

**Women's Work and Assets in the Urban, Global South:
Considering Property Ownership from a Transnational Feminist Perspective**

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Development literature on global gender empowerment devotes much attention to employment, a code word for the inclusion of women's labor in the global market. Recent work in transnational feminisms shows that the emphasis on employment before assets, especially before housing, may not prevent exploitation of labor and perpetuity of poverty within the specific context of urban settings in the global south. This paper first highlights research that shows how women in this urban context are increasingly taking on too much responsibility, working in a confluence of survival-oriented activities that undermine their own well-being. I also highlight research that addresses how women in this context are able to get out of poverty: when they can labor in such a way that they are not merely working to survive, but also working for accumulation of their own material assets, foremost of which is basic housing. Finally, I consider these transnational feminist insights about the importance of housing for women in light of broader, philosophical concerns about property ownership, specifically Locke's theory of property. I show how Locke could give a defense against forced evictions common in the urban slums, along with support for a normative connection between women's labor and assets.

Keywords: gender empowerment, transnational feminisms, survival-oriented activities, Locke's theory of property

Introduction

Development literature on women, gender, and poverty often stresses the importance of investment in women's labor as the key to poverty reduction. Implicit values in development literature consider women solely in terms of their economic utility, wherein theorists envision women's labor as the 'solution' to poverty (World Bank 2001, 2011, 2012). They encourage women, Asian women especially, to be the so-called "Double X solution" to the problem of economic inequality between nations (Kristof and WuDunn 2009: xvli). This vision is ethically objectionable because its aim is not always or primarily women's empowerment, but rather economic growth for growth's sake, generally, and in particular for the sake of the growth of the larger economic units within which poor women in the urban, global south live and work.¹

¹ This paper's topic is limited to women in the urban slums of the global south; it is outside of this paper to address men's situations and vulnerabilities in similar contexts. This is unfortunate, because men face different but very real vulnerabilities, such as the lack of work, and the demands of varying representations of masculinities. The claim is here not that women are more oppressed than men under the exigencies of globalized urban poverty. The argument is only a description of the vulnerabilities and agencies that women do face under these conditions, and a normative suggestion of property ownership given those conditions, for women. For work on men and masculinities in the

These units are most often the nation-state, but can include transnational corporations, or women's own communities or their families. For example, the widely lauded micro-credit programs have been almost exclusively aimed at women, because women tend to invest more in others (their families, their communities) than themselves. (Duflo 2012; Karim 2011). In short, even, and perhaps especially, well-meaning development efforts can instrumentalize women, and in doing so reproduce the intersecting inequalities they set out initially to address.

However, normatively speaking, the subject of economic reforms should be women's own wellbeing, that is, in Amartya Sen's words, development as freedom (Sen 1999). Considering women's own wellbeing as the goal of development takes each person as an individual, and an end in themselves. Such an approach does not ask, 'what are women for?' but rather, 'what social, political, and material goods work for women' (Zerilli 2005)? Economic and development reforms often forget that women's own wellbeing should be the primary goal of development, and replace that goal with the broader neo-liberal aim of opening up new markets for capital expansion. The growth of the economic units within which women in the global, urban South work, enables those larger units to become viable investment prospects. Under this model, mostly foreign investors benefit from economic growth, but working women most often do not (Calvano 2008). Sylvia Chant and others have emphasized that, globally, women are increasingly working not only a 'second', but also a 'third' shift: taking care of families, earning an income, and also advocating for basic goods and services (Chant 2007). Chant calls this gendered exploitation of labor under globalization 'the feminization of responsibility', by which she means that women are now responsible for most of the productive labor and reproductive care work; women are simply doing more of the work, but this work does not necessarily translate into an increase in their well-being, empowerment, or economic stability.

Alternately, Caroline Moser and others have shown how women in poor urban areas can and do get out of poverty: mainly through asset accumulation, most importantly the acquisition of adequate housing (Hamdi 2014; Phillips et al. 2013; Moser 2009).² Moser's insight is important and, perhaps, surprising, because both liberal and Marxist-leaning intellectuals in the global north have an [understandable] aversion to considering property ownership as intrinsic to wellbeing. The relationship between work and assets as regards urban, global poverty is currently under-theorized, and especially so regarding the intersections of gender, poverty, and global geography. For example, the capabilities approach, as iterated by Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, has not yet considered the descriptive and normative connection between women's work and assets, considering the exigencies of the current global economy (Nussbaum 2000, 2013; Sen 2005, 2004). For instance, Nussbaum writes, "Having decent, ample housing may be enough [to ensure capabilities]: it is not clear that human dignity requires everyone have exactly the same type of housing. To hold that belief might be to fetishize possessions too much. The whole issue needs further investigation (Nussbaum 2013: 41)." Indeed it does. Nussbaum's statement is indicative of the widespread suspicion of private property amongst progressive intellectuals in the global north in general, and amongst academic feminists in particular. In an attempt to avoid the seduction of the material prosperity of the global north, the U.S. and Anglo-oriented academy have not yet considered how assets might hold a different degree of

