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Beyond Eastern Europe: The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's Gender Action Plan and the Fourth Wave of Neoliberalism

Stuart Shields[1], Sara Wallin[2]

Introduction

In this paper we analyse the role played by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in advancing neoliberal policies and ideas in the region stretching from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) to Central Asia, and increasingly beyond. The surge of populist reform in Egypt has led to enthusiastic calls for the construction of a "Warsaw on the Nile" (Traub 2011; EBRD 2011). By drawing upon perspectives from 'critical' and feminist political economy, we argue that the bank's recent incorporation of 'gender' corresponds to, and facilitates, the EBRD's movement toward a 'fourth wave of neoliberalisation' to effect further commodification of (re)production in the region. The premise of this paper is that the EBRD is a significant force in reintegrating CEE and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) into global neoliberal capitalism. As such, it plays a role in reorganising social relations into patterns more conducive to the construction of neoliberal hegemony. This becomes particularly clear through reflection on how the EBRD is implicated in the construction and reconstruction of gender norms, identities and relations. As the post-communist transitions literature demonstrates, ideas of gender, the socially constructed and historically specific norms of masculinity and femininity, remain at the forefront of neoliberal projects within the former Soviet Union (FSU) and the debates on social, economic and political reform, alongside discourses of modernisation and nationalism have centred upon contestation over the meanings of gender roles and relations (Kuehnast and Nechemias, 2004).

In contrast to most literature within the field, gender, is here considered as pivotal to the understanding of neoliberal globalisation and transition and we highlight how neoliberal discourse and policy, is a powerful, but not uncontested, force in reconfiguring gender norms to fit the project of market-building. The EBRD allows us to explore the in practice variegated and inconclusive nature of the neoliberal project in and beyond Eastern Europe. While in comparison to other international and regional organisations the EBRD is both late in including

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gender equity concerns and has published relatively little material on the topic, the Gender Action Plan (GAP) constitutes an opportunity to analyse the Bank's understanding of gender in its first explicit format.[i] The plan and its complimentary documents show how the EBRD has internally translated gender equality from the context of the wider institutional post-Washington Consensus turn to gender equality and provides a particularly strong case for highlighting the disciplinary aspects of neoliberalism, especially in terms of the inability of neoliberalism to provide for social reproduction and the micro-level implications on identity and behaviour.

To approach this topic, we suggest that a critical political economy of neoliberalisation opens up opportunities to engage with gender, *via* a discussion of gendered reconfigurations affected by trade-off relationship between neoliberalism and social reproduction. Central to the paper is a notion of globalisation as an uneven process of capital expansion and circulation where we are simultaneously witnessing development and underdevelopment. However, rather than thinking of neoliberalism as a static and homogenous endpoint, we approach neoliberalisation as the *process* of 'mobilising state power in the contradictory extension and reproduction of market(-like) rule' (Tickell and Peck 2003: 6) where although drawing on similar principles, through being implemented by states at different instances and environments, the processes of neoliberalisation will display differences. This can only be understood by grasping the global *and* local spatiality of the process.

The paper unfolds in four parts: we first discuss how neoliberalism and space have been deployed in the study of transitions, where the national, international and global have typically been treated as self-evident and axiomatic and argue that critical international political economy (IPE) has been limited by its inability to account for the production of space and the relations between particular scales. What we contend is absent in this formulation of the importance of space is the relationship *between* different spaces, and their permanent contestation through politico-economic restructuring. We maintain that critical IPE scholars have been too quick 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. This tends to ignore how social reproduction, as part of the architecture of capitalist social relations, are being rescaled; and how other forms of domination, such as patriarchy, racism or heteronormativity, are also scalar and being rescaled. Second, we utilise these insights to provide a re-reading of the EBRD as a part of a multi-level governance structure that proffers neoliberal ideas and policies for CEE and CIS. Third, we explore how the household/gender relations constitute a key scale through which the EBRD's fourth wave of neoliberalisation can be understood as 'internalising neoliberalism' and we highlight some of the tensions and opportunities for resistance this entails.

A critical political economy approach to post-Communist transition

Two decades on from the collapse of Soviet dominance in CEE and the flourishing cottage industry of 'transitological' studies attempting to explain the transitions in CEE and the former Soviet Union (FSU) have reached a peculiar confluence concerning the relative importance of internal and external causes (Fish 1999: 4; Bunce 1999; Dimitrova and Pridham 2004). Beyond the influence of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank (Linden 2002; Pollert 1999; Stone 2002) and of course recent studies on democratisation and conditionality during negotiations to join the European Union (EU) (Rupnik and Zielonka 2003; Grabbe 2003; Henderson 1999; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005) in the aftermath of 1989 there has been an almost uniform acceptance that the genuine causes of the path of transition were internal and international factors were, at most, only supportive such as Rodrik's (1993) claims concerning external trade shocks due to the collapse of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA). Nicholas Stern, former chief economist at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), had a much clearer appreciation for international factors, in particular the international financial institutions (IFIs) who, he reckoned, had 'a major role to play in fostering market-oriented development' (Stern 1998: 9). Indeed Hilary Appel's assertion that it 'makes good sense' to begin a discussion of international factors 'if one accepts the premise that leaders in various … post-Soviet states did not develop their ideas and beliefs … entirely independently', (2004: 22) would appear to be sound advice. Instead most analyses informed by an Area Studies chauvinism have focused on how best to achieve the practical transformation of the construction of functioning democracies and moribund planned economic institutions (Ganev 2005; Cirtautas 1995).

