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## **“A key area of knowledge delivered by someone knowledgeable”: Feminist Expectations and Explorations of a One-off Economics Lecture on Gender**

By Emily Henderson<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

This paper explores the action of attending a visiting academic's one-off lecture, whether in the lecture theatre or on the Internet, in order to gain knowledge from a recognised expert of an unfamiliar but relevant field of research. The actions of entering the theatre and sitting for an hour, or of clicking 'play', appear to be simple gestures for the acquisition of knowledge; this paper explores the complexity of the processes surrounding the lecture, and the way in which the lecture constructs a passive listening position for the audience. The exploration takes place in the frame of one such lecture: the inaugural lecture of the Bocconi annual series at Bocconi University, Italy, entitled "Gender Equality and Economic Development", held in 2010. The author watched this lecture on the Internet in order to gain knowledge of the place of 'gender' in Development Economics; the paper represents in part the author's struggle with expectations of a feminist stance. The paper is an attempt to find an active listening stance, and to interrogate the author's reaction to the lecture.

The first section of the paper addresses the presentation of information in the lecture, how it is established as an Economics lecture on gender. Categories of feminist economics: access feminism, empiricist feminism, difference feminism, and the newer position of gender awareness, are aligned with the lecture. The second section, which analyses the position of the lecturer, situates the lecture in the ongoing processes that establish the lecture as an event, the lecturer as an expert in Economics. Finally, the overt agenda of the lecture, as laid out in the literature on the art of lecturing, is juxtaposed with the covert processes of academic identity construction.

*Keywords:* Gender Economics, Feminism in Academia, Lecturing

### **Introduction**

*“A lecture should be an overview of a key area of knowledge delivered by someone knowledgeable in the field”  
(Exley and Dennick 10)*

*“Lecturing is the transference of the notes of the lecturer to the notes of the student without passing through the brains of either”  
(ibid 3, anon.cit.)*

The idea of attending a one-off lecture given by a visiting academic, hoping to gain an insight into a domain that is not our home territory, is a familiar temptation for all of us. Attendance involves the simple, low-commitment gesture of entering a theatre, or of clicking 'play' on a podcast, and sitting passively before a speaker in order to gain an “an overview of a key area of knowledge” from “someone knowledgeable in the field” (ibid 10). Equally as

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familiar as the temptation to attend one of these lectures as an easy means to interdisciplinarity is the discomfort that the one-off lecture can bring. The discomfort can range from frustration at an unengaged speaker, who speaks to the converted of the discipline, boredom if the lecture title was misleading and the lecture completely irrelevant to your interests, anxiety if the lecture engages with your own topics in a way you always should have... You exit the theatre, or press 'stop', perhaps prematurely, and return to your niche – or you stay, and then perhaps borrow a recommended book from the library to read further. The audience member is positioned in a passive role, where the only active stances are in themselves prescribed: stay or leave. In this paper, I explore the visiting academic's lecture as situated in discourses of power and structures of authority, with the intended effect of resisting the prescribed passive roles and empowering the audience member to engage actively with the processes of knowledge-production and reinforcement. In keeping with the field of feminist research in Higher Education, I aim to harness "creative energy for change and critique, empowering [me] to apply political understanding to methodologies for teaching, learning, research and writing in the academy" (Morley and Walsh, 1995: p. 1).

The broad questions broached in this paper circle around the lecture as a pedagogical medium: What is a lecture? What does a lecture involve? How does lecturing function? These questions are viewed through a lens that seeks out elided power structures and discourses, a lens which I employ to magnify the underlying assumptions of the answers to these questions that literature on the art of lecturing provides. I approach these broader questions through a single example of one such lecture: Esther Duflo's inauguration of the annual Bocconi Lectures at the "Economy and Open Society Forum", Bocconi University, Milan, Italy, in 2010, with a lecture entitled "Gender Equality and Economic Development"<sup>2</sup>. I focus on this lecture because I watched it on the Internet as one such attempt to gain "an overview of a key area of knowledge" from "someone knowledgeable in the field", and my reaction to the lecture was strong enough to wish to explore it in detail. When I came upon Duflo's lecture I was feeling that I should reach beyond my home domain of Gender and International Development into the area of Economics that engages with the same issues: so frequently did the scholarship I was reading cite papers in Economics. In an experimental mood, I typed these terms into a search engine, and the video of Duflo's lecture came up; I had encountered her name in Development Economics papers, so I clicked 'play', and sat back to learn. The discomfort that I experienced during the lecture arose from the contradictory feelings of admiration and dissatisfaction: Admiration at this young woman, standing on a huge stage, delivering a snappy, clear lecture in a confident and informal manner; dissatisfaction at the lack of an overt political feminist stance in a lecture on gender, when I was anticipating an embodied beacon of hope for women in academia.

