

How to Mainstream Gender?

Promoting the Particularisation of Universalism

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Abstract: Gender Mainstreaming is today considered the main strategy in order to achieve gender equality. Unfortunately, the universal human rights discourse carried on by the UN, the EU and the CoE, tends to flatter out the different cultural priorities and needs. After a brief introduction to Gender Mainstreaming history, we will discuss how and why the EU excludes civil society organisations from its developing policy. Afterwards, the present work will take into account the point of view of some black feminists and, in conclusion, it will show how a genuine bottom-up approach to the developing process might be the winning strategy in order to achieve gender equality.

[**Keywords:** gender equality, gender mainstreaming, civil society organisations, development, postcolonial feminism]

Introduction

The origin of global engagement towards gender equality can be traced back to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which unequivocally affirmed the equal rights of women and men¹.

A subsequent milestone in the pursuit of gender equality is the institution of the Commission on the Status of Women (1946). In 1972, the UN's General Assembly, in its resolution 3010 (XXVII), proclaimed 1975 as the "International Women's Year". Such initiative was followed by the "First World Conference on Women", held in Mexico City (1975). The Convention on the Elimination of All the Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was subsequently adopted in 1979. In 1980, the Second World Conference on Women took place in Copenhagen, followed by the "United Nations decade for Women", which was focused on "Equality, Development and Peace". At the end of the decade, the Third United Nations World Conference on Women was organized (Nairobi Conference, held in 1985). However, it is only during the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW), held in Beijing in 1995, that Gender

¹ The recognition of equal rights between genders appears especially in the Preamble, and in Art.16 (more specifically about marriage). Gender equality is also indirectly present along the whole Declaration, when it refers to "All members of the human family" (preamble), "All human beings" (Art.1), "Everyone" (Articles: 2, 3, 6, 8, Articles: 10 to 15 and 17 to 29), "All" (Art.7), "no one" (Articles: 4, 5, 9, 11, 12, 15, 17, 20).



Mainstreaming was explicitly endorsed as a critical and strategic approach for achieving the gender equality commitment. As stated in the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*:

Governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively².

An extended (and the most used) definition of Gender Mainstreaming has been given by the ECOSOC in 1997:

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality³.

As specified in the United Nation's Resolution 64/289, UN Women plays a leading role in mainstreaming the gender perspective in every aspect of people's lives around the world⁴. From 1995, the UN, the EU and the CoE started to publish guidelines and documents regarding Gender Mainstreaming as a transformative strategy in order to reach gender equality.

In Saskia Sassen's words, such "international regime of human rights" has the merit of creating a women's transnational network. However, she underlines how the international arena sometimes reflects only the dominant elite's interests. Sassen calls it the "rhetoric of the exclusion" referring to the amount of people excluded from the international debate⁵. Along with the gender equality commitment, the entire world's priorities are becoming the developing world's priorities.

² United Nations, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, reprinted by UN Women in 2014, 1995, pp. 79.

³ ECOSOC, *Report of the Economic and Social Council for 1997*, New York, Economic and Social Council publications, 1997, p. 27.

⁴ UN Women, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/un-system-coordination/gendermainstreaming#sthash.qoZVc6nE.dpuf>.

⁵ S. Sassen, *Globalization and its Discontents*, New York, New Press, 1998.



The present work will display how governments consider themselves as “active managers, running society in an efficient but not too extensive way, leaving the rest to market forces and civil society”⁶.

It will be also stressed how gender equality should be considered as a goal in itself (as the Gender Mainstreaming approach proposes), while international institutions – especially the EU – at times bypass this step, aiming at a gender balanced world in a rather instrumental sense, i.e. in order to pursue economic growth. The main flaw of such approach to gender equality is that it leaves gender stereotypes unchallenged, while Gender Mainstreaming as a new strategy should deal with social justice and human rights.

A clear example of these dynamics is the recent launch of the W20 group. On September, 6th 2015, W20 has been established as an official G20 engagement group, gathering women from the leading world economies. The aim of the W20 is “to contribute to achieve a gender inclusive economic growth in the G20 countries through the economic empowerment of women”⁷. In other words, the world-dominant elite is influencing the lives of millions of women, without actually involving them in the decision-making process.

In conclusion, we will recall some practical limits of the ongoing bottom-up approach when dealing with development, and some examples of inclusive techniques will be presented. The paper suggests that a genuinely participative Gender Mainstreaming in developing projects is urgently needed and it is possible only through a specific people-centred and place-based approach, whose current features are to be rethought.

1. The International Regime of Human Rights

1.1 Gender Mainstreaming According to the United Nations (UN)

Gender Mainstreaming is considered as a central strategy in any United Nations’ decision. Gender Mainstreaming was established as a major global strategy for the promotion of gender equality in the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*

⁶ CoE, *Gender Mainstreaming: Conceptual framework, methodology and presentation of good practice*, Strasbourg, Council of Europe Publications, 1998, p. 11.

⁷ W20, <http://w20turkey.org/about-g20/>.



(BPfA) from the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women (1995). Following up to such strategy, the ECOSOC agreed conclusions (1997/2) established some important general principles for Gender Mainstreaming and gave an extensive definition of it. Additional commitments came from a letter from the Secretary-General to the heads of all United Nations entities (13 October 1997). It provided further concrete directives and was followed by the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, (the special session to follow up the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in June 2000), the *Millennium Declaration* and a variety of resolutions and decisions of the UN General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, and the Commission on the Status of Women⁸. In the ECOSOC agreed conclusions 1997/2 we can read:

In order to ensure effective implementation of the strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action, the United Nations system should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective⁹.

Another important step towards gender equality was the *United Nations Millennium Declaration (2000)* in which the heads of States and governments resolved to promote gender equality to combat poverty and to reach the so called sustainable development.

⁸ UN Women, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/un-system-coordination/gendermainstreaming>. Main ECOSOC's Resolutions:

- Mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the UN system (1998/43 of 31 July 1998); (2001/41 of 26 July 2001); (2002/23 of 24 July 2002); (2003/49 of 24 July 2003);
- Review of Economic and Social Council agreed conclusions 1997/2 on mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system (2004/4 of 1 July 2004);
- Mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system (2005/31 of 26 July 2005); (2006/36 of 27 July 2006); (2007/33 of 27 July 2007); (2008/34 of 25 July 2008 2007); (2009/12 of 28 July 2009); (2010/29 of 23 July 2010); (2011/6 of 14 July 2011); (2012/24 of 27 July 2012); (E/2013/L.14); (2014/2 of 11 July 2014).

