Women and Intersectional Inequality. A Comparative Study of Gender, Social Class, Socioculture, Ethnicity and Migration in Brazil, Germany, India, Laos, Malaysia, Nigeria and Thailand

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Abstract: The paper studies the intersection of social classes, pre-capitalist hierarchies, migration and the subordinate position of women in contemporary Brazil, Germany, India, Laos, Malaysia, Nigeria and Thailand. It makes the theoretical argument that each social class in each nation state develops a particular gender configuration but, at the same time, earlier gender configurations persist. The gender configurations are embodied and taken along in migration, when migrants enter a specific social class with a (new) gender configuration. The study researches the subordination of women empirically on the basis of around 700 qualitative interviews conducted in the aforementioned countries. The paper outlines the position of women in the social classes of Brazil and Germany, then explains the intersection of female subordination and pre-capitalist hierarchies with regard to India, Laos and Nigeria, before finally looking at international female migrants from India to Malaysia and from Thailand to Germany.

This paper studies the intersection of gender inequality with other dimensions of inequality focusing on the position of women in society. It argues that there is not one general (type of) patriarchy or subordination of women but a multitude of gender inequalities that need to be studied empirically. We propose a preliminary outline of a theoretical approach to such a study as well as some tentative results with regard to the subordination of women in Brazil, Germany, India, Laos, Malaysia and Nigeria. We focus on the subordination of women because we think that this is still the most significant aspect of gender inequality. The study is based on a total of around 700 qualitative interviews in the national languages of the aforementioned countries. The interviews comprised the open question, "What is it to be a woman?", and five questions about the life course of the interviewees targeting the family background, childhood, schooling, professional life and partnership. The interviews were interpreted largely following the documentary method (Bohnsack 2014). This method comprises a sequence analysis by a group of researchers aiming at the tacit or implicit meaning revealing a person's habitus.

Our study generated several results that may be of general relevance. First, the capitalist transformation produces social classes, each of which has its particular prevailing gender relation. Second, the social classes and their gender relations are rooted in pre-capitalist hierarchies, which persist to some degree, especially in countries where the capitalist transformation began only recently. These persisting structures maintain their particular gender relations as well. Third, structures of gender equality seem to exist only in small communities, which remain rooted in a pre-capitalist structure, as well as – to a more limited degree – in affluent urban middle classes. Fourth, the structures of gender inequality are linked not only to social classes and sociocultures

but also colonial constructions of race and ethnicity. Finally, these inequalities are components of an unequal post-colonial world system that shapes gender relations of transnational migrants. We argue that in a capitalist society, *social class* becomes a more fundamental dimension of inequality than gender but does not reconfigure all aspects of gender inequality, does not abolish it and does not affect it in the same way everywhere. We define social class as a hierarchical tradition line with a prevailing habitus structure which reproduces itself from one generation to the next by passing on relevant capital and symbolically distinguishing itself from other classes (cf. Jodhka et al. 2017). This concept obviously draws on Bourdieu (1984) and it can be operationalized by establishing the statistical limits of social mobility, which are the dividing lines between classes. However, social class only explains inequality in nation states with a long capitalist past. In other societies, pre-capitalist structures of inequality persist that have to be interpreted within the particular framework of history, culture and social configuration. We refer to these historically earlier structures that partly persist and partly shape social classes, as *sociocultures*.

The first section of the paper explores the relation between social class and gender in two societies with a long capitalist past and little persistence of earlier sociocultures, namely Germany and Brazil. It shows that the correlation between social class and a particular gender relation is very strong in Brazil and rather strong in Germany. This is different in Laos, India and Nigeria, which the second section deals with. It demonstrates how pre-capitalist sociocultures continue to shape gender relations today, especially the institutions of the peasant community, colonialism, socialism, ethnicity and caste. The final section studies the intersection of gender and migration. It illustrates that unequal relations between nation states rooted in the colonial world contribute to the multiple layers of discrimination of female migrants from lower social classes and less powerful countries.

Gender and Class in Capitalism

Brazil

In all capitalist societies, a hierarchy of social classes emerges as the result of a transformation of pre-capitalist hierarchies (Jodhka et al. 2017). Over time if no major break with the past takes place, such as a revolution, a political intervention or a war, the structure of classes becomes increasingly stable and rigid. This has been observed by many students of capitalist social structure from different theoretical traditions. Each social class develops its own class culture, very much like an ethnic group. This culture includes a particular prevailing type of gender relations, which is distinct from that in other classes. In Brazil, dividing lines between the social classes are comparatively rigid. Therefore, we can observe gender relations that are clearly differentiated according to social class. As in other capitalist societies, the woman in Brazil is classified as inferior to and less valuable than the man in all social classes. The idea of the woman as maternal, feminine and household-oriented is naturalized as universal truth in all classes. However, the particular relation between women and men differs from class to class. The negative classification of the female is strong in the lowest class but is also present in the upper classes, albeit in a subtler form. Within each class, women learn to act in a specific way. The woman has to learn to be a woman and to behave according to the social environment. Therefore, the education of young girls is especially important (see Angrist and Krueger 1992).