Instead, this paper considers transition is embedded in structural and historical conditions as equally generated by external, transnational forces and trends as national and domestic. However, national trends cannot be understood without exploring their linkages to global restructuring and we aim to foreground how new bodies of territorial governance have emerged to shape financial transactions, flows of information, commodities and people into processes of competition and cooperation (Swyngedouw 2004: 26-33; Brenner and Theodore 2002: 341; Brenner 1999: 41). Therefore, to move beyond analytical isolationism, this paper draws attention to projects which drive and respond to restructuring, while rejecting notions of a mysterious invisible explanatory mechanism operating at the global level. To do so, we propose an approach that integrates material as well as social dimensions of global structural change; an approach that neither under-socialises nor over-socialises developments in the global political economy, but that is simultaneously aware of the pitfalls of conceptual methodological nationalism and the problematic binaries of global-domestic and political-economic.

To achieve this we situate the paper in the intersection of debates between feminist IPE and the 'new political economy of scale'. Because the restructuring of relations of production under neoliberalism requires an examination of the changing relations of *social reproduction* and *consumption*, taking core concepts of gender and space seriously helps us approach our research. By interrogating dominant conceptualisations of global/local relations in the theory and practice of neoliberal globalisation, feminist political economists have demonstrated how gender operates across the global political economy from the level of ideology and representation, in social relations and to the body (Marchand and Runyan 2000: 8). Operating in the nexus of relations, including class, race, age and ability, gender thus allows us to see power relations within the global political economy. Peterson (2003: 9) writes:

> 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. 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'.

Social reproduction is constituted by three main elements: first, the biological reproduction of the species; second, the reproduction of the labour force and third, the reproduction and provision of caring needs (Bakker 2007:541). As Ferguson (2010) argues, the study of social reproduction opens up a possibility to analyse global processes from the perspective of the everyday life, where local processes and actors are not passive recipients of top-down imperatives but *de facto* constitute and reconstitute 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 seeing the gender division of labour, where women are concentrated within low-pay, low-status sectors of service and undertake a disproportionate share of unpaid work, feminist scholars challenge the claims to universality and objectivity within neoclassical theory underpinning neoliberal development policy and argue that the notion of a market populated by free and equal rational actors conceals and perpetuates inequalities (Rai 2004: 582-584; Beneria 1999). Neoliberal restructuring brings about a male bias by its tendency to assume that social reproduction can adjust to and accommodate macro-economic changes, and where gender norms ascribing women responsibility for reproductive work serve to facilitate privatisation processes.

These changes have been subject to an *a priori* requirement, namely a redefinition of the relationship between national state and regional and international institutions and the general closure of divergent economic paths to development. The 'upscaling' of governance to institutions affects a new form of authoritarianism where power is transferred to, and locked in by, institutions which marshal the interests of capital in neoliberalism (Swyngedouw 2000: 69-70). This requires not simply analysis of specific spaces, but the study of *scales* in relation to each other. Scales can be actively utilised by actors. Labour is conditioned by the scale of capital accumulation patterns (Gough 2004) but also rescales its organisation to strengthen its hand against capital rescaling (K. Cox 1998). Changes in scales of regulation are therefore integral to capitalism. For instance, neoliberalism has posited economic and 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). To freeze, marginalise and separate as distinct particular components of this complex and dynamic totality overlooks their coterminous and co-dependent character (McMichael 1990).

As Macartney and Shields claim, space does not need adding: it is already there as one of capitalism's constitutive elements (2011: 327). 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. IPE considers these separately, if at all. Our argument is that the international political economy is produced by the internal relations of these spaces. It is in the scalar relations across spaces, from the global to the workplace to the home, where fundamental forms of class, gender and racial power are configured. To understand this relation, an appreciation of *scale* as the 'political economic means of bounding and adjudicating rules and relations of capitalist competition and cooperation of sameness and difference' across different spaces is required (Mitchell 2001: 149). As scale is a *social relation* there is a politics to its production, related to the reconstitution of capital in general. It is a set of economic strategies for states (also sub-state regions, global cities) to follow, encapsulating the different spaces of engagement necessary to translate the specific interests of capital into the general interest across a range of concrete social and political processes, strategies and struggles.

The social relations of neoliberalisation, the "(…) mobilisation of state power in the contradictory extension and reproduction of market(-like) rule." (Tickell and Peck 2003:6), is thus a useful concept to theorise both the behaviour of sub-state actors, states and international institutions. Tickell and Peck (2003: 4) highlight how although drawing on similar principles, through being implemented by states at different instances and environments, the processes of neoliberalisation will display variegation (Macartney 2010). Neoliberalisation can advantageously be translated 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, heterogenous, and contradictory governance. (Peck *et al.* 2010: 104).