General Assembly Resolutions:

- 1995: Fourth World Conference on Women (A/RES/50/42); Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action (A/RES/50/203);
- 1996-1999: Follow-up to the FWCW and full implementation of the BDPfA;
- 2000-2014: Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (A/RES/55/71).

⁹ ECOSOC, *Report of the Economic and Social Council for 1997*, cit.



As already asserted, UN Women has a leading role in mainstreaming a gender perspective in the UN system, but other institutions contribute to promote such issue within the UN, e.g. the Office of the Special Adviser (OSAGI) and the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE). During the last twenty years, these entities have published consistent amounts of documents in order to help different stakeholders to implement Gender Mainstreaming in every policy and programme¹⁰.

In conclusion, in recent years, the theme of Gender Mainstreaming has been largely treated by UN bodies and their commitment to the cause has been renewed.

1.2 Gender Mainstreaming in the European Union (EU)

According to the actual EU public discourse, Gender Mainstreaming is at the very centre of every EU social and economic policy¹¹. Gender Mainstreaming within the EU was firstly defined by the European Commission (EC) in 1996 as:

Mobilising all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality by actively and openly taking into account at the planning stage their possible effects on the respective situations of men and women (gender perspective)¹².

Talking about Mainstreaming, the Commission also stressed the importance to introduce legal instruments and financial resources into the process and to mobilise the Community analytical and organisational capacities in order to get more gender-balanced societies¹³.

Theoretically the EU has a comprehensive and inclusive approach toward women's rights, yet it seems very fond of their economic entanglements. In fact, in the Treaty of Rome of 1957 the provision for equal pay is already claimed for. The principle of equal pay is deepened in Art.157 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). This article provided a basis for the adoption of European legislation on equal pay: Directive 75/117/EEC and Directive 2006/54/EC. The EU introduced more directives related to gender equality, mostly regarding employment

¹⁰ See, for example, OSAGI, *Gender Mainstreaming, an overview*, New York, Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, 2002.

¹¹ EC, *Manual for Gender Mainstreaming: Employment, social inclusion and social protection policies*, Brussels, European Commission publications, 2008, p. 3.

¹² EC, *Incorporating equal opportunities for women and men into all community policies and activities*, Brussels, European Commission publications, 1996, pp. 2-5.

¹³ *Ibid.*



issues¹⁴. Moreover, in Title II (Article 8) – *ex* Article 3(2) TEC – of the consolidated version of the Treaty of the EU (2012) we can read: “In all its activities, the Union shall aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality, between men and women”.

It is also worth mentioning the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (2007), where Title III (Article 23) states: “Equality between women and men must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay”.

Many documents have been published by the EU on this theme so just the main ones will be presented in the following lines.

The European Commission engaged in a *Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men, (2006-2010 period)*. The actions proposed by the Roadmap cover six priority areas: achieving equal economic independence for women and men; enhancing reconciliation of work, private and family life; promoting equal participation of women and men in decision-making; eradicating gender-based violence and trafficking; eliminating gender stereotypes in society; and promoting gender equality outside the EU. The Roadmap also underlines the need for improving governance and confirms the dual approach of gender equality based on Gender Mainstreaming (the promotion of gender equality in all policy areas and activities) and specific measures for women. Clearly, the first of such priority areas is the one the EU cares the most about.

¹⁴ Council Directive 76/207/EEC on equal treatment in access to employment vocational training, promotion and working conditions (in 2002, this 1976 law was strengthened and extended to include a formal ban against sexual harassment). Directive on equal treatment in statutory social security schemes (Council Directive 79/7/EEC of 19 December 1978). Directive in occupational social security schemes (Council Directive 86/378/EEC of 24 July 1986). Directive on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding (Council Directive 92/85/EEC of 19 October 1992); Directive on the burden of proof in cases of discrimination based on sex (Council Directive 97/80/EC of 15 December 1997); on part-time work (Council Directive 97/81/EC of 15 December 1997); on the organisation of working time (Directive 2003/88/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 November 2003); on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services (Council Directive 2004/113/EC of 13 December 2004); on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (European Parliament and Council Directive 2006/54/EC); Council Directive 2010/18/EU of 8 March 2010 implementing the revised Framework Agreement on parental leave concluded by BUSINESSSEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC and repealing Directive 96/34/EC; on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity and repealing Council Directive 86/613/EEC (Directive 2010/41/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2010).



The European Pact for Gender Equality adopted by the Spring European Council in 2006 also encourages Member States to improve Gender Mainstreaming practices.

In march 2010, the European Commission adopted the *Women's Charter*. Here the Commission renewed its commitment to gender equality, and Gender Mainstreaming as a tool for achieving it.

In 2010 the *Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015* was adopted. The strategy prioritises certain issues: equal economic independence; equal pay for equal work and work of equal value; equality in decision-making; dignity, integrity and an end to gender-based violence; the EU's external actions to foster Gender Equality; addressing "horizontal issues" (gender roles, legislative framework etc.).

From a more practical point of view, the European Commission also published a guide on the implementation of Gender Mainstreaming (the *Manual for Gender Mainstreaming. An Overview*, 2008)¹⁵.

Recalling the pervasiveness and importance the EU gives to gender equality, we report some EU's fora and institutions which deal with it: the European Parliament Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) is active in the promotion of gender equality in all policy areas debated by the European Parliament; an Advisory Committee on equal opportunities for women and men (1981) provides assistance to the Commission in mainstreaming a gender perspective; national Equality Bodies were established in all Member States. They meet regularly as an EU network; in 1998 an Advisory Committee on women and rural areas was created; the Helsinki Group Women and Science (1999); the European Network to Promote Women's Entrepreneurship (WES) created in 2000; in 2001 a High Level informal group on Gender Mainstreaming (composed by high level representatives of the member states) was established; the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is considered the EU knowledge centre for gender equality and it is located in Vilnius, Lithuania.

¹⁵ EC, *Manual for Gender Mainstreaming. Employment, social inclusion and social protection policies*, cit.



1.2.1 An Insight from the European Union Development Policy

In her book *Losing Control? Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization*, Saskia Sassen asserts that the hegemony of some neoliberal concepts related to economics are increasingly influencing continental Europe, even if started from USA and UK in the '80s. This actually led to the creation of “transnational legal regimes that are centred in Western economic concepts”¹⁶.

