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Disrupting the gender and development impasse in university teaching and learning spaces

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ABSTRACT

Gender and development (GAD) is coming under increasing scrutiny for its entanglements with hegemonic systems of governance, policy, and knowledge. This article argues that GAD programs and/or development studies programs with teaching provision on gender have not sufficiently responded to the imperatives of race and intersectionality most recently intensified by COVID-19 and the decolonising of the curriculum and Black Lives Matter movements.

The article explores the ways in which GAD frameworks have resisted rather than embraced paradigmatic critiques. We argue that this resistance to the imperatives of intersectionality has resulted in a GAD impasse which is reproduced and perpetuated through pedagogy and teaching, which shapes teaching and learning spaces in the UK. Despite the potentials for teaching to question dominant paradigms and frameworks, the impasse has hindered the field of GAD from adopting an introspective, intersectional, and transformative approach.

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1. Introduction

The field of gender and development (GAD), propelled forward since the mid-twentieth century by the radical intentions of feminist activism and scholarship, has struggled to deeply interrogate and reflect upon questions of race and racism which have shaped its scholarship, practice, and pedagogy. The 1990s was a decade of paradigmatic shifts. One of these paradigms, GAD, was firmly established when gender was “mainstreamed” as a recognised feature of development after the Beijing Platform for Action enshrined gender as a point and category of analysis. GAD became established as a programming area in development agencies and a sub-field within development studies, which can be seen in academic literature and university-level programs of study. However, despite the important feminist contributions that have shaped the GAD field over time, it remains an area of study and practice that has been reluctant and resistant to serious engagement with questions of intersectionality and race. The continuum of global movements and events, including Black Lives Matter, accompanying the COVID-19 pandemic, have brought to the fore conversations on racial injustice, intersectionality, and inequality that are central to the field of GAD, and simultaneously shone a light on the troubling tensions within the field. This obstinance has resulted in a GAD impasse which is perpetuated through pedagogy and teaching.

This article argues that the impasse in GAD is derived from its long trajectory of mobilisation around recognising “women” and then gender while subsequently creating closures for discussions

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around race, intersectionality, and colonial legacies which underlie GAD as an area of study and as a framework of analysis. As Robert Chambers (1997) argued that there was an impasse in development studies due to the hegemonic ideological ascent of capitalism at the end of the Cold War, we highlight that GAD as a field also rose to a position of hegemony which has resulted in its obstinance to intersectionality which comes out within the teaching of GAD in universities. The denial or even refusal to acknowledge its own complicity within the historical and ongoing hegemonies of development is evident and brings the GAD impasse into the classroom, where content, classroom dynamics, and the presence or absence of intersectionality within pedagogy come into play. As two global majority¹ feminist academics who have taught in the UK, North America, and South Asia in the discipline of development studies for the span of two decades and at several different universities in the UK, we reflect in this article on our experiences and observations on the limits for GAD teaching and pedagogical contexts to create critical, intersectional spaces within UK universities.

Employing a social justice framework, we draw upon decolonial feminist scholarship and focus on the teaching and learning environment of development studies in UK universities to explore the ways in which these global events have exposed the obstinance of the GAD framework and ideas of development to paradigmatic critiques. A social justice approach facilitates the identification and naming of behaviour and interactions which produce and reflect patterns of exclusion, injustice, and inequality to challenge these practices in universities. This offers the potential to reimagine teaching and learning spaces which, for the UK context, requires acknowledging both the fraught positioning of race in higher education within the backdrop of Britain's colonial history, the development studies classroom environment in the UK, as well as the ascent and establishment of GAD within the field of development studies.

Our intervention here is written as a curricular and pedagogical reflection emerging from our own experiences and struggles as two global majority feminist academics working across the in-person and online teaching worlds. While the empirical basis of our reflections are drawn from our UK experiences, our approach towards race and gender is a global one which does not only sit in relation to whiteness or Global North institutions. Our positionalities are complex and have been shaped by our respective experiences, backgrounds, and migrations, which cross North America, the Caribbean, South Asia, and the UK, where we currently teach. The ongoing legacies of empire, race, and gender have therefore not only influenced the interpretative frames and the constant process of learning and unlearning (Freire 1971) that is key to our scholarship and pedagogy but have also deeply shaped our lived experiences. This piece brings these strands together as we reflect upon our epistemological engagements with the teaching of GAD. Our argument, based on a selection of development studies classroom experiences and curricular examples, explores some of the tensions which have emerged when race and intersectionality have not been foundationally embedded in teaching and learning and the challenges that emerge when efforts are made to do so. We have not explored learning outcomes or delved into deeper content analysis, as this article is an attempt to highlight and reflect on the implications of the separation of race from development. Ultimately, we conclude that, despite the potentials for university spaces (both in-person and online) to question dominant paradigms and frameworks (Parker et al 2017; Spiegel et al 2017), the GAD impasse has obstructed the field from adopting an introspective, intersectional, and transformative approach. The impasse, however, may not be impenetrable, and we hope our reflections in this article contribute to the journey that will lead to its dismantling.

2. Thinking about development, gender, and race

Recent attention to race within development has emerged as a part of broader demands for decolonisation and racial justice from institutions including universities, whose histories and curricula have become under increasing scrutiny for their ties to colonisation, white supremacy, and financial profits made from slavery (Arday and Mirza 2018; Dancy, Edwards, and Davis 2018). Over

time, a small but critical body of scholarship has situated race within the history of development thought and practice, including in the colonial period and its literal translation into development theory in a postcolonial world (Kothari 2005; Pailey 2020; Veltmeyer and Bowles 2017; Wilson 2013; White 2002). However, as a discipline, development studies has been slow to engage with intersectionality and race and what such critiques pose to the foundational ideas of “development”.