I present an analysis of this lecture, and so of lecturing in general, with contradiction as the point of departure: contradictory feminist positions in feminist economics, contradictions between academic embodiment and performance, contradictions in the overt and covert agendas of a lecture. Strategies are needed to unpick and expose power relations, to examine contradictory stances: the way they are structured and argued, who they include and exclude, how they permit or prevent agency. Henderson, Dudley-Evans and Backhouse define genre analysis as "concerned...with how the communicative purpose of the writer and the conventions of the discourse community are reflected in the structures of argumentation" (1993: p. 3). Without too much emphasis on the problematic term "genre" (Beebee), in the first section I examine the intersecting discourse communities of economists, feminist

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<sup>2</sup> The lecture can be viewed at the following link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dIB8DlmaKh8>.

economists, “Economists who also happen to be Feminists” (Blank and Reimers, 2003: p. 177), in relation to the lecture delivered by Duflo. In the second section, I situate the lecturer and the lecture in the context of academia. Here I explore the ongoing processes surrounding the lecture, and interrogate the construction of an academic identity in conjunction with gender-related work. In the final section, I situate the lecture and lecturer in the interwoven professional and academic agendas of the lecture-as-educational-medium.

### **The Lecture: Gender Economics and Feminism**

In this section, I ask if a lecture on gender is automatically a feminist lecture, and how we can draw the answer to this question from the lecture itself, taken in isolation from the surrounding factors of embodied identity and academic context. This discussion is situated in the frame of broader questions on lecturing as a form: how does a lecture indicate its subject domain and analytical stance? How is it that examining ‘gender’ through the lens of Development Economics can feel so different to examining ‘Economics’ through the lens of Gender and International Development? I first outline the way in which the lecture signposts an Economics perspective: the lens that is transparent to an Economist, but that, to non-Economist members of the audience of a visiting academic’s lecture, appears unfamiliarly opaque. I explore the notion of ‘gender’ that is defined through this lens. I then situate the lecture according to the different types of feminism that are identified in Feminist Economics (Ferber and Nelson *Beyond Economic Man : Feminist Theory and Economics*): where Feminist Economics may catch hold of Duflo’s lecture, it is not clear that Duflo is catching hold of Feminist Economics.

The lecture begins with introductory ideas of gender inequality, and identifies the way in which development theorists place gender equality and economic development in a “virtuous circle” of progress. Duflo examines how development leads to more gender equality, and then also shows that development can result in less equality. She indicates that development policy can lead to women’s empowerment, but that this empowerment has a cost, and demonstrates how this cost can be justified, using both equity and efficiency arguments. She ends by arguing that the statistical relationship between development and women’s empowerment is not strong enough to create a virtuous circle, that only an argument for empowerment policies founded on political preferences can be fully justified.

The Economics lens constructs arguments from “key neoclassical economic constructs”: “...value, efficiency, and choice” (Strober, 2003: p. 136). Duflo, as I will go on to show, subverts traditional ways of addressing these constructs, but her approach is recognisably within an Economics framework. Economics as a discipline has been criticised for taking material well-being as a proxy for overall well-being (Blank, 1993: p. 135; Strober, 2003: p. 136); the studies that Duflo references during the lecture address the question of well-being in this manner. In another feminist critique of the invisibilised lens of Economics, Benería states that indicators “can not...capture a dynamic sense of empowerment at the level of individuals, households and communities” (20). In the lecture, Duflo continually conflates empowerment and equality, discrimination and inequality. She uses the terms freely and interchangeably throughout the lecture; the difference lies in the fact that empowerment is a process, discrimination is an action, and equality and inequality are indivisible states. I now briefly address an example of the problematic use of indicators and proxies in the lecture.

Duflo, in an example which she admits is “caricatural”, takes a local improvement in women’s property rights from a study in the Ivory Coast, and uses it metonymically to represent empowerment. The transition from local to global operates as follows: an increase in household productivity, attributable to greater female empowerment, in one study of one

part of one country, is the proxy for growth, which is in turn a proxy for development. A “critical situation” hits, drought, and the increase in “development” (i.e. growth, i.e. household productivity) is insufficient to prevent violent discrimination against girls. Development is portrayed as measurable on a continuum: the household productivity increase was 6%. Empowerment and equality (here conflated) are seen as a static state to be gained; they are indivisible. This logic denies possibility of a continuum of “critical situation” and of “empowerment”: the “sacrificed girls” may be a heterogeneous group, some of whom would be spared in certain circumstances of increased empowerment and/or decreasing criticality. In the lecture, Duflo often depends on these leaps of faith, the very disempowering logic critiqued by feminist economists, to equate micro-level eventualities with macro-level concepts.