In a general framework the economic genesis of the EU cannot be denied. Indeed, it is not surprising how its policies and directives have often been promoted towards this direction, rather than to the more political and cultural aspects of the Gender Equality goal. Sometimes it appears that the EU is just interested in the instrumental part of Gender Mainstreaming, i.e. in the economic growth that can rise from gender equality¹⁷.

In this sense, it is interesting to analyse MacRae and Petra Debusscher’s points of view.

According to MacRae, to maintain the economic focus, not only leaves gender stereotypes unchanged, but can also lead to a series of unintended and unanticipated consequences in the frame of the EU’s development policies. In fact, these policies are sometimes not only gender neutral, but even damaging for women’s position in society.

Indeed, she asserts “It is noted that if the [European] gender project is not adequately entrenched, neo-liberal policies can produce and reproduce new gender inequalities, thus rendering mainstreaming efforts not only ineffective, but even counterproductive”¹⁸. These consequences can be “unintentional” in the sense that their outcomes can actually contradict the declared goal of the specific European project. They can also be “unanticipated” as they are not direct consequences of the policy but part of an interrelated net of events. In fact, even if the member states have publicly

¹⁶ S. Sassen. *Losing Control? Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization*, New York, Columbia University press, 1995, p. 17.

¹⁷ See, for example: H. MacRae, “(Re-)Gendering integration: Unintentional and unanticipated gender outcomes of European Union policy”, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 39 (2013), pp. 3-11; P. Debusscher, “Mainstreaming gender in European Commission development policy: Conservative Europeanness?”, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 34 (2011), pp. 39-49; P. Debusscher, “Gender Equality in European Union development policy: incorporating women’s voices or confirming hierarchies?”, *Afrika Focus*, 26 (2013), 2, pp. 31-45.

¹⁸ H. MacRae, “(Re-)Gendering integration: Unintentional and unanticipated gender outcomes of European Union policy”, cit., p. 3.



committed to gender equality, the tension between market-based policies (as the EU prioritizes trade liberalisation and the opening of markets¹⁹) and gender equality is still very much present in the EU. Indeed, as “EU’s daily activities is premised upon these neoliberal market principles, this may be a particularly persistent form of gender discrimination”²⁰.

Indeed, some studies²¹ show how developing countries which are closer to the neo-liberal economic ideology are more likely to put in place gender-blind policies. MacRae then argues a more unified and specific framework for the Gender Impact Assessments is needed. Quoting Stratigaki, she shows how gender equality mainstreaming sometimes becomes the justification in order to reach other goals. According to these authors, for example, the “reconciliation between work and family life” prompted by the EU gradually became the justification for more flexible forms of employment (market-oriented strategy) rather than a tool in order to achieve gender equality. In this way women continue to carry on their traditional roles of caregivers and housewives, summed up with more flexible working conditions. While these innovations could potentially challenge gender roles, encouraging men to adopt a more “female work pattern”, this did not happen as the problem was not inserted in a broader socio-cultural framework.

MacRae continues describing the European labour market policy. Regarding this, the EU seems too tight to the old “sameness approach” to gender equality. In fact, women exclusion from the labour market can be actually seen as a threat to the perfect competition efficiency. In this sense, women are often considered just as labour force, not reflecting a real commitment of the EU to the cause of gender equality. Indeed, the author considers the EU as an economic project based on market liberalisation and open

¹⁹ MacRae in “(Re-)Gendering integration: Unintentional and unanticipated gender outcomes of European Union policy”, cit., arguments how the EU’s integration is based on neo-liberal assumptions recalling the financial austerity measures it uses to enact, the focus on the four freedoms (free movement of capital, goods, services and people), as well as the deregulation of markets and the move towards flexible employment models (Lisbon Strategy).

²⁰ H. MacRae, “(Re-)Gendering integration: Unintentional and unanticipated gender outcomes of European Union policy”, cit., p. 4.

²¹ See, for example, E.M. Hafner-Burton and M.A. Pollack, “Mainstreaming gender in the European Union: Getting the incentives right”, *Comparative European Politics*, 7 (2009), 1, pp. 114–138 and C. Hoskyns, “Mainstreaming gender in the EU’s macroeconomic policy: institutional and conceptual issues”, paper presented at the ECPR Conference, Bologna, 2004 (retrieved from <http://www.jhubc.it/ecpr-bologna>).



competition. However, economic growth and gender equality have never been on equal footing. As a matter of fact, the former is actually considered as a more important goal in the European context often leading to the invisibilisation of the gender issue²².

Closely linked with MacRae analysis, Debusscher made an extensive study of the EU's development policy, underlying how the EU uses it to "confirm hierarchies" rather than to "incorporate women's voices"²³. On the one hand, she criticises the EU in the same way as MacRae does when she refers to the neo-liberal project of the EU, on the other hand she deepens one specific consequence of the instrumentalism: when the EU finds societies which do not fit with its instrumentalist and integrationist project of Gender Mainstreaming, it tends to exclude their representatives from the developing project formulation. Debusscher wrote several papers about the European Union's development policy regarding Gender Mainstreaming²⁴. Referring to Sub-Saharan countries, she asserts:

The more transformative issues that are put forward by Sub-Saharan African society organisations do not fit within the EU's dominant development paradigm that is focused on achieving the Millennium Development Goals and does not significantly challenge gender relations or power structures²⁵.

According to the author, this concept is clearly expressed in the reluctance to include in its projects' drafting the point of view of the civil society organisations.

The author highlights the EU is the world's largest donor of development aid, giving 55 per cent of the official development assistance. In this sense, it is important to

²² H. MacRae, "(Re-)Gendering integration: Unintentional and unanticipated gender outcomes of European Union policy", cit., p. 8.

²³ P. Debusscher, "Gender Equality in European Union development policy: incorporating women's voices or confirming hierarchies?", cit., p. 31.

²⁴ We choose to report especially the paper by P. Debusscher, "Mainstreaming gender in European Commission development policy: Conservative Europeanness?", cit., because it comprehends more countries than the other papers. For further analysis by the same author see: P. Debusscher and A. van der Vleuten, "Mainstreaming gender in European Union development cooperation with sub-Saharan Africa: promising numbers, narrow contents, telling silences", *International development planning reviews*, 34 (2012), 3, pp. 320-338.

P. Debusscher, "Gender mainstreaming on the ground? The case of EU development aid towards Rwanda", in E. Weiner and H. MacRae (eds.), "The persistent invisibility of gender in EU policy", *European Integration Papers (EIoP)*, 18 (2014), 4, pp. 1-23.

