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# Feminist policy and platform economy: insights, methods and challenges

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**Abstract:** This essay knits a dialogue between feminist political theory and feminist economy aiming at how to address the multiple challenges of platform economy nowadays. The essay's purpose is to articulate perspectives and tools from feminist economic policy in order to generate a gender equal and intersectional platform economy. The essay first presents an overview of feminist political analysis and a theoretical evolution on feminist economics drawing on the notion of work, the working conditions, and the collective representation in the platform economy. Then it explores the aims and limits of feminist policy-making and economic feminist approaches—merged and transcended—focusing on governmental measures and feminist vindications. Third, the essay provides gender tools in the field of economic policy and outlines suggestions to favour a feminist path in the platform economy in the context of today's complex environments.

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*Thesis XI: Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.*

Karl Marx (1845), XI Theses on Feuerbach<sup>1</sup>

*Thesis 11: Feminism for the 99 percent calls on all radical movements to join together in a common anticapitalist insurgency.*

Arruzza, Bhattacharya, Fraser (2019), *Feminism for the 99 Percent: A manifesto*

This essay knits a dialogue between feminist political theory and feminist economy aiming at addressing the multiple challenges of the platform economy nowadays. Three of these, namely: working conditions in the platform economy, collective representation and the notion of work itself, need to be tackled from a gender and intersectional perspective to overcome current obstacles. Likewise, gender policies in the economic arena have been very fruitful, they have materialised in concrete initiatives, but so far have been studied little. The essay's purpose is to articulate approaches and tools from feminist economic policy in order to help to generate a platform economy that puts the sustainability of life at the centre. The paper is structured as follows: first it presents an overview of feminist political analysis followed by a brief theoretical evolution on Feminist Economics drawing on key gender issues in the platform economy. It then explores the aims, limits, strengths and opportunities of the feminist economic policy-making. Thirdly, the essay provides methods, measures and gender tools in the field of gender economic policy to be applied to the platform economy gender challenges. Finally, the conclusions examine outlines and suggestions to favour a feminist platform in the context of today's complex economic and political environments. Whilst the focus is on the field of economic public policies, social movements and workers' demands will also be considered.

## **Feminist political analyses and feminist economics**

### **Keys to feminist political analyses and practices**

Gender equality policy constitutes an important part of feminist political analyses,

1. *Die Philosophen haben die Welt nur verschieden interpretiert; es kommt aber darauf an, sie zu verändern.*

mainly the study of policy-making from a gender perspective. Policy is the result of processes managed by governmental bodies to plan, implement and evaluate interventions; that is a set of actions taken to achieve a goal in relation to a social problem (Dye, 1984; Chaqués, 2004). Public policies are the output of policy, the results of the policy-making process, the outcome of governmental actions on all areas such as housing, budget or mobility. These policies can be developed with or without the involvement of other actors or stakeholders at various levels. Gender equality policies “are put into place with the aim of making the economy, society and politics more equal” (Kantola and Lombardo 2017, p. 160).

Parallel to the development of a gender public agenda, since the 1970s, feminist scholars have contributed to public policy studies extending their scope in different directions. They have challenged the neutrality of the policy-making process, a neutrality that integrates, at least three basic components of study: (1) Policy goals, the framing of problems and solutions, (2) The concrete tools and instruments for their implementation, and (3) the operational setting—different governmental levels, and the actors involved (Lombardo and Meier, 2015; Lombardo, Meier, Verloo, 2012).

Feminist scholars have also enriched the notion of policy by broadening what is and should be ‘public’ (Young, 1996; Lombardo and Meier, 2015). The ‘personal is political’ slogan has deeply changed the political agenda turning the ‘private’ into ‘public’. That is achieving to progressively integrate topics that were not considered as political, therefore not a ‘legitimate’ policy issues until the feminist considered them (Lombardo and Meier, 2015; Kantola and Lombardo, 2017). For instance: domestic relations including care work; gender violence; intimate citizenship issues such as sexual and reproductive rights, LGBTQ rights or marriage. These considerations are key to the understanding of general political analysis, and especially of policy-making, of which one of the main tasks is to turn theory into actual practice, bridging theory and practice.

Building on earlier feminist policy overviews (Mazey, 2000; Mazur, 2002; Orloff and Palier, 2009), Kantola and Lombardo (2017) distinguish five feminist approaches to political analysis, stressing the fact that “different forms of gender analysis are not necessarily feminist” (2017, p. 17). These analytical approaches to the political—including the policy-making—embed different questions in each of them and can result in diverse methods and tools to confront detected inequalities. These are, in short:

(1) **Women and political analysis** focuses on women’s presence, needs, interests,

voices and rights, among others.

(2) **Gender and political analysis** sheds light on the structural and complex construction of inequalities through gender hierarchical relations.