The lecture is a “gender” lecture in that Duflo is contributing to an existing debate concerning the “virtuous circle” of economic development and women’s empowerment. However, Duflo states that she is relying on arguments that can be justified through Economics logic, rather than through political or sociological means. She does not employ Economics as one of a selection of tools to argue a feminist cause, but rather will only consent to accomplish what Economics frameworks will allow her to argue. The notion of gender that Duflo depicts combines the gender-as-women approach, where women can be separated off as a group and invested in as a category, with the approach that takes gender to be a relational concept that includes both women and men. She takes care to disaggregate data by gender, so as to avoid the investment-in-women approach that seems to be associated with the virtuous circle argument that she is critiquing. There is no sense of plurality or flexibility of gender in the lecture, although there are references to gender as socially or psychologically constructed.

Feminist economics as a field has developed through conscientiously stated frameworks and ideologies (Ferber and Nelson *Beyond Economic Man : Feminist Theory and Economics* (1993); Ferber and Nelson *Feminist Economics Today : Beyond Economic Man* (2003); Strassmann (2008); Berik, Rodgers and Seguino (2009)). The way in which Duflo engages with gender in this lecture does not proclaim feminist values, but the nature of my reaction to the lecture implies that I expected a feminist stance to be taken. I further explore this expectation in the second section of the paper, but in part the expectation is rooted in the problematic association between gender and feminism (Evans), where gender, in an age of mainstreaming, has come to represent feminist concerns. In exploring further my reaction to the lecture, I began to read about feminist economics, to see if Duflo would be categorised as a feminist in Economics terms, and found that the term bears the plurality of the term ‘feminist’, but within the discipline of Economics.

This plurality can be broadly categorised in three ways: women’s access to the economics profession, women as subject-matter in economics research, and methodologies for research that are seen as more “gynocentric” (Ferber and Nelson "Introduction: The Social Construction of Economics and the Social Construction of Gender", 2003: p. 8). These three principles formed the basis of the “manifesto” to feminist economics (Ferber and Nelson "Introduction: *Beyond Economic Man*, Ten Years Later" 29), Ferber and Nelson’s (*Beyond Economic Man : Feminist Theory and Economics*) edited collection. Although these categories have altered over time, they are still recognisable, as seen in the 2003 sequel (*Feminist Economics Today : Beyond Economic Man*). The existence of these three categories, which are compounded into “Feminist Economics”, reveals discrepancies between different economists’ conceptions of feminism and economics. I listened to the lecture again, looking for references that would situate the lecture in relation to these three categories.

The first category can be defined as encouraging women to enter and succeed in the profession; Duflo reflects feminist aims of access by referencing female economists in her lecture, including the qualifier “a very, very nice paper”. This approach is fundamental for progress in access, and yet it can exist without those involved necessarily becoming aware of the significance of gender relations; this can result in a male-dominated status quo in principles, conditions, and measures of success, if not in actual numbers (Walsh, 1995: p. 86).

The second category, which has been termed “feminist empiricism” (Ferber and Nelson "Introduction: The Social Construction of Economics and the Social Construction of Gender" 8, from Harding 1986), considers that “it is not the tools of the discipline that need improvement, only the way that they are applied” (ibid). It is this approach that has led to the inclusion of “women’s interests and needs” (Benería, 2003: p. 47), such as unpaid labour and the family (Blank and Reimers, 2003), into the mainstream of economics (Berik, Rodgers and Seguino). However, because epistemology and methodology are unaltered, there is no guarantee that women’s concerns will be fairly represented (Berik, Rodgers and Seguino, 2009; Chanter, 2006). Duflo signposts her feminist empiricist position by constantly using conventional economics evaluation tools to describe traditionally non-economics topics (Blank and Reimers, 2003), for example analysing the family for its efficiency and its “final outcome”. Duflo also demonstrates the less revolutionary side to feminist empiricism by equating economic growth with progress. In one example, women are described as “lag[ging] behind men” in employment, which implies that full paid employment is the optimal state. In another example, where Indian girls have more access to English education, the girls are “leapfrog[ging]” the boys, who must remain in Marathi schools “to continue investing in the social network”. Employment opportunities are here placed above the “social network” in a hierarchy of development which holds economic growth close to its heart. Although Duflo explicitly challenges the relationship between economic growth and gender ‘improvement’ in the lecture’s overall argument, there is a sense that economic growth, and engagement in mechanisms that contribute to growth, must constitute positive progress.

