Gendering BRICS: Studying the Gendered Language of BRICS Declarations

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Introduction

BRICS is one of the most prominent regional groupings of the contemporary world politics with its growing importance in the present times primarily concerning the global economic order. Commencing the journey as BRIC with Brazil, Russia, India and China in 2009, the grouping became BRICS with South Africa entering it in 2010. As five of the rapidly ‘emerging’ economies of today’s world and representing a huge chunk of roughly 3 billion world population, the grouping has been the focal point of many academic and policy-based discussions and deliberations. Given the geographic extent and a unique combination of major powers, the grouping deserves special attention. As Ana Garcia and Patrick Bond mentions “The relative economic decline of the United States, Europe and Japan is often linked to the rise of an ‘emerging’ bloc comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS).” (Garcia and Bond 2015: 1) It is important to note that unlike other organizations, BRICS does not strictly have an organizational structure. Although not binding, its summits every year provide the concerned countries with a framework by reinstating its faith on the issues of economic growth, sustainable development and the neo-liberal capitalist economic order. This gendered language of its declarations and other relevant documents largely appears compatible with the mainstream IR theorization. Its state-centric approach on the one hand and its market-centric homogenized rhetoric of development on the other make its masculine overtone evident under the neo-liberal capitalist framework. Since conduct of these powers shall be largely paving the way for future global politics, it is imperative to ask the question ‘where are women’ in this ‘development’ enterprise of BRICS? The central question remains: Why is gendering BRICS necessary? Garcia and Bond further mentions:

“…in areas ranging from world finance to climate change to super exploitative relations with the periphery and even to soccer, the bloc aims not to overturn tables at the proverbial temple, but to collaborate in holding them up.” (Garcia and Bond 2015: 1)
Thus, instead of challenging the power privilege of the existing economic order, the grouping reinforces the same order by projecting its member countries as the harbinger of a new economic bloc. The paper takes a critical stance on this very aspect of BRICS as a grouping. Aiming at a feminist critique of institutions and structures surrounding the discipline of international political economy specifically, the gendered language of these summit documents needs to be thoroughly studied to reveal the gendered norms associated with BRICS. By gendered language, I hereby mean that the wordings of BRICS documents are skewed in a manner that reflects a masculine gender-bias by delineating women from its considerations. The paper, therefore, first analyses the importance for studying BRICS and how it reflects its gendered assumptions through the summit documents. It gives an overarching view of the summit declarations focusing particularly on the documents of the seventh BRICS Summit that was held in Ufa. The essence of the documents of Ufa summit does not seem to be changed in spirit overwhelmingly in comparison to its previous summit documents. As BRICS does not have an organizational structure or a secretariat, it bears the marks of an inherent institutional weakness for BRICS. Thus, in absence of such a structure it also becomes crucial to study the structure of the New Development Bank (NDB) putting on a gendered lens, as it lies at the heart of the BRICS enterprise.

To make it easily comprehensible the paper revolves around five main sections in it. At the outset, I briefly discuss BRICS as a grouping highlighting how it has come up to the present form and unfolding the rationale behind the grouping. In the next section, I particularly reflect upon the rationale behind choosing BRICS as a point of study following which I shall elaborate on the need of gendering the grouping and its activity. In this section, I shall provide with a feminist overview of the institutions and structures adding on to the question of feminization. Here, I shall also be throwing lights upon the overall institutional structure of the NDB. Then I shall go on discussing the nuances of the Ufa summit documents with a special emphasis on the Ufa declaration, before moving to the concluding section where I shall talk about the future research prospects on the subject of BRICS and its feminizing project.

BRICS: Brief Background
In 2001 Goldman Sachs, a noted America based multilateral investment banking firm, used BRIC as an acronym for Brazil, Russia, India and China and predicted about these economies overtaking most of the contemporary major powers considering their speedy economic growth. (O’neil 2001) As Coning, Mandrup and Odgaard argue, it:

“…initially meant to be nothing more than clever investment jargon referring to the largest and most attractive emerging economies. However, these countries identified with the BRIC concept, and started to meet annually as a group in 2009.” (Coning, Mandrup and Odgaard 2015: 1)

As it becomes BRICS with South Africa joining it:

“…the BRICS had fully morphed from investment jargon to a name for a new economic and political grouping that had the potential to challenge the unipolar hegemony of the United States and its Western allies, and to alter significantly the dynamics of global order”. (Coning, Mandrup and Odgaard 2015: 1)