Given the commitment of the EBRD to neoliberalism, in the next section the paper interrogates the role of the Bank in the refinement of neoliberal strategies to maintain the disciplining power of capital over labour. We do this by exploring the EBRD's participation in configuring three waves 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.

If at first you don't succeed: a first wave of neoliberalisation

Having outlined the post communist development trajectory in the previous section, we now turn to problematise the notion of neoliberalism as the end point of transition associated with the withdrawal of, or rolling back of, the state. We interrogate how a first wave of neoliberalisation associated with the early stages of transition was the "off the peg" application of the Washington Consensus, as previously applied in the Third World and Latin America based on the now well worn mantra of liberalisation, stabilisation, privatisation and internationalisation. Following the transition recessions in the early to mid 1990s, the perception of failure in post-communist transition encouraged calls for the necessity of completion of reforms. A *second wave* of neoliberalisation associated with EU enlargement reinforced the *first wave* by embedding a highly selective application of neoliberalisation as Europeanisation. This second wave of reform aimed to complete the transition process and opening up what neoliberal social forces considered to be oligarchic and exclusive political economic institutional frameworks and practices to competition. Following on from EU enlargement in 2004 another series of strategies employed by neoliberal social forces was based on the promotion of a global agenda for neoliberal competitiveness. Competitiveness is being aggressively promoted by a number of the world's leading governments, international financial institutions and regional development organisations. Such changes are evident in the reorientation of domestic/national economic *and* social policy against labour resistance that subsequently lead to the closure of policy flexibility at the national level. This then leaves the final section of the paper to bring these strategies up to date by focusing on 'roll in' neoliberalism.

In the first wave of neoliberalisation the focus was on constructing the market economy in a region of the world where the market had been ostensibly absent. The victory of capitalism, having defeated its communist rival ensured a period of triumphalism transposed into the neoliberal blueprints Western social scientists offered ECE which in principle instructed each government in the correct techniques of transition (Buroway 1996: 1106). These blueprints centred on the construction of a market economy based primarily on private ownership, the rolling-back of the state as collective owner and provider, and in the political sphere free elections, democratic constitutions and the rule of law. While at a more concrete level the transition programme entailed the liberalisation of foreign trade and capital movements, and potentially accession to a range of 'Western' intergovernmental bodies such as NATO and the EU, these were treated as natural components of a programme of post-communist transition that would allow ECE to successfully rejoin the European mainstream.

This is not a spontaneous process though, as neoliberalism necessitates a constant stream of ideological and material forces to synthesise a long-term framework for political and economic interests (Shields 2012). ECE capitalism did not just fall fully formed from the sky when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989. The launch of the first wave of neoliberal transition mapped out the parameters of the reform debate for the first half of the 1990s. Furthermore, it reveals the degree to which the neoliberal context had been preconfigured as the only rational course of action. Once elected, former dissidents wholeheartedly embraced draconian cuts in government spending, immediate liberalisation of trade and privatisation implemented to restore macroeconomic stability and the creation of a market system. It was adopted with little significant input from *non*-neoliberal social forces. Alternative strategies like an Employee Stock Ownership Plan were omitted as supposedly regressive community-based notions of property rights, an omission rapidly reinforced by "objective" advice from the IMF and World Bank. (Squires-Meaney 1995)

Reaganomics and Thatcherism were taken as the only canon of a market economy; alternatives like the German, Japanese or Scandinavian models were taken to be deviations from the accepted rules of the game (Balcerowicz 1995: 233). It was assumed that allegiance to neoliberal rules would be rewarded by a dramatic improvement in general efficiency in the economy and sustainable growth, since the 'invisible hand produces a particular set of results which are outside the control of human agency and is, therefore, impartial in its operation' (Hardy 2006: 136). Under these circumstances active industrial, commercial, employment and foreign trade policies are redundant, an impediment to the actions of the invisible hand. Stabilisation programmes suggested and supported by the IMF would be a necessary and sufficient condition for a shortcut to full membership of the EU, '[incorporating] the East European countries into a common European market' (Sachs 1989: 24). By embedding transition within an uncompromising anti-communist and pro-Western normative framework, the first wave neoliberal blueprint for transition supplies a clear set of definitions and an uncontroversial set of goals, while simultaneously offering expertise as a means of implementation. 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 institutional change a lot quicker than the "winners" would experience success - a message that persists to this day (compare Sachs 1994; World Bank 2002; and EBRD 2007).