We conducted interviews with more than 100 Brazilian women from all walks of life. The interviews included the question what it means to be a woman. This question did not aim at a rationalized opinion but immediately incited emotional reactions in the interviewees. Common answers from all social classes to that question were that women are more “delicate”, “sensitive”, “fragile”, “family-oriented” and “emotional”. However, even this general question evoked different

answers in different social classes. Women from the lower classes tended to include that to be a woman is "horrible" and implies having to do "more work". For women from the upper classes, it rather meant "having an obligation for the husband" and "family dependence". At the same time, a general gender classification was subconsciously incorporated by almost all our interviewees, including the men we interviewed. Most Brazilians agree on the binary and biological gender classification: there are men and women and both have different characteristics and tasks, which also means that they carry different social values.

Our study of the position of women in Brazilian social classes is based on a class model developed by Jodhka et al. (2017). This model distinguishes four social classes in Brazil that are rooted in the slave-holding society (Souza 2017). We call the lowest social class "marginalized" because it is excluded from all social privileges and regarded as undignified by the rest of the population. These are people who have no access to formal jobs because they have little formal education and no networks into the formal sector. This class mostly consists of descendents of slaves classified as black. It comprises more than thirty percent of the Brazilian population. A more privileged social class largely comprises former members of this class struggling to stay above the marginalized class by having several jobs, saving money, trying to get an educational degree etc. We call them "fighters" because of their struggle for privileges that the marginalized are unable to attain. They amount up to another thirty percent of the population. The established middle class is historically rooted in the group of administrators, skilled labour and immigrants from Europe. It is mostly classified as white. This is true for the dominant class as well, whose members are often descendants of former land-owners and the colonial elite.

Table 1 summarizes the results of the interviews with regard to some of the most relevant categories. While many women consider their lives difficult and underprivileged in comparison to men, being a woman in the marginalized class is especially tough. The social division of tasks is much more defined in this class. For a marginalized woman, her body is the most important capital, since other forms of capital are lacking in this social class. Her body is sexualized, both by men and women. Since there is competition among the women of this class, they naturalize that they should perform their sexual "functions" according to male wishes. It comes as no surprise that fidelity is a much more important criterion to define an ideal partner than in the other classes.

Social relations and the future are uncertain. There are few financial but also few emotional resources, a general feeling of insecurity and low self-esteem. Due to the unstable and often violent environment in childhood, all women we interviewed from this social class cannot develop a stable emotional structure and lack self-confidence, since they live in conditions of deprivation. The lack of security makes upward social mobility almost impossible, due to the lack of courage and initiative for change. Thereby, the negative conditions are reproduced for and in the next generation. Time is not organized in a productive way. This is not only because of childhood experience but because of the actual circumstances, which are unstable and often change in unforeseen ways. Immediacy prevails in daily life and the outlook on the future. In relation to the division of activities between genders, the women in this class are very much confined to the private realm: domestic work, childcare and partnership. This exists not only in the marginalized class but it is more evident here. Financially, women in this class are usually dependent on someone (often a man). We have heard often times that they are "born to be" mothers.

For the female fighters, the "batalhadores", symbolic capital is less important than for the marginalized. Any random event, like unemployment, divorce or death of a family member, can have disastrous effects. There is insufficient emotional support from the family as well, because like in the marginalized class, verbal communication is not explicitly taught. The communication between mother and daughter in this social class is often marked by a punitive education. Therefore, it is almost as difficult for women in this class to develop a stable emotional structure as for the marginalized women.

Table 1: Class and gender in Brazil.

	Marginalized (Ralé)	"Fighters" (Batalhadores)	Established (Estabilizados)	Ruling (Dominantes)
Body Image	Sexualized	Used strategically	Secondary, not used strategically	Sublimated, secondary
Time Organization	Almost inexistent, stuck in the present or past	Focus on work vs. free time	Disciplined, oriented toward the future	Focused on long-term planning
Emotional Capital	Unstable, emotionally insecure	Unstable, weak family support and emotional stability	Emotionally stable, some family support, emotional stability	Stable, strong family support, strong emotional stability
Income	Unstable income, Resource exchange with relatives	Unstable income	Stable income	Stable income, dependent on the family/ men
Concept of Maternity	Central	Substantial	Optional	Outsourced
Childhood/ Parenting	Restrictions without explanation, unstructured family, physical violence	Restrictions without explanation, unstructured family, physical violence	External motivation, psychological support, communication between family members	External motivation, psychological support, communication between family members
Domestic Division of Labor	Domestic work restricts women	Domestic labor is feminine	Division of domestic tasks between women and men but women are responsible for the home	Most domestic labor outsourced
Family Support	Communication restricted	Communication punitive	Explanatory communication	Robust, complex and explicative communication
Romantic Relationships	Painful, volatile	Painful, volatile, necessary	Stable relationships or appearances, partnership	Stable relationships or appearances, partnership
"To be woman"	Triple journey (home, work, servile home), sexually active	Triple journey (home, work, servile home), sexually active	Servile, domestic partner, caregiver, sexual when necessary	Docile, feminine, caring, sexual when necessary

