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Introduction Gender in a Global Market Society

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We linked hands in solidarity. We refused to vindicate those responsible for this tragedy. Some people spoke of settling of scores...others talked of war...But why did it have to be our market? What had our street done? Did our market really have anything to do with that terrible tragedy which transformed children into assassins? How could they have borne a grudge against our market? Nobody understood why this market had become the target of such violence, such wanton acts of vandalism and the scene of all those horrors. Nobody!

Ghislaine Sathoud, *Le marché de l'espoir*, 2005

The classical liberal ideology does not seem to draw any significant distinctions between men and women when they engage in commercial transactions that sanction the unevenness of the product without really factoring in the social status of the trading partners. It apparently does not consider that the individual, *homo oeconomicus*, whose conduct, viewed from the standpoint of the minimum 'human' referent, maximizes its utility based on a stable scale of preferences whose history is never recorded; such interest, which is at the root of trade, is constantly discounted by an individual reduced solely to his or her economic activity. Within liberal theory itself, the contradictions highlighted by the growth of real capitalism as practiced, which clash with the tenets of liberal thought, have always led to a conceptual readjustment of some of its classical tenets and a review of the system of ideological legitimization of the quest for profit. However, we have recently been witnessing a resurgence – after a long Marxist contestation – of this vision of rational economic agents who pursue their own goals, free from all institutional influence, and whose actions automatically regulate their social sphere of action. In light of the progress achieved so far in the social sciences, this idea is again

being strongly challenged by the new economic sociology; some researchers (Wacquant and Calhoun 1989; Boltanski and Thévenot 1991) assert that the practices and representations of actors are the product of their specific historical and cultural background; the identity of individuals is neither natural nor vested with 'ahistorical' permanence, but it is exclusively informed by the general social ties that bind and mould society as a whole. Such major issues, which are at the centre of the dynamics of capitalism, are transposed and updated in areas that have recently come under the influence of the market economy. However, such issues have been reformulated differently because they echo problems raised in a specific contemporary context and addressed, therefore, by new theoretical approaches in tune with the characteristics of the host society.

It is worth noting that this phase of rapid expansion of market relations, after a very long period of social maturation, is predicated on the dismantling of geographical boundaries of the economy which outpaces the requisite emergence of nation-states as a form of political emancipation from the powerful religious forces that are dominant in the Judeo-Christian West. Adam Smith (Rosanvallon 1979) understood that the geographical sphere of influence of the politician was reduced to small zones, whereas in that era, trade zones were already expanding and opening up on a quasi-global scale. The dismantling of national frontiers is preceded by a huge wave that destroys weaker social entities, and by the reconstruction of a broader and relatively homogenous social environment. It is easy to understand why the objective of building a market society – a social structure superior to the market economy – entails the elimination of all barriers to free movement of individuals and trade to foster the building of a 'fluid and homogenous space structured exclusively by the geography of prices' (Rosanvallon 1979). This historical re-shaping of social relations jolts one of the pillars of the social order, namely the extended family, viewed as a place of captivity and immobility. The nuclear family is an offshoot of the market society. This social unit is, indeed, the tentative consequence of an extreme form of individual distinctiveness proposed by liberal ideology as the social and economic completion point of the model. The domestic economy soon becomes a target, as do all the non-market and intra-communal exchanges. This social model, as a preferential context, is based on the smart distinction it makes between 'formal rationality' and 'material rationality', vying with one another for the historical establishment of conventional trade. Formal rationality is defined as that which is based exclusively on accounting assessments, with no consideration of the social conditions of participants in trade, while material rationality is that which integrates ethical and moral requirements into economic activity.

Admittedly, the analysis of gender identity on the market cannot elude such a conflict of 'values' which logically involves a controversial re-definition of the scale of social values governing various forms of social belonging and egalitarian

considerations. Max Weber makes a very accurate analysis of the break-up of the domestic community (Weber 1995) caused by the expansion of ‘commercial relations’ coupled with ‘increasing calculability’ in the social environment. The Weberian analytical model takes for granted the set-up of a relatively autonomous economic order, free from the moral injunctions of Protestantism and independent of its religious roots. It is easy to imagine the consequences of this historical confrontation between the market order and the peculiar history of relations that are social constructs between the two sexes; as Weber points out:

When the market is left to its own legal devices, it only considers commodities, and not individuals nor natural human relations, which are peculiar to people-oriented communities. All these relations are obstacles to the development of a truly communal market, and the specific interests of such a market are tempting for all (Weber 1995).