(3) In the **Deconstruction and political analysis** approach, gender has a fluid meaning that is being constructed in the political debates and processes. This perspective has made a major contribution to the policy analysis, as it favours the study of discourses, framing political problems.

(4) **Intersectionality and political analysis** focus on how the intersection of gender with inequalities such as class, race, age, disabilities, LGBTQ issues, among others impact on people's lives and have to be tackled by policies taking into account this approach.

(5) Finally, **Post-deconstruction** and political analysis, which is not yet fully considered in gender and politics handbooks, nor in mainstream political analysis, presents concepts and notions that spring from feminist new materialism raising concerns on issues such as emotions, collective bodies and affects that are also seen as collective, social, political and economic. These five approaches are frameworks to put theory into the practice of policy-making, that is to address social problems, vindications and needs, especially those that are significant to gender equity and social justice. In this essay I reflect on which gender policies and tools should be put in place to guarantee a feminist path in the platform economy.

Parallel to the rise of the platform economy, this economy has been central to the concerns of governments around the world (Wood et al., 2019; Renau et al., 2021). Labour legislation changes from country to country, as much as the taxation of this economy is a priority on many governmental agendas, also at an international level. The platform economy blurs certain boundaries unprecedentedly.

Building on previous research (Codagnone et al., 2016; Woodcock & Graham, 2020; Wood et al., 2019), Renau, et al., (2021) refer to the platform economy as any form of economy mediated by digital platforms. It is also presented in the literature as the sharing or gig economy and precarious and among others, discriminatory working conditions are being a central issue of concern (Gregg and Andrijašević, 2019; Wood, et al., 2019; Heidaripour and Forlano, 2016).

## **Feminist economics in digital expansion**

According to Agenjo-Calderón and Galvez-Muñoz (2019, p. 138), “the general ob-

jective of Feminist Economics is to transcend a reductionist, biased and hierarchical vision and to create new economic concepts that place people's daily life in the center (...) Feminist Economics is an ethical-political framework for social transformation and for the construction of an economy that works on the basis of justice and equality". In the essay, I explore the notion of platform work, the working conditions and the collective representation in the platform economy and highlight feminist policy and economic proposals to overcome challenges.

There are some main trends encompassed by the different feminist economic perspectives. One of these common characteristics is that gender is a fundamental category of analysis: that means it is important to show the specific situation of women and their needs, to study the differences and inequalities between women and men and increasingly use an intersectional approach to analyse diverse identities and the power systems. In the feminist economy, there is also a need to value the unpaid domestic and care-giving work, and this doesn't require a recognition through money. To value what has been hidden, new tools and methods have to be freshly created. For example, human and sustainable indicators have to be taken into account (Beneria, Berik, and Floro, 2016; Agenjo-Calderón and Galvez-Muñoz, 2019, pp. 141-142). The processes that guarantee life and social provision are central to the feminist economy, moving away from a competitive approach between human activities—productive over reproductive—and include perspectives such as the affects, or the contribution, of political and social activism to economics. Moreover, time is also essential to the understanding of feminist economics. Its organisation can generate multiple gender inequalities: women work more, rest less, and are more available for others (Berbel and Ruiz, 2021); women make up the majority of the part-time workers and the ones taking leaves from their jobs to take care of dependent people. Time poverty is mainly female and a common trend in single parents, who are basically women. Drawing on digital labour perspectives, Gardner (2019) shows how time poverty linked to the division of labour, contributes to deskilling in the market. Finally, a last common trend to point out in feminist economics is the willingness to propose recommendations and a call for action to change unfair relations (Agenjo-Calderón and Galvez-Muñoz, 2019).

Unfolding the notion of platform work, capitalist mercantile rationality, established in the industrial revolution, excluded unpaid activities such as care or domestic work (Gorz, 1995; Moreno, 2003; Federici, 2004). Industrial capitalism with tight links to the growth of liberal democracies favoured the separation and hierarchisation of the productive and the reproductive spheres (Carrasco, 1998; Gardiner, 1999; Scott, 1993; Pateman, 1996). Women were pushed to stay in the do-

mestic sphere: undervalued and not taken into account in the mercantile and monetarised public sphere, the high valued one (Ruiz, 2013). The sexual division of labour is therefore based on a subsequent separation of tasks between women (social reproduction) and men (production). It is one of the concepts that brings together the most diverse authors (Borderías, Carrasco, Alemany, 1994; Barrett and Macintosh, 1980; Beneria, 1981; Scott, 1993; Pateman, 1996) and that still explains many of the inequalities present today. The platform economy presents quite a large set of them, updating gender discriminations and obstacles.

