political change*. Just after its establishment the EBRD acknowledged this, accepting that,

this poses a major challenge: to create a new economic framework, while simultaneously changing the political system, behaviour, and even the attitudes

of the people involved, without creating intolerable social conditions which could seriously endanger their societies and threaten those nearby (EBRD, 1991: 23).

The EBRD has a specific mandate to ‘foster transition to market-based economies and to promote private entrepreneurship, while also promoting sustainable development’ (EBRD 2013: 13). Therefore EBRD activities in the realm of gender are necessarily located within a liberal feminist framing. As with other institutions of global governance gender equality is articulated in terms of “Business Cases” or “Smart Economics”. As Chant notes, the ‘adoption of gender equality as a strategy for development effectiveness’ (2012: 199-200) gains increasing momentum, endorsed and promulgated by a wide range of international institutions, Non-Governmental Organisations and government bodies especially in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis (Roberts, 2012; Elias, 2013; Bedford, 2009a; Roberts and Soederberg, 2012). How has this been evident at the EBRD?

The impact of the “global financial crisis” should not be understated. As the then Chief Economist of the EBRD, Erik Berglof noted in the 2010 *Transition Report*, the crisis was not a moment for ECE to lose its collective nerve: ‘complacency would threaten not only recovery, but also long-term economic growth. There can be no return to the region’s pre-crisis dynamism without new reform’ (EBRD, 2010: iv). From 2008 resources directed at gender-related work were expanded to enable further opportunities for reform. The establishment of a dedicated Gender Team illustrates this well given that coordination of the GAP had fallen on EBRD staff with little experience of working on gender. Additional support for developing and disseminating the GAP was to be provided by a Gender Steering Group that consisted of senior members of departmental staff as well as volunteers. Though the

overriding concern for selection to the Gender Team, overshadowing expertise and experience of working on gender, was candidates' knowledge and understanding of how the EBRD goes about its business (Wallin 2012). Since then the EBRD has developed more institutional infrastructure for its work on gender culminating in the 2013 SGI.

The SGI emerged as a significant internal response to problems experienced with the GAP. Internal responsibility for the GAP was located in the Stakeholder Department, a non-operational department of an institution primarily focused on project work. This meant that despite the institutional pressure to find an approach to gender that would “fit” the EBRD's transition mandate, internal operational procedure sidelined gender. The SGI has become the EBRD's main policy on gender. The Gender Team now has three employees with experience of working on gender in other international institutions. It has also shifted into the Environmental Department that operates directly at project level. This provides opportunities to integrate gender at earlier stages of the project cycle.

To illustrate this point further, the EBRD had argued in the GAP that gender equality was linked to a specific notion of post-communist development in the following ways:

Gender equality leads to market expansion through the creation of products and services that appeal to women consumers. It leads to the strengthening of market-based institutions and policies designed to improve labour conditions, favour social inclusion and reduce discriminatory practices. It also leads to a transfer of skills and behaviours that enhance existing human resources. It further contributes to the adoption of the latest management best practices,

including policies related to corporate social responsibility (EBRD, 2009a: 11).

The SGI continues to align gender within the EBRD's wider neoliberal framework of transition. This enables the EBRD to demonstrate how gender does not stretch its mandate. The SGI repeatedly stresses the EBRD's limited resources and seeks to outline an approach where 'the Bank can best add value given its mandate and business model' (EBRD, 2013: 5).

Where the GAP claimed that it would embed gender mainstreaming in the EBRD (2009a: 4, 11-12), it contained no systematised approach to operationalising this beyond extant opportunities in the appraisal and risk mitigation stages of project development (EBRD, 2009a: 12). In comparison the SGI introduced a much more detailed and robust approach to including gender to support the operations and objectives of the EBRD. However, the SGI discarded gender mainstreaming in favour of a more targeted approach. The SGI continued to support a range of initiatives such as development of guidance tools, policy dialogue and women in management and director positions, easily redolent of the GAP. Yet it also introduced a new method for identifying appropriate locations for the EBRD to work on gender issues.

This more targeted method in the SGI set out to identify the 'gender gap' to achieve a greater impact on 'women's economic opportunities' (EBRD, 2013: 10). The SGI is based on assessment of the gender gap across legal and social regulation, health, education, labour policy, labour practices, employment, firm ownership and access to finance. As with the GAP, this is translated in the SGI into *a focus on women and their potential contribution to*

growth and efficiency. Gender is described in terms of an attribute that ‘can both determine or impede a person’s economic opportunities’ (EBRD, 2013: 14). The main authority this is derived from is the management consulting firm McKinsey. McKinsey’s encouragement of “gender diversity” stems from their commitment to competitiveness, the skills available to a company, and better targeting of women as consumers (McKinsey, 2007: 10-11). Such an instrumentalised view of gender equality is connected to wider objectives, particularly securing greater labour market deregulation. Gender inequality can be remedied by including women in the market. In an uncanny echo of Chant’s argument (2012) McKinsey, quoted fulsomely in the SGI, recommended a set of ‘best practices’ to increase the number of women in managerial positions by promoting workplace options such as flexible working and the encouragement of women to ‘master the dominant codes’ via networking (McKinsey & Company, 2007: 20-21).

There is therefore a profound absence in the GAP and then recapitulated in the SGI: neither addresses the social reproductive content in the type of work they promote. This is strongly indicative of how gender has been subsumed to the EBRD’s wider objectives. The GAP contained some recognition of how women’s opportunities in the labour market are limited by their reproductive responsibilities:

Indeed, many women had to choose between participating in the formal labour market and undertaking “caring” jobs. The shrinking of public expenditures allocated to childcare or care for the elderly shifted the burden of child and elder care from the public sector onto the individual. These caring tasks mostly fell to women. Further, in the emerging private sector, employers engaged in discrimination against women with children far more than state

employers did. Private sector employers have also been less willing to accommodate maternity leave (EBRD, 2009a: 5-6).