The third category, “feminist ‘difference’”, which focuses on methodology, views mainstream economics as a masculine domain on every level, with its roots “within the psychosocial world of men” (Walsh, 1995: p. 86), and seeks to explode the neutralised gendered hegemony by suggesting alternative academic values to “objectivity, reason, and analytical enquiry” (Ferber and Nelson "Introduction: The Social Construction of Economics and the Social Construction of Gender" 9). During the lecture, Duflo manifestly queries some of the ingrained methodologies of traditional Economics research. She shows that relationships of causality are open to interpretation, and refers to her own fallible position as researcher, by including her own study in an opposition where two economists arrived at different answers to the same question. Duflo also insists that neat models such as the virtuous circle be evaluated for their applicability, and questions the viability of sampling. These critiques are nonetheless firmly rooted in the mainstream of the Economics discipline, in that alternative disciplines are not sought out for non-Economics mechanisms of critique.

In 1993, Ferber and Nelson could hardly conceive of the possibility of shared ground between ‘difference’ feminism and mainstream economists (Ferber and Nelson "Introduction: The Social Construction of Economics and the Social Construction of Gender" 9). Even those who promote “feminist ‘difference’” within feminist economics are astonishingly averse to admitting that progress may occur in the form of plurality. They rather seek *an* “improved economic practice” (Ferber and Nelson "Introduction: *Beyond Economic Man*, Ten Years Later" 11), “*the best science*” (Nelson 29, emphasis added), “credibility within the discipline” (Blank and Reimers, 1993: p. 177). This contradiction indicates that there is not only

diversity in the goals of feminism, but also in the motivations that feminist-economists have for embracing these goals. With the question of access to the profession, the justification can, for example, be based on arguments of efficiency or equity, and it may be internally or externally driven. “Feminist empiricism” can aim to reveal ways in which women can contribute to growth, or express the unfairness of their invisibilisation. Likewise, “feminist ‘difference’” may use the feminist lens to seek to establish “rigor” (Strassmann 1), or to denounce “malestream academic values and practices” (Walsh 93).

Aside from the numerous positions available within these three established categories, a fourth category is developing in feminist economics, as noted in the Berik et al. (2009) article in *Feminist Economics*. This category shows a de-homogenising awareness of gender, both in its intersection with “other types of inequality” (25) and in its inclusion of both women and men as gendered subjects. Duflo signposts this position throughout the lecture by referring to boys *and* girls, to “mums” *and* “dads”: both genders are posited as potential agents of change. This gender awareness can be viewed as a positive move, in that the notion of gender as relational may appeal to those who would not wish to work within an overtly feminist framework. However, awareness is a static state which implies neutrality and shuts off further process, and may be seen as depoliticised (Unterhalter and North). Duflo’s gender awareness at times misses steps that a more overtly feminist stance would necessarily include. For example, from a feminist perspective, the explanation of why women make better tea-growers, “because they have nimble fingers”, there are many missing steps. These clauses should account for the biological and social construction of this statement, and, from a relational perspective, for the presence of men: “women have nimble fingers”, ‘women are trained to have nimble fingers through the work they are expected to perform’, ‘masculinity is contingent on not having nimble fingers’, “women make better tea-growers”. Duflo does not expose the interim explanatory steps, which would no doubt require a move into a more discourse-based methodology, away from the logic of Economics.

Asking an Economics lecture on gender if it is a feminist lecture has involved, in the first place, asking how the lecture reinforces its links with the discipline, and how the notion of gender conveyed adheres to the requirements of the discipline. The question of feminism in Economics has led to the fragmentation of the term in the singular, as the lecture adheres to aspects of each category of feminism in economics, as well as the more recent category of gender awareness. My initial reaction was that my expectation that the lecture would announce a feminist position had not been met. The result of this exercise in categorisation has been to revise my expectation that the *lecture* would be feminist: the lecture results from the development of ways to address gender within Economics, a development which is inseparable from, and yet is no longer necessarily identified with, the development of feminist thought and the feminist political agendas. I now move on to address my anticipation that the *lecturer* would be a feminist.