context of slums, see Chimaraoke Izugbara, Ronny Tikkanen, and Karin Barron, "Men, Masculinity, and Community Development in Kenyan Slums", *Community Development*, 2014.

² It is outside the scope of this article to give a thorough, theoretical definition of poverty. For such a definition, see Luttrell, Johanna. Alienation and Global Poverty: Arendt on the Loss of the World. *Philosophy and Social Criticism*. Vol. 41, November 2015, 869-884.

importance between the worlds of the global north and the global south. Similarly, feminist philosophy has worried about the relationship between material and symbolic oppression in the abstract, but not enough, yet, about housing, poverty, and empowerment specifically and especially the context of urban slums in the global south, the settings in which women of color or “3rd world women” are now, in ever-increasing number, living and working (Jagger 2015). Historically, of course, feminist analysis has focused on inclusion in the workplace as a site of empowerment, but the question of property ownership and the relation to empowerment remains understudied, or at least under-appreciated.

The questions, then, that motivate this article are: What kind of work are women doing, living as most do now, in the cities of the global south? What is their work getting them, in terms of lasting wellbeing or empowerment? Normatively speaking, what should their work get them? In order to make inroads into these questions, I consider the relations between the work that women do, and the settings and contexts in which they live. That is, I consider urban migration in an era of globalization, and the feminization of the workforce as related phenomena.

Where “Third World Women” Live, and the Kind of Work They Do: Instrumentalizing Women’s Labor in the Urban Slums of the Global South

The global south is experiencing an unprecedented movement of urban migration, wherein rural populations are increasingly moving to and living in slums on the outskirts of rapidly expanding megacities. Urbanization is increasing to such an extent that the UN has termed this explosive growth “the new urban revolution”; it is a new period of human history.³ As urban centers in the global south expand, cities, bursting at their seams, have neither the planning, infrastructure, or funding to support the influx of people. Thus, urban inhabitants squat and settle in enormous slums, using whatever material they can find (cardboard, aluminum, cane, and hopefully, eventually, brick and mortar) to build their houses. They set up informal housing or squatter settlements, outside or beyond the sphere of city-provided goods and services, including basic plumbing and trash collection.⁴ Even once migrants settle into fairly stable communities, in many instances their neighborhood can be razed at a moment’s notice, repeatedly displacing their families (Potts 2011; Macharia 1992).⁵ Local governments have made the razing of slums a standardized policy practice and not an out-of-the ordinary occurrence (Sawhney 2013). This setting – the urban slums of the global south – is the setting and context in which millions of women now live and work.

³ (UN Habitat 2003; Davis 2007). The UN reports: “In 2001, 924 million people, or 31.6 percent of the world’s urban population, lived in slums. The majority of them were in the developing regions, accounting for 43 percent of the urban population, in contrast to the 6 percent in more developed regions” (2003, xxvi). Further, “It is projected that in the next 30 years, the global number of slum dwellers will increase to about 2 billion ...” (2003, xxvi). The UN calls this phenomenon, the explosive growth of cities in developing countries, ‘the new urban revolution’. It is unprecedented. “Every year, the world’s urban population is increasing by about 70 million, equivalent to 7 new megacities” (2003: xxvi). This shift is equal to seven new New York Cities growing every nine months.

⁴ For example, Priscilla Connolly (1999) observes that in Mexico City “as much as 60 percent of the city’s growth is the result of people, especially women, heroically building their own dwellings on unserviced peripheral land, while informal subsistence work has always accounted for a large proportion of total employment” (56).

⁵ The UN description of the situation reads: “The urban poor are trapped in an informal and “illegal” world – in slums that are not reflected on maps, where waste is not collected, where taxes are not paid and where public services are not provided” (UN Habitat 2003: 6).