The neoliberal reform package worked rapidly, provoking recession and unemployment as enterprises laid off workers, curtailed production, and failed to respond to the new neoliberal environment. The first wave of neoliberalisation in ECE consisted of the imposition of financial discipline and competition (World Bank 1996 45); the creation of property rights and their lock-in through privatisation and the attraction of foreign capital (World Bank 1996 48; Frydman, Murphy and Rapaczynski 1998). Privatisation, FDI and hard budget constraints were no panacea and instead pointed to the need for an appropriate institutional context (Stiglitz 2000). The first wave constituted a stylised form of transition treating it as an axiomatically linear process and offering a pragmatic, one-dimensional 'toolkit' to solve the problems of ECE which has at best, provided a set of misguided signposts for transition states to follow and, at worse, contributed to the sobering wholesale impoverishment of large proportions of the population of ECE (Milanovic 1993, 1998). The international institutions and many analysts still remain wedded to the notion that 'firm and persistent application of good policy yields large benefits' (World Bank 1996: 55); for good policy read the core neoliberal virtues of liberalisation, privatisation, stabilisation and openness to the global economy, an orthodoxy that continues to hold sway in the international financial institutions, the EU and the finance ministries of ECE.

A second wave of neoliberalisation – getting the institutions right

Having explored the social formation associated with the first wave of transition we now turn to focus attention on the impact of neoliberalisation correlated to the pressures of EU membership. Following on from the perceived failure of the initial post-communist transition there were a number of significant legacies of the first wave of changes, and how this has been extended into the process of negotiating EU membership and the second wave of reforms. With the constraint of market making still in place the EBRD and other neoliberal social forces asked how to embed and institutionalise neoliberal reforms. EU enlargement reinforced the original *first wave* transition process by further embedding neoliberalism. The EU has become 'the conduit through which the neoliberal social and economic model is being institutionalised in Europe' (Wahl 2004: 38; Grabbe 2003: 247-8).

This second wave aimed to complete the transition process and open up oligarchic and exclusive political economic institutional frameworks and practices to competition. Even in 1991 the EBRD considered such concerns vital:

> 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 has 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).[ii]

In the second wave of neoliberalisation reformers pointed to the harm done by vested interests and rent-seeking in preventing the completion of transition. The need to open up key sectors of the economy to competition (especially the coal, ship building and steel industry), as well as to promote entrepreneurship and remove existing distortions in the ECE labour market that impeded the supply and development of quality human capital. Having witnessed the "failure" of initial moves towards completion of the market economy 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 neoliberal route to achieve this through the creation of the correct type of institutions resonated with wider changes in the global political economy and was drawn out in the World Bank's wider institutional move towards deep interventionism.[iii] In essence, this abandons *economic* shock therapy and in its place proposes an *institutional* shock therapy. As the EBRD noted in its 1995 *Transition Report*

> 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, emphasis added).

Despite the shift in strategy, progress was protracted: in 2004 it was noted that in Poland 'little further progress has been achieved during the past three years to improve the investment climate, the competitiveness of the economy and the level of administrative capacity' (EBRD 2004b: 1; also World Bank 2004).

Rather like the way that neoliberalisation as Shock Therapy became the answer to the problems of communism, the catch all solution to the problems following the transition recession has come to be the EU. The EU's wider reach in economic reform, demonstrated in the membership negotiations means that the EU has taken over as the primary driver of neoliberalisation. Agenda 2000 has been another attempt at readying the ECE states for membership. However, ECE still remains stuck playing catch up with the west and development is characterised by an unevenness not necessarily ameliorated by EU accession. EU membership negotiations created a notable improvement in the business environment for investors in ECE during the late 1990s. Market-oriented reforms advanced. For many Europeanists the baton of reform had been passed from the institutions of the Washington consensus to those of the Brussels consensus (Vachudova 2005) with the lion's share of responsibility in actively 'improving the investment climate and enhancing competitiveness' ceded to the EU and the EBRD (World Bank 2005).

While social learning and lesson drawing may explain certain elements of EU rule adoption in ECE (Jacoby 2001), 'conditionality has been the main driving force and the main condition of effective EU rule export in this region' (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005: 221). The process of accession has predominantly involved the assimilation of the ECE states as they shed their not-yet-fully-EU status (or Easternness) in favour of deeper Europeanness defined in neoliberal political economic terms (Kuus 2004). This was clearly accepted at an early stage by the EU, while the applicants deserved membership in principle actual accession negotiations were not based on the idea of mutual benefits of enlargement. Enlargement was interpreted as a historical and political obligation that could generate benefits for old and new members if organised appropriately. Given that this strategy remains incomplete the reform process mutated and became associated with the promotion of a neoliberal agenda for competitiveness.

The promotion of competitiveness: a third wave of neoliberalisation

The preceding sections draw out aspects of the parallelism that exists between the reform agendas in a number of the institutions of post-communist transition. At the World Bank, Stiglitz (2000) emphasised the need for greater flexibility rather than the dogmatic application of a priori neoliberal models, and a greater sensitivity to national and regional conditions. As Fine (1999: 10; also Standing 2000) notes the Stiglitz approach 'builds up from the micro to the macro from notions of civil, as opposed to market, imperfections and with the potential for non-market improvements with impact upon the market'. This form of micro-level social engineering is directly reflected in the key challenge confronted in ECE; changing attitudes, which

> 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).