### **The Lecturer: Academia Embodied**

A common mistake in the literature on lecturing is to view lectures as isolated events (Aarabi, 2007; Exley and Dennick, 2004), and lecturers as selfless imparters of knowledge for the sole benefit of the audience (Brown, 1978; Bligh, 1998; Gaw, 2010; Aarabi, 2007). The simple gesture of attending a visiting academic’s lecture situates the audience member in a freeze-frame of these processes; the processes leading up to and away from the lecture are masked. Furthermore, the action of attending a lecture to learn from a proclaimed expert entails passive listening and absorption of information; the listener is not expected to interrogate the lecture for the ways in which authority is constructed and conveyed. In this section, I address the questions ‘what is a lecture?’ and ‘what does a lecture involve?’ by

situating the one-off lecture in the complexity of the ongoing processes, by asking how the lecturer is set up as an expert. In this discussion, I interrogate my expectation that Duflo would represent a feminist academic position.

One of the processes in question relates to the fact that both visiting lecturer and university have considered how the lecture will affect prestige. If the lecture takes place, it is because *the prestige-building aspect of the lecture is greater than or equal to the prestige-damaging aspect*, for both parties. Transactions and communications will have taken place to establish this relationship, and the outcome is indicative of the power-balance between lecturer and institution. If it is a great honour to welcome the lecturer to the institution, for example, the institution will have less control over the lecture, in terms of content or length. We can imagine the mechanisms that led to the organisation of the lecture: the administrative and logistical processes, the marketing and communications, the technical work and preparation of the venue. Why was Duflo chosen? Was this choice made by a declared feminist academic – in which case, does this tag the lecture feminist, regardless of Duflo’s stance? Did the labour involved in organising the lecture reflect the gender inequalities that Duflo expounds? I can only speculate about these questions; as a member of the online audience, I am too far removed from the context of the lecture to seek the answers. Furthermore, this analysis is positioned in the passive audience, where the audience member is cut off from the processes that have established the ‘one-off’ nature of the lecture. I try to engage with these processes from this disempowering position, to see how the experience of the lecture changes by simply posing the questions.

The fact that the lecture is taking place with Duflo as the inaugurating speaker is evidence of ongoing processes of change in academia which we cannot banish at the door. In the case of the Bocconi lecture’s prestige-balancing equation, it is an honour to welcome Duflo, but her case is more complex than this. She represents a contradiction, in that she is a woman, she became Professor of Economics at 29, and is still rather young to be an eminent keynote speaker. As a younger woman, she does not embody the status she holds in the traditional manner; this lecture is an opportunity to vindicate her status in performance, to become the keynote speaker through speaking. Duflo embodies the facet of feminist economics that aims to open the Economics Faculty doors to more women: the fact that Duflo is even standing on-stage is evidence of access feminism. This is a two-way process of becoming, where Duflo becomes the keynote speaker, and so opens up the possibility for the keynote speaker to become other young women.

One of the processes that we do witness in the lecture theatre is the tradition of introducing the speaker. The introduction, which generally roll-calls a speaker’s achievements and accolades, taps into the prestige-balancing equation, in that the expertise of the lecturer is conveyed before the lecture begins. Maristella Botticini (Professor of Economics at the University of Bocconi) introduces Esther Duflo, aided by PowerPoint slides (Botticini). The slides take us through a catalogue of awards and successes, from “tenured professor at age 29”, to “Abdul Latif Jameel Professor of Poverty Alleviation and Development Economics, MIT”. There is even a picture of Duflo’s head on Superman’s body: the visual representation of feminist empiricism! Botticini quotes Duflo’s ethos: “a true human science – rigorous, impartial, a science of humans in its imperfections and complexities, humble and humane and generous”. Not so long ago, this juxtaposition would have been considered oxymoronic. When Esther Duflo begins to speak, we have already formed an opinion of her, which is based on the academic identity with which we are presented in her biography, iterated by another academic voice. Even if we were previously unaware of Duflo’s academic prestige, we are now left in no doubt of the authority of the

speaker's voice. For Aarabi, "[t]he audience is...the means by which the lecture can succeed or fail" (5). An audience that is already persuaded of the brilliance of the lecture before it begins, is more likely to allow the lecture to "succeed". We have also already constructed an identity for Duflo, based on what she embodies. The assumptions we draw are derived from markers such as appearance, gender, age, accent. Lecturing on gender necessitates a certain amount of reflexivity, as the lecturer cannot avoid embodying her gender: Duflo by default must embody access feminism.