BRICS as a grouping constitutes of a unique combination of countries with no shared geographical proximity as such. These countries despite their commonality of being emerging economies came together rather to realise their ‘common vision for a new global order’. (Coning, Mandrup and Odgaard 2015: 1) As Coning, Mandrup and Odgaard put it, “The BRICS countries shared a common experience in that they were all negatively affected by being on the periphery of a world order dominated by the United States and its allies.” (Coning, Mandrup and Odgaard 2015: 1) At the beginning of the first decade of the twenty first century the BRICS countries could successfully merge themselves with the existing neo-liberal global economic system. The expanding economies of these BRICS countries integrated well with the market economy predominantly because of its cheap labour pool and cost effective production possibilities facilitating investments in them. As Coning, Mandrup and Odgaard mention, “The BRICS thrived because of their natural resources, high education levels (not in terms of literacy) and their status as gateways into their regions.” (Coning, Mandrup and Odgaard 2015: 2)

The Sanya Declaration of 2011 BRICS summit sums up the objective of the grouping as following:

It is the overarching objective and strong shared desire for peace, security, development and cooperation that brought together BRICS countries with a total population of nearly 3 billion from different continents. BRICS aims at contributing significantly to the
development of humanity and establishing a more equitable and fair world. (Sanya Declaration, 2011 BRICS Summit)

It further adds:

We affirm that the BRICS and other emerging countries have played an important role in contributing to world peace, security and stability, boosting global economic growth, enhancing multilateralism and promoting greater democracy in international relations. (Sanya Declaration, 2011 BRICS Summit)

From these two above-mentioned statements of the First summit including all five of the BRICS states, the predominantly economic logic of the BRICS becomes evident and in fact, in all other summits consequently this logic gets reiterated through its ideals of development and state-centrism. Although it also talks about ‘security’ as an important factor, often it seems to be correlated with the concept of development. To the extent the debates over the BRICS revisionism are invoked, that necessarily underlines overhauling shift in terms of the economic power centre.

Thus, while talking about the economic infrastructure surrounding BRICS two significant occurrences of the recent times need to be mentioned. The first among these two is the New Development Bank (NDB) or as initially was called as the BRICS Development Bank. Announced in the Fortaleza Summit as a multilateral development bank, it creates a platform for collective lending maneuvering exclusively by the BRICS states. The bank relies on a firm infrastructural and developmental logic as it created an authorised capital of $100 billion ($50 billion subscribed capital), of which it could lend up to $34 billion per year. (Khanna 2014) The grouping has also created a pool of $100 billion Contingency Reserve Arrangement (CRA), “…meant to provide additional liquidity protection to member countries during balance of payments problems.” (Desai and Vreeland 2014) Unlike the NDB pool of equal sharing, it gets funded 41 percent by China, 18 percent from Brazil, India, and Russia, and 5 percent from South Africa. (Desai and Vreeland 2014)

**Why BRICS?**

The previous section of the paper has elaborated on the rationale and the main principles of establishing BRICS as a grouping. In this section I specifically justify the reason behind picking...
up BRICS as a point of study for the purpose of gendering. Certain points can be highlighted in this regard.

First of all unlike other organizations and institutions, the grouping has a unique combination of states; especially geographically it is spread over a broad horizon of the world map. Naturally, it represents a huge world population of almost 3 billion people. Unlike having a strict organizational structure or being a conventional military alliance, it seems to be much more adaptive to the newer dynamics of the world.

Secondly, the flaunting economy of these five states, China and India specifically, shows some promises of challenging the existing world economic order. Until recently all these countries were considered as the second order powers for not being able to make it to the level of the great powers like USA. In fact Brazil, India, China and South Africa still belong to the league of the developing nations and are regarded as the post-colonial societies and thus BRICS was expected to strongly echo some of the third world concerns of economy and development. To my mind, these concerns should not get limited to the state-centric concerns but include in it the human security perspectives of which mainstream theories largely remain oblivious.

Third, development remains a central motto of BRICS. Peace, security and development are some of the core elements of its concern.

Joseph Stiglitz in one of his interviews mentioned:

“...it reflects a fundamental change in global economic and political power, that one of the ideas behind this is that the BRICS countries today are richer than the advanced countries were when the World Bank and the IMF were founded. We’re in a different world.”

(Stiglitz 2014)

These above-mentioned expectations are strongly attached to BRICS as there seem strong potentials for it to give the unheard section of the population a strong voice. But in reality the state-centric development oriented approach of the grouping raises fundamental questions over its motives. BRICS funded the International Monetary Fund (IMF) with 75 US billion dollars in 2012 despite showing its dissatisfaction for its workings. The establishment of the NDB and the IMF-style CRA also evidently reverberates a tacit nod for the existing capitalist system. The growing conformity of these states with the neo-liberal measures and evolving understanding with the USA on climate change issues made it clear that BRICS was not intending to turn the table at all. Countervailing evidences also show BRICS’ resistance against a stringent Intellectual Property Rights regime (IPR), geopolitical confrontation with the West
on several strategic issues ranging from the Snowden episode to the proposed bombings of Syria in 2013, implicit siding with Russia on the occasion of Crimean annexation etc. These indicate the BRICS motives not to bring an overhauling change in the situations of systemic exploitation and economic marginalization of people under the neo-liberal order but to turn the table in the favour of these five BRICS countries projecting its relative power vis-à-vis the weak countries and tacitly conforming to the existing neo-liberal world order by endorsing economic growth and development with an insistence on better GDP measurement for them. This reflects an inherent paradox of BRICS which is of no match to other international organizations and groupings and therefore, makes it an interesting case to study.