In this section the paper identifies the key policies and ideas that guide the new commitment to the discursive construction of a global agenda for neoliberal competitiveness.[iv]

The fundamental principles of neoliberal ideology posit economic and developmental beneficence in open, competitive markets via the utility of the individual citizen, the application of such neoliberal strategies produces new institutional and regulatory landscapes supported by new functional logics and political imperatives (Peck 2004). Gough identifies new modes of socialisation arising as both capital and labour are confronted with economic and social problems resulting from neoliberal "roll out" and "roll back". These modes of socialisation are necessitated by the inability of the core mechanisms of neoliberalism to provide the means for social reproduction. Instead, neoliberalisation bypasses the palpable failures of inefficient production in the accumulation regime (Gough 2002). This can only be understood by grasping the global *and* local spatiality of the process. Crucially, this phase is being carried out increasingly under the rubric of promoting universal convergence on a particular global agenda for neoliberal competitiveness. These moves have been subject to an *a priori* requirement, namely a redefinition of the relationship between national state and regional and international institutions, and the general closure of divergent economic paths to development. Competitiveness is the latest in the series of strategies employed by neoliberal social forces against labour resistance that subsequently lead to the closure of policy flexibility at the national level.

Labour market reform is an essential element of this strategy, and its principal objective, as elsewhere, is the creation of a 'flexible' labour force. Accordingly, the Kok Report argues that a coordinated reform process is required across all EU states and identifies key requisites for growth: "identify and remove barriers to competition'; 'creating the right climate for entrepreneurs'; and 'building an inclusive labour market' which increases the adaptability of workers and enterprises, and the effectiveness of investment in human capital (European Communities 2004: 44). This is a message delivered repeatedly since the late 1990s. For example, Agenda 2000 attempted to ready CEE states for EU membership, but within the broader context of a hegemonic neoliberalism:

> Successive governments have made serious attempts to improve competitiveness by framing policy in a comprehensive medium-term context, integrating macroeconomic and structural policies as well as preparations for EU accession [...] an ambitious medium-term programme aiming at export- and investment-led growth, continued disinflation and sound public finance. […] a comprehensive reform […] which focuses on the requirements of EU accession, and more specifically on the need for

> greater fiscal discipline and the channelling of national savings into investment (European Commission 1997: 33).

It is not surprising, given the significance of the dependent reintegration of the states of ECE into the global political economy, that the EBRD played a parallel role in promotion of a global agenda for neoliberal competitiveness. The 1990 agreement establishing the EBRD declared that its purpose was

> to foster the transition towards open market oriented economies and to promote private and entrepreneurial initiative in the Central and Eastern European countries committed to and applying the principles of multiparty democracy, pluralism and market economics (EBRD 1990).

In 1999 the Bank adopted an operational strategy, *Moving Transition Forward*, which reflects early formulations of the key aspects of the competitiveness agenda. In an uncanny echo of the World Bank's Comprehensive Development Framework, it argued that the

> primary responsibility for shaping the response to the transition challenges' lies with the countries of the region themselves, and they are urged to foster investment, entrepreneurial and market skills and build popular support for them, while the IFIs and the international community will play a crucial *supporting* role (Cammack 2006: 356).

Given the circumstances, the response of the economies of continental Europe to the new challenge of global competitiveness and the prospect of a new field of expansion *and* source of competition to the East, explain too why the EU and its Commission have been prominent actors alongside the OECD and the World Bank.

The promotion of a global agenda for neoliberal competitiveness within the EU went hand in hand with its promotion beyond what were its then borders, as the European Council set out a framework for dialogue and consultation with the associated countries CEE towards membership, intended to secure their full integration into the single market. The global extent of the promotion of competitiveness has not just appeared from nowhere.[v] Considerable consensus exists at the international level as to the logic of competition-enhancing reform. Given the extent at this level that such institutions coordinate operations in the design and implementation of policy frameworks this consensus is heading towards an interchangeable adoption, or in the institutional discourse 'ownership', at the national level of a competition-oriented reform agenda across all transition and developing states (Jessop 2004; IMF et al. 2003). Competitiveness along these lines is being aggressively promoted by a number of the world's leading governments, international financial institutions and regional development organisations. Van Apeldoorn (2000) outlines a new competitiveness discourse sponsored by elite business organisations which imposes a set of benchmarks on policy makers reflecting the interests of European transnational capital. Such changes in global/international forms of governance are as evident in the reorientation of domestic/national economic *and* social policy.

What is perhaps most curious about these changes is the degree of consensus among international organisations in developing and co-ordinating policy initiatives, and transmitting them to national governments (Charnock 2008). While a broad consensus has emerged that the spread of neoliberal policies does not spell the end of the state, but rather a change in the character and orientation of its core activities, and it is commonplace to suggest that states continue to act as key nodes or points of transmission in an increasingly integrated global system (Jessop 2006; Jayasuriya 2004). As Cammack argues

> Over the last two decades international institutions have been acting with increasing purpose to promote unimpeded capital accumulation on a global scale by supporting governments committed to such reforms, and coaxing other governments towards desired reforms where they remain reluctant institutions like the EBRD are central to the promotion of the politics of competitiveness (Cammack 2007: 1).