P. Debusscher, "Gendered assumptions, institutional disconnections and democratic deficits: the case of European Union development policy towards Liberia", *Women's Studies International Forum*, 40 (2013), pp. 212-221.

²⁵ P. Debusscher, "Gender Equality in European Union development policy: incorporating women's voices or confirming hierarchies?", cit., p. 31.



assess the extent to which the EU carries on Gender Mainstreaming in development projects.

The analysis of Debusscher²⁶ firstly tries to apprise whether a real shift of the paradigm regarding women and development – from the Women In Development (WID, an old and conservative approach) to the Gender And Development approach (GAD, i.e. Gender Mainstreaming) – took place or not. Then, she focuses more on the involvement of civil society organisations into EC’s developing projects in which gender is supposed to be mainstreamed²⁷.

Debusscher analyses two generations of Country Strategy Papers (CSPs) and National Indicative Programmes (NIPs) from four regions: Asia, Africa, Latin America and the European Neighbourhood, assessing whether a transformative approach to gender equality was taken into account or not. The author’s study compares the first and last generations of CSPs and NIPs: 2002-2007 and 2008-2013. The data set comprehends a total of 49 countries (which means a total of 98 CSPs and NIPs).

Debusscher makes a quantitative analysis about language considering a policy as gender mainstreamed if there is the same amount of references to women (the use of words like: women, woman, girl, mother and female) and men (man, men, boy, father and male) along the texts. In the first set of documents analysed, there is an over representation of the references related to women (59.92%) as references to men accounts just to the 10.99%. This is a clear example of the old approach: the WID. In the second set of CSPs and NIPs the references to women accounted for a 53.66%, while that to men for a 13.73%. Moreover, the references to both men and women positively increased from a 20.09% to a 32.61%. We notice a slight improvement in the language towards a more gender mainstreamed one, but clearly not a balanced one.

In practice, according to the language used, women are seen as the main problem-holders, while where men are mentioned it is often with reference to general

²⁶ P. Debusscher, “Mainstreaming gender in European Commission development policy: Conservative Europeanness?”, cit.

²⁷ The analysis is focused on the EC’s policy as this is the executive body of the EU and it represents the interests of the EU as a whole (http://ec.europa.eu/about/index_en.htm, 25/8/2015). Regarding EU’s development policy and aids, the responsible body is the Commission’s Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO), (http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/general_en, 25/8/2015).



sentences about gender equality or with reference on data (like “the rate of enrolled boy is...”). It appears that men and boys are not seen as part of the problem (the author just makes reference to the Indian NIP, in which there is an explicit link of men’s responsibility to the reproductive health of women). Indeed, this approach reflects more on the old approach of WID and does not accomplish the Council of Europe’s requirement to: “shared responsibility of women and men in removing imbalances in society”²⁸.

In fact, Debusscher points out the need of higher financial and intellectual investments in order to change any discriminatory norm as long as a full involvement of men into the process of building a gender-balanced society. From her studies, it comes out how a real shift towards Gender Mainstreaming only partially took place. The author links this way of framing the issue in terms of compatibility with the MDGs. In this sense gender equality would be a tool for halving poverty by 2015. Indeed, in the context of the CSPs and NIPs, gender equality in employment is often framed as an instrumental tool in order to eliminate poverty (and for growth and enhancement in competitiveness as well). This approach actually fails to accomplish Gender Mainstreaming’s strategy as gender equality is not considered a goal in itself.

On the same subject, citing the case of Lebanese NIP, links to education are sometimes close to economic growth (improving the quality of education and increasing the participation of women in the labour force linked to “relevance to the labour market”²⁹). It is worth noting that also in cases of an apparently weak link of some themes with economic growth, the EC could find someone: in the Colombian’s CSP when it talks about gender violence, the author highlights how this “entails high economic costs for the country”³⁰.

Debusscher reports some scholars’ points of view which are in line with her thought³¹. She also analyses the involvement of civil society’s organisations in the

²⁸ CoE, *Gender Mainstreaming, Conceptual framework, methodology and presentation of good practices*, Strasbourg, Council of Europe, 1998, p. 18.

²⁹ EC, *Country Strategy Papers and National Indicative Programmes 2007-2013 for Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela*, Brussels, 2007, p. 26.

³⁰ Ivi, p. 12.

³¹ P. Debusscher, “Mainstreaming gender in European Commission development policy: Conservative Europeanness?”, cit., p. 39.



redaction of CSPs. She found that just six out of 98 CSPs mentioned civil society organisations' inclusion during the drafting process. Up to 16 CSPs had some reference to civil society organisations along the texts. Moreover, the sources to which the CSPs used to refer, came mostly from governmental sources, like the World Bank and the UN.

Another point worth noting are the different frames in which EC and civil society organisations insert gender equality. Indeed, the most frequently mentioned fields in the NIPs are: equal access to education, employment and maternal mortality. On the contrary, in their documents, civil society organisations talk more about gender equality in terms of “the right to...”. For instance, in the CSPs and NIPs, when dealing with maternal mortality the EC's focus is very much on health, while in the civil society's sources the theme is framed more in terms of sexual and reproductive rights. Moreover, civil society organisations framed in a more social and cultural context the problem of access to education, which was included by the EC into the CSPs in a more instrumental way³². From these facts it clearly emerges how external local voices are not included in the drafting process, notwithstanding several high level commitments the EC made towards a more participatory process. This remained just rhetoric.

More than the general different approaches the civil society organisations and the EC had towards gender equality, Debusscher highlights how the former (EMHRN, 2008³³; NEWW, 2007³⁴; CLADEM, 2005³⁵ and REMTE *et al.*, 2003³⁶) focused their

³² See also: Red Mujer y Habitat de America Latina, <http://www.redmujer.org.ar/>.

³³ Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network comprehends more than 80 human rights organisations, institutions and individuals based in about 30 countries in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (2008). Recommendations to the 2009 Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference to follow up on the implementation of the Istanbul Framework on “Strengthening the Role of Women in Society”, Copenhagen, September 22, 2008, p. 7.

³⁴ Network of East-West Women, EU Gender Watch supports the countries in the CEE/CIS region which are eligible for development assistance by using monitoring, lobbying and advocacy to ensure that gender concerns are present in the EU development policy towards this part of the region. Network of East-West Women, EU Gender Watch, *A Gender Analysis of EU Development Instruments and Policies in Ukraine. Representing EU Neighbouring Countries*, Kiev, 2007.