Garcia and Bond, thus, analyse BRICS from three predominant perspectives (Garcia and Bond 2015). First, they talk about ‘BRICS from below’ which stands for ‘the struggles and collective experiences of resistance and construction of alternatives’. Second, they discuss ‘BRICS from above’ analysing ‘the position of government and corporate bodies’ within which BRICS takes three positions, such as: ‘anti-imperialist’ by resisting the West based upon their colonial past, ‘sub-imperialist’ by re-legitimising globalization to pave a smoother way for neo-liberalism as it amounts to exploitation of BRICS hinterlands along with sanctioning the perpetration of structural violence within these countries and rampant abuse of the nature, and ‘inter-imperialist’ by backing potential imperialist activities among the BRICS countries as opposed to the West as it was shown in BRICS backing for Russia during the Crimean crisis. Third, they throw lights upon ‘BRICS from the middle’ as they focus mainly on ‘BRICS Academic Forum, intellectuals, trade unions and NGOs’ where three strands can be found, such as: ‘pro-BRICS advocates’ who claim BRICS as significantly challenging the global injustices, ‘wait-and-see-about BRICS’ who want BRICS to take an anti-imperialist position by its superficial emphasis on NDB and CRA replicating the Bretton Woods model and ‘critics of BRICS’ who relate more to the ‘BRICS from the below’ position by reiterating their skepticism over BRICS operational as being sub-imperialist or sometimes inter-imperialist. (Garcia and Bond 2015)

Moreover, the paper does not claim BRICS to have a great impact in a conventional sense of IR but it considers its potential to become a credible platform that could transcend the state in order to reach its people. Measuring the contribution of BRICS in the geo-political sense lies beyond the purview and scope of the paper. Therefore, these multilayered perspectives on
BRICS make its study relevant and promises to bear fruit for future purposes. Drawing from this the next section formulates a critique on BRICS distinctively from a feminist perspective and talks of the need for gendering BRICS.

**A Feminist Approach towards BRICS**

Silencing women’s voices as the ‘other’ in the discipline of international relations (IR) has been a common place practice until feminism knocks its door in 1980s. Feminism naturally takes a gendered lens in explaining IR and brings women into the centre of analysis. Carol Gilligan, one of the earliest contributors in IR, argues that women think differently primarily as a result of socialization (Giligan 1982). She also adds about women’s tendency to see the reality as a set of interconnected experiences and interrelationships leading towards a holistic worldview. Betty A. Reardon writes:

“Over the past several years, research into women’s ways of knowing, reasoning and decision-making has demonstrated that, at least in Western countries, women’s thinking is different from that of men…These feminine modes of thinking and problem solving can be learned and applied by both women and men…” (Reardon1993: 141)

For feminism, international system, at least in the conventional way, is an essentially masculine patriarchal structure. Cynthia Enloe therefore points out,

“…patriarchy is the structural and ideological system that perpetuates the privileging of masculinity. All kinds of social systems and institutions can become patriarchal…Patriarchal systems are notable for marginalizing the feminine…One of the reasons that feminists have been so astute in exposing patriarchy as a principal cause for so many of the world’s processes—empire-building, globalization, modernization—is that feminists have been curious about women. By taking women seriously in their myriad locations, feminists have been able to see patriarchy when everyone else has seen only capitalism or militarism or racism or imperialism.” (Enloe 2004: 6-7)

For feminists, rather societal structures ultimately shape the system. Cox can be invoked in this context as he says, “Structures are prior to individuals; there are already certain established and accepted social practices. These social practices are the creation of collective human activity.” (Cox 1987: 4). Even on a similar note echoing Cox’s definition of structure Jill Steans argues, “…gender can be seen as constituted by the structure of various social institutions and practices that tie gender into intricate patterns of domination.” (Steans 2013: 35). To go by
Tickner’s words “…feminism is also committed to progressive or emancipatory goals, particularly the goal of achieving equality for women through the elimination of unequal gender relations.” (Tickner 1997: 616).