Just as the shift in the 1990s to the second wave emphasis on institutions reflects a refusal to change overall direction, since the mid 2000s and further exacerbated since 2007/8 we are witnessing the renewal of the neoliberal model, properly understood and applied through the competitiveness mechanism. Rather than providing impetus for an alternative, the crisis has reinforced a continued commitment to neoliberalism (Macartney 2009). The response to the crisis has been increased dialogue and cooperation with other IFIs, joining forces in investments and policy dialogue. The joint IFI Action Plan created by the EBRD, EIB and World Bank in February 2009 will bring €25 billion of investment to the financial sectors of ECE from 2010 (EBRD 2009: 12).

As Mirow makes explicit, the EBRD is contributing to a wider, global project that is as applicable in Europe as the developing world. However, as the next section illustrates the debate has moved beyond the promotion of competitiveness at national and global levels and the current crisis is an opportunity to press ahead with a revised version of the neoliberal project. While the IFIs recognise the necessity for more effective regulation of the global political economy but this should not be understood as abandoning the neoliberal project but a unique opportunity to reinforce it. Remember, the time for reform is always now: when times are good, resources are available to fund reforms and buy off opponents; when times are bad, crisis weakens resistance and justifies reform. Just as significantly, the EBRD also promoted the crisis as a moment of opportunity to more aggressively push privatisation and competition:

> Most countries are demonstrating continuing commitment to market reforms and democratic processes. A crisis can lead to reversals, but can also create new opportunities in healthier and stronger systems. The EBRD is committed to being the catalyst in this process (EBRD 2008b: 21).[vi]

According to Thomas Mirow, the newly appointed President of the EBRD, the message is clear that the neoliberalisation of the state must not be allowed to slow:

> The crisis is so severe that it seriously challenges the concepts we have been following. In many countries around the world the state is intervening where the private sector is in serious trouble. For the transition countries of our region the current problems are a severe setback. In this situation it is all the more important that we must not allow the crisis to lead to reversals of the huge progress which has been achieved over the last two decades (EBRD 2008b: 1).

Instead, the trend in the EBRD's discourse since 2008/9 has been the engendering of a shift from FDI and competitiveness toward a stronger emphasis on domestic production and finance – in response to economic crisis. The continued transformation of the state is portrayed as essential in order to protect consumers and borrowers (Tong 2010; Berglöf et al. 2009; Sanfey 2010; Connaghan 2010). In the 2010 Transition Report, the Bank's Chief Economist Erik Berglöf warned that: "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 2010m: iv, emphasis added). In the next section we demonstrate how the EBRD's strategies for neoliberalisation have been translated into the drive for encouraging female entrepreneurship in the 2009 Gender Action Plan, indicative of a fourth wave of neoliberalisation that is focused on the rolling in of neoliberalisation to further internalise capitalist commodification and socialisation of social relations.

A fourth wave of neoliberalism: the EBRD's gender action plan

In the final substantive section of the paper we turn to gender initiatives as the most recent articulation of neoliberalisation by the EBRD. Having previously faced criticism for the absence of a gender perspective within its analysis and operations, the EBRD in 2008 became one of the most recent multilateral financial institutions to endorse gender equality as a development goal and in the following year the bank endorsed its first ever Gender Action Plan (GAP).

The diffusion of 'gender equity' concerns international organisations constitutes one of the major trends of the Post-Washington Consensus. While from struggle to include gender issues in development, Western feminists have played an active role in bringing about and enacting this transformation, ways in which 'gender' has been incorporated in leading organisations has faced critique (Jackson and Pearson 1998). First, to make it palatable to organisations operating within neoclassical economics conceptual frameworks, 'gender equity' has been framed in ways congruent to 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, it is seen as reproducing and permeating rather than challenging gendered power relations. Griffin illustrates well that

> 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 (2009: 115).

Second, the translation of this instrumental view of gender equity into policies promoting female entrepreneurship is in tension with catering for social reproduction. (Elson 2009: 38-39; 42) highlights how gender analysis remains subjugated to a neoclassical understanding of the economy and argues that the emphasis on equality of opportunity in the agenda is premised upon a high degree of individual responsibility to seize opportunity and has not adequately considered how to accommodate women's reproductive work.

To understand how the EBRD's GAP forms a strategy of neoliberalisation, it is helpful to follow Griffin's (2009: 113) view that 'gender' is a part of discourse in two ways. First, there is of course the official gender which is articulated in the bank's documents and which we will focus on below. Second, as seen above, while unaddressed, gender is also part of the bank's conceptual framework and has long been implicated in its actions. That is, prior to 2008/09 the EBRD made little mention of gender issues, yet the bank both marshalled social policy prescriptions and investments with effects for gender relations and social reproduction (Bacheva et al, 2006).