The mapping of the world in the name of *development* has a long historical trajectory and was rooted in the same imaginaries that justified colonisation: the “scramble for Africa”, the “civilising mission”, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and other colonial enterprises from the 1600s onwards (Leys 2007; Cooper 2010). European domination and development went hand-in-hand, as can be seen in the evolution of normative ideals of development during the nineteenth century contained in the French policy of “constructive exploitation” (Hoodge and Hodl 2014) and the British empire’s “constructive imperialism” policy (Green, 1999). In critical development studies, the history of development has been firmly linked to the colonial project in terms of how imperial objectives of extraction in the nineteenth century and onwards occurred alongside the generation of seemingly altruistic-themed social programming. The constructed divisions that justified the colonial project became embedded in development discourse, as populations and communities in the Global South (constructed as primitive and backwards) became mapped onto new development policy paradigms as the underdeveloped and the poor (Author 2018).

The discipline of development studies itself has continued to reproduce divisions and distinctions which have roots in the colonial project. Though the colonial gaze has been critically identified and addressed within postcolonial studies, it has been less recognised within development studies, despite efforts by a few scholars to insert attention to race and whiteness from other disciplinary debates into development (Patel 2020; Pailey 2020; White 2002). Overall, the field has retained its driving principle of “development as progress” despite its convergence with colonialism and the trajectory of historical and contemporary Western domination and racialisation which it stems from. In fact, the field has been characterised by loud silences on race and racism, which, in many ways, reflect their centrality to its origins and contemporary manifestations of the development project and discipline. The silences around race, racism, and development have given way to a slow and insufficient recognition and engagement with the racialised histories and spaces of development, both as a sector and as an area of study.

Related, and important to our concerns expressed in this paper, are the long-term implications that feminist critiques of development have had in establishing women and then gender through “gender and development” as a named sub-field and paradigm that has replicated these silences. The early failures to make GAD paradigms intersectional lie at the centre of our concern. Part of our concern is “how slow feminist studies has been to recognise and acknowledge its own active and enabling participation” (Purewal and Ung Loh 2021). One important omission is the significance of the roots of the early waves of feminism, which were inspired by the suffrage movement of the early twentieth century but which were inherently anti-intersectional by remaining silent on direct colonial violence occurring at the time, and therefore represented a cause for “some women” and not for all, including a disregard for the rights of racialised as well as Global South women in colonised societies (Breines 2002; Zakaria 2021). The coloniality of gender is an historical as well as contemporary dimension to the emergence of GAD as a field.

The introduction of women as a matter of consideration into the development field, beyond their reproductive capacities, is often told as beginning with the work put forth by Boserup (1970). Her calls for an integration of women into development processes and a focus on women’s experiences with development and change resulted in the Women in Development framework commonly referred to as WID. The history of development scholarship highlights the significant shifts that took place as new paradigms emerged. There were differences along ideological grounds and emphasis between WID and Women and Development (WAD), which came to the fore in the late 1970s, and which focused on the relationship between women and societal change and economic development processes. WAD scholars, in adopting a (neo)Marxist feminist critique of development,

recognised that women had always been part of the development process, and they therefore questioned the structural collusions between patriarchy and capitalism (Mies 1986). This era also saw influences of radical feminist thought which could be seen in the demands for recognition of women in the 1975, 1980, and 1985 United Nations (UN) Conferences on Women. These spaces created opportunities for transnational solidarity. However, the different visions of empowerment, development, and change articulated by global majority feminists, though not necessarily centring race or racism within the discussion, also reflected the divisions between them and the mainly white Western feminists at the conferences (Bonfiglioli 2016; Ghodsee 2010; Zinsler 2002). In fact, there was little uptake or recognition of race specifically within the analyses of development during this time. In essence, development and gender were extractable from race as an intersectional consideration for the field. This moment was significant in that the late 1970s to the mid-1990s saw the rise of the GAD approach in which WID's modernisation prevailed over intersectionality, and race was therefore absent from the ascent of GAD as the predominant approach.

The emergence of GAD in the 1980s, however, raised a significant challenge to the liberal focus on "women" espoused in WID and called for a need to focus on the gendered nature of power and its relational manifestations. By the mid-1990s, GAD frameworks began to be more institutionalised and gender mainstreaming was formally introduced in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (UN 1995). Gender experts and units emerged across development agencies and gender became firmly ensconced in the development literature and lexicon. Meanwhile, WID's focus on women's exclusion from the economy and the failure of development interventions to recognise women's contributions to the labour force did not disappear, but re-emerged in the Smart Economics approach of the 2000s. This twentieth-century intervention borrowed from WID while also appropriating the concept of women's empowerment and producing a troubling narrative that calls for a focus on women's endless potential as economic actors who can drag their countries out from the burden of poverty.