³⁵ CLADEM is a feminist network involving 15 Latin American and Caribbean countries. CLADEM, *Regional Electronic Bulletin: CLADEM ESCR and Globalization Area*, February, 2005 (second edition).

³⁶ Red Latinoamericana Mujeres Transformando la Economía is present in 12 countries of Latin America. Its aims are to involve women into the economy and at to re-shape economy in a more equitable and sustainable way, with a focus on more vulnerable and poor women.

REMTE *et al.*, *Marcha Mundial de las Mujeres-AL, Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales y Agencia Latinoamericana de Información. Mujeres y Trabajo: Cambios Impostergables*, 2003.



attention also on themes which have not been treated by the EC, like for example: sexual harassment at work, the quality, type, and context of women's employment, childcare, maternity leave and social security protection. Debusscher continues reporting the different attitude the civil society organisations had about the following themes, when compared with that of the EC:

- More system-critical analysis aimed at structural transformations: African Feminist Forum, 2006³⁷.
- The gender effects of globalisation: AWMR, 2002³⁸; REMTE *et al.*, 2003³⁹; CRTD-A, 2004⁴⁰; CLADEM, 2005a⁴¹; CLADEM *et al.*, 2006⁴²; AFF, 2006⁴³; ARWC, 2008⁴⁴; CAW *et al.* 2007⁴⁵; APWLD, 2008⁴⁶.
- Trade liberalisation: APWLD 2008⁴⁷; Asian Rural Women's Conference, 2007⁴⁸; CLADEM, 2005a⁴⁹; CRTD-A, 2004⁵⁰; SOAWR, 2005⁵¹.

³⁷ African Feminist Forum, *Reclaiming our spaces. Executive Summary of the 1st African Feminist Forum*. November 15th–19th 2006, Accra, 2006, p. 6.

³⁸ Association of Women of the Mediterranean Region, *The Impact of Globalisation on Mediterranean Countries: A Women's Perspective, 10th Annual Conference – in cooperation with the Association of Human Environment and Development Networks*, July 12-14 2002, Marrakech, Morocco.

³⁹ REMTE *et al.* *Marcha Mundial de las Mujeres-AL, Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales y Agencia Latinoamericana de Información. Mujeres y Trabajo: Cambios Impostergables*, cit.

⁴⁰ Collective for Research and Training on Development—Action, *Gender and trade in the MENA. Strategy Meeting*, 2004.

⁴¹ CLADEM, *El “Libre Comercio” y los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos. IV Cumbre de las Américas y III Cumbre de los Pueblos, Mar del Plata noviembre 2005, “Crear trabajo para combatir la pobreza y fortalecer la Democracia”, Documento de posición del Grupo de Trabajo “Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos” de CLADEM, 2005.*

⁴² CLADEM, *at al.*, *Campaign for a Convention on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights.*, Manifiesto, October, 2006.

⁴³ African Feminist Forum, *Reclaiming our spaces. Executive Summary of the 1st African Feminist Forum*, cit.

⁴⁴ Asian Rural Women's Conference, *Rights, Empowerment and Liberation: Asian Rural Women's Conference 2008*, 6-8 March 2008, Arakkonam, Tamil Nadu, India.

⁴⁵ Committee for Asian Women and Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat, *Linking commonalities and struggles: Informal workers' exchange in South Asia*, Report for the South Asia Conference on Informal Labour and Trade Union Organisations, 19-22 August 2007, Yashada, Pune, India.

⁴⁶ Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, *Political Economy of Violence Against Women in Asia Pacific. Summary Report of the Asia Pacific NGO Consultation with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Its Causes and Consequences*, Manila, 2007.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Asian Rural Women's Conference, *Rural Women's Declaration. Rights, Empowerment and Liberation*, Manila, 2007.

⁴⁹ CLADEM, *El “Libre Comercio” y los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos. IV Cumbre de las Américas y III Cumbre de los Pueblos, Mar del Plata noviembre 2005, “Crear trabajo para combatir la pobreza y fortalecer la Democracia”, Documento de posición del Grupo de Trabajo “Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos”, cit.*



- Climate change or environmental degradation: ARROW, 2008⁵²; ARWC, 2008⁵³; APWLD, 2008⁵⁴.
- Relevance and changing nature of patriarchy, along with its interrelation with systems of class, race, ethnic, religious and “global-imperialism”: African Feminist Forum, 2006⁵⁵.

In conclusion, the EC approach to Gender Mainstreaming in development aids sometimes seems to carry on a kind of “blind europeanness”⁵⁶, along with a “one size fits all” approach. The EC clearly has a different point of view regarding Gender Mainstreaming and other tools in order to reach gender equality if compared to that one of the civil society organisations.

The author recalls the EU’s obligations in involving the civil society’s organisations with reference to the Cotonou Agreement and the Paris Declaration. According to article 4 of the Cotonou Agreement, civil society’s representatives should be fully involved in the drafting process. This approach reflects the content of the Paris Declaration, in which the European Commission commits itself into the protection of the partner state ownership and partner country leadership. Anyway, she reports CONCORD (2010)⁵⁷, when she writes:

⁵⁰ Collective for Research and Training on Development—Action, *Gender and trade in the MENA*, cit.

⁵¹ SOWAR (Solidarity for African Women’s Rights Coalition), *The protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Right’s on Women’s Rights in Africa: from Ratification to the Realization of African Women’s Human Rights*, Oxford, Fahamu, 2005.

⁵² ARROW (Asian Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women), *Arrows for change. Women’s, Gender and Rights Perspectives in Health and Programmes*, Kuala Lumpur, The Asian Harm Reduction Network (AHRN), 2008.

⁵³ Asian Rural Women’s Conference, *Rural Women’s Declaration. Rights, Empowerment and Liberation*, cit.

⁵⁴ Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, *Political Economy of Violence Against Women in Asia Pacific. Summary Report of the Asia Pacific NGO Consultation with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Its Causes and Consequences*, cit.

⁵⁵ African Feminist Forum, *Reclaiming our spaces. Executive Summary of the 1st African Feminist Forum*, cit., p.22. To have an idea, in 7000 pages of the CSPs and NIPs analysed, the terms “patriarchy/patriarchal” appeared six times. On the other hand, in about 1000 pages of civil societies’ documents analysed, the terms appeared around 140 times (see: P. Debusscher, “Mainstreaming gender in European Commission development policy: Conservative Europeanness?”, cit., p. 45).

