GLOBALIZATION AND GENDER IMPLICATIONS

EDITORIAL

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This special issue aims to highlight the logical connection between social process (as present currently in globalization) and gender: one of many identifying factors. Even if this connection has been of the foci of gender studies leading up to its first theories, it has been explored only so far as its clear and obvious consequences. In reality, they do not precisely outline how and why these implications might be particularly interesting for the interpretation of globalization, up to the point of supposing that the transformation of gender factor might be considered a cause, and not only an effect, of globalization.

All the contributions to this special issue draw a double parallel link between globalization and gender that is characterized by positive and negative aspects associated with the consequences of globalization from a gender point of view. But if we consider globalization as "a multi-dimensional process, a system of growing interdependencies between economics as well as society and culture which has produced multiple effects on both the macro level (more commercial flows, more mobility, more communication, more innovation), and the micro level, redrawing the confines between time and space (Giddens 1990), local and global and, thus all forms of collective life, social relations and the life conditions of men and women", as Ruspini states in her contribution, we must assume a more correct methodological position and ask ourselves: did gender promote – with all the other causes – a multi-dimensional transformation thanks to a new social political,

economic, cultural identity as an unexpected agency? Could the macro and micro levels of social change have also been developed by changing social actors that cannot only be the passive outcomes of what happens around them?

We can force ourselves to explore this hypothesis by starting from the positive and negative effects of the multidimensional process assuming the agency of men, women and the other gender identities not only as a reaction to social change. If commercial flows, mobility, communication, innovation and so on changed and, with them, time and space, different social identities took hold and promoted this transformation. It happened both in the negative definition of gender by the global prevailing neoliberalist and conservative protagonists (see at Butler's contribution) as in the positive connotation of gender as an accelerator of change – with a specific reference to sustainable development (as seen later).

It is not easy to discern a negative interpretation from a positive one and it is quickly evident that the consequences of globalization have to be read considering their casual factors too.

Therefore, Butler's interpretation of gender as a threat to globalization is very suggestive of those elements that are opposite, but also – and at the same time – bracing for the gender factor in global processes. The American philosopher recognizes traditional gender roles, socially ascribed to family, as a value reference that is important so as not to be misplaced in a phase of radical transformation of social institutions due to globalization, starting from the State: "The effort to fortify the heteronormative family through more autocratic moral and religious mandates – Butler underlines – seeks to stop queer alternatives to the family, single mothers, assisted reproductive technology to those out of wedlock, trans rights, all because *a*) they challenge collectively the heteronormative fantasy that sustains the idea of the nation, one that often depends upon a doubling of the two fathers (familial and state masculine leadership), but also *b*) relieves the State of having to provide financial assistance to dependent women and children".

Many examples – from Brazil with Bolsonaro, to Hungary with Orbán or Spain with the ultra-conservative Vox party – are mentioned by Butler in order to explain how the protec-

tion of traditional gender identities can try to restore the part of the social system that globalization changed and that institutions cannot control – so, an undesired effect, among many others, is more appreciated, such as the retrenchment of the State from welfare and new market opportunities in the private sector. What is impossible for these institutions (and religious ones too) – according to Butler – is the domination of social change declaring that "the radical changes in economic life, including the loss of basic structures of social welfare produce a heightened sense of precarity and fear among populations who are then told that it is 'gender ideology' that is breaking apart the family, destroying heterosexuality as a natural law, threatening both God's creative powers and civilization itself". Gender ideology, or simply, gender is increasingly recognised as a basic factor in social processes despite the conservative effort to define its evidence as an adverse effect of "bad globalization". We can consider (with Butler) as a negative consequence of globalization and of the institutional reaction to this phenomenon "that women and young and old people everywhere are subject to increasingly precarious work conditions, foreclosed horizons, and exposed to a moral message that they are individually responsible for conditions that have undermined their very capacity to work and act". But this negative aspect conceals the fact that these social actors – women, young and old people – are becoming the new actors in global processes: they were hidden before, both by the State and its welfare, in favour of indistinct members of the family and by the Market, of which the main recipient was the head of the family, the male bread-winner. We can affirm that, in the age of economic post-Fordist transformation, a more widespread schooling and interpersonal communication, they might appear as "new" social identities, with new roles and values that, at the same time, possess the cause and the result of the global change. In the view of social institutions and in the defence of their power, the new actors of the changing global world are recognized as a "threat": a negative definition of what they represent, that is, the new protagonists both in terms of quantitative presence and of cultural role in the changing world. What is tragic for the institutions is that they

can be more than a threat when they are excluded as "vulnerable minorities": they are not a minority, they can and must be the added value of the global process and, only then, will they be able to represent the defeat of the institutions compared to the opportunities that globalization can offer.