What kind of work are women who live in mega-slums doing? Or, asked differently, what is the nature of the majority of “third-world women’s” labor, now, in this stage of globalization? First, it’s important to note that so-called “women’s work” one factor (amongst many) driving urban migration in the first place, in so far as their work in the home makes it possible for their husbands and other family members to work outside the home in manufacturing, agriculture, and other more ‘formal’ work settings (Sassen 2010).⁶ Women’s unmonitized subsistence production allows for agricultural operations to modernize. Oftentimes, when small-scale agricultural operations ‘modernize’ and become large-scale, corporatized farms, subsistence-level workers are no longer able to make a living in agriculture, and are pushed into large cities to look for other work. Once arriving in the city, women work both [in what economists call] “productive” and “reproductive” activities, and in both the ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ sectors.

In terms of ‘productive’ labor, women in many of the world’s urban areas, especially on the US Mexico-Border and in China, work in factories owned by transnational corporations. Because there are so many migrants and immigrants in these areas, factory employees are forced to work for low wages in places with high turnover rates. Maria Guadalupe Torres, a maquila worker in Nogales, Mexico, explains her daily routine:

I worked in a maquiladora [foreign-owned assembly plant] for eighteen years. Every day I rose at 4:30 A.M. and was at my work station at 6:45, where I spent the entire day. I couldn’t go to the bathroom without getting permission. My job was to assemble electronic capacitors with epoxy. Many coworkers developed health problems because of the epoxy. I don’t know if it is responsible for my current health problems or not. I was paid \$27 for a forty-hour week. Twenty-two percent of that went for transportation. I worked 3 1/2 hours to buy a gallon of milk. My diet was a few potatoes, six eggs, a kilo each of tortillas and beans. Meat, vegetables, and fruit were unaffordable luxuries. I lived in one room with an outdoor toilet. My colonia [neighborhood] had no potable water, no electricity, no sidewalks, no infrastructure. (Maquiladoras do not contribute to local taxes (Torres 2005).

Torres’ work experience is part of a larger, global pattern of the feminization, and concurrent exploitation of women, in the workforce. Large-scale manufacturing production, most evident in the global economy after the 1970s, has engendered a sort of global “feminization of the proletariat” (Sassen 2010: 32). In poorer countries, women are holding many of the manufacturing jobs. Women, especially predominate the garment and electronics industries. In holding these jobs, the “women proletariat weakens strong unions and secures competitive prices” (Sassen 2010: 32).

However, the more traditional vision of the proletariat-as-factory-worker does not encompass all work that women are doing in the current stage of globalization. Women, especially in East Asia, also increasingly work in the so-called ‘pink collar’ sector, doing data entry, credit card processing, or are employed in the expanding tourist sector. Moreover, there has recently been

⁶ Often this work is “invisible” because it is subsistence work that does not produce a trade-able product, but instead women’s work makes it possible for their husbands or other family members to leave the home and “work”, in the traditional sense. In rural, export-oriented agriculture, women’s work in producing food and other necessities in subsistence economies is made invisible by way of informalization (Sassen 2010). For example, women’s invisible work could include feeding their families while their husbands pick fruit, raising children so that their husbands can enter into the agricultural workforce, and/or working themselves in the sugarcane fields, doing un-contracted labor if their husbands are ill or unable to work.

an expansion of facilitated prostitution and related sex work, and more women than ever travel out of their native country to engage in domestic day care work (Benería et al. 2015; Pareñas 2005; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002). Currently, the ‘feminization of responsibility’, and, let it be said, feminization of survival, can be seen most clearly in the traffic of and in women, but it is also visible in international patterns of migration wherein entire governments are dependent upon remittances from women migrants (Pareñas 2005). This ‘feminization of the work force’ on a global scale has been quick, in comparison with other cultural shifts, and involves much more movement on the part of women, both in terms of travel within countries and transnational migration (Benería et al. 2015).