The term ‘domestic economy’ does not only pertain to the management of the home or domestic units that are more or less large, but also includes all communities established on the fringes of capitalism. Fernand Braudel, in his analysis (Braudel 1985) inspired by the work of Karl Marx,¹ presents the capitalist as an ‘evening visitor’ who arrives just in time and uninvited to partake of the evening meal without having contributed to it. The capitalist takes all the credit for social structures of which he is not the creator. The age-old project of restructuring the domestic economy, the market society as it has developed in the West – whence it has set out to conquer the whole wide world – places at the very centre of the current capitalist expansion the challenge of imperatively reshaping gender identity, *inter alia*,² in market relations.

Globalization, as a product of a global environment of interdependent market relations, is not a new phenomenon. The effects of this general expansion of the market society, whose principles alone dominate Western societies, quickly influenced discussions in the social sciences, well before the confirmed advent of globalization. Ester Boserup’s pioneering book (Boserup 1970) revealed the changing role of women in the production system streamlined by the internationalisation of capital and division of labour on a global scale. In the book, Boserup already castigated the globally harmful effects of ‘modernisation’ in the countries of the South on women, and highlighted the gender division of agricultural and industrial labour as well as the various effects of development strategies on men and women. In her view, colonialism and the voluntarist policies of modernization have considerably transformed the status of the woman. However, this perspective remained clearly development-oriented and did not place the change in the status of the woman in a historical perspective linked to the metamorphosis of capitalism itself.

In light of Immanuel Wallerstein's research (Wallerstein 1980) on the 'global system', globalization can be defined as 'the spatial expansion of capitalism' and accordingly as a 'process of circumventing, razing to the ground and, ultimately, dismantling the physical and regulatory borders that obstruct the accumulation of capital at the global level' (Adda 2006:7). The old norms that had hitherto governed the identity of individuals and hierarchical relations between them are now undergoing a decisive and unprecedented transformation. The spread of ideologies advocating the return to the market (liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation of labour), which accompanies global financial integration, growth of multinational firms and technological innovations (revolutions in the Information Technologies), are the main drivers of this new capitalism, liberated from the fetters and constraints imposed by the old States and communities.

The dissemination of this hegemonic capitalist model called 'westernization of the world' by some scholars (Latouche 1988) reflects a 'category that is both analytical, that is, indicative of an economic phenomenon, and normative, in the sense that it prescribes rules of conduct, defines and justifies the content of norms and institutions' (Talahite 2000:121). The globalization process is, therefore, based on the establishment of a hierarchy and competing social entities that are part of the process to build a market society at the global level.

A careful perusal of initial studies on relations between globalization and gender reveals that special attention is paid to the social consequences of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). Christiana Gladwin (1991) in her study of African peasants shows that the SAPs imposed by the IMF and World Bank – both of which are institutions inspired by the neo-liberal model – affected households by triggering variations in income (salaries and commodity prices), food prices and public expenditure (increases in school fees and cost of medication). Bisilliat notes that Structural Adjustment Programmes have only 'reinforced, hardened, and aggravated structural inequalities between men and women, as development projects since the 1950s had already done, according to the cumulative logic of the double patriarchy: that of decision-makers of both the South and the North' (Bisilliat 1998:100). The patriarchal relationship is resolutely destroyed or reformulated in a peculiar context of reformulated secular ties between men and women involved in the ongoing context of social reproduction. However, everyone is well aware that condemnation of gender inequalities does not always reflect a clear understanding of a phenomenon as complex as formulation of a global market society; reducing this historical process to its simple economic expression blinds one to the influential reciprocal relations between the patriarchy and peripheral capitalism, which is in turn subject to an unbalanced relationship with the hard core of capitalism. Like Karl Marx and Fernand Braudel, Claude Meillassoux (1975) has shown that the main objective of capitalism, as concerns

'domestic forms of production', is not necessarily to destroy them but to subject them to economic exploitation. This stranglehold on domestic production seems to affect the cultural identities of women and modulate their statutory rights in the new system of social relations called modernity.