Current gender intersectional experiences and inequalities in work show that public and private spheres and activities are at the expense of the accumulation of capital (Charnock et al., 2014). Old patterns and traditional gender relations are being stressed in terms of what and how tasks are valued. For instance, social reproduction fails to be fully recognised, it is mainly invisible, not well distributed either between women and men, nor among the state and the private sector and when it is mercantilised it is performed in precarious conditions. For instance, the case of platform-based food delivery workers in the United States being mainly women is an example of this (Milkman et al., 2020). At the same time, platform work also blurs diverse binary frontiers, creating new intersection if gender is crossed also with class and race, LGBTQ elements and disabilities among others. On the one hand, the entrepreneur/employee dichotomy is unbalanced by a constant development of the platforms (Heidaripour and Forlano, 2016). The nature of these jobs, based on the connection of customers, digital platforms and workers blurs the dichotomy of the private/public spheres. Moreover, the relationship between the work done in social media and the unpaid sphere of social reproduction has been outlined in the notion of 'digital housewife', where the Economics of Affect plays an important role, too (Jarrett, 2015). Finally, more research is needed to understand why structural elements of platform work have reinforced the exclusion of certain activities from employment relations (Gregg and Andrijasevic, 2019).

What do platform working conditions look like from a feminist perspective? Does the platform economy maintain, decrease, or increase the gender inequalities governing the traditional labour market? Although the sharing and platform economy has often been pictured as an alternative to the capitalist approach (Heidaripour and Forlano, 2016; Fuster Morell, 2019), especially in terms of its potentialities, figures state quite the opposite.

Digital platforms adopt diverse structures and scholars have shown differences if they follow a corporate or a pro-common and cooperative model (Fuster Morell,

2019). It is stated that less women participate in the platform economy than in the traditional market and the corporate model has a greater number of women producers compared to the pro-common one (Fuster Morell, 2019). Drawing on a European survey, Urzi Brancati et al. (2019) report that 12.5% of adults had worked at least once through a digital platform, 11.5% in Portugal and 12% in the UK—where 3.6% of the population considered it as their main employment.

There is evidence of a persistent sexual division of labour—female workers are less likely to get hired for jobs such as programming but more likely to get jobs in customer service or cleaning services—even more widely prevalent in these sectors (Hunt and Samman, 2019). Women are also less likely than men to work regularly in this economy and the gender pay gap persists (Schmid-Drüner, 2016). Women have to face discriminations combined with race, age and aspects of appearance (Schmid-Drüner, 2016; Milkmann et al., 2020).

Employment in the platform economy has many precariousness factors, with time organisation being one of the most relevant, in which apparently good features—flexibility—can easily turn into a patriarchal trap. In Europe, figures show that platform employment is usually part-time, although workers might be required to work at very short notice (Schmid-Drüner, 2016). In certain sectors, for example food delivery in the US, many of the women workers are students or combine this job with caregiving commitments (Milkmann et al, 2020). In the case of women working in the platform based-food delivery sector, this employment—apart from monetising their domestic skills—favours balancing paid work with domestic activities because of the flexible time schedule (Milkmann et al., 2020). This flexibility also has negative effects—for instance the ‘mixing-up’ of work and non-work activities impacting on work-life balance. Furthermore, platform work promotes a rapid pace of work without breaks (Schmid-Drüner, 2016). Literature highlights that this economy is providing low-skilled, low-remunerated and precarious jobs, especially for the ‘on-demand’ platform workers (Schmid-Drüner, 2016; Rocha, 2018; Hunt and Samman, 2019). Platform unregulated work is rising, and it is generating ‘digital slavery’ (Qiu, 2016) worldwide but there is a major geographical segregation between work in the Global South and in the Global North (Lehdonvirta et al, 2019). Other labour risks have not yet been sufficiently addressed from a gender and intersectional perspective, for example the psychological factors of the ‘on demand philosophy’ or the rating/reputation system (Schmid-Drüner, 2016). In this sense, more research is also required to shed light on gender violence, sexual harassment and the perception of security of female workers in the platform economy. In Spain rider women have recently de-



nounced violent situations they sometimes have to face with customers—waiting for them naked at home. By showing their phone numbers and profile pictures, platforms generate a more insecure labour context for women workers; this is added to the determination of their ratings (Congostrina, 2021).

Another trend of employment conditions in the platform economy that could be worth studying from a feminist approach is isolation. This is a characteristic that has impacted on the domestic and care workers' collective representation, too (Ruiz, 2013), and that leads to the topic of collective action and bargaining in the platform economy. As regulations vary from context to context, so is the nature of the occupation with clear impacts on the working conditions—with the self-employed either having all their workers' rights externalised by the platforms or full-time workers for the platforms with total social security coverage—and in the possibilities of representing their demands in the economy platform. Although much research is still needed in this area, trends are showing that representation of the platform workers is not following the classical trade union path (Woodcock, 2019; Hidalgo Cordero and Salazar Daza, 2021). Women's action is taking the lead in innovative forms in the digital era, especially sustaining strikes and being key to the organisation of collective events even in masculinised sectors (Hidalgo Cordero and Salazar Daza, 2021) or by generating secure and only women platform structures<sup>2</sup>.