Time is basically divided in hard work and days off, because the women in this class use the day off to take care of the household and family. Financially, these women work outside the house, usually as a cleaning woman, nanny, or call centre employee. Often, the woman works several jobs. These jobs are characterized by a very long journey to work and low salaries. Consequently, the mother is not very present in the lives of their daughters. The relation between mother and daughter is fragile. However, mothers in this class often try to provide some simple but very important items, they invest to give to their children what they lacked themselves. They also have a fixed income and some stability in their lives. But the presence of a partner is necessary, and a separation can create instability. In spite of their workload, they still fulfill the stereotypical function of a good wife – taking care of the house, cooking, looking after the children.

In the established class, the body is not used as a strategy in life. As far as the organization of time is concerned, women in this class are disciplined, since they live in stable conditions and are encouraged. This allows for planning and the development of goals. The gendered division of social tasks is taught in a more imperceptible way. The most important difference between the established women and women from the two lower classes is emotional. In the established class,

the social environment gives support to girls. This is very important because this boosts self-confidence. That confidence encourages women to seek opportunities. Many women in this class have a fixed income, which provides stability. Maternity is optional, but still felt to be a component of being a woman. For the established women, the body is less relevant in terms of a resource for sexuality and labour. They grow up in a stable and usually supportive environment. Their future can be planned and their time actively structured. Life is interpreted as a comprehensive work of art, in which motherhood, labour, sexuality, family and partnership are optional components that are composed according to individual preference.

Since we managed to interview only one woman from the Brazilian dominant class, our results are very tentative. It seems that in this class, the body as capital is less relevant than in other classes. The organization of time is very disciplined. The emotional household of the dominant class women is strong and stable, which encourages them to be active in life, both professionally and personally. Financially, they depend on their husbands but can often rely on their own inherited wealth. Their role in marriage is either that of a partner or that of a trophy. Maternity is strongly encouraged to reproduce the family. However, women in this class have help from nannies and maids. The dominant class can outsource housework and child care. Therefore, women from this social class have free time and the possibility to develop personally.

Germany

It is almost impossible to cross social class divisions in Brazil. The same is true for contemporary Germany (Rehbein et al. 2015). Mobility across class lines happens, if at all, only for a limited period of time or within one generation and often only for one person in the family. We discovered three such dividing lines within German society. The dividing lines contribute to the existence of social classes that are reproduced over many generations. Each class has its own culture, habitus and life-worlds. Since classes should be understood as traditions lines, they are not only defined by capital but also by habitus and symbolic systems (Bourdieu 1984). The general structure of social classes in Germany resembles that of Brazil. However, class cultures are not as rigidly separated and the structure has been more dynamic (Vester et al. 2001). This is due to the fact that Brazil has experienced little deep social change since colonial times. In contrast, the two World Wars, division and re-unification have been important events that entailed change and opened windows of social mobility in Germany. Furthermore, Germany has not been a slave-holding colony. For this reason, the intersection between race and class as well as the contempt for entire groups of people are less pronounced.

On the basis of 350 qualitative interviews, we distinguish the marginalized class, the fighters, the established and the aloof. The marginalized remain excluded from many sections of society, especially a stable profession. They dispose of a small total volume of all types of capital. The fighters are the core of society and form the bulk of the laboring population. They have two distinct historical roots, the labouring class and the petty bourgeoisie (Geiger 1932). The dividing line between these two classes has become blurred; therefore, we treat them as one class. They fight either against relegation or for promotion. This is why we use the same term as in Brazil. The established carry out the leading functions and dispose of a large total amount of capital. The aloof are aloof in the sense that they are virtually separated from the rest of society and especially from labour. They are the large owners of economic capital and usually have old family trees. The marginalized class in Germany is much smaller than that in Brazil, while the fighters comprise more than 60 percent of the German population.

There are some "normalized" female characteristics that are shared by women from all classes. These include the relevance of sexual attractiveness, niceness, an inferior position to that of the man and family orientation. Very few boys and men in our interviews talked about household

tasks or their family and especially fatherhood when not asked about it, while almost all women touched upon the topic of motherhood. Despite many decades of emancipatory movements, the primary social function of women is linked to motherhood and the family.