In fact, even while talking about the institutions, organizations and groupings in particular, feminists show enough skepticism. Feminists assert that the mainstream economic theories take institutions and reproduction for grant granted and thus, rather than insisting upon states and markets as the starting point of their analysis they conceive the world as made of men and women as their units of analysis. Generally feminists have focused more on the institutions with military organizations, although given the way international system works all international groupings carry inherently masculine structures in it. Historically a particular form of masculinity has become the norm of the international institutions with their hegemonic tendencies reifying their gendered practices. (Connell 1995: 77) As Annica Kronsell points out, “Silence on gender is a determining characteristic of institutions of hegemonic masculinity… It indicates a normality and simply ‘how things are.” (Kronsell 2006: 109) These institutions normalize the everyday gender identities; thereby making masculinity the norm. Men become the ‘persons’ whereas women’s experiences and particularities become insignificant in this regard. Therefore, analysing an institution or a grouping from a feminist perspective becomes “…a risky enterprise because masculine norms, when hegemonic, are never really a topic of discussion.” (Kronsell 2006: 110)

Naturally applying the same framework for the context of BRICS would involve similar risks. To operationalise the venture of gendering BRICS and to explore the gendered language of the grouping ‘the deconstruction of the texts and discourses’ of its declarations play a vital role as it helps to read between the lines and explore what is unwritten (Kronsell 2006: 109). Questions can be raised as to, how far is BRICS mature enough to talk about its gendered analysis given the fact of its being a recent phenomenon? I argue that a grouping does not necessarily need to get ‘mature’ to talk about its gendering. Prioritizing gender should become an objective of the groupings irrespective of its type and vision. Here it becomes an imperative to specify the specific aspects of BRICS. BRICS by its very nature assumes a state-centric traditional security oriented approach on the one hand and a limited notion of development along the lines of the existing neo-liberal economic order.
Feminists deeply question the very state centric nature of international relations. International organizations and groupings also inherently presuppose state-centrism of which BRICS is no exception indeed. Jill Steans interrogates the concept of state as a ‘bounded community’ and focuses on how

“...discourses on identity and belonging and state practices – such as security and war and the framing of nationhood and citizenship – serve to reproduce the state and the national community over time.” (Steans 2013: 69)

Tickner thinks that states can create a bridge between the individual and the international and work as mediators (Tickner 2001). V. Spike Peterson in fact is critical about the very foundation of the modern western state being a perpetual source of women’s insecurity and domesticity (Peterson 1992:4). Goldstein and Pevehouse conceive the autonomous sovereign states capacity as essentially projecting masculinity as it testifies the rational character of states (Goldstein and Pevehouse 2008: 108). Therefore, logically feminism denies the very primacy of the state security and feminism looks for expanding the horizon of security. As Jan J. Pettman argues, “Feminist understandings and re-vision of security are by no means monolithic, but they do reveal war and peace as gendered processes, and suggest strategies for a more secure world.” (Pettman 1996: 62). Therefore, feminists ask these fundamental questions: Whose security are we talking about? Can we feel secure being insecure at the inter-personal level? Tickner in one of her articles writes,

“Speaking from the margins, feminists are sensitive to the various ways in which social hierarchies manifest themselves across societies and history. Striving for security involves exposing these different social hierarchies, understanding how they construct and are constructed by the international order, and working to denaturalize and dismantle them.” (Tickner 1997: 624).

BRICS’ operations also similarly revolve around these five states and their so-called national interest issues; in turn people at large are not taken into major consideration. In this regard, it can be said that the process of gendering transcends beyond the man-woman binary to talk about the feminized society at large living at the margins of the state-led development. There is a ready assumption of people’s welfare being flown from the state-apparatus itself. Naturally in this frame of security within BRICS women remotely feature. As BRICS does not have an institutional structure, a look at the NDB organizational structure will help extrapolating its state-centrism in a better way.
The last BRICS summit in Ufa marks the entry into force the Articles of Agreement for the NDB. Article 2 of the agreement, apart from recognizing the five founding members, mentions that “The membership shall be open to members of the United Nations, in accordance with the provisions of the Articles of Agreement of the New Development Bank” (Agreement on the New Development Bank 2014: Article 2, para 2). This suggests being a recognized sovereign state as the primary criteria of the NDB membership. In fact, it also adds:

The initial subscribed capital shall be equally distributed amongst the founding members. The voting power of each member shall equal its subscribed shares in the capital stock of the Bank. (Agreement on the New Development Bank, 2014: Article 2, para 3)

Thus, it even indicates that the bank’s main aim is to serve the purposes of the member-states and thereby it does not address the needs of the people living in these states. Article 3 of the agreement also mentions Shanghai as its headquarters and adds that there are three main organs of the bank clubbed as the bank leadership, such as the Board of Governors, the Board of Directors and the Senior Management consisting of the Presidents and the Vice-Presidents (Agreement on the New Development Bank, 2014: Article 3, para 2-3). It is interesting to note that the Board of Governors of the Bank consists of the current ministers of finance of the five founding members and the positions of the Board of Directors are also held by the second tier finance ministry personalities of these five countries. BRICS summits are also represented by the leaders of these five countries. Therefore, it becomes evident that the whole BRICS system is representative solely of the states concerned. And as it is true for most of the international institutions, not to the surprise of many, the NDB leadership also does not constitute a single woman in it. Thus, one can be convinced to assert the blatant exclusion of ‘women’ from BRICS operatives, further enhancing the need of its gendering.