## **Mapping (radical) feminist economic policy**

As stated above, the feminist economy is fruitful in proposing recommendations and frameworks of action. In this section, I will gather feminist economic policy approaches to contribute towards outlining a more gender justice path for the platform economy. Feminist scholars and activists drawing on former economic crisis experiences have been particularly exhaustive developing approaches and proposals for action based on the economic crisis that started as a financial one in 2008. The explanation of this recession was enriched by feminist scholars who questioned the normative assumptions of the economic crisis by integrating gender, food, care, humanitarian and ecological concerns into a description of a 'multiple crisis' (Grisoni and Ruiz, 2019; Pérez Orozco, 2011; Larrañaga et al., 2011; Fraser, 2014). This structuralist approach has to link action towards the interaction of all the oppression and exploitation systems: racism, heteropatriarchy, capitalism, etc.

2. Les Mercedes is a courier cooperative of women riders based in Barcelona that has an ethical, sustainable and inclusive approach. <https://mensajerialesmercedes.com/>



The crisis topic has been a connecting issue between feminist political and feminist economic analysis exploring the gendered changes in institutions, the consequences for equality policy, the impacts of austerity measures, as well as the feminist and intersectional struggles and resistances against neoliberal politics (Kantola and Lombardo, 2017b). The ongoing crisis scenario has acted as a catalyst for progressive political change and in the opening up of new possibilities in terms of gender agenda (Walby, 2011; Rubery, 2014). The impact of neoliberal measures and a (re)imposing of a conservative gender order in diverse contexts has also entailed the mobilisation of social groups, the resurgence of the social democratic project or a feminist agenda (Lux and Wöhl, 2014; Walby, 2011; Grisoni and Ruiz, 2019). Feminist radical democratic forms of discourse and action have come to the forefront especially in the economic field with a transformative potential of the neoliberal approach that pervades (Grisoni and Ruiz, 2019; Klein, 2017). This is embodied in Arruzza, Bhattacharya and Fraser's call (2018, p. 21) in their *Feminist Manifesto*: "Thesis 5: Gender oppression in capitalist societies is rooted in the subordination of social reproduction to production for profit. We want to turn things right side up." I will briefly explore this potential in the platform economy.

## 2. Aims and limits of feminist economic policy

### Feminist policy: approaches and strategies

In this section, the essay draws on feminist policy analysis in order to highlight the aims and limits of what and how economic policy addresses gender issues. Here I review perspectives and orientations put in place by governments to contribute to defining the feminist path in platform economy. The **Women and Policy** approach suggests that the role of women in society has to be made visible in policy-making and therefore the impact of policies on women should be analysed along with the presence of women in the policy processes (Kantola and Lombardo, 2017; Lombardo, Meier and Verloo, 2013). While this approach provides information about who is empowered in the policy-making and who might be marginalised it also encompasses a rather limited notion of gender represented by 'women' and 'men'. Gender economic policies located in this approach could be specific measures to promote women's presence in employment sectors where they are represented, for example the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and digital sector, police forces or firefighters' corps.

The **Gender and Policy approach** highlights gender biases reproduced by policy-making, it also questions the supposed neutrality of the policy processes and proposes strategies in order to integrate gender into all public policies. It follows,

both a descriptive and a prescriptive strategy (Lombardo, Meier, and Verloo, 2017; Kantola and Lombardo, 2017). Its prescriptive will has made the Gender and Policy approach a fruitful contributor to gender methods and tools in the policy sphere. Scholars outline strategies, quality criteria, and different paths to achieve gender equality that enrich policy analysis (Walby, 2005; Lombardo, Meier, and Verloo, 2017). For example, Squires' (2005) proposal on visions of equality—inclusion, difference, transformation—assesses decades of gender policies with the connections to equal treatment measures, positive actions and gender mainstreaming.