Most women share a common space: at school, on the job, in the household and in public space, and are subjected to similar expectations. But the similarities are differentiated according to social class because the classes do not share the same schools, jobs and organizations. Class culture influences the way a habitus is gendered and used as capital. Like in Brazil, violence and abuse in childhood are much more common in the marginalized class than in the other classes and social, financial and emotional relations are unstable. The woman often looks for a husband to provide these and considers fidelity to be the most important virtue of a husband, just like in Brazil. For the marginalized, the concept of maternity is central. In this class, girls learn that "to be a woman" is to have a feminine appeal and to be servile towards men, as there are few other options to attain any kind of security and stability.

Conditions in the class of fighters are more stable than in that of the marginalized but in both classes, motherhood is a core value for women. This includes a traditional division of sexual labour. One fighter says: "I do the household, I am his wife." In contrast to the marginalized, this position is reliable. The girls also grow up under these conditions, internalize it and pass through the next generation. As women, they are able to plan ahead because they have a long-term perspective. The basic temporal structure consists in the distribution of labour, leisure and family. The family for these women is more important than are the other two. In sum, women in this class have more in common with established women in Brazil than with the Brazilian fighters.

Established women grow up in an emotionally and financially stable environment, just like the (German) fighters and the Brazilian established. The parents are usually very supportive. They learn to plan ahead and feel in charge of their life. In the entire class, life is interpreted as a comprehensive work of art, in which maternity, labour, sexuality, family and partnership are optional components. Most established women are in a position to support themselves financially. Many of them actually have a paid job and some can outsource some of the typically female household tasks.

Aloof women may be less emancipated than established women as they have to contribute to the reproduction of the social position and the family. They do not do this as individuals but as members of a larger network. Their life is structured and well-planned but not a work of art. In this class, the inferiority of women is, in many cases, more pronounced than in most social environments of the established class. However, some women we interviewed are the heads of their families and actually billionaires.

Most people choose their partner from the same class. However, in some cases women become upwardly mobile by marrying a man of a higher class. A man marrying a woman from a higher class is comparatively rare in Germany. The most appropriate partner for a marginalized woman is someone who can provide the physical, emotional and financial support that most women in this class depend on. For the fighters, a male partner has to value the family and have a job. Established women attribute a relatively high relevance to an active and attractive physique and an appropriate amount of all types of capital. In the aloof class, family origin and respect are the most relevant factors. Fidelity and mutual support are relatively more important for marginalized men in choosing a partner, while the relevance of attractiveness is most pronounced among men of the upper classes.

Gender and Pre-capitalist Sociocultures

Sociocultures in Laos

Social classes have begun to emerge in Laos after the capitalist transformation since 1986. However, gender relations differ not so much according to class as according to the historical social organization, or socioculture. In the case of Laos, these sociocultures are the village organization, the pre-colonial state, socialism and capitalism. The country has experienced three major historical transformations in its recent past: the imposition of colonial rule from 1893 followed by a protracted struggle for independence, a socialist revolution in 1975 and the gradual introduction of a market economy beginning in 1986. Today, Laos retains the political system of a one-party state under the leadership of the socialist politburo, while transforming the economy and many associated institutions into a capitalist system. The respective conditions under quasi-colonial rule before 1975, under quasi-Stalinist rule after 1975 and in the unfolding market economy since the mid-1990s differ strongly from each other. Only a minority of the population really lives in capitalist structures and has developed a capitalist habitus.

As Laos has become a capitalist society, albeit with a socialist form of government, social classes are developing out of pre-capitalist sociocultures. As long as these persist, society is differentiated into rather dissimilar milieus; milieus being the intersection of sociocultures and hierarchies. We can distinguish the precolonial milieus of the villages and the state, the socialist socioculture and the capitalist socioculture. Within the first, there is a hierarchy of mountain peoples (mostly ethnic minorities), peasants, patrimonial elites and nobility (cf. table 2 below). Within the socialist socioculture, there is a hierarchy of village cadres, administration and party leadership. The capitalist hierarchy comprises the marginalized class, the working class, commercial farmers and traders, the new urban middle class and the capitalists. This class structure differs from countries with a longer capitalist past, such as Germany and Brazil.

The fact that the majority of Lao citizens have been raised in a village setting implies that gender relations are strongly influenced by the structures of the villages. Officially, 49 ethnolinguistic groups are distinguished in Laos and many of them present a huge internal variation according to locality and surroundings. This includes gender relations, which vary from strongly patriarchal to almost matriarchal. In our survey, which comprises around 150 qualitative interviews, all men and most women claimed that the male was the household head. This is the official classification, which was introduced by the French colonial power. However, reality varies significantly. Villages of the Miao-Yao ethnolinguistic family are much more patriarchal than the Lao and the Mon-Khmer, who tend to be matrilocal and matrilinear. The pre-colonial state, in contrast, was clearly dominated by men. All monarchs were men except for a few, possibly legendary queens. All important functions in the administration and the entire Buddhist order were staffed only by men. This tendency was strengthened under the French, who did not even consider the existing matrilocality and matrilinearity as legitimate forms of inheritance. However, neither the pre-colonial state nor the colonial power managed to fully integrate a significant number of villages into its structure (Scott 2009).