The mainstreaming of GAD and the explosion of Smart Economics have been met with critiques, which have been discussed at length elsewhere, from feminists that argued these approaches appropriated and depoliticised the radical intent of GAD and reduced women to economic actors (see Chant and Sweetman 2012; Kabeer 2003; Porter and Sweetman 2005). Critiques, often attributed to Marxist feminists, challenged the relationship between gender equality and economic growth and the bureaucratic nature of the development project and insisted on class as a key feature of economic systems (Razavi 1997; Kabeer 1999; Mies 1986; Sen and Benería 1982). Scholars pondered the danger of cultural imperialism latent within GAD, where equality was envisioned as a mirror of Global North gender relations (Marchand and Parpart 1995; Schech and Haggis 2000). Others picked apart the concept of "gender" and contested the binary which much of GAD policy and programming revolved around and called for a repositioning of the feminist engagement with development and a re-politicisation of GAD debates and discourse (Mukhopadhyay 2004; Tadros and Costa 2010; see Cornwall and White 2000; Cornwall, Harrison, and Whitehead 2004). Waves of feminist scholarship and activism led to ruptures in gender mainstreaming and deconstructed the Smart Economics approach. Despite these important contributions, however, the GAD field maintained a few blind spots.

As the gender space became accepted as the location of radical and feminist social justice activism in development circles and scholarship, its heightened status left issues of race less interrogated. While the proponents of the expanding GAD scholarship mobilised around the notion of universal womanhood as a unifying principle, a small but critical group of commentators critiqued the idea of universality, given the problematic historical and structural backdrop of inequality between the Global North and Global South (Mohanty 1991; Oyewumi 1997; 2005). Feminist scholars and bureaucrats largely sustained the Global North–South dichotomy despite the long-standing interventions by global majority feminists across this divide (Alexander 1994; Amos and Parmar 1984). Intersectionality, though not a new concept, only received cursory recognition and there was even less engagement with or analysis of the racialised nature of aid or any other markers of

difference, apart from by a critical number of scholars (Nash 2008; Ramirez 2007; Smith 2006; White 2006; Wilson 2013). Overall, the resistance centring intersectionality within the early GAD paradigms meant that a sub-discipline was born out of a trajectory of Western hegemony in which Western feminism's colluding history with colonial and Western domination contributed to the invisibilisation of race and racialisation in development. Still today, the story of GAD is one that tends to deny how implicated the field has been in the perpetuation and maintenance of the global system stemming from colonisation, racialisation and race, and the hegemony of the West. This oscillating narrative, found in both critical and mainstream scholarship, which has given issues of race and intersectionality only limited airtime, constitutes what we call the "gender and development impasse".

In the same way that the invisibilisation of women in development marked the normalisation of patriarchy with the field, the silences around race within GAD circles reflect feminism's own history of exclusion and complicity in violence and racism within the GAD field. These silences and refusal to own up to feminism's own history of exclusion and complicity in violence within the GAD field have greatly contributed to the impasse. This impasse is exposed when we consider how Western, as well as elite Global South feminist mobilisations have run parallel to histories of coloniality (Lugones 2010; Icaza 2017). Especially in the case of so-called first-wave feminism, the antecedent to the lineage of WID and GAD, the colluding nature of feminism can be seen in the silences around empire and racist exclusions and violence. The impasse denotes the racialised nature of development studies and feminist engagements with race within the field, and the obstruction of a serious engagement with race in GAD teaching practice becomes apparent in teaching and learning spaces. We outline below two connected and troubling practices central to the impasse. Challenges to the impasse, many of which take place within GAD learning spaces, highlight the trajectory of feminist perspectives from global majority women and questions which apply intersectionality not only as an analytical idea but as integral to academic and pedagogical practice.

3. The gender and development impasse in teaching and learning

Colonialism, gender, and development

The key element of the impasse is the failure to explicitly name the ways in which coloniality and race feature in the explanations of the gendered nature of development and in the feminist critiques of development. Critical development scholarship has problematised the aid architecture and processes and called out the tendency of "white saviourism" in international development (Icaza Graza and Vasquez 2016; Khan, Dickson, and Sondarjee 2023). However, that critical eye has paid less attention to its own knowledge-producing practices. The feminist constructions of the "Third world woman" as an object represented through poverty and pregnancy and without her own history were exposed by scholars like Mohanty (1991, 2003), Dogra (2011), and Abu-Lughod (2013). In teaching on GAD, the critiques made by such scholars have become a standard part of the curriculum and feminist movements outside of a liberal Eurocentric Global North centre are recognised. The feminist traditions underpinning GAD, however – acknowledging their concern with addressing power inequality, othering, and exclusion and the social ordering of gender – have side-lined issues of race. This is reflected in the ways in which scholarship and analysis by decolonial and global majority feminists are positioned in the history of feminist thought (Icaza, Graza, and Vazaquez 2016). A common approach to teaching the trajectory of feminist thought is to represent it as a teleological pathway which diverges but emanates from dominant Eurocentric thought and values. The sequential framing of feminism as a movement evolving through first, second, and third waves crafts a narrative that delimits other feminist traditions as only existing relationally to white, Eurocentric Global North feminist visions. This undulating tale remains a stone that is difficult to dislodge in the classroom.