Another relevant point of discussion in the context of BRICS is its market-centric neo-liberal development rhetoric. From the critical development theory perspective ‘development’ as a concept has invoked much skepticism among the scholars because in the mainstream sense of the term it is believed to promote capitalism and aggravate global inequality as a product of capitalism itself as mentioned by Blaney and Inayatullah (Blaney and Inayatullah 2010). As opposed to the unabated hope of economic growth solving the problems of poverty through its wealth creating techniques, they contend ‘poverty might be intrinsic to wealth creation’ (Blaney
and Inayatullah 2010: 2) and thus economic growth ‘…rather than solving poverty only exacerbates the pathology of the wealth/poverty nexus.’ (Blaney and Inayatullah 2010: 3) Vincent Tucker posits, although development is steeped up in optimism, has failed as a harbinger of human emancipation (Tucker 1999: 1). Terming it as ‘the myth of development’ the author alleges it to be “…elevated to the status of natural law, objective reality and evolutionary necessity” (Tucker 1999: 1). As rooted in the very notion of Western modernity, Tucker refuses to call it a natural process (Tucker 1999: 2). By refusing to assign a universal meaning to it, he, therefore, strongly demarcates between the concept of development and modernization. Whereas the former recognizes the ‘plurality of discourses’, the latter suggests ‘the monopoly of truth and enlightenment’ (Tucker 1999).

This limited sense of development also seems highly market oriented and growth centric, projecting and promoting the present day neo-liberal economic order, of which feminists are clearly not in favour. In V. Spike Peterson’s words:

In political economy terms, the developments at issue are variously characterized as post-Fordism, disorganized capitalism, post-industrialism, internationalization of production, and/or a shift from manufactures to intangibles - from material commodities to services and information/signs. What these labels share is an acknowledgment of restructured economic/political processes, in various ways related to the collapse of the Bretton Woods system, deregulation, feminization of flexibilization, globalization of finance, credit and debt, and the effects of information and computer technologies on regimes of production and accumulation. (Peterson 2003: 46)

She asserts that patriarchy’s enduring legacy that creates a binary of gender that castes women and femininity as essentially different and inferior to men and masculinity in the world of global political economy. (Peterson 2003) She vehemently criticizes the neo-liberal development strategies mushrooming under the garb of economic restructuring. This process is applied through the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) and Peterson quotes Fall to concisely elaborate on this:

Structural adjustment policies are meant to sustain and reinforce conditions that will invite foreign investors to exploit either the labor or natural resources of a country to produce foreign currency for balance of payments purposes and to repay national debt. They encourage the use of a country's resources for export development rather than for domestic development (again to produce foreign currency to repay debt). They encourage the privatization of services, which reduces the autonomy of local governments and often generates massive
unemployment. They encourage cuts in health, education, and social welfare budgets for the purpose of reducing deficits, leaving people, especially women and children who are already impoverished and disadvantaged, in desperate and life-threatening situations. (Fall 2001: 71)

As the growth in financial markets goes hand in hand with the dramatic growth in informal and flexible work arrangements, it leads to higher profitability through increasing informalization of work force. (Peterson 2003) On a whole it depresses formal wages, disciplines workers and through isolation of informal workers, does not pose a risk of collective action. (Peterson 2003) This flexibilization process inheres in it cultural code of feminization. It naturalizes the economic devaluation of feminized work- work that is done both by women and men who are culturally, racially and economically marginalised. (Peterson 2003) As Peterson tries to understand feminization as denigration, she argues how it assumes the process of devaluation. (Peterson 2003) Barker and Feiner also mention, “The feminization of labor made the consumption patterns of the elite possible and naturalized the type of hegemonic masculinity that characterized the international finance system.” (Barker and Feiner 2010: 246)

In the context of the BRICS countries, this scenario becomes a stark reality. These countries despite their relative economic growth, are yet to achieve their goals of social cohesion domestically and therefore, these external definitions of neo-liberal development does not address their core internal issues in terms of enhancing the quality of people’s lives. Just to operationalize this argument, the human development index can be a useful tool. Russia’s human development index in 2013 (according to HDR 2014) was the highest of the BRICS, ranked 57; followed by Brazil (79th rank), China (91st rank) and South Africa (118th rank), while India had the lowest HDI score (0.586, 135th rank) of the five countries (Human Development Report 2014: 160-163). The infant mortality rate (per thousand live births) during 2010-2015 is projected to be 11 for Russia, 19 for Brazil and 20 for China, where as India and South Africa, at 48 and 46 respectively, are far worse off in this respect (Sahni 2013: 589). Even the adult literacy rate male-female ratio presents a severe variation among these countries with India featuring low (0.68) in comparison to Brazil (1.0), Russia (1.0), South Africa (0.96) and China (0.94) (Sahni 2013: 589).