On an ideological level, socialism demands equal rights not only for all classes but also for all genders. In practice, however, socialist policies in Laos were ambivalent. The communist party called for gender equality and many forms of inequality were addressed, such as discriminating language, prostitution, and female beautification. At the same time, the party defined the "three virtues" of the Lao woman as being a good citizen, good mother and good wife (Ngaosyvathn 1995, 60). This confirms older and especially colonial patterns of gender inequality. Additionaly, on the level of high party positions, women were marginalized to the same degree as during colonial rule. Both aspects were important to define gender relations in socialist Laos. They persist along

with gender configurations of the villages.

Women continue to dominate petty trade as well as small enterprises, microcredit institutions and food markets. In contrast, women are often marginalized in the formal sector. They earn less for the same job and are often employed without pay. Formally, all citizens are equal in a capitalist society and have equal economic opportunities. Women, however, tend to have less capital than men, including symbolic capital. They also continue to be responsible for family reproduction and the household. Inequality in the political realm continues as well, with a tiny minority of political leaders being female, even though the leadership actively pushes gender mainstreaming.

Table 2: Intersection of milieu, gender, age and ethnicity in Laos.

Dominant class: old, male domination, mainly Lao		
Patrimonial elites: old, male domination, Lao	Administration: middle aged, gender balance, mixed ethnicity	Urban middle class: age and gender balance, Lao
		Commercial farmers: middle aged, male domination, Lao
Peasants: old, male domination or egalitarian, Lao	Rural party: middle aged, male domination, mixed ethnicity	Laborers: young, gender balance, mixed ethnicity
Mountain peoples: old, male domination or egalitarian, ethnic minorities		Marginalized: all ages, gender balance, ethnic minorities

Note: Age refers to the average age of milieu members and ethnicity to the predominant ethnolinguistic composition.

Capitalism in itself seems to encourage gender equality within the market, more precisely the world of labour. However, market access is not equal, pre-capitalist structures persist and lower classes remain excluded from the market, while the dominant class does not have to labour. Carol Ireson (1996, 197) summarized what it takes for women to succeed in the market: apart from access, they need education, the mastery of Lao language and special skills. All of these characteristics are generated by social class and not by gender, but they are also distributed differentially between women and men. Furthermore, capitalist gender stereotypes influence the younger generations in Laos, particularly the image of the beautiful and servile woman.

Table 2 offers an overview of the main milieus we have identified empirically and their relation with gender, age and ethnicity. Even though the table uses the term intersection (Crenshaw 1989), we argue that the different dimensions of inequality do not simply add on to each other but that each dimension is mostly determined by the sociocultural milieu. This means that each milieu has a particular configuration of gender, age and ethnicity – but not each gender, age or ethnolinguistic family has its own configuration of milieus. Male domination in the pre-colonial state is countered by an egalitarian discourse in socialism and somewhat egalitarian conditions in capitalism but does not entirely disappear. The disadvantaged position of the ethnolinguistic minorities was less pronounced under socialism than before but resurfaces under capitalism.

The case of Laos demonstrates that dimensions of inequality from pre-capitalist times persist after the capitalist transformation. They also intersect in a similar way: gender, ethnicity and social rank form particular configurations. We observe that local village structures, patrimonial relations in urban settings and the socialist party apparatus still form relevant and effective social structures in contemporary Laos. They slowly give way to social classes – which in turn are prestructured by earlier sociocultures and thereby specific for Laos. Each socioculture and each milieu has its own particular gender configuration. The most egalitarian and some of the most patriarchal configurations can be found on the local village level.

Gender, Class and Ethnicity in Nigeria

The following section on Nigeria tries to show that pre-capitalist sociocultures and their relations to gender also vary between nation states. The argument is based mainly on secondary sources, since we conducted only twelve interviews. In Nigeria, the role of ethnicity differs significantly from Laos. Both nation states have been created by colonial powers without any consideration to existing ethnolinguistic configurations and therefore, both states are multiethnic and are still in the process of undergoing the capitalist transformation. However, Nigeria is basically divided into two structures linked to religious affiliation with drastic consequences for women from the lower middle class.

The colonial system reshaped the Nigerian social structure by introducing new forms of class relations and social institutions (Imhonopi et al. 2015). These reforms, coupled with the pluralism of religion and ethnic differences that define the intricacies of diversities in Nigeria, make it difficult to clearly define social class structures and gender relations. For practical purposes, we can distinguish four social classes: the upper class which comprises top government officials, wealthy aristocracy, military officials, and leading entrepreneurs; the upper middle class that can indulge in luxurious economic decisions; the lower middle class that can afford the basic human needs; and the majority at the bottom of the pyramid that account for nearly 50 per cent living below the poverty line (World Poverty Clock 2018: worldpoverty.io). This structure resembles that of Brazil.