While the champions of the neoliberal globalization protect "the heteronormative family, sometimes violently, as the sole defence against devastating market forces", the same market forces rarely support, as Butler states, the global processes that are negatively linked with gender for many other reasons. We will try to focus on two cultural processes that affect gender in a global context and that can add to the attack of the conservatives that define gender as a threat.

The first, one of the most shared, is the expectation of a "globalization capacity to significantly reduce gender inequalities (that) still remains unmet", as Ruspini highlights. Gender is not only a danger for the achievement of positive results from globalization, but it is considered – and used – as a differentiating factor. If someone had expected that a global world could favor a collective participation of equal individuals to social life thanks to the "dominant narrative of globalization that emphasizes hypermobility, global communications, and the neutralization of place and distance", as Sassen noted (1996: 15), now (s)he is surprising by growing – sometimes new – forms of inequalities. Gender seems to be one of the most vivid factors of this increasing separation between the winners and losers of globalization everywhere, both in the Global North and in the Global South – that are themselves new definitions of not geographical areas of the world where the globalization has reinforced inequalities and where women are often the more vulnerable actors. Sassen herself claims that "an increasingly globalized world impacts on the rights and circumstances of historically disadvantaged groups, particularly women […] considering the global economy depends upon work done in particular places by particular persons" (Sassen 1996: 15.). She denies that globalization reduces inequalities and confirms that the traditional social differences are also the base for the global society. In this negative connotation of globalization, we are once again required to not only find the

gender condition as a consequence, but also as a cause. If a global system has been established, it has been so also thanks to those "pre-existing conditions that were biased against women, policy-making institutions neglect the gendered outcomes of globalization, and economic growth is dependent upon women's unpaid reproductive work and gender wage inequality". In this case, Ruspini, following Thorin (2001), correctly completes the analytical review of the global implications on gender and finds the causes of a social phenomenon that she tries to define in a neutral way. Globalization is further increasing existing inequalities and leading to new ones because it has engaged in social structures already stratified and also because its economic and political models are not completely new and different. Ruspini properly mentions Wichterich (2000) when arguing that "the strategic function of the globalized woman within the boarder project of globalization is the execution of unpaid and underpaid labor: the globalized woman is the voluntary worker who helps to absorb the shocks of social cutbacks and structural adjustment". This is also true beyond the neoliberal and colonial theorizations (Pareck, Wilcox 2018) that assume the capitalism-patriarchy formula at the base of the development of the globalized economy.

The second cultural process that concerns gender in a global context and one that is a very compelling issue for social scientists – who could face it by searching for more adequate methodological tools – is the misplacement of the meaning of gender due to power structures that neutralize each attempt for a cultural recognition of social diversity. We must pay close attention not to equivocate this cultural trend with the neoliberal conservative strategy of defending the inherited system of dominance and of reaction to the fear of a new gendered "society". The neutralization of gender is a natural condition for both the new institutions or political movements born after – and far from – the struggle for gender equality as well as the new generations due to their socialization in an apparently more balanced society. There is nothing having to do with masculine dominance, but more with the overcoming of biological and cultural identification in favor of other strategic

identification factors. If some scholars could interpret the neu-
tralization of gender as a reply to its ideologization in the age
of the globalization (Davis, Greenstein 2009), it is possible to
configure this trend as a linear evolution of a cultural phe-
nomenon and its transformations. After an initial phase of
emersion and claim for the social recognition of gender identi-
ty, gender has been established as an identifying factor – both
in a positive and negative way – and in recent times seems to
be institutionalized in order to be misplaced by its traditional
symbolic meaning. Therefore, it cannot be understood as the
outcome of the impact of globalization, as we have previously
claimed for gender as a threat and gender as a factor of inequality.

The effects of contemporary globalization on gender iden-
tities and relations can be interpreted both for their negative
and positive aspects in a very compelling way (Shiva 2005) be-
cause they are becoming "long-term" and are ready for a more
"complete" analysis. It permits to highlight the symmetrical
and positive trends of the negative processes described until
now and to confirm that in the positive trends we can not only
find the consequences of globalization, but also its causes.

We can identify at least three dimensions for the positive
logic nexus between globalization and gender.

The first one is clearly economic and paired with the neg-
ative phenomena of the subordinated role of gender for ne-
oliberalism and the economic gender inequalities. As the cause
of this negative nexus in a global world, we have stressed its
basis on female social positions and on the role in the job
market since the onset of globalization. We agreed upon the
definition of a post-Fordist economic model thanks to female
workers, even if in subordinated, underqualified, part-time
while working under similar conditions. Due to women's in-
creasing level of education, more and more highly educated
women have entered the job market, the very market that
globalization characterized for the integration of national
economies with global economy and the assumption of profit
as the main goal. The combination of these trends has favored
economic growth both in the short and long term due to trade
openness, new market opportunities, foreign direct investment
and the spread of information and communication technolo-

gies. As Ruspini claims, each of these processes have improved the situation of all citizens, including women.