Global majority and Global South feminist movements have highlighted the ways in which the linkages between colonisation and patriarchy have created the foundation for globalisation and

capitalist exploitation but also for the underlying logics of development. They have raised longstanding and serious resistance to environmental degradation, inequalities, the global and local divisions of labour, access to justice, and women's position in society. Analysis has provided insight into the ways in which imperial constructions of "gender" become normalised in gendered and development discourse on the Global South and in racialised diasporic communities to justify occupation and extraction (Mohanty 1991; Mendez 2015; Oyěwùmí 2005; Wekker 2016). The critiques espoused in this long tradition of scholarship, however, have remained tangential to discussion of GAD. Though certain voices have been heard and are part of the GAD lexicon (Sen and Grown 1987; Mohanty 1991; 1995; 2003; Mies and Shiva 1990), underlying them is a diverse body of literature (e.g. Blidon and Zaragocin 2019; Mendez 2015) that, despite contributing critical scholarship and debates in highlighting the complexity and wealth of feminist thought, remains peripheral to GAD studies. In fact, as White (2006) points out, many of the core critiques of GAD made by feminist scholarship within GAD had already been articulated by Black feminists (2020; Hill-Collins 1990; 2000; hooks 1981; 1984; Jordan 1989). This scholarship, however, has had to exist within adjacent disciplines and canons to avoid the silencing grip of the impasse while arguing for a Global South orientation to how GAD are envisioned (Tamale 2020). A wave of global majority feminist scholarship has decentred Europe and speaks to different and diverse realities (Banda 2020; Tsikata, Rodriguez, and Ampofo 2015; Tuck and Yang 2012; Ultreras Villagrana, Gamlin, and Fernández Aceves 2023). Recent events, such as decolonise the university movements, have led to an inclusion of some of these voices in debates and in the curriculum. However, often absent is the critical self-reflection needed within the field to interrogate the multitude of ways in which race has shaped GAD practice and scholarship. Therefore, even calls to decolonise feminist discourse can be reduced to "radical theoretical intervention without critical interrogation of the discursive structures of feminist knowledge production" (Persard 2012, 15).

One of the most symbolic dimensions of the impasse is how closely GAD teaching and content is wedded to Western intervention and race. Gendered tropes have provided a justification for intervention, first through the colonial "civilising mission" and then through development. GAD as an area has its own history, which is taught as a lineage originating from WID to WAD to GAD, and the identification of this lineage as one of Western European power is rarely acknowledged. As a result, the triumph of GAD eclipses other and conflicting histories of gender which do not necessarily align with the history of GAD and its claims. For instance, at the height of the ascent of GAD as a framework at the time of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA) in 1995, the 1990–1991 Gulf War had only recently occurred a few years earlier and continued as an ongoing occupation by US and NATO forces. Meanwhile, GAD were simultaneously being wielded as a supra-national framework, notably marked by Hilary Clinton's speech at the 1995 UN Conference for Women in Beijing, making it a strategic tool of femo-nationalism for intervention through policy (Farris 2017). Alliances were forged through the instrumentalisation of gender, which is a part of the history of GAD that is not always reflected upon critically. Therefore, it continues to fall short of the calls for decolonisation, which, as Lugones (2008; 2010, 745–6) reminds, requires engaging in a "critique of racialized, colonial, and capitalist, heterosexual, gender oppression as a lived transformation of the social". As a result, the colonial and racialised remnants that have infiltrated even the feminist scholarship on the topic are often not fully interrogated in teaching and learning spaces.

Intersectionality, gender, and development

The misrepresentation of intersectionality forms the next piece of the impasse. Intersectionality was coined in the academic space by Crenshaw in the 1980s; however, its origins can be credited to Sojourner Truth, a Black women's civil rights advocate in the US, over 100 years before. During her speech *Ain't I A Woman* at the Women's Rights Convention (Truth 1851), Truth, who had formerly been enslaved, refused to choose between abolition and feminism. According to Crenshaw (1989),

intersectionality is a way of understanding the systemic and structural factors that underpin injustice across multiple social categories. The concept, however, is often misunderstood and represented as an additive framework in which different identities can be piled up to demonstrate a hierarchy of privilege and oppression. The conceptual significance of Crenshaw's framework is that it pushes for a more complex, multifaceted, and nuanced understanding of how systemic domination operates, such that the concerns of the most and multiply disadvantaged can be identified and addressed. The framework draws analytical robustness from its insistence on beginning with Black women, or, more specifically, queer working-class disabled Black women, as the unit of analysis because it facilitates the critical examination of all sites of systemic domination taking account of its overlapping nature and compounding effects (Rivas, Beckles-Raymond and Simpson Miller 2021). Applying an intersectional framework requires being able to identify and analyse numerous factors across multiple hierarchies at the same time and locating categorical inequalities and injustices as structural and systemic, not just as personal, subjective, or cultural (Gonzalez 1988). The logic being that, in addressing the concerns of the most disadvantaged, the injustices experienced by those at other intersections of those singularly disadvantaged will also have their needs met (Crenshaw 1989; 1991). Within this framework, race is not only present, but central.

Without foregrounding this in our teaching, intersectionality can be reduced to a static concept that stacks identities to be understood and analysed like bar charts of oppression. An additive explanation of intersectionality can facilitate the positioning of race as a siloed piece of the puzzle that is both equal and interchangeable with myriad others and the displacement of race from the equation to accommodate a preference to engage with and insert categories which one/students may feel more comfortable acknowledging. For example, a preference to engage with gender or class, and in ways that do not highlight or contest the pervasiveness of colonial and white supremacist culture and practices of extraction and exclusion within development studies, and, specifically, GAD. Therefore, race as a social ordering mechanism may be recognised in the classroom while simultaneously met with great denial and discomfort.