At the beginning of this century, **gender mainstreaming** was regarded as a promising strategy, a concept that embedded gender policy implementation, a (velvet) revolution (Verloo, 2001). Over these decades, scholars, practitioners and gender experts have presented the opportunities, as well as the mechanisms and the failures of gender mainstreaming. For Kantola and Lombardo (2017, p. 165) “gender mainstreaming epitomises a gender analysis of policy”. The Platform for Action of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) explicitly endorsed gender mainstreaming and urged governments to establish it, and the European Union also adopted it as a policy strategy. As an international political mandate, gender mainstreaming made its way adjusting methods and objectives to concrete national, regional and local contexts. The group of Specialists of the Council of Europe depict gender mainstreaming as “the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making” (1999, p. 16). A definition that has been profusely quoted and used as a roadmap to operationalise multiple initiatives in the gender mainstreaming strategy. Gender mainstreaming explicitly aims at being transformative as it tackles the supposed gender neutrality of the existing policy agenda and it focuses on the machinery, the structure and functioning of the governmental organisation (Verloo, 2001; Verloo, 2005). Scholars have been analysing the factors of its ineffective implementation. These have been linked to the existence of competing definitions of gender equality that makes assessment difficult; the scarcity of specific governmental bodies and, also the possible dismantling of infrastructures created to support women. Another obstacle is the fact that gender mainstreaming is based on efforts towards voluntarism and binding commitments can rarely be found. A final obstacle is the lack of gender awareness and knowledge of the policy-makers who are supposed to implement the policies (Lombardo, Meier, and Verloo, 2017; Verloo, 2001; Walby, 2005).

Specific gender mainstreaming and other proposals entailed in the Gender and

Policy approach have greatly contributed to the advancement of gender tools. In the following section, I present measures and gender mainstreaming tools and their scope for a feminist transformation of the platform economy. Gender tools are key to the promotion of gender equality policies, nevertheless, scholars have stressed the dangers of depolitisation of a feminist project in the policy-making through “the governmental use of gender impact assessment, statistical data, benchmarks, targets, and indicators” (Lombardo, Meier, and Verloo, 2017, p. 663). Many reasons have been developed to highlight the recurrent risks of the reliance on technical solutions, for instance that these are not likely to transform organisations and unequal gender relations policies (Verloo, 2005). Another one is that this (neutral) ‘toolkit approach’ might be easier for policymakers to implement rather than to put in place policies aimed at changing established inequalities (Lombardo and Meier, 2006), not forgetting that in certain governments there is also a patriarchal opposition towards feminist approaches (Stratigaki, 2005, as quoted in Lombardo, Meier, and Verloo, 2017). Above all, technification should not demean the feminist objectives of gender mainstreaming.

The **Deconstruction and Policy approach** “(...) signifies fundamentally questioning and challenging the contours of policy and analysing what policies mean for gender” (Kantola and Lombardo, 2017, p. 169). It takes into account not only how policy-making is gendered—as the previous approach already did—but it also focuses on how policies can be gendering (Bacchi, 1999, 2009). Discourses have the power to create reality and represent political problems in one way or another. Therefore, policies draw the borders of sex, gender, bodies and other concepts through how they are formulated. The policy-making itself and especially the discursive and framing policy process is very important to this approach that signifies a highly contested field by different actors (Bacchi, 1999; Lombardo, Meier and Verloo 2009; Ferrée, 2009). The Deconstruction and Policy approach questions the rigid gender categories of men and women and constitutes the subjects as women, transgender, men, homosexual, bisexual or heterosexual subjects, despite failing to address intersectionality properly. This approach also favours a transformative perspective through policy framing analysis which allows different and alternative problem and solution representations to emerge, as well as voices, actors and submergéd norms (Kantola and Lombardo, 2017).

Although it is crucial for the advancement of feminist economic policy, the use of an intersectional perspective, the **Intersectional Policy approach** still remains in its initial stages. This analysis is relevant to scrutinise the quality of public policies, regarding the inclusiveness of social groups as a result of the interactions of gen-

der with class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and identity or disability. Scholars have highlighted the many challenges that Intersectional policy analysis is still failing to take into account: how to study intersectionality in policies or how to not neglect the autonomous impacts of a concrete inequality (Kantola and Lombardo, 2017). Moreover, the intersectional approach is still failing to address several issues, usually connected to the complexity of the operationalisation of the perspective. Coll-Planas and Solà-Morales (2019, p. 6) warn about resistances that go along with the intersectional approach, among others having too high expectations or exactly the other way around, that it is a “complication that is not worth pursuing”. A final feminist policy approach is the **post-deconstruction** one. Related to a ‘new materialism’, these analyses focus on biopolitics, the relation of the humankind to natural environment, economic structures and technologies or bodily experiences in daily life. It opens up policy to new topics and disruptive perspectives (Kantola and Lombardo, 2017). Recently, among feminist economic policy, care and affections have been incorporated as priorities and relevant frames in the policy agenda of a variety of governments. Examples include the Democratisation of the Care Strategy of Barcelona City Council (AB, 2017) or the Block of Care experience of Bogotá’s Municipality (Bogotá, 2020), a district care system that seeks to recognise, and redistribute care work in the city as well as to reduce women poverty.