⁵⁶ P. Debusscher, “Mainstreaming gender in European Commission development policy: Conservative Europeanness?”, cit., p. 39.

⁵⁷ CONCORD is the European NGOs Confederation for Relief and Development (www.concordeurope.org). CONCORD, “Civil society involvement in the review of the 10th European Development Fund”, CONCORD Cotonou Working Group Briefing paper, 2010.



critical observers agree that the drafting process does not allow any 'democratic ownership' of CSPs and that the programming process is 'often used as a way of imposing Europe's economic and geostrategic interests upon ACP countries, at the expenses of the populations' actual needs'⁵⁸.

2. The Rhetoric of the Exclusion

One main critic to Gender Mainstreaming regards its imperialistic features. As the whole discourse around Gender Mainstreaming arose in and is still carried on mostly by scholars and institutions based in the western part of the world while aiming at describing the whole world, there is something mismatching. Indeed, black feminists complained and still complain about their involvement. Sometimes Western feminist priorities are not the same as Southern women's and, more in general, every context has its own needs and priorities which cannot be imposed from outside. In fact, among the international institutions, the main imperialistic critique regards the EU, as it seems to have economic priorities rather than socio-cultural ones.

Indeed, "Women's movements are far from homogeneous or conflict free. Like all social movements, they are riddled with conflicts that reflect and cut across regional, class and ideological differences while raising serious issues of ownership and representation"⁵⁹. These words of Rosalind Petchesky give an idea of the topic we will treat in the following section.

Sylvia Walby⁶⁰ underlines how today feminism is reshaping itself towards a universal conception. The rhetoric that "Women's Rights are Human Rights and Human Rights are Women's Rights" is spreading more and more since Hillary Clinton's speech at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing⁶¹. We are assisting to a progressively homogenisation of the discourse on Women's Rights, which "moves away from separatist groups"⁶². As a matter of fact, according to Walby, we can now see a transition in the gender regime due to the complex globalisation

⁵⁸ P. Debusscher and A. van der Vleuten, "Mainstreaming gender in European Union development cooperation with sub-Saharan Africa: promising numbers, narrow contents, telling silences", cit. p. 321.

⁵⁹ R. Petchesky, *Global Prescriptions: Gendering Health and Human Rights*, London, Zed books Ltd, 2003, p. 2

⁶⁰ S. Walby, "Feminism in a global era", *Economy and Society*, 31 (2002), 4, pp. 533-557.

⁶¹ This sentence was formally used for the first time during the UN World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in June 1993.

⁶² S. Walby, "Feminism in a global era", cit., p. 533.



phenomenon, which is bringing a more and more pervasive national and trans-national intervention.

If, on the one hand, globalisation is putting on the stage Women's Rights as Human Rights, this re-framing of the issue can be a threat to some forms of feminist treatment of differences. One of the main challenges of today's feminism is how to theorize differences addressing commonalities.

The theory of Universal Human Rights is considered embedded in a Eurocentric vision of the world and also really tight with a Western idea of the individual. The adjective "universal" implies a sort of legitimacy which stabilises the Declaration of Human Rights as "absolute". Basically, in recent years the world assisted to a shift of the feminist movement through an increase in its engagement within the Universal Human Rights discourse and within the States. Sylvia Walby gives an interesting explanation of this phenomenon. She points out three main interrelated changes: in social structure, in political opportunity structures and in the general context. The categories of "women", "femininity" and "masculinity" have been evolving, and with them also women's and men's interests and priorities changed. Macro social changes came with industrialisation, urbanisation, the rise of a middle class (proxied by education), and communication technologies, etc. These changes lead to modernisation, the spread of postmodern values and the rise in women's employment. Thanks to these changes, women started to pass from a more domestic form of interrelation to a more public form. In practice, as the social context changed, also economic and political priorities changed, and with them also the feminist movement's shape. Basically, Sylvia Walby underlines four features of the postmodern feminist movement:

1. In the past, feminist politics was engaged in "radical separatist autonomous political developments" and the State was more part of the problem rather than part of the solution. On the contrary, today feminist politics are mainstreaming more liberal politics, which aim to change women's status through reform of state actions (i.e. engagement of feminist movement within the state);

2. The increase in the use of the "equal rights discourse", with a progressive expiration of the radical feminist movement;



3. The emergence of an international arena (mainstreamed by UN and EU) in which all the feminist movements can (potentially) gain space;

4. The increasing use of coalitions and alliances as a way of organising. This obviously produces the smoothing of differences within the various feminist groups.

In general, the world undoubtedly assisted to an inclusion of the feminist movement in the international discourse. This could also happen thanks to the alignment of the personal interests and the interests of the social movement organisation. Walby calls this aspect “framing”. Indeed, feminist movements used the globalised context, which allows the Universal Human Rights discourse, through a deep argumentation. In this way, feminist movements became part of the political life as well as of the international organisations and so there was no more opposition between feminist movements and the State: there has been more involvement with governments rather than the usual anti systemic discourse⁶³.

Martha Nussbaum is more focused on the consequences of this shift. Indeed, if it is true that in the last decades women’s voice has been more and more heard, she recalls some questions we should bear clearly in mind: where should these normative categories come from? How can they be justified as appropriate for cultures that have traditionally used different normative categories?

Moreover, aiming to describe one culture through concepts, which originate in another culture can be considered as a form of imperialism. The issue becomes more and more articulated if the cultures we want to describe have been oppressed (i.e. colonised) for decades by the describer’s culture.

Indeed, Martha Nussbaum argues that in addressing women’s rights in a universal way, we risk westernising and colonising those women (again). But she goes further: even when these discourses are developed by non-western feminists who live and work in a “western nation”, some colonial shadows can be found. Indeed, these women are considered “alienated from their culture, and (they) are faddishly aping a Western political agenda. The minute they become critics, it is said, such women are alienated, they cease to belong to their own culture and become puppets of the western

⁶³ Ivi, pp. 533-546.



elite”⁶⁴. This is a very strong statement and Martha Nussbaum tried to address the issue in several books and papers. In fact, Nussbaum rises some questions about the theme, like:

- Should we use only one framework or a plurality of “similar” frameworks?
- Can “our” framework fit all the human cultural varieties?