The preference to discuss intersectionality by centring gender, class, and geopolitical divides and women's experiences, rather than race, is a protective mechanism. As development scholars and students are faced with the realities of epistemic violence and white privilege, they often seek to try and reclaim some position of criticality or a moral high ground through deflection and obfuscation. The de-centring of race from intersectionality, however, allows an underlying white saviourism within development studies scholarship and teaching to go ignored and to be constructed as forward leaning or even paying homage to diversity and decolonisation (See Khan, Dickson, and Sondarjee 2023). This facilitates what Bilge (2013) refers to as a "whitening of intersectionality" as a brainchild of feminism, ultimately, displacing the radical Black feminist lives and work upon which it is based. Too often, this problematic logic is offered in the classroom as an analytical map to understanding intersectionality and structural injustice. A common strategy is to attempt to deflect and re-focus the discussion on racism within groups, the conflicts between communities, and the diaspora or, for UK academics, to absolve themselves of responsibility through comparison with other European countries or North America. In so doing, space is given for skewed arguments that suggest, for example, that discussing race has been divisive for feminist objectives and movements, or that intra-group differences among Black or global majority feminist movements, around sexuality and class, diminish the importance of race and shared lived realities (Beckles-Raymond 2019). Of course, this strategy misstates the long-standing critiques made by Black feminists over a span of several decades (Boyce-Davies 2007; Combahee River Collective 1977; hooks 1981; Lorde 1984), many of which have been located in the UK (Amos and Parmar 1984; Bryan et al. 1985; Christoffersen and Akwugo 2023; Mizari 1997; Tate and Page 2018; Olufemi 2020). These scholars challenged essentialist notions of universal sisterhood propagated by white feminists and early GAD scholars. Their critique highlighted the differences, contradictions, and diversity between and among women and men as a precursor for understanding the realities of power and racialisation and building solidarity.

The impasse is made evident through the elements described above: the colonial and racialised residue that has influenced the discipline, the positioning of feminist perspectives from global majority women and the de-centring of race from intersectionality. These tools do not operate independently of each other but become entangled in practice in the teaching and learning spaces of higher education institutions. While the classroom is an important site for knowledge production and disrupting the gendered, racialised, and elitist structures of power, it is also a site that needs to be carefully examined for the ways in which classroom spaces can reflect the desire to reinforce inequality and privilege. In this sense, it is both a colonising space and a site for transformation.

4. Fieldnotes from the gender and development curriculum and classroom: looking for intersectionality

The first few months of 2020 marked the beginning of an unprecedented moment for universities, in which there was a sudden and frantic move online of teaching delivery, student participation, and assessment due to COVID-19 and the restrictions of both lockdowns and social distancing. While online learning was not entirely new at that point, many universities and academic staff were not fully prepared to make the sudden move online. This included both pedagogical and technological limitations. Curricular content and interpersonal exchanges became even more clearly defined in terms of either their recognition or lack of recognition of intersectionality.

A few months into the pandemic reaching Europe and North America, the police murder of George Floyd in the US sparked a plethora of global responses, ranging from outrage to statements against institutional racism as pledges to address the historical injustices of racial discrimination. Indeed, the convergence of Black Lives Matter with global student movements calling for the decolonisation of Global North universities provided a significant backdrop for these discussions, which took place online due to the pandemic. Students and academics called for universities to pledge and to make statements about how they were working to address historical and contemporary systems of racism which George Floyd's murder exposed. Responses to this ranged from solidarity statements to pledges to fund equality, diversity, and inclusion schemes within universities. However, the limits of this could be seen in the resilience of the structure and power of institutions themselves and canonical trajectories of disciplines to change.

Despite racial justice and intersectionality being established academic and social justice frameworks for analysis, development studies has shown itself to be particularly resistant to taking on such critiques (Patel 2020). Universities based in the Global North drive mobility and professional aspirations and ambitions of students wanting to gain knowledge about GAD. Academic staff producing and imparting such knowledge act as conduits of knowledge, either passing on, interpreting, or challenging how GAD is understood as a history of ideas, policy, and practice. While calls for embedding decolonisation of the curriculum have sparked a response administratively for departments, programs, and modules to highlight their attention to diversity of authors, acknowledgement of history, and even diversity in the classroom, intersectionality as an approach or methodology has been less obvious for GAD teaching, largely because of the symbolic focus on gender over other social and power relations.

Our own experiences and observations in teaching GAD inform this article's analysis. As Henry (2021, 22–3) points out in her analysis, academic community universities "are characterised and emboldened by white authority and expertise reflected by the domination of research and faculty". As such, she calls for "a countering of the thick suffocating fog of whiteness" (Lewis and Hemmings 2019, cited by Henry 2021, 22) that results in the exclusion or selective inclusion of women of colour seen as "bodies out of place" (Puwar 2004), even in so-called critical feminist spaces. A common manifestation of this is the denial of the everyday experiences of racism and understandings of racism by global majority women as individual perception or emotional misinterpretations rather than acknowledgement and analysis of structural conditions of violence and

exclusion (hooks 1994 hooks 2003). Our choice of method in this article draws from a social justice praxis that aims to contest acts of silencing and highlight the potential for change.

In the following section, we present three vignettes, which we refer to as Classroom Fieldnotes. Each Fieldnote outlines distinctive areas in which we identify the GAD impasse as a feature in the teaching of GAD in UK universities. The first focuses on a classroom of students of colour and students from the Global South. The second is in online and distance learning delivery of content, which highlights the ways that online learning and delivery are by no means a panacea to the academic narratives of development in which GAD appears. The third vignette presents an introspective focus on our attempts as two global majority faculty trying to disrupt established narratives and world feminist engagements to development. Our reflections in this final vignette highlight the challenges of teaching across a range of different types of development studies modules, in which we have experienced and witnessed a range of dynamics.

