

DETERMINING DEVELOPMENT: THE IMPACT OF WHITE FEMINISM ON WOMEN OF COLOR

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“Against White Feminism” has been called a “counter-manifesto” and a “call to arms,” but most importantly, it is a propulsive synthesis of how American feminism fails women of color. Propulsive because by succinctly capturing all those dimensions in one place, Zakaria has created the force needed for the discourse on feminism to move forward, and in some ways, to move beyond its current “whiteness.”

This essay will elaborate upon the consequences of white feminism for marginalized women of the south. I attempt to highlight how the objectives of white feminism—identified as “shared power over systems with men”¹—reinforce the obstacles of patriarchy for women of color. Instead of creating inclusive institutional solutions, white feminism privileges women of one dominant culture, situating them as the new norm that every other woman must navigate. The dangers of white feminism play out on two parallel stages: first, women of color situated in the west must conceal cultural diversity to lay claims to any feminist policy. Second, the

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1. KOA BECK, WHITE FEMINISM: FROM THE SUFFRAGETTES TO INFLUENCERS AND WHO THEY LEAVE BEHIND 12 (2021)

school and the program are not tasked with changing their structural inequities to help a woman in my situation succeed. In fact, the structural flaws are not even acknowledged. Yet, I, by being a woman and a mother, have now situated myself to face “brutal” tradeoffs and must choose. This incident exemplifies what whiteness does to feminists: it effectively blinds them to their acts of dispossessing women of opportunities, because those opportunities exist only for those who can adequately assimilate.

Whiteness then encapsulates the tension between assimilationism and multiculturalism that Okin foregrounds in her book. My advisors could ask why you expect to succeed if you are willing to bear the inequities that Mydmatuereheth (or)-

grant program targeted toward women. The program seeks to empower women by providing them with a quarterly cash payment that amounts to almost \$9 per month; this is a substantial amount in a country where the poverty line is about \$13 per month. This program was launched against the backdrop of the microfinance revolution and a “ghost statistic” that women spend almost ninety percent of their income on their children, as compared to men spending only thirty to forty percent.¹³ While this statistic has never been verified, Moeller warns that “even when quantitative data are valid, they often produce very limited understandings of the complex realities of girls and women’s lives and the conditions that produce poverty and inequality.”¹³ Most of this research relies on statistical methods that have poor external validity and are often contextually specific; yet, development agencies are quick to cite studies housed at large universities as they draw up plans to meet their obligations. The big data revolution also disadvantages the implementation of these programs by imposing the need for continued monitoring and evaluation. Again, taking the example of BISP, the payments are disbursed using a biometric verification system which allows t cTD [(i)9.2 (a)-19 (f)-3.9 6f- Mo ti bisomllyhe progind em ()]TJ 0.002 30 -5.7117.

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partially responsible for the move towards developing countries: while graduate students could do a field experiment in the global south, they were usually unable to afford one in Europe or North America. This, paired with the path dependency of research, can lead to skewed priorities for development. For example, Punjab is the most heavily studied region of Pakistan because of the prevalence of survey companies and research tanks, all part of a broader research infrastructure that was established by early Pakistani-American academics, most of whom hailed from the country's affluent region of Punjab. This has only served to cement inequities, rather than address them, through development.

Recently, Open Philanthropy circulated an open prompt, winning responses to which could win up to \$25,000. The prompt asked, "[w]hat new cause area should Open Philanthropy consider funding?" When I received this prompt, I knew that I could most convincingly justify increased funding to BISP because: a) data on its transparency and effectiveness vis-à-vis selected metrics of women development exists and b) because I could propose to conduct a new survey with BISP recipients in Punjab to better understand how the increases in money could be used. Even I, a brown immigrant academic, had to cave into some existing structural inequities, which continue to inform how development can unfold. But for Open Philanthropy, this prompt, its circulation amongst elite U.S. graduate schools and its evidence-based responses manifest its core "whiteness."

The most compelling way to move from white feminism to inclusive feminism is to recognize women as agents, across different cultures and different contexts. Whether it is recipients of foreign aid, or the expats involved in foreign policy making, there needs to be cultivated a renewed accommodation for cultural diversity. As Zakaria contends, in its current form, aid not only imposes saving on women who haven't asked for it, but it also chooses for them how they should be saved. Similarly, the move towards community-driven development in the aid literature, which emphasizes seeking input from the natives, essentially assumes away the agency of the recipients. The idea that giving a marginalized woman X will change her behavior in predictable ways has formed the thrust of developmental social science, focusing narrowly on the predictive power of policies. Yet, this predictive power is itself biased by those wh

question our predictive margins and to acknowledge that people/women in other cultures have