There is hardly anything new in the assertion that the crisis of development theories and practical models in Africa is closely related to the contestation of theories spearheaded by the liberal school which is dominant in contemporary social sciences. The new conception of 'the rational economic individual' has sparked several criticisms. Since this vision, which is both academic and political, increasingly seemed to focus on technical aspects based on 'precision' and 'rigour', and became distanced from the daily reality of social actors, a protest movement gradually developed, giving birth to circles of opposition to the dominant model. The growth of this movement was accompanied by a proliferation of alternative schools of thought and political action that proposed alternative frameworks for analysis. These schools of alternative thought professed a 'heterodox' vision at variance with the ongoing 'conservative subversion'. Feminists, who emerged as an epistemological force in the early 1970s and who passed themselves off as a ramification of the heterodox economy, tried to anchor the falsely rational reasoning in social and political processes with a firmly established historical perspective. The lack of historicity is indeed the kingpin of the liberal vision of the rational actor who is presented as an individual without any social weight and who is constantly reduced to his or her productive and consumerist function. Feminist economists, who have been largely inspired by some Marxist theories such as the critical study of social division of labour, forms of production, their inherent power relations as well as the institutional frameworks for economic and social relations, have collectively sought to explain the processes and mechanisms sustaining exploitation and inequalities between the individuals, in particular, between men and women. In fact, as Beneria (2003:43) asserts, feminist economists have not merely focused their work on a social construct of the economy, but have consistently called into question the central role played by individual choice, as opposed to the insurance principle of individual and collective wellbeing. They focus their analyses on processes ushered in by capitalism and on the emerging inequalities in new power relations observed at various levels of society. The process of capitalist expansion which shapes and moulds the social identity of participants in the new global market society firmly anchors the characteristics of belonging and their functions in the new social order.

Meanwhile, such a global perspective ought not to be locked in sterile linearity which within the process of globalization would fail to perceive the irreversible opening up of the worlds of the south. There is the need within the framework of the analyses presented here to quite cogently define the sense of the notion of

the market. The market here does not refer to saving or the localized exchange of goods, a perspective which is imposed by normative perceptions. In fact, a strictly materialistic reading of exchange would be included, since every social practice and interaction implies a communitarian transaction; meanwhile the exchange system under study here broadens to root out the obligation of the maximization of mercantile profit from the cycle of exchange. Trade here would have a meaning closer to those of old, one of human interaction, in a way that one could refer to 'good trade' between humans. In an acclaimed study, Mauss elaborated a broader vision of social exchanges:

What they trade is not exclusively goods and wealth, furniture and buildings, economically useful items. They are before all else, courtesies, feasts, rituals, military services, women, children, dances, parties, fairs of which markets are only a part and where the movement of wealth is only one of the terms of a much more general and more permanent contract (Mauss 1978).

In one way, trade places itself at the heart of social exchanges and is carried along by a multitude of social interactions. Certainly, the reader is called upon to take into account the major mercantile formations of the social trade system, without forgetting the diversity of exchange routes as well as the varying modalities of social construction, at the margins and within market logics – those of implicit value in trade between humans – which the texts herein also seek to review. The globalization process which is at issue here cannot be reduced to simplistic analyses of movement of materials, but ought to be considered in the globalization of interactions through the broadening and the intensification of contacts on the planetary scale which create a clash between cultures, objects, techniques and values in the constant forging of innovative social relations under the influence of major global currents, while remaining determined to local historical frameworks. In order to grasp such a complex phenomenon, the encounter of different disciplinary perspectives allows for the elucidation of contradictory facets of this social dynamic, many of whose characteristics continue to remain hidden and rarely explored.

In discussing the subject of International Trade Dynamics and Gender Perspectives in Africa, the 2002 session of the Gender Institute of CODESRIA, from which the articles of this volume emerge, showed how different kinds, at different scales, of globalization can hold different meanings and trigger social, economic and technical strategies among contemporary African women. These manifestations of globalization are even, of course, perceptible on the smallest social relational scale. It should be pointed out that globalization has been described and analysed as a protest ground or a vast strategic chessboard that does not leave enough leeway for time marking or capitalization in the face of life's

adversities. As such, the supposed winner – the powerful market network – always carries the day. The presentations contained in this volume reveal two parallel and paradoxical trends. On the one hand, while globalization has liberalized and opened up some domains – the most important being the economic sphere – it has, paradoxically, ushered in other forms of ‘liberties’ and this same dual process has also led to a new enslavement of marginalized social groups whose boundaries do not always square with those defined by the identity-based groupings of the former social regimes.

The analyses arising from these different presentations address the issue of the social construction of these reconstituted entities and the economic bases of factors giving rise to various forms of social and gender inequality, in the context of the changes and adjustments triggered by the globalization process. Equally scrutinized are the gains that eclipse the increasing isolation of, and withdrawal of all responsibility from women, which came with the advent of financial and commercial policies informed by the new values of globalization.