The feminization of the global workforce has also meant the informalization of women’s work. Instead of formal jobs that involve some form of employee benefits, job security, and contracts, both women and men are increasingly working in the informal sector. The informal sector includes activities such as: opening up an unincorporated restaurant from one’s house, selling fruits on the sidewalk, doing weaving and tailoring work out of a private residence, or collecting metal scraps from a trash dump. Mike Davis writes: “All together, the global informal working class (overlapping with but non-identical to the population of the world’s slums) is about one billion strong, making it the fastest-growing, and most unprecedented, social class on earth (Davis 2007: 178).” The economies of informal labor, economies that exist ‘horizontally’ between people living in specific urban settings, in contrast to the ‘vertical’ economies that link people within the privileged parts of globalization, are complex, and the people who survive in them are extraordinarily innovative and resourceful. However, often the informal economies do not provide a security net or long-term, sustainable hope for improvement of livelihoods. The sparseness of informal work, and the fits and starts that characterize the flow of cash in the informal arena, can harm women and children especially. Informality – in both space and work – can ensure the extreme abuse of women and children (Bremman and Das 2000). Out of public view, out of the purview of community and family members who watch out for one another, such informal women and children workers bear the heaviest burden of poverty. Poverty is thus not shared equally amongst all residents of a certain geographical area and the hierarchies of poverty are reproduced in the private space of the home. Of course, many women have, for a long time before the shift occasioned by globalization, engaged in ‘reproductive labor,’ the work most often associated with duties of care and the maintenance of the domestic, and the so-called ‘private’ sphere. However, women are not often in charge of these realms of labor; they are still vastly under-represented in management and property ownership (Duflo 2012).

The global informalization of the economy constitutes a poverty trap for women, “concentrating them”, as Kate Meagher explains, in low-skill, low-income activities with little prospect of advancement” (Meagher 2010: 472). In addition, neoliberal economic reforms, Meagher writes, increased women’s economic disadvantage because they turned the ‘double burden’ of unpaid care labor without adequate social and/or state support into a ‘triple burden’ domestic labor, income generation, and decreasing support. Women are now expected to be breadwinners as well as primary caregivers, and do so without any increase in support, either from their social systems or state intervention. Those expectations are just too much of a burden for women, or anyone, to bear. Interestingly, Meagher concludes:

“Amid the depredations of economic restructuring, the growing role of women as ‘breadwinners’ through increased informal income-generation and more direct access to credit have tended to increase women’s share of reproductive responsibilities, diminish

their control over income, and intensify rather than alleviate women's economic vulnerability in the face of diminishing male household contributions (Meager 2010: 473).”

Women's increasing responsibility for both productive and reproductive labor has not increased their empowerment, only their exploitation.

Here is the crucial point: contrary to the endorsements of development organizations that conflate women's empowerment with their ability to contribute to the economy, we see that the expectation that women will contribute to all things (the economy, their family, local activism) results in serious disempowerment. The entrance of women into the workforce is not an unqualified good, in all contexts, if that entrance is accompanied by the continued pressure for women to contribute to the home and to the community, without enough support to do so. Entrance into the workforce could be considered a good, if it allowed women to get out of poverty. However, just because women are working, it does not mean that they are on such a path out of poverty. Often, they are working only to survive, and their labor does not allow them to build a life. Women's informal economic participation concentrates them in 'survivalist' rather than 'growth' activities, and these survivalist modes of work prevent women from gaining a real foothold in the world, a foothold that gives them security and hope.

In short, “third world women” are just working harder than ever before. Second wave feminism's 'second shift' paradigm is an underrepresentation of the problem for women living in the urban, global south. Women essentially have a 'third shift' (Kumar 2010; Chant 2007). They have a triple role: reproductive (childbearing and caretaking), productive (as income earners), and community organizing tasks (because women are often the ones responsible for demanding and organizing for basic services like water and sanitation). The expectations of the global economy, shaped by the reforms of neoliberalism, are that women would be both income earners and primary caretakers. Concurrently, the state has retreated as an arbiter of support for either of these activities. But, one could ask, what is wrong with women working harder, if that work is their ticket out poverty? The problem with women doing all the work of the global economy is precisely that this work does not allow them to accumulate any assets. They spend all their time in 'survivalist' work, without getting to do any of the work that would give them basic housing or infrastructure, or security for the future.

Getting Out of Poverty: Asset Accumulation Instead of Endless Work

What would it look like, then, if women could labor not only for survival or subsistence, but labor to build something for their communities in that would last into the future? In other words, what does it take for a person's work to lift them out of poverty?

Caroline Moser conducted an excellent, longitudinal study on a group of families living on the outskirts of Guayaquil, Ecuador with that guiding topic: how to account for some families getting out of poverty, while others remain (Moser 2009)? She concluded that the accumulation of assets, basic housing being the first asset, is a necessary (while not sufficient) condition of poverty alleviation.