Classroom Fieldnote 1. The limits of intersectionality on the teaching frontline

Over the years I have been part of teaching teams at undergraduate and masters' levels, in which the courses are either entirely gender focused or the courses are more broadly focused on development. In both scenarios, my positioning in the teaching team has a directed purpose to fill a gender, race, or "decolonisation" gap, either in terms of my representational presence or in the coverage of race and/or gender. I commonly use examples as tools to expose students to otherwise abstract or intangible causes and consequences of injustice, power, and inequality. Gender and development thinking as a field of rigidity and imposition informs the discussion and, in some instances, can turn the looking glass towards gender and development thinking, policy, and practice. The steadfast insistence on the categories of male and female within the gender and development literature and frameworks is one area of discussion in the classroom which has highlighted the poverty of intersectionality within gender and development. I have had messages of gratitude from gender non-binary students who have said that they are used to feeling excluded or silenced in gender and development teaching due to the almost complete focus on "women" and the insistence on binary distinctions between male and female which are so integral to the gender and development field. Gender binary categories sit firmly within the gender and development impasse and illustrate the closures which the field have contributed to generating.

Another area where the limits of intersectionality can be seen is in using examples in teaching of perpetuation of ideas which include feminist activism. In one course, I taught a session focusing on the punitive outcomes of feminist mobilisations around zero-tolerance policies towards gender-based violence in different contexts. This included how racialised and marginalised communities disproportionately bear the brunt of state violence; a lens which intersectionality facilitates. Gender and development as a framework for planning and policy can become entwined with and even empower the state apparatus which differentiates, racialises, and targets specific marginalised communities. In one of the examples, the death penalty was highlighted as an outcome of feminist mobilisations in India following the rape and murder of Jyoti Singh Pandey in Delhi in 2012. In another example, the mass incarceration and disproportionate sentencing of Black men in the United States was highlighted as an example of how sexual and gender-based violence policies are experienced by marginalised, targeted communities. Several white female students in the lecture and in the smaller tutorial groups commented about how disturbing the examples were and how they found the examples uncomfortable to watch. In the discussion, several of these students questioned what the examples had to do with development. Comments by these students did not mention the importance of questioning the boundaries of "development" in how gender policies over time have contributed to the targeting of already marginalised communities; what I had highlighted to be a matter of intersectionality. Instead, the discussion kept coming back to their own emotional states in how the examples made them feel from an individual rather than societal response, while global majority students listened and commented mainly with societal responses. Despite the presence of a trigger

warning about some of the resources on the virtual learning space, I recall these students requesting that the trigger warnings be made more explicit or even that the examples be made optional for students to watch.

Analysis of Fieldnote 1

In this particular example, global majority students were confronted not only with the difficult conceptual challenge of querying feminist mobilisations around sexual and gender-based violence, but they were also confronted with the individual responses by white students who managed to divert much of the discussion time towards their own personal perceptions in relation to intersectional gender analysis. These tensions spill over into the classroom, where global majority students, in particular, can be made vulnerable to positions which assert the dominance of Western hegemony in all of its forms. The two illustrations from India and the US highlighted how caste, class, and race inform the outcomes of GAD frameworks as they are experienced in societies and communities of marginality.

The GAD impasse comes out at these moments of tension when issues and examples are discussed and debated and the promise of GAD as a framework is met with a desire to recentre the narrative as well as a desire to critique it. The examples were intended to create a sense of empathy in unsettling the idea that GAD exists unproblematically as a field of study. When intersectionality informs the session, then the GAD impasse comes to the fore. The classroom becomes a place where the impasse, rather than highlighting the significance of gender in development, can stifle discussions directed towards an intersectional lens.

Classroom Fieldnote 2. Attempting to traverse the impasse online: the limits of online teaching

In the setting up of a new online Development Studies program, we created a course from scratch with a curriculum designed to have an intersectional approach, both in the core as well as a specific gender module. Having observed how gender and development was being taught on campus and elsewhere with a cursory attention to intersectionality, this course sought to deploy an intersectional narrative to gender and development at a juncture when gender diversity, decolonisation, and racial justice had become paramount to the intellectual debates circling the gender and development field from other disciplines. The module ended up becoming an interdisciplinary one, with topics which both critiqued the history of gender and development through a critical reading of how gender has been utilised over time within imperialism and capitalism. Engagement of students who were logged in from around the world was lively and there were often difficult conversations around power dynamics in the classroom, how race continues to shape development, how gender is instrumentalised in development, and the significance of positionality in terms of where people were based while attending the online program. This was possible because of the voices from global majority students who understood intersectionality as an epistemological not only academic matter. Since Development Studies distance learning programs attract cohorts of students working in the development sector and studying online while working, their voices very directly criticised Eurocentric logics in ways which are often not as easily vocalised in classrooms in London. As a convenor and tutor, I was continually aware of the power I had as a moderator of these discussions and felt that I was able to achieve more in creating a space for intersectional analysis online than in the classroom. However, this had to do with the fact that the module was an option and therefore somewhat free from the purview of disciplinary insistence on recentring conventional debates. The fact that the module was not hinged on a homage to the history of WID/WAD/GAD and instead centred global majority examples and literature meant that the impasse could be critically engaged with, and the discussion could be informed by student participation from the Global South and also voices from global majority diaspora students who felt less obligation to retain gender and development as a field beyond reproach or critique.

Analysis of Fieldnote 2

The teaching of development studies online highlights already-existing epistemological absences of intersectionality in the teaching of the discipline as a whole. Online learning has many potentials to overcome the GAD impasse, yet it is not free from the history of structures of power and knowledge production. The move to online learning does not necessarily bring with it a progression of thought or reflection on epistemological concerns or debates. On the contrary, it can revert to or even reproduce structures and institutions of power in rather unreflective ways.