Ethnicity is as important as social class in Laos. There is a large variety of ethnic groups, similar to Laos. However, there are three significant differences. First, the colonial construction of ethnicity continues to be a dimension of inequality and segregation to a much larger degree in Nigeria than in Laos. The country is virtually divided into geopolitical zones that reflect historical, cultural, and religious ethnic differences. Second, no egalitarian policies have been pursued in Nigeria. Third, no ethnic group in Nigeria seems to have an egalitarian or matriarchal tradition. Irrespective of cultural and geographical differences, patriarchal systems prevail in the more than 250 ethnic groups. For the purpose of this paper, the broader categories Northern and Southern Nigeria are used.

Irrespective of the social class and ethnicity, the Nigerian woman's role in the society is defined along gendered dichotomy lines, where the woman is expected to be domesticated and the men

are to be the economic providers of the family (Tayo et al. 2015). Any deviance from the cultural patriarchal order is negatively sanctioned. However, with the increase in the number of female-headed households, the Nigerian women is faced with the triple burden of domestic work, child care, and productive work – which does not differ substantially from the three virtues of the woman as defined by the communist party in Laos. In fact, the value of a Nigerian woman is determined by her success in these three areas, and societal value is doubted and criticized when she fails in any of the three parameters.

Northern Nigeria is a highly conservative society where Islamic fundamentalism thrives (Onyebuchi and Chigozie 2013). These two factors influence the social lifestyle of the Northern Nigerian woman from infancy. A Northern Nigerian girl is raised by her parents with the main goal of becoming a mother and wife, and every decision made throughout the course of her childhood and adolescent days is shaped by this objective (Bunting 1999). Marriage is widely considered as the sole path to convey the virtues a woman possesses. After marriage, the woman is put in purdah (a practice of seclusion) by her husband to restrict and regulate her movement and to curb her relations with other men except for her kinsmen (Bunting and Merry 2007). Women in the Northern region are more inclined to be relegated and content with reproductive responsibilities than Southern women.

Cultural gender-biased practices such as early marriage, female genital mutilation, and purdah have excluded Northern women and girls from social interactions, such as western education, employment and vocational trainings. They are supposed to become dutiful wives, responsible mothers and domestic workers who perfect the responsibility of managing all affairs in the home with little or no support from the husband. Based on this, the girl child is married off at an early age with limited Islamic education and outlook on her self-development. As a result of the impoverishment that exists among most rural communities, educating the male child is prioritized over the girl child since she is expected to get married and bring in economic gains through the payment of a dowry (Walker 2015). However, women in the privileged classes can aspire to become relevant actors in the productive sector, whilst maintaining their roles as mothers and wives.

In Southern Nigeria, more women have access to education as a result of Christianity which is predominant in the region (Bunting 2011). Social class, however, is much more relevant than religion. Girls from the privileged class attend the best-quality private schools in Nigeria and abroad, but this opportunity is not accessible to the lower middle class or the marginalized class with limited economic means. As a result of being a member of a privileged lineage, economic and political positions are passed on to women in this class. Women in the middle class also have access to good private formal education that cost less than the private schools children from the wealthy class attend. Women from this social class can leverage their education to secure relevant positions in economic and political affairs, although nepotism and gender bias have frustrated the efforts of many women. However, these women seek out innovative and entrepreneurial skills to attain their economic freedom. Female-headed households are common in the middle class as women take up the responsibility of fending and caring for the family when the male head is either absent or negligent. In order to balance the triple burden of being a mother, wife, and provider, middle-class women often employ domestic workers to help in caring for the home and children while they work.

The marginalized woman in Southern Nigeria has no access to quality education and usually has to opt for the basic free education the government offers but only a limited number of families can afford to enroll all children in these schools. Hence, when a compromise is to be made on who attends school, the girl child is often the one that stays at home to help her mother to contribute to the family's economic survival (Femi 2011). Women in this class tend to get married earlier than other classes, as a means of economic survival. Because they mostly marry within their social class, this only results in the reproduction of the cycle of poverty among the women. Marginalized

women do not possess any relevant capital to compete in the labor market, thus they are mostly the low-scale traders, domestic workers, and low-income exploited workers.

Gender and Caste in India

India combines many characteristics previously discussed with regard to Brazil, Laos and Nigeria, and adds another dimension of inequality, namely caste. It would be misleading to argue that each caste has its own particular gender relation but the inequalities of caste intersect with those of gender as well as with other dimensions of inequality. India is a diverse country with many religions and regions and the position of women has been affected by these factors. What India is today, consisted of hundreds of political entities before, and to a certain degree even during, colonial rule. However, structures of the Indian states have been clearly patriarchal for millennia. Women have faced discrimination in all areas of life and have struggled to achieve the same position and respect as men in political, economic, social and cultural spheres.