Compare this with the SGI, where social reproduction is briefly mentioned but, again, markets have been assigned a key role in negotiating women's double burden,

Reducing the amount of time women spend on unpaid work via improved infrastructure can free women's time and help them spend it more productively and efficiently, such as engaging in economic activities that will eventually contribute to women's empowerment and closing of gender gaps in the labour market (EBRD, 2013: 13).

In effect, gender is only relevant to the EBRD to the extent it can 'aid the purpose of the Bank' (EBRD, 2013: 7). Their rationale for addressing gender inequality derives from a view of gender inequality as a form of market inefficiency where the exclusion of 50 per cent of the population *is first and foremost a waste of resources*. EBRD President Suma Chakrabati summarises this appositely: 'The Bank recognises that gender equality is a fundamental aspect of a modern, well-functioning market in as much as it contributes to the efficient use of all resources' (EBRD, 2013: 5).

Conclusion

This article offers an examination of gender in relation to the EBRD within a wider schema of a neoliberal politics of market building and development. Our particular focus was on post-communist transition, and while these issues discussed here have certain features unique to the ECE experience of development under the EBRD, we have also located our critique

within a wider global framing of the gendered dimensions of neoliberalisation. The paper proposes that analysis of the EBRD opens up multiple opportunities to engage the gendered reconfigurations affected by the relationship between neoliberalisation and social reproduction. Central to the paper then is an understanding of neoliberalisation as a highly gendered, variegated and socialised uneven process of capital expansion and circulation simultaneously contriving mechanisms of development and underdevelopment. The discursive formation of post communist transition reifies neoliberal institutions (especially the market) so as to close down the categories of political economy and deny their contradictory social and gendered constitution. The paper is a first step in due consideration of the historicity, gendered composition, and contingency of reform.

A threefold series of strategies was employed by the EBRD case that led to the closure of policy flexibility: first, the initial construction of the market; second, institutional reforms necessitated by market failures; and third, the promotion of neoliberal competitiveness. From 2003 onwards the EBRD became increasingly cognisant of the importance of gender and acknowledges that it can and should work on gender. Stimulated by the opportunities presented by the global financial crisis, in 2008 the EBRD introduced the GAP and then the SGI in 2013. Both framed gender as a “business case” that adds value to the EBRD’s transition mandate. By representing and promoting an idea of women as individualistic consumers and entrepreneurs, while promoting reforms in social policy, the EBRD influenced the negotiation of how socially reproductive work is distributed between the state, market and household scales to ensure social reproduction and the intensification of exploitation. The EBRD’s gender equality agenda thus both disciplines workers to support the market and removes alternative options configuring a clear tension with social reproduction.

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Endnotes

ⁱ To achieve this we situate the paper at the intersection of dialogue between feminist and critical IPE. In no way do we intend to suggest that feminist IPE is not critical. This is more a comment on the disciplinary constructions of particular forms of knowledge. We do this mindful that the restructuring of relations of production under neoliberalisation requires an examination of the changing relations of social reproduction and consumption, taking core concepts of gender seriously. We develop this further in the next section but for now see for Waylen, 2006; Steans and Tepe, 2008; Murphy 1996, Macartney and Shields, 2011.

ⁱⁱ Peterson enlarges on this:

Corollary stereotypes of (devalued) femininity and (valued) masculinity map onto the gendered dichotomy of public and private that locates women and feminized work/activities in the family/household as unpaid, unskilled, reproductive and ‘natural’ – in contrast to (over)valorized masculine activities in the public sphere, cast as paid, skilled, productive and ‘political’.(2003: 9)

ⁱⁱⁱ For notable exceptions see Pollert, 2003; Stenning and Hardy, 2005; LaFont, 2001; Kuehnast and Nechemias, 2004; Gal and Kligman, 2000. but we would note that many of these interventions remain on the margins of the transitological orthodoxy.

^{iv} This section draws on material from Shields (2015) which outlines the shifting internal discourse of policy at the EBRD in more depth than the necessarily truncated version here.

^v The outcome was that it was considered better to undertake all the changes concurrently and as rapidly as possible, because of the threat that the ‘losers’ would feel the social costs and uncertainties pushed through by the shocks of change a lot quicker than the ‘winners’ would

experience success - a message that persists to this day (on ECE compare World Bank 2000; and EBRD 2007; and for contemporary developments in the Middle East/North Africa [MENA] see EBRD 2013)

^{vi} This occurred roughly concurrently with the EBRD's burgeoning interest in Central Asia and the CIS. In an effort to remedy the 'poor investment climate and underdeveloped market economies', the EBRD had launched the 'Early Transition Countries Initiative' in 2004. This included advice and finance provided to SMEs while the EBRD 'engage[d] in policy dialogue to the purpose of institutional reform' (EBRD, 2004a). The Women in Business programme constitutes an integral part of this, clearly indicating that governments need 'better realise the potential of women's contribution to economic development in emerging markets.' (Greenberg, 2010:2). The programme targets women-led enterprises and has executed eighty-six projects involving consultancy, guidance and subsidies for female entrepreneurs, thirty-six focus groups and workshops to develop business skills, alongside study tours and networking activities in Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Serbia and the Southern Caucasus. (Greenberg, 2010:3).