Moser lived and worked in a suburbio (slum on the outskirts of a city) of Guayaquil from the 1970s to 2004. In the 1970s, the community of Indio Guayas first settled a swath of swampland, building houses on stilts above the water, and connecting the houses with rickety boardwalks

made of wood, sugarcane, and aluminum. Most first generation families in this community had come to Guayaquil looking for work in the city when farm life became too difficult to sustain. Being far from the city center, Indio Guayas did not originally have electricity, running water, sewerage, or roads. The lack of basic infrastructure was harder for women, who had to complete their domestic tasks in primitive conditions. Also, moving from their places of origin was harder for women. Many women in the community feared loneliness when they first moved to the settlement. In leaving their families, women had to find different kinds of support.

By 2004, the neighborhood had changed significantly; many families had brick and mortar houses, and they had been able to send their children to school. Second and third generation families were able to start out their adult lives with more assets and security than first-generation families had. Moser argues that the families who were able to dig themselves out of first generation poverty did so because of a combination of factors: they were able to build themselves homes, mobilize for infrastructure, educate family members, deal with violence within the family, and identify opportunities for employment both in Ecuador and in Spain. When individual men and women in the families were able to be empowered in these ways, they could get out of poverty with minimal support from external aid agencies or NGOs (Moser 2009: xvi).

In this multi-faceted process of gaining security and reducing vulnerability, housing is the first building block of all those varied elements of social capital women and families can develop later on. “Housing”, Moser writes, “is the first priority asset, and while it does not necessarily get households out of poverty, adequate housing is generally a precondition for the accumulation of other assets” (Moser 2009: 40). Research in community action planning confirms the importance of housing in poverty reduction and empowerment. Nabeel Hamdi writes that, while lack of housing or poor housing conditions is a symptom and not a primary cause of deeper social problems like insecurity and unemployment, one does not address those social problems without, first, making sure everyone has a place to live (Hamdi 2014: 31). Thus, good design and, participatory processes that accompany that design, are important. Property ownership is the lever that turns the momentum of poverty in these contexts; it is an intervention into the flow of survivalist-oriented labor to which women are increasingly bound, in a world shaped by urbanization, globalization, and neoliberalism. The tangible asset of a home is a necessary but not sufficient condition in gaining intangible goods like security, identity, inclusion, hope, and a place in the world.

As a woman with a steady income living in the Global North, owning land and housing is not an essential element of my own empowerment. But I do not live in a large slum on the outskirts of a megacity, where I have carved out a small place in the world first by squatting, and then by building up my home, first by cardboard, then by cane sticks, and finally by purchasing one brick at a time. Land rights and housing do seem to be a crucial aspect of empowerment for women in the urban, global south.⁷ Of course, there is no magic solution to getting out of poverty – both income and assets matter, and are, of course, interrelated. In addition, there are innumerable non-material goods that come along with inclusion into the workforce, for example confidence, freedom, sociality, independence, etc. However, when women own land and have an opportunity to build their own houses, they have the potential to accumulate other varied and valuable assets, against which they can leverage their way out of poverty. Like Virginia Woolf

⁷ To note, the connection between women’s homeownership and empowerment does not apply in every context, and especially so in the context of immigration and citizenship; people can still be deported if they own a house. So this connection must be, importantly, qualified to apply to citizens of a given country.

wrote about a 'room of one's own' as a necessary precondition for women's basic growth and empowerment, so "third world women" in this specific context may need 'a house of one's own', or rather, control over housing assets for themselves and the well-being of their families.

Moser expounds upon the varying benefits of housing as a first generation asset:

"Housing was not only the most important component of physical capital but also the first asset accumulated. Although housing did not get all households out of poverty, for various reasons it was a precondition for the accumulation of other assets. First, shelter reduced the physical vulnerability of the homeowner's family as well as the socioeconomic fragility of extended household members, who often stayed during times of adversity. Second, over time it provided a mechanism through which additional income could be generated; options included home-based enterprises, rent (from rooms or separately built apartments above the original house), and cash from subdivisions. Finally, for many of the next generation, the original plot continued to provide shelter for them as adults with their own families, with houses extended (upwards or outwards) or separate structures built in the same plot" (Moser 2009: 44-45).