We observed ten online distance learning programs in the UK, which showed that very few even had modules focusing on gender or had topics in the core curriculum which focused on gender. While it might be argued that gender analysis has been integrated into development studies topics, the absence of gender-specific material in many programs raises questions about the triumph of GAD within development studies. The sub-discipline of GAD even further highlights how an area of academic learning and enquiry has, by and large, maintained rather than challenged the dominant global systems of power and knowledge in online teaching.

Further to this, where there is attention to gender, there is almost no mention of race as a term or concept in any of the development programs online. The lack of intersectionality within the content and narrative of development is notable, which shows how GAD has not only resisted any challenges to its claims to represent “universal sisterhood” but has failed to move with the times in responding to demands for racial justice and a de-centring of white Western perspectives, not least Western feminism. Additionally, the GAD impasse has been slow to recognise gender diversity. This is no doubt informed by the decades of focus on men and women as the core units of analysis and data collection. If race and gender diversity are not being recognised by the proponents of the lineage of GAD, the GAD impasse will only persist while other disciplines and other spaces will be the sites of more contemporary debates and discussions around GAD. The online space in the reflection shared here certainly shows the potentials for breaking the GAD impasse. However, this required both an intervention in the core curriculum as well as in the gender module so that intersectionality, not only gender, could be mainstreamed.

Classroom Fieldnote 3. Worlding feminist approaches to development: race in the classroom

When I began teaching gender and development as a postgraduate student, the established weekly progression of topics irked me but were admittedly a marked shift from the conservative almost gender-blind development curriculum that I had been taught as a student. Classes moved swiftly from WID to GAD and raised important questions about the appropriation and de-politicisation by development agencies of the radical intent of GAD and acknowledged the critical pushback from the Global South. While this allowed students to gain a deeper understanding of the gendered nature of inequality and aid processes and programming, what irked me was that this history, and present, was presented as an almost non-racialised story. Instead, the preference seemed to be to understand these issues through a Global North–Global South binary. I was also left wondering how and why the recognition of global majority feminism perspectives was rarely more than just that. Beyond the acknowledgement in a dedicated week of a course, the decades of resistance, critical thought, and scholarship by global majority women rarely featured anywhere else.

In the more recent past, I gave a lecture on Black and Indigenous feminist approaches and resistance, which also touched on feminist struggles across the Muslim world and in parts of Asia. Now more in control of my own modules, and hopefully a better and more experienced teacher, I have centred race in my classes on feminist engagements with development and displaced WID to GAD as the departure point for my courses. This lecture firmly introduced race, racism, and development through a prised feminist lens to the students. The class was more of an interactive workshop with videos, imagery, and music. The last segment of the workshop was discussion-focused. The students were

given a few minutes to share their reflections in small groups before moving into a discussion that involved the whole class. This allowed the students to gather their thoughts but also to air them. The verbal expression of one's thoughts and the initial response from their peers can build confidence but also provides an initial opportunity for feedback.

As we went around the room, students shared their reflections on different aspects of the lecture. Some also added their experiences with and knowledge about some of the topics covered. There are, however, a few questions that I have come to expect at the end of that first class, or "the race lecture" as coined by a recent student. The well-meaning question, and one that I had grown to expect, came slowly and timidly from this young student, "Maybe white feminists just have a stronger feminism and have achieved more and that's why they dominate?". This was closely followed up by her classmate from the same group, who added, "Or, what about solidarity? Isn't it better to focus on that than like race, so things that bring us together?". I paused for a moment and flashed back to earlier in the term when, after a lecture on race and development, a student had asked me "If I was sure about what I had said during the lecture or if this was more of a personal take as she had heard differently before".

So, there I was at the end of another gruelling lecture about race, feminism approaches, and development and the first fundamental and foundation message of the lecture was being questioned. The lecture was gruelling because it is an important one, but also because I always must be prepared for the difficulty of speaking about race and intersectionality to students whose engagement with race and gender, if at all, had most likely been through the lens of feminist solidarity. Indeed, the next question came from an Indigenous student who asked, "What hope was there for solidarity with white feminists when they invest in systems of oppression?". The response from the class was shock and awe.

As the class finished and the students slowly milled out of the room, I told the students remaining at the front of the room to have a good day and closed down the computer. Feeling a gaze upon me, I looked up and noticed the three students from the group sat at the back of the class standing off to the side of the room, two of them staring intently at me. I asked if they had a question and they responded "no" and thanked me for the lecture, but their frustration was clear. Being a faculty member of colour has added another layer of resistance to the willingness of students to re-consider the norms of what they have come to learn to be radical feminist engagements with development. While students become aware of racial injustice, the safety of being presented these messages by a colleague who reflects not the majority of the classroom but was a Black woman stirs up discomfort. Indeed, having taught gender and feminist courses for several years, I have noticed that, after some of these lectures, it is difficult for the students to look at me.

Analysis of Fieldnote 3

The struggle unfolding in the room was not a matter of the clarity of my presentation, though there is always room for improvement there and teaching hopefully gets better over time. It was disbelief by many students in the class of what was being suggested. The existence of feminists in other spaces and places was acceptable, but the suggestion that those other feminist visions and movements were equal and not peripheral, or in response to Global North (read as white) feminist visions was unpleasant to the ears. They understood that white feminists needed to acknowledge other women, and that not all African women are poor and pregnant, not all Asian women are home-bound, and not all Arab women are oppressed; but to consider that those women could critique and reject the white feminist overtures was jarring. It was not a disempowering provocation but rather one that de-centred whiteness and Eurocentrism and acknowledged the complicity of white feminist movements in white supremacist culture.