Therefore it can be stated given a more skeptical outlook towards BRICS that rather than becoming the major reformers of the contemporary global neo-liberal order, these countries can
be seen “as new members happily included in a still hierarchical ‘world steering committee’ because they too will play by the basic rules.” (Vanaik 2015: 262) In the light of the critique of BRICS posed in this section, the next section will throw lights upon the Ufa summit developments in order to deconstruct its gendered language.

**Analysing the BRICS Documents: Ufa Summit**

So far there have been seven summits to be talked about. Although the first two summits were held under the banner of BRIC, the third summit taking place in Sanya in 2011 marked the entry of South Africa into the grouping converting it to BRICS. Consequent summits were regularly held in 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 in New Delhi (India), Durban (South Africa), Fortaleza (Brazil) and Ufa (Russia). As the very nature of these declarations and the core principles remain the same, in this section a thorough look of the latest Ufa declaration will help us reading between the lines. Ufa declaration, being the most recent one in the series of BRICS summit, carries with it the latest developments and therefore, studying its gendered language can give a comprehensive picture. Alongside this declaration, other Ufa summit papers are also to be considered in this respect, particularly: the MoU on Cooperation with the NDB and the Strategy for BRICS Economic Partnership.

The MoU on Cooperation with the NDB marks an entry into force of the Agreement on the NDB that was signed during the Fortaleza summit in 2014. As a matter of fact, at the very beginning of the document, it acknowledges “…the strategic relevance of such cooperation for sustainable development and inclusive economic growth” (MoU on Cooperation with the NDB 2015) which in the previous section has already been problematized for being the conforming approach of BRICS. As the article 1 of the document reads, “Guided by the existing international banking practices, all applicable laws and regulations, and principles of equality, mutual benefit, responsible financing, partnership and the balance of interest, the Parties intend to cooperate with the New Development Bank…”, (MoU on Cooperation with the NDB 2015) this claim of BRICS’ commitment to the existing neo-liberal economic order gets further reified. Despite that the MoU also seems sensitive to the ‘mandates, missions, policies and procedures’ of the respective member countries, thereby upholding state sovereignty as one of primary concerns.
Another relevant document in this regard is the Strategy for Economic Cooperation. As per the document the key purposes of the BRICS strategy are market enhancement, mutual trade investment, creation of business-friendly environment, inclusive economic growth among others (The Strategy for BRICS Economic Partnership 2015). Needless to say, these form the bedrock of a neo-liberal economic order. In fact, when it talks about the technological innovation as the basis of economic development it leads to the fundamental neo-liberal assumption of increased profitability. The final purpose also talks about BRICS interaction with other international organizations and forums. World Trade Organization (WTO) and G20 are the ones that are even mentioned clearly in the later sections of the document. This evidently affirms that the BRICS countries seek to gain the economic power strictly within the purview of the existing system, not actually seeking an overhauling change. Even if the aim is to challenge the Western domination, BRICS aim for a power transition in its favour clinging basically to a status quoist approach.

The document also lists its eight priority areas of cooperation which are as follows: trade and investment, manufacturing and energy processing, energy, agricultural cooperation, science-technology and innovation, financial cooperation, connectivity, and ICT cooperation (The Strategy for BRICS Economic Partnership 2015). The list self-evidently expresses its market bias and growth centric characteristics. Whereas the emerging economies such as these are grappling with their inherent internal problems the list does not mention some of the crucial factors of social cohesion such as poverty reduction, women empowerment and environmental concerns to specify some.

Unfortunately and as expected, ‘women’ do not feature in any of these two documents. The thrust of economy lies in both these cases at the level of market. Increased investment opportunities, better infrastructure becomes the primary focus, whereas cheap labour, lack of quality of lives, matters of unorganized unskilled workers never go up to the list of priority. The inequality and distributive injustice within these five countries do not get addressed by these big ventures which potentially could have altered the existing scenario.

Now, we shall take a look at the Ufa declaration itself. Needless to say these grandiose of economic growth, development and state-centrism remain equally powerful even in the text of the declaration. Rather than repeating these mundane aspects of the grouping, here I would simply like to point out the humane aspects of BRICS. In this regards, I would like to throw
lights upon two specific keywords, such as women and human rights. Also I shall highlight the term ‘sustainable development’ in this context.