The author deals with the point of “difference and sameness” in her book “Women and Human Development: The capabilities Approach”. In a certain way she criticises the mainstream, arguing there is no international interest in understanding how specific contexts shape the aspirations and choices of women. She argues sometimes the Western world falls into a narrow way of thinking, with colonialistic features. According to Nussbaum, any discourse which aspires to be defined as “universal” should also include a critique of colonialism itself. But this is not really what used to happen and is still happening today in the international political agenda. As a matter of fact, many feminists recognize the complexity of the discourse, but sometimes they seem to be blind to any colonial interpretation.

A comparison with the so called “classical economists” can be easily made. In fact, their vision was focused on the maximisation of the utility. This did not recognize any cultural or traditional difference, and their role in shaping preferences. In Martha Nussbaum’s words: “Such thinkers see before them the prospect in which all interesting differences, all the rich texture of value, have been flattered out, and we all go to McDonald’s together”⁶⁵.

According to the author, in our era of deep and fast changes we should reflect more on moral norms, which could be a constraint to the utility-enhancing choices nations may take.

Nussbaum makes some considerations⁶⁶ on three factors shaping today’s feminism:

- Culture;

⁶⁴ M. Nussbaum, “Women’s Capabilities and Social Justice”, *Journal of Human Development: A Multi-Disciplinary Journal for People-Centered Development*, 1 (2000), 2, p. 224.

⁶⁵ M. Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The capabilities Approach*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 32.

⁶⁶ Ivi, pp. 31-59.



- Diversity;
- Paternalism.

For example, she argues it is completely unfair to simply attach misogyny to some Hindu or Islamic traditions without a deep knowledge of such complex cultures. As a matter of fact, the Hindu and Muslim cultures, celebrate women modesty, self-sacrifice etc., but, according to Martha Nussbaum, it is incorrect to judge negatively such characteristics. In effect, they do not actually impede women to live a good and flourishing life. Indeed, Nussbaum's argument is in the possibility for women to choose alternative ways of life, i.e. to have full access to different economic and political opportunities. Reporting Veena Das, Martha Nussbaum describes how Indian women are not used to consider themselves as a singular element (detached from the other family members) as many western women use to think regarding themselves. Indeed, Indian women are very tight with their husband and children and they consider that it is very important to make some sacrifices for their family. This can sound weird for a western woman who puts individualism at the basis of her relationships.

About the argument of "diversity", the author assesses that each cultural system has its own beauty and our world is rich because we do not all agree on a single set of practices and norms. Of course, not every cultural value is worth being preserved just because it is an old one (she denies any "culture" to sexual hierarchy or slavery). The question we should ask is whether or not some values are worthy to be carried on.

The third argument she analyses is "paternalism". When we use a set of cross-cultural norms (i.e. the Universal Human rights discourse) as benchmarks for every different culture, we actually do not respect other people's freedom as agents. Anyway, according to Nussbaum, it is "fully consistent to reject some forms of paternalism while supporting those that underwrite these basic values (i.e. liberty of choice)"⁶⁷. In conclusion, the author offers a mid-way view, which takes into consideration an alternative form of paternalism: treating each person as an end, allowing people to search for their priorities in their own ways.

Also Verloo addresses the issue of intersectionality (i.e. the overlay of gender and other inequalities). As a matter of fact, in recent years the issue has been more and

⁶⁷ Ivi, p. 53.



more recognized by scholars, even if the way to deal with this point differs very much among them. Today feminists are well aware of the risk of homogenisation, which is rising from the “universal discourse”, but at the same time, too much differentiation could disperse attention and resources. According to the author, even if the path to follow for recognizing differences in sameness is not clear, it is clear that a more complex thinking about this theme is gaining space in the socio-political debate. Indeed, using the bipolar logic of analysis, which used to compare two types of inequalities, addressing what appears to be the dominant one is no longer possible. On the contrary, scholars should analyse how inequalities intersect and are mutually reinforced. What Verloo, reporting Young, suggests is to integrate intersectionalities into the legal framework of each country.

Verloo offers an interesting point of view about who should be the protagonists in mainstreaming a gender perspective. According to her, the more the process is undertaken by technocrats (i.e. gender experts), the less “other womens’ voices are represented”. The basic idea is that an elitarian process could reproduce some old dynamics, excluding subordinated groups from articulating their interests. Verloo, reporting Fraser’s, describes that the elite can be challenged only if there are a “subaltern or non-hegemonic counterpublics” participating in the debate. In conclusion, Verloo suggests a more profitable cooperation between the “experts” and the “civil society”, through potentially mutually beneficially alliances⁶⁸.

On the same wave, Monica Mookherjee⁶⁹ says that the rectification of the actual unequal circumstances

cannot be achieved by applying preconceived interpretations of the term equality in itself. This is because a necessary, if not sufficient, condition of equality is the enabling of excluded groups to unsettle and destabilize meanings and interpretations, which the institutional culture has hitherto taken as universal and complete⁷⁰.

⁶⁸ M. Verloo, *Multiple Meanings of Gender Equality. A Critical Frame Analysis of Gender Policies in Europe*, Budapest-New York, Central European University Press, 2007, pp. 24-28.

⁶⁹ M. Mookherjee, “Justice as Provisionality: An Account of Contrastive Hard Cases”, *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 4 (2001), 3, pp. 67-100.

⁷⁰ *Ivi*, p. 69.



2.2 The Post-Colonial Feminism Answer

One of the main representatives of the post-colonial feminism is undoubtedly Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Her famous essay *Can the Subaltern speak?* is considered the founding text of Postcolonial Feminism. She reports how some Indian elite components used to be the “best native informants for first world intellectual interested in the voice of the Other. But one must nevertheless insist that the colonized subaltern Subject is irretrievably heterogeneous”⁷¹.

In her view, an epistemic violence is perpetrated by the western world on the colonised world. The margins of the circuit marked by the epistemic violence are: people among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lower strata of the urban proletariat and, more than the others: women. According to Spivak, these are the “subaltern”. If some western elite can speak in the place of a subaltern, women are even at a lower level in this scale, because actually men within subalterns used to speak in their place. Indeed:

Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern project, the track of sexual difference is doubly affected. [...] Both as object of colonialist historiography and as a subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. [...] If in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply *in shadow*⁷².