What benefit does owning a home give, as opposed to renting or squatting? First, in owning something, a person can leverage their property to their own specific needs and uses. Also, in owning, a person has the right to any income that can be derived from their home, the right to use and manage it, and to security from its expropriation (Honoré 1961). Owning property gives the right to "manage, use, possess", and the power to transmit it should the need arise. Women who own their homes in the slums of the global south are extraordinarily resourceful in terms of the ways in which they leverage these properties to their own benefit. For instance, they start their own shops on the first level, build upwards to accommodate growing families on the second level, rent out rooms to gain extra income. For children going to school, a stable home wherein, say, the ceiling does not cave in when the rain comes, or the floor does not give if their friends dance too much, gives a sense of consistency and stability, a peace of mind that allows them to leave the house and do other things. When women own and control their homes, they can begin to build a life for themselves that takes them out of poverty. Further, land ownership gives social respect and recognition. Research in Chandigarh, India, shows that when women can joint-title their homes, they make more decisions, and have more access to public knowledge, and gain more respect from their husbands (Datta 2006). In short, the benefits of secure land tenure, the ability to own and keep a house in the slums, are both material and symbolic.

Alternately, expropriation from private property hurts women especially. Forced evictions disproportionately affect women because it disrupts the social support system for caregiving (Al Helal 2012). In many places, though, it is harder for women to gain access to land – they face discriminatory credit practices, and exclusion from property inheritance (Kumar 2010). It is worthwhile, then, for development organizations to take a serious look into empowerment through asset accumulation (re: housing and land), rather than inclusion into the economy solely by way of labor. Women's labor is being leveraged and exploited for purposes other than their own well-being, and their endless increase in responsibility does not contribute to their ability to increase their assets. However, normatively speaking, there should be a connection between one's labor and one's assets, one's security, and one's place in the world. Women must be allowed to labor in such a way that their labor does indeed result in their own asset accumulation. In the context of urban slums of the global south, owning property, specifically owning a house,

undergirds such a relation between labor and assets, in so far as housing provides a bulwark against constantly laboring in survivalist modes. Women living in these contexts leverage basic housing for other material and non-material assets, and so it functions a sort of protection against the exploitation of labor.

Owning Property: Supporting the Normative Connection between Labor and Assets

One consequence of attempting to justifying property ownership is a sort of return to the questions of early political philosophy, specifically, the questions of Hobbes, Locke, Marx, and to some extent, Hegel, amongst others. That return, is, however, nuanced: Marx was, of course, attempting to abolish the system in which capitalists owned the means of production, while Locke and Hobbes were interested in assembling a justification for people who already owned property to be able to keep it. Hegel believed everyone, excepting perhaps women and non-citizens, should to own property, as an element of their moral development. The issue of women in the slums needing to own their houses has a different starting point: the goal is to encourage an environment for women, who are not originally property owners, to be able to squat, and then make, then keep their housing, knowing housing can function as a protection against the exploitation of their labor. Further, knowing that labor alone is not working to give women security and reduce their vulnerability, we see that labor is not, as Marx perhaps hoped, liberation. As I have explained, urbanization increasingly begins in slums, and urban settlers mostly start as illegal squatters. Squatter settlements present a unique challenge to state-sanctioned rules of private property acquisition. That is, here we have a situation where very ingenious and hardworking people have (conjuring Locke) very much ‘mixed their labor with the land’ to heroically, and, for the most part, illegally, scrap out an existence from the detritus of industrial centers.

As a philosopher, then, I am interested to justify homeownership, regarding these makeshift and ostensibly illegal settlements. I am specifically concerned to provide theoretical protection against forced evictions, and protections that bolster a normative connection between labor and assets as regards “third world women” living and working in large urban slums. As I have noted, justifications for private property are not foreign to the history of political philosophy. In fact, the question over what material resources can be considered ‘mine’ motivates Hobbes’ entire inquiry.⁸ Interestingly, though, Jeremy Waldron notes that no modern political philosopher has a fully developed theory of property, in the way that, Locke and Hegel do (I might add Marx to this mix) Waldron 1988: 14). Perhaps the dearth of thought on property is due to Rawls’ influence, wherein questions on property were relegated to the sphere of practical political judgment, outside the scope of theories of justice proper. Certainly though, the matter of women owning property is a matter for justice, both practical and theoretical, both ideal and non-ideal.⁹ The fact that, for much of western history and thus western political philosophy, women were excluded from property ownership (and therefore excluded from being full citizens and political agents) makes the question even more interesting. Knowing that property ownership, both in the global north and the global south, works in many ways as a litmus test and reinforcement of

⁸ ‘[M]y first enquiry was to be from whence it proceeded, that any man should call any thing rather his *Owne*, th[a]n another mans’ (Hobbes 1983 [1647]: 26–27).