## **Feminist economic policy: proposals and action**

As presented in this essay, beyond the variety of policy approaches there is a wide variety of feminist proposals to address current economic gender inequalities through economic policy measures. These are not isolated from each other, but in permanent dialogue. These could also be divided into two perspectives (Agenjo, 2011; Grisoni and Ruiz, 2019). Drawing on these approaches I will identify non-governmental proposals and actions related to the platform economy.

On the one hand, there is a ‘merged’ strategy anchored in the market with a focus on production that has been reviewed with a gender perspective. This approach merges the market and the domestic sphere ensuring both are granted the same value and analytical status. It also makes women’s hidden work visible in the economy. A social democratic approach is stressed by formulating proposals aimed at reshaping the financial economy and generating new employment models that are socially and ecologically sustainable (Larrañaga et al., 2011) and promoting a work-life balance.

On the other hand, a ‘*transcending*’ strategy has been also highlighted (Grisoni and

Ruiz, 2019). Here the focus is on a sustainable living argument which places people's and nature's needs at the centre of economic decisions (Beneria, 1999; Kuiper and Sap, 1996; Carrasco, 2011). This approach transcends the dichotomy of employment and domestic work in relation to productive and reproductive spheres. It takes into account the social reproduction agenda, migration and international care chain issues and identifies all those topics linked to the *multiple crisis* (Pérez Orozco, 2011; Herrero, 2017). This is a more radical democratic approach which stresses among its solutions: "the socialization of the responsibility of care; business tax on care; the promotion of community projects; tackling private property and putting a focus on body politics and ecological concerns - in conjunction with traditional care policies such as the public provision of nurseries and dependency centres, measures to support dependency situations; the implementation of mechanisms that allow for the collectivization of rights such as pension systems and promoting high quality universalised health and education systems" (Grisoni and Ruiz, 2019, p. 158).

An example of the **merged approach** is the European Women's Lobby's Purple Pact. A Feminist Approach to the Economy (2019). This Purple Pact is based on three pillars: (1) A new macro-economic policy framework based on economic, social and environmental justice addressing multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination from an intersectional perspective. The feminist approach to macro-economic policy includes fiscal policies that benefit women and the well-being of all; not cutting back public services that can increase women's un-paid work; increasing public spending as a long-term collective investment; applying gender budgeting and analysing the economic cost of gender violence. (2) Care should be seen as a collective need that requires public responsibility; it is an investment as essential as technology and a right; women's unpaid work should also be counted in a country's GDP; the provision of care services is totally related to the achievement of equality between women and men therefore a care deal is urgently needed. This includes investment in care provisions, work-life balance and valuing the care sector regarding working conditions. (3) The third pillar is the labour market (2019, pp. 24-27). Although employment is shown as "becoming more informal, more precarious and difficult to access" for women, the labour market is mainly framed as "changing". The European Union (EU) urged to adopt a holistic strategy on equality between women and men to address all women and all forms of discrimination they suffer. This pillar of the Purple Pact is centred on the digital and gig economy. The first one is pictured with a gender transformative potential and as an opportunity for women's social-economic independence, just as if a feminist economic perspective is applied. In turn, several gender intersectional risks of the gig economy

are pointed out. One of them is related to the labour market and the solidification of casual labour (short-term or one-off hire) that unprotects workers. The other obstacle that is voiced is the representation problem: as the majority of the platform economy workforce is not unionised it can generate problems to negotiate for standardised pay rates, social protections or access to parental or sick leave payments. These last examples provide an opportunity to present an example in relation to the **transcending strategy**.

While the merge approach calls on the trade unions to provide a solution for failed workers' representation in the platform economy, the transcending strategy aims at a different path of action. Drawing from a collective action frame of analysis, the 'strike' is an excellent example of this feminist radical approach. Social movements frame their collective action around selectively chosen symbols of cultural tools that political promoters creatively convert into frames for collective action (Tarrow, 1997, p. 210). The strike is an essential collective action frame originally from the workers' movement that has been radically reinterpreted by feminist activists from a variety of perspectives. It enlarges both the subject and the type of work object of the traditional strike (Ruiz, 2013). Not taking into account only women's strikes that occurred the last third of the 19th century and the first third of the 20th, for decades an inclusive or equality feminism has pushed for women's participation in 'traditional strikes.' This second millennium started with a Global Women Strike calling "to stop the world to change it". Only women were invited to take part in an action that expanded the classic strike to all works that women do, that is: including unpaid care and domestic work. Being part of this strike empowers women and recognizes these invisible tasks (Ruiz, 2013). The classical strike generates dissatisfaction among feminist activists for not recognizing the experiences in domestic and care work and for uncovering exploitation and oppression relations in paid jobs, where women are usually overrepresented. In this enlargement process the strike promoted by feminists integrates paid and unpaid jobs and by incorporating precariousness and social class, also life and the political fight or the possibility of the strike itself. Housewives, precarious subjects, migrant persons without papers, are called to join the new feminist strikes that culminated in 2018 in a huge International Feminist Strike on 8 March. The platform economy worldwide struggles are also enlarging the notion and practice of striking. This was the case in London in 2016 with the riders strikes where the technology put in place for capital and to control workers was hacked by the workforce (Shenker, 2019). Woodcock (2019) suggests that the 'unorganisable workers' as the riders were called have created international connections showing that they are not isolated, they have created a transnational solidarity and have confronted the platform's lack of negotiation. In