Now is it possible for a woman to lecture on gender without being a feminist? Blank and Reimers suggest that "[p]erhaps any woman who chooses to pursue a full-time career in a non-traditional profession such as economics should be considered to be a feminist, whether she identifies herself as one or not" (1993: p. 157). This approach deprives the "woman" in question of agency in her identity: should Duflo be considered a representative of feminist academic work if she does not declare herself as such? Botticini does not present Duflo as a feminist; again, from the position of audience member, we do not know who provided the biographical information for Botticini to present, so we can only associate it with her voice. Duflo's biography only presents gender as a research interest. Gender, or associated terms such as 'women', 'feminism', 'masculinities', can appear at different levels of an academic identity, so conceived through the introduction to a one-off lecture. A high level presence of gender in an academic identity might include the job title, or the name of the institution, where it is impossible to describe the professional role without mentioning a gender-related term. A lower level presence of gender would be editing of journals, publishing, projects, teaching, where there is more choice about which to include, and how to name them. At this level, the academic in question can provide biographical information for the introduction according to the context, or the introducer can edit the information. Research interests fall at a lower level; they can easily be changed according to the context.

The fact that gender only occurs in Duflo's research interests, and yet she is able to pronounce an inaugural lecture on the subject, demands reflection on what it is that academics see as prestige-building in their academic identities, what it is that they do not see as prestige-building but wish to include on principle, and what could be prestige-damaging. This question is reflected in Blank et al (2003): "*we run the risk of being labeled within the profession as economists who work on 'women's issues'*" (165, emphasis added). Are those who include gender at the lower levels of their identity wishing to be seen as open to gender-related work but not as 'gender academics'? Through the juxtaposition of the lecture title with the biography and the embodied identity, Duflo physically and biographically represents progress in feminism of access for Economics, but is more resistant (or Botticini is more resistant on her part) to furthering the prestige of the gender-related academic identity. That Duflo does not embrace a feminist academic identity certainly contributed to my expectations. It is the key question of a generation: is the generation, whose comparatively easy success in academia is in part due to the staunchly political feminism of the previous generation, obliged to continue that political work and recognise the help it has received?

In lifting the veil of neutrality from the academic convention of introducing speakers, as well as the other processes that have led to the lecture event, we can take a more active stance as listeners, by asking what effect these processes have on our acquisition of knowledge. The lecture, as I go on to address in the final section, is a pedagogical medium that constructs itself as purely pedagogical; the context of the lecture, with the introduction, the disguised technical and physical labour of organisation, provides a physical space that encourages passivity. It is, however, this prescribed passivity that prevents the audience member from evaluating the lecture based on notions of power and authority, and identity. In my case, amongst the layers of passive listening, questions arose as to the combination of

young woman, with Professor of Economics, with lecture on gender. I am surprised to find the locus of my frustration in Duflo's lack of reflexivity, when, as a member of a generation that is even further removed in time from the original Women's Movement, I am far from thinking that a successful woman has only succeeded because of feminist work, and that she should acknowledge the work that has assured her success. On the other hand, I recognise that Duflo cannot avoid being positioned in the feminist/gender debate. By not voicing her position, she leaves her stance open to assumptions that are based on the very embodied identity that she is performing against.

### **Lecturing: Interwoven Agendas**

Duflo is giving a *lecture*. As we saw with the opening quotations, the medium of lecturing and the way its properties are described are not neutral: the fact that Duflo is giving a *lecture* is already significant. Whilst the literature on the art of lecturing concentrates on the university lecture as a medium of instructing students, the discussions of successful lecturing can be applied to both forms. As a hallowed pedagogical institution, the lecture as a medium of education is ripe for feminist critique. In this final section of the paper, I bring the lecture and lecturer together to identify the ways in which the lecture form provides a structure for the authority of the lecturer's voice. I pair critiques of the neutralising logic of Economics with my own critique of the neutralising form of the lecture that is suggested in the literature on lecturing, thus constructing a view of the Economics lecture. I show how the suggestions made in the literature on lecturing avoid any recognition of the use of the lecture form as a performance of academic identity, which can be termed the hidden agenda of lecturing.

Reasons for giving a lecture include (i) "communicating enthusiasm for the topic", (ii) "providing a structure or framework for the material", (iii) "tailoring material to the students' needs", (iv) "providing current information", and (v) "using another format is not viable" (Exley and Dennick, 2004: pp. 8-9, from Staffordshire University). These reasons provide a comprehensive list of the pressures under which Duflo finds herself. As a prestigious visiting lecturer, lecturing on development and gender, Duflo will have attracted a diverse audience, including gender-averse economists, economics-averse gender people, development people and those who have come along with a general interest, who may be economics- and gender-averse. She has approximately one hour to make progress in the popularity of the domain (i). She is providing a framework for material that has not traditionally been combined (ii). She has a varied audience to whom it is difficult to tailor the lecture (iii). She must demonstrate that the subject is cutting-edge (iv). The only way she can do all of this as a famous visitor, in person, is in the lecture format (v). Furthermore, in the literature on lecturing, the lecture is seen as less than ideal for "attitude change, development of thinking and problem solving" (Edwards, Smith and Webb, 2001: p. 4, from McKeachie, 1999; Bligh, 1998).