⁹ For more on ideas of justice coming from non-ideal theory, see Amartya Sen, 2011. *The Idea of Justice*.

inequality makes the matter a consideration of justice.¹⁰

Reading Hegel, Waldron, similarly to Moser, stresses the importance of property ownership for people's wellbeing. That is, property ownership gives a person more than material status or wealth; it also gives a sort of autonomy or empowerment. In Waldron's words, property gives a person "a place to stand in the world, a place where he can be confident that his freedom will be recognized and respected; and it affords him control of at least a minimum of those natural resources access to which is a necessary condition of his agency (Waldron 1988: 22)." Such was Hegel's insight in *The Philosophy of Right*, that everyone must have property, because property is necessary for ethical development.

John Locke, too, recognized the power in owning material assets. Of course, we do not find in Locke the sort of Hegelian demand that everyone should own property, or the sort of account of what property does to enhance one's moral development. Rather, Locke begins by worrying to prevent the government of Stuart England from disrespecting existing property rights. Locke's account, though, is interesting to read if one is concerned about the specific problem of the exploitation of labor in the slums of the global south, because he gives a defense against forced evictions, along with support for a normative connection between labor and assets.

Locke writes in what could be called the 'basic rights' tradition of Aquinas, in that he believes it immoral that civil society should be a hindrance to people's basic subsistence. Thus, even before beginning to talk about the right to property, all people, equally, have a right to life, and therefore a right to work to maintain that life. Even though the right to property is, along with the right to life and liberty, the cornerstone of political morality, property rights are not unlimited. Rather, for Locke, they are always constrained by the right to subsistence. That is, my own right of property ownership does not trump another's right to survive. Thus, if the migration to the urban slums is indeed an effort of survival, a Lockean might argue that a society's existing property laws should not prevent people from squatting, even illegally. Or, for example, that the owner of an airport cannot prevent people from squatting on the airport's unused land, if those people are on the very edge of survival.¹¹ Of course, people move to slums for any number of different reasons (for example, independence from conservative family, adventure, economic improvement, and survival).¹² When the reasons people squat on unused land near big cities do not include mere survival, the Lockean case against forced evictions vis-à-vis the right to subsistence is significantly weakened. Nevertheless, the right to survive does give significant momentum to the beginnings of an argument against forced evictions and secure land tenure for squatters, in the most extreme of settings.

Working in parallel to this right to survival, we see in Locke an emphasis on equality, albeit equality of a theological origin: God gave the earth to all men equally, and therefore all men equally have a right to use the bounty of the earth, providing each only use enough as he needs (the sufficiency/ fairness proviso) and does not leave the land unusable for others who come later (the spoilage proviso).¹³ Further, Locke believed that property existed before, and in some ways independent of, the advent of civil society. That is, property relations existed in the state of nature, because people labored in the state of nature. There are ways in which state of

¹⁰ See, for example, Elizabeth Anderson, 2010. *The Imperative of Integration*.

¹¹ See, for example, Katherine Boo, 2012. *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*.

¹² For rich explanations of the varied reasons young women in China move from rural zones to the cities, see Leslie T. Chang, 2009. *Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China*.

¹³ Of course, Locke very literally here meant these provisos to apply only to men, but we can extend his provisos to women without losing the guiding spirit of his argument.

globalization and urban migration resemble Locke's state of nature. In the slums, we see a situation in which people are living in an informal and illegal world, outside the scope of any government's goods and services, outside the scope of being counted, known, or taxed by any city or state. Additionally, people are migrating to the city at such an astounding rate that the whole situation is improvised, informal, and chaotic; it does not resemble any ordered civil society. If it is indeed fair to liken urban migration in the global south to a state of nature (without, importantly, implying that the slum dwellers themselves, in their moral beings, are any less 'civilized' than those who live and work in the formal economy), then we might claim, along with Locke's description of the origin of private property the state of nature, that the right to survive reorients property relations along the lines of labor, rather than, say, inheritance.

Locke's central claim on the relation between labor and property ownership is widely known:

“Though the Earth, and all inferior Creatures be in common to all Men, yet every Man has a Property in his own Person. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The Labour of his Body, and the Work of his Hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his Labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his Property. (Locke 1988: 27)

While there is much critical scholarship skeptical of the connection Locke assumes between 'mixing labor and the land' and ownership,¹⁴ when thinking about first, the exploitation of women's labor in the global south, and second, the severing of the normative connection between that labor and women's assets, there is an intuitive way Locke's theory of 'mixing one's labor with the land' works to repair a normative connection between labor and assets.