‘Women’ as a word appears four times in the entire document. First it appears almost at the middle of the document at the 33rd recommendation out of 76. This is evidence enough to realize that this is none of the primary concerns of BRICS. At the first instance it reads:

ICTs are emerging as an important medium to bridge the gap between developed and developing countries, as well as to foster professional and creative talents of people. We recognize the importance of ICTs as a tool for transition from information to a knowledge society and the fact that it is inseparably connected with human development. We support the inclusion of ICT-related issues in the post-2015 development agenda and greater access to ICTs to empower women as well as vulnerable groups to meet the objectives of the agenda. (Ufa Declaration 2015: 16)

This recommendation basically revolves primarily around the concerns Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and therefore, women empowerment is merely a subsidiary concern in this context. Here as it talks about the greater access to ICTs facilitating women empowerment, the main thrust remains on fostering ‘creative’ and ‘skilled’ workers, specifically women in order to improve their qualities of lives. It completely remains oblivious to the large pool of unorganized and unskilled pools of labours, especially women from the developing world who are often used to lubricate the pathways of profitability for the transnational corporations (TNCs). Peterson aptly mentions: “…restructuring of production, facilitated by technological developments, has enabled firms to rely increasingly on subcontracting arrangements and external labor in pursuit of the cheapest labor.” (Peterson 2003: 63) More importantly, in the present day world of technological boom, women remain at the receiving end of these technological innovations. Although machines has reduced women’s domestic work load exponentially, ICTs in other ways have also facilitated the ‘double day’ work for women where she works both for the household for free and for the world outside at the exchange of money. Internet despite being of numerous help even to women, its darker side cannot be hidden as it in multiple ways it violates women’s privacy and dignity in a virtual space. Peterson further elucidates on this:

Where export manufacturing is established (shaped by colonial histories, uneven capitalist development, and selective foreign direct investment) women are especially likely to be drawn into the workforce, but often at the expense of men's employment in these jobs. Also, employment for women in export manufacturing tends to be short-lived, as the preference for
young women and arduous work conditions entail high turnover rates. Moreover, as industry develops, it tends to dispense with labor intensive processes in favor of capital- and technology-intensive production. This development is associated with decreasing employment for women, as technology intensive production generates fewer jobs and the remaining jobs are dominated by men. (Peterson 2015: 66)

The declaration also shows its humanitarian concerns as it talks about the Syrian crisis where women’s and children’s rights have been grossly violated because of the rise of the Islamic State. In this regard the declaration only mentions to the extent ‘violations of international humanitarian law’ are concerned and therefore, it condemns the victimization of women at large (Ufa Declaration 2015: 21). Feminists have also problematized this very way of imposing victimhood on women rather than recognizing the agency women exerts even in the ISIS phenomenon. Nonetheless, BRICS should be given due credits to the extent that it recognises the gory humanitarian crisis in Syria. On a similar note of mentioning the Congolese conflict ridden region the declaration shows similar concerns towards women and children in this region by welcoming ‘the efforts to stabilize the region and protect civilian populations. (Ufa Declaration 2015: 27) The final instance where the declaration talks about ‘women’ is in the context of the Agenda for BRICS Cooperation on Population Matters for 2015-2020. To quote it from the declaration:

We underscore the relevance of the demographic transition and post-transitional challenges, including population ageing and mortality reduction, as well as the importance to effectively use the demographic dividend to advance economic growth and development and to address social issues, in particular gender inequality, elderly care, women's rights and issues facing young people and people with disabilities. We reiterate our commitment to ensure sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights for all. (Ufa Declaration 2015: 32)

From these instances certain things can be inferred in terms of a gendered analysis. First of all, in all these cases ‘women’ is not a focal point. Second, despite showing its humanitarian gesture ‘women’ in this regard is solely seen as voiceless victims. Third, the declaration does not really provide a way out of such violations. Fourth, in all these cases women’s rights are clubbed with other considerations of rights, thereby neglecting the particularities of these disparate issues. In fact, whereas more than using the men-women dichotomy in today’s world, feminists prescribe ‘gender’ as the term to encapsulate the other categories apart from male-female; the
declaration remains completely oblivious to it. As in the above-mentioned quote it uses ‘gender’ only once that as a part of the main concern.

The document also talks about human rights 14 times and in most of the cases it does so by reaffirming its faith on United Nations (UN) and its agencies in protecting human rights. It also talks about the contemporary crisis ridden regions of the world and expresses grave concerns over the gross human rights violations in those regions, especially in Syria. ‘Human rights’ is also mentioned in the document to consider how ICTs can be used to protect its violations and affirm protection of the right to privacy as a vital human right. Talking about human rights, here it looks highly superficial as it only talks about these in terms of its protection. It does not take into consideration the particularities of rights across the world.