In the literature on the art of lecturing, there are commonalities between the different authors as to what a lecture should include, how it should be structured. A lecturer should be aware of the aims and learning objectives/outcomes of the lecture (Exley and Dennick, 2004; Bligh, 1998; Gaw, 2010), the lecture should have a clear structure which suits the nature of the content (Exley and Dennick, 2004; Brown, 1978), the structure should be clearly signposted (Gaw, 2010; Exley and Dennick, 2004). These unselfconsciously unself-interrogatory instructions, which reveal the assumption of an objective truth to be imparted, can be unpacked to reveal the underlying criteria for a successful lecture. In this framework, plurality of meaning could only be construed as confusion and misunderstanding, and would therefore be attached to a notion of failure on the part of the lecturer. If the student exited the lecture hall having constructed her own notion of the objectives of the lecture, then the learning outcomes would not be correctly suited to the intended learning objectives of the

lecture. If the student retained an explanation as an example of a notion, or an example as an explanation, this would be the result of inadequate signposting. The recommended strategy is to “Tell them what you’re going to tell them. Tell them. Tell them what you’ve just told them” (Exley and Dennick, 2004: p.45). In this approach, there is a single correct interpretation, where the listener is able to equate the “told” with information imparted during the “telling”.

Duflo clearly states her lecture aims: to show the relationship between development and gender equality, to assess the strength of the relationship, to evaluate the possibility of a virtuous circle. She uses the “Rule – e.g. – rule” technique (Bligh, 1998: p. 91) to structure the lecture: she follows a pattern of alternating the explanation of the virtuous circle with examples. Towards the end of the lecture, however, Duflo refers to her “section on development” and “section on empowerment”. For me, this “told”, the existence of these two clear sections, was not in fact obvious during the “telling”: the “told” has a retrospective influence over the organisation of the “telling”. The importance of signposting (Exley and Dennick, 2004) or “verbal signals” (Bligh, 1998: p. 104) is related to the overt lecture structure and the lecture objectives. Duflo constantly signposts the progression through the lecture structure, from “so let’s start with” to “well let me now conclude”. These signposts do help the listener to follow the complex windings of Duflo’s argument, but they also help the listener to not be distracted by the matrix of other signposts that surreptitiously guide the listener through Duflo’s hidden objectives. The sheer extent of verbal signalling (“firstly”, “for example”) indicates that the lecture is more complex than the signposted structure lets on.

McCloskey, in the seminal work *The Rhetoric of Economics*, carries out literary analyses of economics texts to investigate how, and why, economics writing is presented as an objective science. In an analysis of a 1961 paper by Muth, McCloskey concludes that “[t]he official rhetoric of the paper allows no room for anything but unanimous assent” (1985: p. 100). This statement could equally be applied to the recommendations for a successful lecture, such as “what I expect the student to be able to know...or what attitude they should have by the end of the lecture” (Gaw, 2010: p. 44), where “unanimous assent” is also a requirement, as with the “tell them” approach. Here we see a crossover between the lecture as medium of instruction, and the academic discipline of Economics. Bligh, in his work *What’s the Use of Lectures?*, defines “lecture objectives” as “exclud[ing] asides and detail used for arousing interest” (1998: p. 89). Nelson, in her feminist economics article entitled “The Study of Choice or the Study of Provisioning?”, critiques the subordination of more “intuiti[ve]” knowledge in economics: “the formal model is generally considered to be the substance of the talk, the rest merely supplementary material” (Nelson, 1993: p. 31). The latter critique could have been written of the Bligh text, where the “asides and detail”, rather than being “merely supplementary”, can rather be construed as a viable form of explanation.

The analytical techniques used to expose neutralising behaviour in economics can, then, be directly transferred to the literature on the art of successful lecturing. In a case of neutralising behaviour, power lies with those who are aligned with the norms. We, as passive members of the audience, can reclaim agency in interpreting the information presented by seeking the hidden objectives of the lecture, which are equally necessary for the lecture’s “success”. The lecture is wielded by an academic with both an academic and an embodied identity. Transmitting knowledge is never the only agenda of the lecturer, who takes her own personal agenda into the lecture hall, including her standing, politics, and position in the prestige-building equation discussed above.