Due to the heterogeneous nature of India, there are multiple patriarchies even today. Each community, region, religion and caste imposes its own set of expectations on men and women, and in most of these it is women who are confined to the home and given the role of caretakers and men are tasked with being the breadwinners. This was reiterated by our 30 interview partners when asked about their management of careers and households. In some cases it was an unspoken expectation that child rearing and the majority of domestic household tasks would be the primary responsibility of the women, placing their careers as secondary. In other cases, it was made explicitly clear that the home is the woman's central responsibilty. During the interviews, women from affluent social classes also indicated that their jobs/careers are treated more like an avocation by their families and that even they are expected to be primarily engaged with overseeing the running of the household. Along with placing men in the public sphere and women in the private, India has in its history some especially cruel practices against women, such as widow burning, female foeticide, the practice of dowry, and child marriage. These practices have now been officially banned and witnessed legal amendments after a long struggle. The caste system in India has been known to reaffirm ideas of patrilineal succession and subjection and control over the labour and sexuality of women (Jeyanayagam 2015). The basic ideas of purity and pollution are deeply ingrained in the concept of Hinduism and are often applied to women. The normalisation of the ideas of purity with relation to gender is evident in India and as a consequence the subjugation of women is apparent (Livne 2015). This legitimizes the inferior position of women. Thereby, women are subordinated to their husbands. The impossibility of getting divorced became an important feature of the Hindu marriage system whereas it was present in the Muslim marriage system (Sen 2000).

During British colonial rule, apparent attempts toward reforms of gender relations were made. However, beneficiaries of the reforms towards achieving women empowerment were almost exclusively upper-caste women. One example of this is the law that allowed upper-caste widows to remarry after the death of their husband. India attained independence in 1947. The socialist-leaning government proclaimed that every citizen of India regardless of their gender deserved a dignified position and was to be afforded the same protection under the law. Special thought and consideration was given to the position of women in society and certain safeguards were put in place in the constitution (Singh 2015). The findings in the report by the Committee on the Status of Women appointed by the Indian government in 1974 confirmed that the status of women, especially poor women, had become even worse in some ways since 1911. Gender disparities had widened compared to before in all fields including education, health, politics and the economic sphere.

Presently, almost 68 percent of all Indians live in rural areas. It is an important statistic as

the rural-urban divide entails dual realities of the status of the Indian woman, the highlight of which is the caste- and class-based division. The experiences and the kind of oppression faced by women in rural and urban areas are quite different. Speaking in a general sense, as the urban woman faces challenges of balancing work and home, sexism at home and the workplace, rural women are still facing multiple kinds of caste- and gender-based oppressions. The access to basic facilities like sanitation, health and nutrition is lacking and with the absences of such basic necessities it becomes extremely difficult for rural women to raise their voices for their rights. Several programmes by the Indian government like the Swachh Bharat Mission to address issues of sanitation and health are underway but their long-term effects remain to be seen.

Even when rural women migrate to urban areas in order to gain economic independence, they still face caste- and class-based prejudice. Poor women in and from rural areas still go through the worst kinds of oppression. They work outside their homes as maids, cooks, nannies etc. to improve their financial situation, but their job does not end there. They are also responsible for taking care of their own households, and are required to do the domestic tasks like cooking, cleaning, taking care of children etc. While they shoulder most of the workload, they are usually last in line when it comes to the fulfilment of their basic needs, from food to safety to education.

This is especially true for women from lower castes. They are excluded from good education, white-collar jobs and much of the public sphere not only on the basis of their gender and their rural background but also on the basis of caste. From a Hindu perspective, they are impure in several dimensions: gender, work and caste. At the same time, women from the upper castes had been privileged by colonial policies and continue to be privileged even under the conditions of legal equality. The upper castes have come to dominate both the state and the private sectors. As social classes emerge in India, the distribution of the population to classes is not random but is rooted in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial hierarchies. In all of these, upper castes have been privileged. It comes as no surprise that there is a strong correlation of caste and class (Jodhka et al. 2017).

The structural picture of India is very similar to that of Laos. Pre-capitalist hierarchies are the foundation of the contemporary order of social classes while they partly persist. Like in Laos, there are pre-colonial, colonial, socialist and capitalist sociocultures – while the colonial period left much less of an imprint on Lao society. And like in Laos, there is a huge variation of local structures in India, often down to the village level. Finally, we see a tendency toward more egalitarian gender relations in the (privileged) urban middle classes. It is interesting to note that India also hosts localities of ethnic minorities with egalitarian and even somewhat matriarchal gender relations in marginalized regions, especially along the Himalayan rim. These traditions partly persist, just like in Laos. However, the Hindu states and the caste system, which was rendered all-encompassing and systematic only by the British colonial power (Jodhka et al. 2017), created a much stronger and pervasive foundation of patriarchy than in Laos. In this regard, India resembles Nigeria more than Laos.