It must be admitted that the debate sparked off by the analysis of the systematic strategy of *homo oeconomicus* hinges directly on the collective component in the definition of the rationality of social agents, thereby questioning the function of utility and social identity, belonging to a given group, like those relating to sexual identity.

It is quite understandable that the theory of social identity considers gender categorization as a ‘salient categorization’ in the repertoire of possible identities for a group of individuals. However, although the economics of conventions has clearly shown the fundamentally limited nature of rationality and *ipso facto* the performance of social and institutional referents, the competition in situations of action existing between ‘self-stereotyping’ and external institutional taxonomic operations, the historical test of social reality places women at a constructive and argumentative disadvantage, a critical process that limits depersonalization and increases the oneness of women.

The expansion of the global trend in the sphere of influence of capitalism contains theoretical and technical principles that underpin liberal thought, the paragon of this economic and social order which is expanding rapidly today. The studies presented in this volume lay, from the perspective of trade, a historical framework for understanding the phenomenon of globalization while also seeking to show multiple modes of construction of feminine identities and the dynamics of their confrontation with major trends of the globalization process. For, contrary to the justifications proffered for this expansion, the various aspects examined here show quite clearly that the market order, even at global level, bears major contradictions which portray the level of involvement of the societies considered

in globalization and consequently, the reflection of the degrees of contradiction that it engenders and reformulates to portray social identities still resistant to the imposed standardization. It is thus interesting to note that a practice so often presented as general, human and, therefore, socially neutral and only subject to principles of overcoming the material or symbolic lack of fulfilment, is strongly informed by the expression of social identities. The upholding of feminine identities in the global market begins, as Béatrice Faye shows, with its encroachment on economic theories developed in a male chauvinist intellectual context.

Béatrice Faye breaks new ground in her study of historical philosophy which seeks to capture the implications of gender and the interpretative frameworks that have made this concept a central category – highly favoured by international organisations – for analysis. Basing her analysis on interpretations of ancient philosophers such as Anaxagoras, Socrates, Plato, or those of philosophers of a more recent epoch such as Thomas Aquinas, Rousseau, Machiavelli, Aristotle through Hobbes, Pufendorf, Locke to the most recent such as Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill, the author chose to discuss the dialectics of the intellectual and social transition from the economics of gender to the gender of economics.

Thus, she is defending an incomplete thesis which directly asks the following question: 'If women were in control of the economy, would ethics, economic policies and the choice of priorities be the same?' To answer this crucial question, one needs to return to the biological origins of inequality between man and woman and, in so doing, retrace the process of confiscation of power by man to the detriment of woman, an extension of the primary physical dichotomy. By considering gender, not as a biological, natural fact but as a social construct, it becomes possible to rethink the epistemology of philosophy and that of the social sciences while releasing them from the grip of essentialism. One of the aims of this critical review of the intellectual history of the West is to refuse the blindness imposed by dominant philosophical concepts and economic theories, the latter having considered for a long time the economics of gender relations as relations between market values without underlining the historically constructed identities conflicting therein.

The sustained silence over issues of gender equality was powerfully covered by the search for equality for the citizen, who had become sacred. Paradoxically, this policy fostered the development of metaphysics of gender which launched a radical counter-offensive to vindicate womankind confronted by the domineering phallic order. The author constantly raises the problem of the exclusion of women from some areas of knowledge and, concurrently, the silence of theoreticians of economics who have brought about a rethinking of the integration of women into market relations today as well the manner in which this process is addressed

by the dominant liberal thought. The chapters in this volume explore, each in its own way, the difficult circumstances surrounding this encounter between the gender order and the order of contemporary substantive and symbolic economics.

In the same critical vein, the article by Edward Kisiangani draws from the French theoretician, Michel Foucault, to show through a study of fashion, the media and music, the manner in which the new liberal movement – height of irony – has contributed to the imprisonment of the body. It shows how global trade in fashion and music, driven by the media, has stripped the feminine body of all power while increasing the authority of men and, by the same token, the subordination of women. The author maintains that in the global village, African women have become subjects who keep watch over themselves according to the panoptic principle, an expression he borrows from Foucault. Kisiangani advocates a critical analysis of disciplinary practices – in terms of the control Michel Foucault gives to this concept – introduced by the globalization process, which seems to have punished the feminine body by imprisoning it and making it inferior while emancipating and liberating the masculine body.