these fights, women have played an important role. For example, the group of women who founded the Gig Workers Collective in the United States and organised nationwide strikes but had never met in person (Levinson, 2020). Moreover, these networks that have transcended the gig economy linking with the traditional one, uniting precarious and exploited workers who usually are not interesting for traditional trade unions. As the Deliver union Berlin that has supported the struggle of the “Kellys”, a Spanish organisation of hotel maids that is subverting the labour relations through their autonomous representation of their rights beyond traditional trade unions.

### **3. Feminist policy and platform economy—tools and measures**

This section focuses on the practice of feminist economic policies. It presents examples of successful gender policy tools that have been designed to diagnose gender inequalities and also measures which have been implemented to overcome those injustices. It addresses economic issues from the functional and structural side of organisations promoting deep changes and also as a policy in relation to the labour market, the care and domestic economy, poverty, precariousness and rights as well as other fields that should be taken into account. On the one hand, feminist economic policies serve as a significant learning to draw from through the gender mainstreaming experience. On the other hand, the platform and gig economies embody challenges that could be better faced by integrating a gender perspective in the functioning and by ensuring suitable transforming policy and regulation.

#### **Economic gender tools: what use for the platform economy?**

Despite the danger of technification of gender tools, the pinkwashing threat linked to many actions that seek to counterbalance inequalities and even the co-optation risks—and reality—pointed out by scholars (Fraser, 2013), and despite its weaknesses, gender mainstreaming provides an exceptional framework to put in practice measures aimed at transforming gender biases in policy practices, mechanisms and norms. Scholars have extensively provided theoretical and technical guidelines to integrate a gender perspective in the core of organisations and especially in the functioning of governmental bodies (Bacchi, 1999; Walby, 2005; Verloo, 2005; Bustelo and Lombardo, 2007; Alfama and Cruells, 2010).

In addition, local, regional, national and international institutions, according to their needs and expertise, have also produced their own tools and methods in the



process of institutionalising gender policies. The creation of specialised permanent and ad-hoc bodies as well as ensuring gender training for policy and decision-makers are key to the advancement of gender mainstreaming. Also, to further the participation of the civil society mainly the feminist and women's movement through coproduction methodologies, or enlarging accountability and consultation by, for example promoting shadow reports. Gender mainstreaming also requires developing specific methodologies to integrate a gender perspective in the planning, the implementation and evaluation of public policies—plans, programmes—and also regulations, including gender impact assessment and comprehensive gender indicators systems. In particular ex-ante and post-facto evaluation have been essential to the development of gender tools and gender mainstreaming. Finally, a good implementation of gender mainstreaming requires guaranteeing the use of an inclusive and non-sexist communication where needed.

The technification process of gender policy-making – promoting the bureaucratic side and reducing the political one - also presents positive aspects that should be stressed. Usually these tools, through their innovative and critical methods, improve the effectiveness, efficiency and the transparency of public policies (López and Ruiz, 2021). Moreover, the constant feminist and scientific demand for gender desegregated data is at the core of the bodies in charge of gender policies. Obtaining them on a permanent basis is essential for an accurate diagnosis and therefore errorless planning. These indicator systems have also been extremely useful in order to broaden the notion of gender equality. By integrating issues such as domestic and care work, time organisation, life sustainability and other topics voiced by feminists as political, the policy agenda has been transformed. This has been particularly significant in the economic policy arena.

Gender budgeting which means the elaboration of budgets from a gender perspective, identifying implications and effects of revenue and expenditure policies on women and girls in relation to men and boys (Elson 1999) is probably the most well-known feminist economic policy. Gender budgeting is regulated at a European level and in many countries also at a national, regional and even local level, nevertheless its practice and results are uneven and not homogeneous. Certainly, to increase the knowledge, to review it and finally to redistribute public expenditure is fundamental to gender equality goals. The scope of gender budgeting is seriously limited by the fact that the production of a gender budgeting report is usually mandatory, but the results are not binding.