The document also uses the term ‘sustainable development’ 12 times which demands some attention. It starts by talking about NDB as the powerful instrument of sustainable development. It also mentions about ‘sustainable development’ in the context of the world drug problems and the threats of piracy that might adversely affect the sustainability of the development. As per the declaration ICT is also one of the tools used to keep up with the sustainable development. The declaration also reiterates its faith on sustainable development along the lines of UN summit on the post-2015 development agenda. Thus, in one instance it reads:

> We consider eradication of poverty as an indispensable requirement for, and overarching objective towards the attainment of sustainable development, and stress the need for a coherent approach to attain inclusive and balanced integration of economic, social and environmental components of sustainable development. (Ufa Declaration 2015: 39)

It is important to note that although it seems quite positive to see BRICS talking about poverty eradication as one of their concerns, it majorly comes under the purview of UN post-2015 development agenda and it not something exclusive that BRICS promises. Despite that it brings a lot of hope if such considerations are taken sincerely by BRICS as a grouping. Moreover, as Richard Douthwaite remarks, “The goal of ‘sustainability’ owes much of its popularity to the freedom of people to define the term whatever way they wish” (Douthwaite 1999: 157). Sustainable development broadly indicates a process by which the produced development would even be fruitful for the subsequent generations to come without any effective harm or progressive deterioration in any human or environmental factor. Douthwaite further mentions that, “…the set processes by which the needs of most of humankind is currently met,
the world economic system, is seriously unsustainable” (Douthwaite 1999: 157). Therefore, sustainable development as a concept can invoke substantial feminist concerns given the fact that environmental and human sustainability are two of the crucial feminist goals. This then can take us to ponder upon some of the alternatives that BRICS can potentially offer us.

**Conclusion**

So far in the paper the aim was to have a gendered analysis of BRICS as a grouping. Given the unique potential of BRICS putting up a wall of challenge against the American version of world economy as professed by many scholars and policy analysts, BRICS becomes an interesting case of study. As the study suggests, the rationale and the vision of the grouping was not such to originally talk about ‘women’ or ‘gender’ in this very mainstream construction of BRICS. But given the fact of the grouping standing apart from other institutions or groupings as have been discussed above, it bears in it certain budding possibilities.

But as the analysis shows BRICS operatives does not really challenge the existing system. Rather it very neatly binds itself with the neo-liberal capitalist form of economy. The insistence on the traditional state-centric security issues on the one hand and economic growth and development on the other make it obvious for BRICS to conform with the contemporary economic system rather than trying to exacerbate a substantial change in the world economic system. As a result people remain at the bay of its consideration and women’s voices are largely muted in this regard. This constant silencing of women’s voices by the feminization of the work forces in order to maximize profit becomes an inevitable truth of BRICS like any other mainstream international organization or grouping.

Given the limited space and scope, this particular paper only takes a look at the relevant Ufa summit documents and therefore it leaves enough space for future researchers to even go to the details of all other summit documents. In fact, the recruitment in NDB has just begun a month before and once it has a substantial intake, the institutional structure of the NDB can be studied once again. Even taking a comparative note of NDB with the banks like the Asian International Development Bank (AIDB), having a similar perspective of development can be a prospective field of study. One can also dig deeper into the specific issue areas that revolve around the broad purview of the BRICS developmental enterprise.
As the paper has mainly posed a strong critique of the way BRICS functions and the way it conceives a limited notion of development and growth on a whole, I would roughly propose two alternative ways for BRICS to reflect upon development and economy. First if we consider development, BRICS can expand its horizon of development as a concept by recognizing the multiples discourses on development. Rather than considering development in terms of better infrastructure and economic growth with a superfluous GDP, development can be brought by accepting the particularities of varied people and their needs. Of course, in that sense women can be included in the discourse of such an inclusive development. For Amartya Sen, expansion of freedom works

“…both as the primary end and as the principal means of development. Development consists of the removal of various types of unfreedoms that leave people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency. The removal of substantial unfreedoms, it is argued here, is constitutive of development.” (Sen 1999: xii)

Thus, emancipation of women in particular as well as the feminized section of the population living at the margins of life becomes an important precondition for the realization of development even of a sustainable kind. Peterson here seems relevant given her emphasis on highlighting the sphere of reproductive economy. Her critical rewriting of political economy systematically integrates reproductive economy with the global capitalist order by drawing the ‘private’ household to the forefront of economy (Peterson 2003). It can even be suggested for BRICS to take a note of reproductive economy to the extent of breaking the walls between economic growth and production on the one hand and family and reproduction on the other. This can further make BRICS sensitive to the gender issues. To facilitate such an arrangement independent women networks from the BRICS countries should be welcomed to discuss the human particularities in these countries in order to improve the qualities of lives.
References:

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*Human Development Report 2014, United Nations Development Programme. Table 1