The impasse facilitates a dulling down of the realities of racial injustice so deeply embedded in development studies and practice. The faculty, the curriculum, the discussions, even the essay questions reflect the gendered development story that the students were used to hearing, explained through a "critical" lens. That lens, however, was carefully constructed as a non-racialised one. In some ways this re-centred a Eurocentric reading of the world that was analytical yet unwilling to

engage with the fundamental ways in which the social construction of race had shaped so much of the history of GAD. Even less common is a move beyond acknowledgement of the complexities of racism in which the classroom can provide a space to re-imagine the paradigms which have shaped development. The counter-mapping of feminist struggles is one of the starting blocks of worlding feminist thought. That cannot occur, however, by focusing sheerly on solidarity or universal woman/sisterhood. World feminist approaches to development first require a recognition of the tensions and conflicts that have marked global feminist history and the power relations that have shaped these interactions. These silences ring loudly and are accompanied by a fierce resistance at times within the gender circles. Ironically, they also reflect how much race and racism continue to shape the field of GAD today.

5. Conclusion

We conclude by suggesting there is an urgent need to recognise that there is an impasse in GAD, not only in teaching and learning spaces but also more broadly. As this article has shown, the impasse is evident in many areas of the field. The classroom and the curriculum are not removed from the GAD impasse. Rather, they are a part of the embedded institutional structures and histories which constitute the establishment and maintenance of knowledge and power. Our three Classroom Fieldnote examples highlight how the centring of intersectionality within teaching and learning spaces both offers the possibilities for breaking the impasse while also making global majority students and staff who dare to critique the field vulnerable. Attempting to disrupt the GAD impasse, as our reflections in this article show, reveals the risks that emerge when embarking on this as a disruptive pedagogical practice.

This signals the extent to which academic fields will go to assert their power, gate-keeping, and authoritative stance. Many global majority women, as we have attempted to do here, have written widely about their experiences with the many vectors of racism embedded in disciplines across the ivory tower and their attempts to unsettle them through anti-racist feminist pedagogy and organising (Ahmed 2009, 2021; Hamad 2018; Mirza 2017; Tate 2016, 2017; Tolia-Kelly 2017). While everyday interactions and institutional practices in universities which global majority faculty and students experience are commonly referred to as micro-aggressions, behavioural analysis does not account for the weight and structural dimensions of how race and racism shape teaching and learning spaces. We suggest that the pushback against disruptive intersectional pedagogical practices can be better understood as examples in themselves of upholding anti-intersectionality and therefore structural racism, which is implicit in the field. While reactions which resist intersectionality might be “unconscious bias”, “silly mistakes”, or “acts of good intentions”, as Ahmed (2021) points out, refusal to accept poor explanations can lead to gaslighting and further violence. The impact of exposure to these constant blows can have detrimental long-term impacts on one’s physical and mental health. Perpetrators are, also often, given space and time to attempt to redeem themselves within institutional structures, spaces, and with people who benefit from and build the continued institutional racist violence and white supremacist culture. For example, equality and diversity committee membership can be strategised to erase or conceal regular or systemic racism, sexism, transphobia, and other forms of discrimination and bullying. Indeed, university equality and diversity initiatives and responses to decolonisation reflect the grinding institutional mill and instrumentalisation of equalities or inclusion agendas by dominant interests, which serves as a constant reminder that certain bodies were not meant to be in these places and survival is at a cost or a compromise (Puwar 2004).

Disrupting mainstream critical development studies and GAD scholarship that have crafted the GAD story requires the disruption of dominant epistemologies, methodologies, histories, and pedagogical practices within the university. Fundamental to this task is challenging the epistemic violence of colonialism and ongoing instrumentalisation of race in development, which are a part of the canonical history of GAD. Worlding feminist thought is a means to break the impasse, as it

requires bringing racial and social justice into the centre of analysis and pedagogy. We recognise that invoking the term impasse in this discussion signals a sense of no possibility for change. However, we argue that it is precisely at the site of the impasse where change is even possible to imagine, because this is precisely the point at which vested interests are identified, named, and confronted. It is clear that, after over nearly four decades of GAD, the vested interests in the impasse will not let go easily. It will be in teaching and learning spaces in which questions around race, intersectionality, and the discipline's lineage can be actively engaged with. Reimagining these spaces as transformative sites will ultimately enable us to develop pedagogical strategies and practices to grapple with the structures, including feminist hierarchies, which have upheld a field.

Finally, we write this article in an act of solidarity with each other, and with other feminist scholars who may be encouraged to share their experiences from other contexts. It is also, however, a call to other feminists in the field to engage in the hard task of critical self-reflection about the ways in which they may contribute to the impasse. The forging of feminist solidarity is a difficult one that cannot be realised through silencing and erasure. Change must be predicated on reflection, unlearning, and the ability to face difficult conversations about denial, power, privilege, and racism. Our hope, however, is that on the other side of those conversations real solidarity and feminist futures can emerge and form a foundation to begin dismantling the impasse.

Note

1. We use the term "global majority" in this article. Coined by Rosemary M. Campbell-Stephens as early as 2003, it refers to people who are Black, Asian, Brown, mixed-race, dual-heritage, Indigenous to the Global South, and/or have been racialised as "ethnic minorities". Globally, these groups currently represent approximately 80 per cent of the world's population (see Campbell-Stephens 2020, 2021).

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