In the run-up to the GAP, the EBRD took a number of steps toward gender analysis. First, on March 8, 2003, the EBRD issued a joint statement with major development organisations declaring their support for gender equality and later made this commitment formal by signing the third Millennium Development Goal in 2008. The bank commented on the event with the following words:

> By accepting a torch, President Mirow 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, in 2008 the EBRD launched its Environmental and Social Policy. Rewritten from the Environmental Policy, this document moves social foci into the spotlight by compelling the bank to mainstream social and environmental concerns through all its activities and that these are to operate as the part of criteria through which clients considered for funding are assessed. While the bulk of the document addresses labour standards, working conditions and community impacts, gender is mentioned in relation to work place discrimination and the relocation of indigenous people (EBRD 2008b). However, the shift is firmly situated within the confinements of the EBRD's mandate and all the Environmental and Social Policy directs the bank to invest in 'projects that have the potential to realise additional environmental and social benefits' within the realm of promoting transition.

Two years on, the EBRD Board of Directors officially endorsed the Bank's Gender Action Plan (EBRD 2010: 4). The plan contains three parts, titled 'the impact of economic transition for women', 'the EBRD's efforts to promote gender equality' and the 'EBRD's Gender Action Plan'. In the remainder of this section, we focus discussion on each of these parts. First, the plan maps out the gap that emerged between women and men during transition in terms of opportunities and access to resources in areas including health, education and political power. It provides data on the following areas: labour force participation, 'qualitative modifications in employment' (types of jobs), wage equality and access to finance. When investigating labour force participation, the authors do highlight how women were restricted by discrimination and increased caring duties following the roll-back of public provision. In the section on access to finance, discrimination against women is described as particularly high in the CIS countries where 'financial development and competition are less advanced' in comparison to the CEE. Thus, while the authors write that discrimination stems from culture, history and institutional starting points they argue that it can be reduced by participating in a 'more competitive financial market (EBRD 2010a: 7). In the second part, the authors move on to outline how the bank, although not targeting gender issues explicitly, has had positive effects for women. This includes: the Social and Environmental Policy, supporting women in accessing finance and starting small businesses, technical assistance and advice (TAM/BAS), by board appointments and by the Women in Business Awards. Thereafter, in the third part, the document sets out the initiatives and policy priorities for the EBRD over the following two years, using the number and position of women in managerial positions in the private sectors its main indicator of achievement. In summary, major proposals within the plan focus on gender mainstreaming within the bank, the use of Georgia, Kyrgyz Republic and Romania as pilot countries for improving women's access to credit and business opportunities, the development of impact assessment tools with an inclusion of gender and further collaboration with civil society and IFIs.

Thus, with the GAP the EBRD's focus on women in Central Asia as drivers of economic growth is formalised and embedded into the bank's discourse on gender equality. This occurred in connection with the bank's heightened general interest in the region, where, to remedy the 'poor investment climate and underdeveloped market economies', the EBRD in 2004 launched the 'Early Transition Countries Initiative' under which small and medium-sized enterprise is promoted, advice and finance provided to individuals and businesses and the bank 'engages in policy dialogue to the purpose of institutional reform' (EBRD 2004a). The Women in Business programme constitutes an integral part of the activities in the region, and construed within the Bank's Business Advisory Services (BAS) and TurnAround Business Management Programme (TAM), it aims to 'better realise the potential of women's contribution to economic development in emerging markets.' (Greenberg 2010:2). Acclaimed within the GAP for its positive gender impact, since its beginning in Azerbaijan in 2004, the flagship Women in Business Programme has expedited seven TAM projects targeting women-led enterprise in Serbia and twenty-five workshops to build women's business skills in Southern Caucasus. More notably, since 2006, eighty-six projects entailing consultancy, guidance and subsidies for female entrepreneurs, thirty-six focus groups and workshops to develop business skills, alongside study tours and networking activities has been rolled out in Armenia and Georgia (Greenberg 2010:3).

While the GAP is in part a welcome move toward recognising the role of gender and unpaid labour in transition, it contains several points of concern. First, there is an absence of discussion of what it means by 'gender', hence rather than taking seriously issues of power relations, it collapses the concept into a homogenous category of women. On this point, it is worth paying attention to how the language is used in the plan. The case for discussing gender equality is made in the 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 in the document, the authors describe women as having positive impacts on market expansion both via consumption and as contributing to better governance by 'lesser tolerance for corrupt practices' and also see that

> 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 focus on private sector participation and entrepreneurship within the plan excludes a consideration of women's various productive and reproductive roles hence no proposals are made in relation to the balancing of paid and unpaid work. The heavily individualising discourse of the Women in Business programme, where to overcome hurdles women are to 'change their mind set in order to become more entrepreneurial' and even act as role models to their (male) partners, is carried on within the GAP (Greenberg 2010: 18). Here the EBRD utilises gender analysis as an investment tool, which is not only replete with ideas on women's natural role but *de facto* seeks to embed its investments in these constructions (EBRD 2010b: 4; EBRD 2010c: 4-5). This is expressed in statements such as 'Women are the primary guardians of health and carers and therefore, are more likely to be more aware of health, safety and security issues affecting the community' (EBRD 2010b: 5).