First of all, Locke, in contrast to Marx, is concerned to found property (and maybe even a theory of value) on use value, and not upon the value of an object's exchange on the global market. Ownership depends upon, for Locke, how one uses the material with which one has mixed their labor. This emphasis on use value sheds light on the sort of value that is at stake in squatter settlements. In contrast to, say, subdivisions in the global north, these shack houses in slums do not have much exchange value. If anything, the value they have for local governments and private companies is in the land itself, not the sugarcane or aluminum structure that constitutes the houses. But for women who could own that house, it is precisely the use value of those structures that they leverage towards their eventual well-being. Thus, Locke shows us how migrants who stake out small parcels of un-serviced land on the outskirts of cities to make and build their houses are making rational decisions that deserve to be supported by civil bodies.

Furthermore, Locke imagines a sort of 'first appropriator' of such private property, the first man who, by his labor, enclosed land and made it his own. This earliest laborer was no ordinary person. In Waldron's words, he was "particularly resourceful and opportunistic character... He is the individual who sees personal advantage in rupturing what might have been a previously satisfactory mode of subsistence by enclosing land and seizing the materials for himself... This person is the true founder of private property; and this is the sort of economic opportunism that a Lockean theory takes it upon itself to vindicate (Waldron 1988: 172)." So, Locke's original appropriator was an ingenious originator who sought more than subsistence out of life, and worked hard to transform say, a fallow, unused field into a thing from which he could extract advantage. Needless to say, besides their gender, this person looks remarkably like a migrant

¹⁴ See, for example, Nozick, 1974. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*.

woman and her family who, in moving from the rural to urban areas of the global south, settles in un-serviced land, works hard to construct her home and community, and then leverages her home for remarkable uses related to the furtherance of her own well-being.

Locke's theory of ownership provides, in some part, a normative connection between women's work and her assets. The problem for women in poverty, living in the settings of the slums and in the time of globalization and neo-liberalism, is that there is ever-increasing demand for their [both private and public] labor, and ever decreasing support. They are doing all the work without being able to benefit from the fruits of their labor. Having a home gives women the ability to begin to benefit from their labor, in a way that it gives them a tangible asset over which they have control, and which they can leverage for other tangible and intangible goods. Poor women do not and cannot control their labor, the extent that is exploited in survivalist-oriented modes. Having this one thing – a house – they can control gives them a position over which to have authority in other realms. In his theory of moral development, Hegel understood the way in which property gives authority. What Locke gives, by contrast, is an argument against the state forcibly taking away a person's property, along with a picture of ownership that is justified not only by inheritance or capital, but by labor itself. If one labors on the land, if one transforms it from something feral to something cultivated, then one makes a justifiable claim of ownership, especially and imperatively so if one is laboring to survive. In such a setting, it would be wrong for a government to send bulldozers to slum of 3,000 people near the airport, a place that international business people flying overhead see as a scourge, but where its inhabitants have slowly been building their dwellings piece by piece, over many years.¹⁵ It would also be wrong for the airport to justify forced expulsion of the people from its land if they are dumping their industrial waste in it, and not using it for any other purpose. Under Locke's account, the use-value to the people living on the land would trump the market value of the land for the parties who own the official title.

It is strange and controversial, perhaps, to present a transnational feminist analysis of labor and work that advocates a liberal, Lockean justification of property and enclosure over and against of a Marxist destruction of the institution itself. The turn to private property might be especially jarring, given the concern with the effects of neoliberalism, in terms of the retreating of state services, on "third world" women. It is necessarily to emphasize that analysis I have given acknowledges the exploitation of women's labor on a global scale, and worries about the ways in which global capitalism is creating unprecedented inequalities and perpetuating poverty. However, giving an account of the ways in which ownership of private property could politically empower a person is not equivalent to giving a defense of global capitalism and or justifying its inequalities. This account of property does not rule out the possibility that collective or common property can be just as empowering to women's wellbeing as private property. Neither is the account a definitive argument for or against either socialism or capitalism – that is not my aim. Perhaps "third world women" would not need homes if their labor were not being exploited on the stage of global capitalism. The account is, though, a description of how "third world women's" labor is currently being exploited in urban settings of the global south, an argument about housing assets being a bulwark against endless exploitation of women's labor, and an explanation as to how Locke's theory of property could provide a normative connection between a woman's labor and her assets.

¹⁵ Here I am referencing the Annawadi Slums that Boo depicts in *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* (2012).

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