Such relegation to inferior status, although considered more in its economic sense, is the theme addressed in the chapter by Iwebunor Okwechime. Through his analysis, the author shows how the changing political and economic environment has deprived women of their ‘traditional economic spaces’. He goes on to state that the local economy has been eroded by the opening up of markets to free trade. However, he shows how women have been able to benefit from feminine movements both at local and international levels by availing themselves of their power, and also how, through such ties, they have succeeded in raising their voices and triggering change. The salient points of this study concern the means of action employed by women at the grassroots to fight petroleum multinationals, as well as the way in which – thanks to their union and their activism – grassroots women have succeeded in overcoming the barriers imposed on them by global exploitation structures.

Samuel Ong’wen Okuro’s article explores the theme of alternative economic spaces. He portrays parallel processes engendered by globalization. Whereas this process has opened up national borders in Africa and ushered in the free movement of money, goods and persons, coping strategies on the fringes have, paradoxically, developed. Take, for instance, the increase in fraudulent movement of goods across borders as well as growth in the ranks of smugglers swelled mostly by women. The fact remains that despite the relative success of these women’s strategies, the positions they still occupy in society have always taken a toll on them due to such economic and social liberalization.

From a local standpoint, using the case of Cameroon, Gérard Tchouassi examines the conditions for building a new trade model – termed equitable – at the global level. Designed as an alternative to the current domineering system which is unfavourable to producers of the South, this equitable trade seeks to combat the degradation of global terms of trade and to transform the power relations wrought by the global economy. However, this alternative is based on the desire to subvert the market order, dominated by the principles of economic rationality, through the application of ethical and moral principles with a view to building a world where social inequalities – including gender-related ones – would be banished. Observing a relatively strong presence of women in the equitable trade system, Tchouassi questions the effectiveness of this mode of access to world trade.

Although it would be illusory to apply a single market model, he observes the limits of this utopia in the increasingly evident influence of the rules of the dominant order that compel ‘local’, ‘personalized’, markets to abide by the logic of economic calculation, far from the ethical imperatives of ‘fair trade’.

Two articles, one written by Ndinga and the other by Zachary Arochi Kwena, discuss the innovative aspects of the expansion of market relations to African societies. Ndinga in his presentation describes the use of new means of communication by women in Brazzaville in their business activities and shows clearly how they adapt to the new world and how mobile phones do not seem, for anything in the world, to disturb a non-egalitarian system dominated by men. The author examines the incidence of ICTs and their unequal use in the trade in loincloth practiced by both men and women. Against the backdrop of globalization and transformation of relations between genders, Ndinga’s economic analysis attempts to explain this gender-based differential integration in the economic and technical environment of globalization. He equally portrays an influence that varies with gender as well as the position of each player in the loincloth business, which itself is subject to the vicissitudes and opportunities of globalization. Henceforth, communication technologies have taken centre stage.

Studying the role of social capital in small enterprises, Kwena shows how women put social belonging to good use. Such is the case with the ‘tontines’ where access is closely linked to the capacity to mobilize the requisite social capital. He concludes that in the era of globalization social capital as expressed in associations, rules and networks of all types, is indispensable to the creation and sustainability of women-owned micro enterprises.

Zo Randriamaro’s article underscores the permanence of a global division of intellectual labour which is reflected in issues of relations between gender and global trade liberalization. She observes that although cognizance is given to the place of gender in policies and institutions governing world trade, African women

are still very poorly represented in these debates. Radriamaro proposes a critical review of existing literature on relations between gender and trade after laying down the general framework represented by GATT and the WTO. She moves on to state the causes of Africa's predicament in the current world trade system. This debate that she launches enables her to figure out the modalities for creating and maintaining inequalities in the global order as a major prerequisite for understanding the structural discrimination that affects both women and the poor. In this critical perspective, the interaction between gender, social class, race and ethnic group should be constantly borne in mind by whoever seeks a profound understanding of the inequalities engendered by the global market order. She then underscores the need for a radical transformation of the interpretative paradigms that condition the transforming action of advocates of a balanced global order and an equitable position for African women.

It is evident that the market order, in spite of the strength of the social forces imposing it, faces resistance that calls into question the theoretical legitimacy and the social justice of its practices. The consistency of the social identity of this capitalist expansion, this global market society, depends on the resolution of these contradictions, some aspects of which are unveiled in this volume. This is a prerequisite for the building up of a utopia, a world of equality which the history of humanity also enjoins us to work for.

Notes

1. Marx writes 'Capital did not inaugurate the world but found at its disposal production and products that it made a point of duty to subject to its process'. *Karl Marx, Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, T 2, Paris: Anthropos, p. 191.
2. These, of course, should include forms of captive belonging such as religious and ethnic groups.

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