Beyond gender budgeting there are other economic policies that are being reviewed through a gender perspective by the use of tools and methods. Fiscal poli-

cy is essential to gender equality and although the analysis of its profound impacts is slowly moving, showing not only current problems but also how fiscal policies have a bearing on pensions (Medialdea and Pazos, 2011; IQ, 2016), there are still few concrete measures proposed and implemented (DSGPT, 2018, 2019, 2020). The gender impact assessments of Barcelona City Council on taxation regulations and public prices to access municipal facilities and resources are an example of diagnosis and proposals to further gender equality into local fiscal policy. Fiscal policy has two main elements: taxation and spending. The Purple Pact (2020) of the European Women's Lobby urges tackling both. In this sense the EWL demands that taxation policies have a redistributive effect with the aim of an equalisation of wealth between women and men and an increase in investments in public services, particularly care services; governments have to raise taxes progressively, refrain from VAT as a means to increase public venue and ensure effective participation of women's organisations in the economic governance (EWL, 2020, p. 29).

Grants and subsidies are another field of work that aim to achieve a more gender equal redistribution of public expenses. They have also been used as a tool through different methodologies and formula that usually converge in putting in place gender criteria (Lesmes, 2009; AB-PJG, 2016). Moreover, work on both the recognition and economic redistribution sphere is also performed whenever gender criteria—parity tribunals, among others—are integrated in the awards given by the city, as well as being a distinction policy of a government which balances the number of women and men in all the categories.

Finally, the procurement policy is an excellent economic field to be reviewed through gender tools. As major contractors and investors, governments have an impact on the labour market and the economic side effects of the services and products they contract. Governments are putting in place a number of different gender clauses which are being integrated in the procurement policy, generating regulations in different fields: parity in the teams developing the services; requirement of gender training, equality plans, measures against sexual harassment, measures to establish an equal work-life balance; the promotion of female recruitment in sectors where women are underrepresented; LGBTQ anti-discrimination measures and the use of an inclusive communication. Both Madrid and Barcelona are local governments with a gender-responsive public procurement strategy. Belgium's national government is also leading this strategy and EIGE, the European Institute for Gender Equality, is promoting gender-responsive procurement as a gender mainstreaming tool.

These tools and measures are significant for public institutions with a focus on

policy-making. That means that many of them could be useful to regulate the platform economy and also be incorporated in all sorts of organisations and therefore implemented structurally in the platform economy.

## 4. Conclusions and challenges

I have examined how the feminist economy highlights main gender and intersectional inequalities in the platform economy, namely in relation to working conditions, collective representation and the changing notion of work in the digital context. These challenges should be urgently addressed and therefore I have also proposed how feminist policy and especially feminist economic policies can be of service.

By reviewing the different feminist policy approaches and linking them to feminist economic policy measures and proposals I have started to put together two areas of theory and practice whose connections have been little studied together. This dialogue, drawing on examples of the digital and sharing economy, has been fruitful to contributing to generate a feminist path in the platform economy. Further research and reflections on this connection is still required. Feminist policy has more than half a century of practice, but the trajectory of feminist economic policy is shorter, however it has been very much nourished with vindications and proposals from the women's and feminist movement. Economic gender mainstreaming tools—gender budgeting, taxation, public procurements, etc.—as stated show a great variety of methods that help the advancement of good governance and social justice. In addition, the classification of the diverse economic proposals into the merged and the transcendent feminist economic approaches is useful to cover all the elements required to work for gender equality.

All of these public policy approaches can help to this end in different ways. Gender mainstreaming provides a wide variety of tools and methods that should be taken into consideration both for the machinery of the platform economy itself and also from the policy-making to regulate it. And it is fundamental to constantly assess the differences and the inequalities between women and men in the platform economy. The strengthening of an intersectional perspective is a must if the aim is to consider the variety of situations and systems of oppression that are in play nowadays, and that have been shown to be so also in the platform economy. Both the deconstruction and the post-deconstruction approach are relevant, too. The latter especially presents important potentialities by bringing up new issues—sustainability, biopolitics, etc.—as well as revisiting old themes—affections, the body, etc.—that are intrinsically bound to the digital arena. And, last but not least, and

although the women's approach might seem to be outdated, it is still key to understanding central redistribution, recognition and representation problems (Fraser, 2008), exploitation, marginalisation and exclusion processes. The data collection and the availability of sex disaggregated needs to be increased in order to have an accurate diagnosis firstly of the situation of women in the platform labour market and secondly to shed light on the gender and intersectional inequalities that this model is promoting.

Moreover, urgent steady steps have to be taken towards economic and political models that take into account social reproduction work and the community and social activities that benefit our societies, a fairer organisation of time and those that put the sustainability of life, social justice and equality ahead of corporate profit.

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