The literature on lecturing assumes that all facets of the lecture are connected with the lecture objectives, and thus invisibilises the lecturer, preventing the recognition of agency

and/or exploitation of power structures. Detail is seen as a danger to the lecture's success: "the lecturer should attempt to minimize the amount of detail... The more the lecturer teaches, the less [the audience] will understand" (Exley and Dennick, 2004: p. 51). This conception of detail ignores the possibility that the lecturer may occasionally include a display of scholarly expertise, for example, simply in order to impress those present. Bligh assumes that anything which distracts from the "point" will be damaging to the success of the lecture, and includes "ambiguity, amount of information in a sentence, extent of redundancy" in his list of undesirables (1998: p. 109). Any of these three anti-tropes could be used deliberately by the lecturer to speak to the hidden agenda. After all, it will be in Duflo's interest to take full advantage of the opportunity both to assert her academic identity and to downplay any negative connotations her embodied identity may have.

Duflo situates the lecture in an economics genealogy that begins with Sen, and she situates herself in this genealogy by referencing her own work, thus engaging in a process of self-canonization. She also seems to have the objective of protecting the conventional economist's role, and thereby her own, from contamination: she defines the economist, and therefore herself, as bearing no responsibility for certain debates in the domain of development work. On the one hand, an economist is not a "policy-maker":

"As economist, I don't feel like I [...] should make a judgement as to whether we prefer water or schools – policy-makers can do that"

On the other hand, an economist does not become involved with "political preferences":

"So this is a first argument which, as economist, I would find no reason to argue in any way. This is political preferences."

This self-positioning action directly relates to the academic identity discussion above. Duflo uses her position of power to freeze her academic identity as an Economist, overruling hybridity (gender?) with securely demarcated roles. This position resists the branding of 'gender academic' to which the young woman plus gender lecture combination calls.

In the example of the visiting academic's one-off lecture, more emphasis is placed on the hidden agenda than a university lecture series that forms part of a curriculum. The pressure to succeed is greater for the one-off lecture, and the opportunity to make an impression on a more diverse and more powerful audience is an invitation to the lecturer to wield sophisticated subtexts of the performance of expertise and authority. The form of the lecture, in tandem with the Economics discipline, creates an atmosphere where the audience member is not expected to question the subtext. In interrogating the mechanisms by which the Economics lecture imposes a passive listening position on the audience, we take a more active stance in learning from both the information provided, and the way we are persuaded of its import.

## Conclusion

I began this paper with questions regarding the lecture as a medium of instruction that sprang from my reaction to Duflo's inaugurating lecture for the annual Bocconi lectures. As I have showed, the lecture does not begin – or end – with the lecturer's utterance. To situate the lecture in a wider context of power relations entails a resistance to the normalised conventions of academia. By asking how the lecture came to take place, how the lecturer came to be on-stage, we expose the way in which neutralised and normalised structures and activities can reinforce dominant modes of knowledge production and dissemination.

Recognising the prescribed passivity of the audience in the lecture context is the first step to reclaiming the normalising processes and utilising them. Positions of power, such as the status of the visiting academic's lecture, when gained, can be utilised to shape further opportunity: further keynote speakers, increased acceptability of gender-related academic identity, shifted canons.

I have explored my initial reaction to the lecture in terms of the combination of the young woman, the Economics academic, and the gender-themed lecture. Using the categories of feminism in feminist economics as a springboard, I have accounted for the complexities of a feminist position in the Economics domain. In terms of access feminism, Duflo performs her academic identity with an ease that would have been impossible until recently. In so doing, she creates the template for other young female academics to gain status; Duflo also contributes to the canonisation of other female Economists. During the lecture, Duflo moves seamlessly between formerly women-only concerns and conventional economics subject-matter, thus demonstrating, but never signalling, the feminist empiricist position. With regards to the 'difference' position, we have seen that Duflo frequently interrogates methodologies that claim objectivity, without ever leaving the Economics discipline. Duflo can be said to embrace a gender-aware position, a more recent development in feminist economics: she discusses men as well as women, and in her lecture men and women are fully implicated in both private and public spheres. In many ways, Duflo's lecture can be heard as a catalogue of the success of feminism in infiltrating the Economics discipline. It can also be heard as a product of the mainstreaming of feminist questions into a more neutral and depoliticised form of gender, where the work of feminism is forgotten or banished to a past era. These two hearings occurred simultaneously for me, as a recognition of the obligation for a woman who performs an academic identity to be reflexive about positions of power, and as a recognition of the unfairness of the perpetuation of this expected obligation.

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