Gender Inequality and Migration

Nation states are not closed containers but are crossed by flows of migration. The migrants take their sociocultural heritage with them and their social position in the receiving country is determined by the intersection of social class and the original country's place in the world system. Gender feeds into the equation as another dimension of inequality. There is a general tendency to racialize and relegate migrants from the global South. In addition, female migrants receive the underprivileged position in a patriarchal system, usually as spouses of either a member of the receiving country or a male migrant.

Migration of Thai women to Germany provides a good example for South-North migration and double relegation. Most Thai migrants to Germany are female and many of them hold at least a high-school degree. But even those with a Master's degree are pushed into stereotypically Thai female professions, such as gastronomy, prostitution and especially massage, since their educational titles are not recognized, their status as economic migrants renders them vulnerable and the classification as a Third-World woman predisposes them to undervalued jobs in the service sector (Chantavanich et al. 2001).

The German government seeks to channel economic migration into sectors in which labour and skill shortages are emerging, as well as to attract highly-skilled third-country nationals. Most of the Thai women in Germany are disadvantaged because of their economic situation as people from a relatively poor country comint to a rich country. All of them are also disadvantaged as women. Most lack a valuable educational title and German language skills. Thus, marriage remains the main migratory channel for Thai women, who either have no professional education or whose educational degree is not recognized. Marrying a German enables a Thai single mother to achieve her ultimate goals: accumulating wealth, providing a new life for her child(ren) from a previous marriage, and, if lucky enough, living happily ever after with her new family either in Germany or Thailand. Thereby, the women become entirely dependent on their husbands. This became clear in all the 30 interviews we conducted.

In addition, German society associates Thai women stereotypically with sex trade. This is complemented by the situation of Thai women after migration. Having slim chances to compete for decent employment, Thai women turn to Thai-specific opportunities mainly in service or entertainment industries, even those with a Master's degree. In the recent years, massage has been the number one profession for Thai migrants. It is easier, in term of less strict regulations and lower investment, to open a Thai massage parlour or a spa places than opening a Thai restaurant. The income of 30 to 50 Euros per hour is by far more attractive than cleaning, waitressing or prostituting. In addition, advanced German language skills are not required as little verbal or written communication is necessary. Many success stories of 'wife-turns-entrepreneur' encourage Thai newcomers to enter this market. The financial independence has ultimately earned them self-confidence, pride and respect from their spouses, in-laws and German society while re-enforcing stereotypes about women and Thailand.

South-South migration implies a different intersection of inequalities. We take the case of Indian women in Malaysia as an example. Indian migration to the region of modern-day Malaysia started before the eighteenth century (Gopal and Karupiah 2013). This organized migration consisted only of single males from the lower castes to work on British plantations (Lee 1989). After 1920, the increasing demand in plantations and flexibility in the recruitment of the labour system motivated British administrators to bring Indian females to Malaya. Most women did not migrate as labourers on their own account, however, but as wives, thus reproducing the gender relations of India. In addition, the circumstances of an underprivileged minority created at least one more dimension of discrimination. Indian women had limited work options and often had to serve as prostitutes (ibid.).

After the independence of Malaysia in 1960, Indians were subject to racialization (Mandal 2004). The new state distinguished "bumiputera" (sons of the soil) from Indians and Chinese and postulated that Malaysia should belong to the Malays. Caste has thereby become rather irrelevant for Indians in Malaysia but Indians have become an underprivileged "ethnic group". Gender, in this context, emerges as a double category: an Indian woman is an underprivileged person in the state of Malaysia as well as in the Indian family. Indian women who initially faced caste discrimination are now being exposed to gender, race and ethnic inequality. Hence, the current generation of Malaysian Indians is considered the poorest community in Malaysia (Gopal and Karupiah 2013). The habitus traits of underprivileged gender, race and ethnicity explain

the inivisibility and minimal pariticipation of Indian women in the economy, society and politics in Malaysia. This kind of habitus vastly prevails in the poor Indian community where low self-esteem, gender inequality, strong patriarchal practices and the low-caste identity continue to have an impact.

Conclusion

The study reveals a complex structure of gender relations in and between the selected countries. The prevailing idea that subordination of the woman is biological or at least universal in human societies cannot be sustained. We find structures of gender equality in some South and Southeast Asian communities as well as tendencies toward egalitarianism in the urban middle classes. It also seems to be misleading to speak of a general patriarchy, in which the woman is subordinate to the man. Even though this is true for all the larger political entities we studied, it obscures the fact that the particular relation between men and women differs widely between sociocultures, countries and social classes.

More importantly, the sweeping classification of gender inequality as the subordination of women diverts from the study of intersecting inequalities and hampers an understanding of inequality and society. This has been acknowledged by a vast body of feminist literature. It is vital to intensify this line of research in order to deal with inequality. Emancipation in one dimension of inequality will obscure other dimensions of inequality – if it is even possible at all. These inequalities do not intersect in a standard, universal way but depend on the sociocultures and their interactions in a globalizing world.

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Notes

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