Directly connected to the economic dimension, there is the second dimension, the political one. Women and other gender identities have established themselves as new actors in the global scenario, active agents that, even in an individualized world, can express their voice (Hirschman 1970) thanks to what Ruspini defines as the

proliferation of women's movements at the local level, and the emergence of transnational feminist networks (TFNs) working at the global level. If, on one hand, contemporary feminist groups and women's organizations remain rooted in local issues, on the other hand, they must also engage in information exchange, mutual support, and a combination of action towards the realization of their goals of equality and empowerment for women on an increasingly supra-national level to advance women's rights and gender equality issues beyond the nation-state (Baksh, Harcourt 2015).

These new collective agencies, based on gender issues, have achieved supranational and national recognition: we can refer to, for instance, the United Nations entities and the many World and macro-regional conferences that took place in the Nineties. We can therefore argue that gender is considered a crucial factor in the enforcement of power structures that try to adapt themselves to the current changes (in the Global North as in the Global South) in economic as well as political structures, in cultural as well as social representations with a new function attributed to women and weaker gender identities (LGBT+) and not with the recognition of "new" actors simply because they existed before globalization. If not for neoliberals and conservatives, political institutions, market and Third sector see gender identities – or better, "all genders" – as a target for achieving electors, consumers and supporters. For institutions, globalization becomes a tool that is more appealing because women and other gender identities appreciate it seen as challenging existing gender injustices and highlighting their multiple gender identities. If some scholars stress the limits of global female transnational movements as the exclusive kingdom of the Global North's women (Tohidi

2005) – those "who speak English, are better educated and socioeconomically more privileged, who can travel, who can go to conferences, who have access to cyberspace" as Ruspini states – the priorities of women who do not have access to the Internet or transnational networks now are a new universal, shared target (see Cao 2017).

The content of the latest connotation of gender is gender equality as an accelerating factor of sustainable development. This content connects the second and the third dimensions of the positive logic nexus between globalization and gender. The third one is cultural and complies with the evolution of the scientific debate about globalization and the challenges of gender identities associated with its multi-dimensional nature. The indisputable fact that there are "universal concerns that all women share and that should not hide particular conditions, inequalities, struggles, and activisms of different women at the local and national levels" as Ruspini states following Herr (2013), a common female condition pertains to the universal experience (Robertson 1992) of acting locally, but thinking globally, as a common awareness of living in a planetary dimension. In this case, gender is not neutralized or subordinated, but, in the shared condition favoured by the globalization, gender is

critical to achieving a wide range of objectives pertaining to sustainable development, from promoting economic growth and labour productivity, to reducing poverty and enhancing human capital through health and education, attaining food security, addressing climate change impacts and strengthening resilience to disasters, and ensuring more peaceful and inclusive communities. Based on this evidence, accelerating the pace of advancing gender equality in all spheres of society leads to a more rapid increase in progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda (UNDP 2018).

Sustainability becomes more than a complex system of goals and targets to achieve. It can be defined as a paradigm (Nocenzi, Sannella 2020) which integrates positive and negative implications of globalization on gender. Only a sustainable development safeguards the planet in its near future and the achievement of the SDGs will not be attained if women –
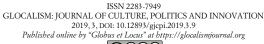
who accounted for 3.7 billion persons in 2017, or 49.6 per cent of the world's population (UNDESA 2017) – are denied access to resources and opportunities for education, employment and decision-making (UNDP 2018). In this way, human development – in economic as well as political and cultural terms – coincides with the total recognition of gender: it "requires political will and stronger multi-stakeholder collaboration involving not only national and local governments, but also civil society, the private sector, academia and the media" (UNDP 2018). The role of all the institutions is important and, among them, the function of scientific institutions is strategic for the "systematic design and collection of and access to high-quality, reliable and timely gender-disaggregated data, essential to implementing effective and evidence-based policies" (UNDP 2018).

The increasingly evident ineluctability of sustainable development, as a result of the globalization, seems to overcome the dually counterposed positions of gender and attributes a strategical role to this identifying factor, evolving gender identities beyond the globalization experience.

This new paradigm guarantees evidences on multiple benefits of advancing gender equality in economy (development, poverty reduction, good health and education; recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work), politics (political participation, preventing conflict and achieving peaceful societies), culture and environment (food security and agricultural production; climate change, disaster risk management and natural resource management, eliminating all forms of gender-based violence). For the institutions and, among them, the scientists (especially social scientists), the challenge is to identify the equality of gender diversity, the interdependency of actors, the mutual improving of targets, the integration of different outcomes as the new directions of the social processes. An urgent revision of the basic concepts of the social sciences is required in order to interpret the final evolution of the meaning of gender both today and in the future.

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