Conclusion

In the paper we have argued that neoliberal social forces wish to see the market reform process advanced to the point of completion in ECE, FSU and Central Asia. 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, whilst neglecting due consideration of the historicity and contingency of reform. Thus neoliberal social forces remain engaged in shoring up the hegemony of common sense amongst powerful transnational epistemic communities of experts, policymakers and capitalists, thereby delimiting the space for counter-hegemonic ideologies and limiting the debate on possible alternatives to neoliberalisation.

A threefold series of strategies has been employed by neoliberal social forces as illustrated by the EBRD case against resistance that subsequently lead to the closure of policy flexibility at the national level: first in the initial construction of the market in a first wave of neoliberalism, second in the wave of institutional reforms necessitated by the failures in the first wave, third a reliance on the centrality of the promotion off neoliberal competitiveness to attempt completion of the reform process and finally a move to individually internalise the reform process and jump scales bypassing the mendacity of the post-communist state. These waves translated into how neoliberalisation implies both new forms of social relations between men and women 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 affecting a concentration of the work undertaken to care and provide into the private/domestic spheres (Bezanson 2006; Bakker 2003: 66-67). By representing and promoting an idea of women as individualistic consumers and entrepreneurs, whilst promoting reforms in social policy, the EBRD influences 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.

Whilst considering women as highly productive, these are also often based on the ascribing of characteristics of nurture and care to women which serve to intensify the work women undertake (Bakker 2003). This means the retrenchment of responsibility for care and reproductive work into households subsequent to neoliberal reforms such as large scale privatisation processes and roll-back of public welfare provision. The intensification of exploitation signals the neoliberal emphasis on self-sufficiency implicated in the reduction or abolishment of the family wage and the growth of personal debt which in turn entails the increased responsibility of women for sustaining their families and/or communities under uncertain labour conditions and low pay which has followed in the aftermath of neoliberal restructuring. 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. In practice, we are still to see the outcomes, a number of projects have been rolled out but gender equality remains far from the centre of the EBRD's analysis.

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ENDNOTES:

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[i] For example, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (first GAP in 1998-2002) and the European Union as other actors with overlapping and neighbouring geographical scope have published extensively on gender since the mid- to late-1990s

[ii] In addition James Wolfensohn, then President of the World Bank described the situation thus:

> There are a set of "globally accepted principles'' underpinning the global governance consensus which require political, economic and social reform in all states […] the most important obstacles to impartial and transparent justice. […] We looked at Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union and developing countries, and we discovered that the first and biggest is the takeover of the justice systems by economic interests and the elite. Second, and significantly behind, particularly in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, is political interference (Wolfensohn 1991).

[iii] Deep interventionism had three components. First, that 'interventions that affect the dynamics of the political process – thereby affecting subsequent outcomes – can be thought of as deep interventions. They entail irreversibilities'; second, that they are distinguished from 'shallow interventions that typically make up a part of "reform" packages'; and third, that a 'large enough disturbance can move an economy in a direction that converges to a steady state equilibrium' (Hoff & Stiglitz 2001: 419-20, cited in Cammack 2004).

[iv] Though competitiveness may appear to many as a dry economic indicator, one recent example of this relevant to ECE is the High Level Group report on the Lisbon Strategy that asserted:

> 'Competitiveness' is not just some dry economic indicator that is often unintelligible to the man on the street; rather, it provides a diagnosis of the state of economic health of a country or region. In the present circumstances, the clear message must be: if we want to preserve and improve our social model we have to adapt: it is not too late to change. In any event the status quo is not an option (European Communities 2004: 44).

[v] In order to illustrate the extensiveness of the consensus that has emerged around the competitiveness agenda consider the synchronisation evident between three recent publications by key agencies in the competitiveness agenda: the OECD, World Bank and the EU. OECD findings revealed that 'pro-competitive regulations improve productivity performance' (OECD 2003: 10). The World Bank *World Development Report 2005* argued that 'a good investment climate encourages firms to invest by removing unjustified costs,

risks, and barriers to competition', promoting 'an environment that fosters the competitive processes that Schumpeter called "creative destruction''' (World Bank 2004: 2-4).

[vi] The parallels with the IMF's strategic thinking are striking:

> *Bottom line*. The crisis has revealed flaws in key dimensions of the current global architecture, but also provides a unique opportunity to fix them. On the flaws, surveillance needs to be reoriented to ensure warnings are clear, successfully connect the dots, and provide practical advice to policy makers. An effective forum for policy makers with the ability and mandate to take leadership in responding to systemic concerns about the international economy is key. Ground rules for cross-border finance need to be strengthened. And, given the growing size of international transactions, resources available for liquidity support and easing external adjustment should augmented and processes for using them better defined so they are more readily available when needed. These are all ambitious undertakings. But the damage wrought by the crisis provides an opportunity to make progress on seemingly intractable issues. The moment should not be missed (IMF 2009: 13).