The epistemic violence includes the colonised world, but in order to exclude it. The sovereign subject could in this way reinforce its role spreading its way of representing the world and its value's system (“worlding of a world” in Spivak's words). In a certain way, the western world, embedded in the “white man”, creates “the Others” like objects to analyse, personally representing them, in order to control them. The western world constructs “the others” as inferiors, underdeveloped, uncivilised, or simply: “not enough”. This is an ongoing process of social dominance of the west, something Spivak calls “postcolonial reason”⁷³. In her book, *Critique of Postcolonial*

⁷¹ G.C. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, in B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin (eds.), *The Post-Colonial Studies*, London, Routledge, 1995, pp. 24-28.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ P. Calefato and A. D'Ottavio (a cura di), *Critica della ragione postcoloniale. Verso una storia del presente in dissolvenza*, Roma, Meltemi Editore, 2004, pp. 7-8.



Reason, she reports how the subaltern groups are strategically excluded from the organised resistance⁷⁴.

Another well-known post-colonial feminist is Clenora Hudson-Weems, who coined the term *Africana Womanism*. She clearly differentiates her experience from that of the white feminism, asserting the priorities of African women are different from those of white women. Particularly she refers to her prioritisation of race oppression and to the importance the family has in the African culture⁷⁵. These two basic issues really differentiate black feminism (or *Africana womanism*) from white feminism. As a matter of fact, regarding the first issue, Clenora Hudson-Weems, quoting Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* writes:

I am one of those who can realize themselves fully and bloom only when they form part of a couple. Even though I understand your stand, even though I respect the choice of liberated women, I have never conceived of happiness outside marriage.⁷⁶

If on the one hand Hudson-Weems “understands” that white feminists tailored a theoretical construct in order to fight against gender oppression, she clearly asserts that it is at least “presumptuous”⁷⁷ to put all the women’s history under the white umbrella. This white arrogance found opposition by both black women and men. As a matter of fact, both black women and black men have been oppressed, for ages. Indeed, black women do not see their male counterpart as their first enemy, as the white women do. One point Hudson-Weems underlines can be uncomfortable for some white women. Indeed, she claims “black women have always been equal to their male counterpart, in spite of some *Africana* men’s attempts to subjugate them on some levels”⁷⁸. The main deep historical cause of this phenomenon is the mutual oppression both black women and men suffered. Indeed, even if in some traditional African societies, male domination was a characteristic, the sharing suffering of the slavery made them practically acting on the same stage. This in part explains how the traditional gender stereotypes in African society have been often “misinterpreted”. Regarding this, Hudson-Weems asserts:

⁷⁴ G.C. Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1999, p. XI.

⁷⁵ C. Hudson-Weems, “*Africana Womanism: the flip side of a coin*”, *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 25 (2001), 3, pp. 138-139.

⁷⁶ M. Bâ, *So Long a Letter*, Oxford, Heinemann, 1980, pp. 55 and 88-89.

⁷⁷ C. Hudson-Weems, “*Africana Womanism: the flip side of a coin*”, *cit.*, p. 140.

⁷⁸ Ivi, p. 143.



Africana women have not had the sense of powerlessness that White women speak of, nor have they been silenced or rendered voiceless by their male counterparts, as is the expressed experience of White women⁷⁹.

In conclusion, the absence of this historical opposition between women and men used to reinforce the closeness between African women and their family. As a consequence, the Africana women globally, both in their private and public lives, put their male counterparts (and their families and communities) as the top priority in their claims⁸⁰.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's, a well-known Indian postcolonial feminist scholar, also offers an interesting point of view about the issue of universalism or particularism in the feminist discourse. One of her essays, *Under Western Eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses*, has been widely debated for years, also being sometimes misread. In the essay, she analysed the "Third World Women" as described by the western feminist texts. She argued the western world used to codify its relationship with "the other" in implicitly hierarchical terms: they expected all women to have the same priorities, independently of their skin colour, class, religion etc.⁸¹.

Mohanty differentiates the hegemonic representation of women and the multiple women's groups as historical subjects. In the period she wrote, we assisted in a discursive colonisation of the so called "third world woman" made by the dominant feminist discourse. This is of course inscribed in the "developed/underdeveloped" dichotomy, which brought on stage the "oppressed third world woman". Indeed, this woman has often been represented as: "religious (read: not progressive), domesticated (read: backward), family-oriented (read: traditional), legal minor (read: 'she is not still conscious of her rights') etc."; this appears in contrast with the representation often given for the "western women", who are: "educated, modern, having control over their own bodies and sexualities and the 'freedom' to make their own decisions⁸²".

Of course, all this speculation used and uses to reinforce the assumption that the third world just has not evolved to the extent the west has. Mohanty deconstructs

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Ivi, pp. 138-143.

⁸¹ C. T. Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses", *Feminist review*, 30 (1988), p. 68.

⁸² Ivi, p. 95.



colonisation arguments which define the women of the third world as archetypal victims. Homogenising all the “third world women” reinforces the dual structure between white and black women in the Foucauldian “juridico-discursive” model of power. Indeed, when (western) women escape the victim status, they become “oppressors”: western women take the place of southern women in shaping their preferences.

For example, Mohanty analyses the western description of the practice of veiling. The general significance attached to it is the control of women exercised by men. Instead, she underlines how this can vary among different cultural and historical contexts. Mohanty points out both the limits of such a theoretical framework and how this process is intrinsically imperialistic, ultimately robbing “historical and political agency”⁸³ of non-western women.

If in 1988 the author criticised western feminism, today, this critique should be inserted in a more general critique of the globalisation process. The naturalisation of the values of capital, and the unacknowledged power of cultural relativism in cross-cultural feminist scholarship and pedagogies is well acknowledged. Mohanty argues that today capitalism exacerbates racist, patriarchal and heterosexist beliefs. Indeed, she points out that, in the US, feminist movements are becoming more and more conservative, and there is a shift between these movements and the antiracist and more radical feminist movements.

She also underlines the emergence of some historical features: the role of the religious fundamentalisms with their deeply masculinist and often racist rhetoric which undermine feminist movements around the world, the growth of the prison industrial complex in the US, the increasing militarisation (and masculinisation) of the globe and the increasing privatisation of the market. As a matter of fact, today challenges are exacerbated by more brutal political and economic processes, boosting economic, racial and, according to the author, gender inequalities.

All these changes are actually very challenging for today’s feminism. Indeed, the author underlines how in such a new context, there should be a reengaging of the

⁸³ Ivi, p. 79.



relation between the universal and the particular in feminist theory. Mohanty underlines how:

in the context of the hegemony of the western scholarly establishment in the production and dissemination of texts, and in the context of the legitimating imperative of humanistic and scientific discourse, the definition of ‘the third-world woman’ as a monolith might well tie into the larger economic and ideological praxis of ‘disinterested’ scientific inquiry and pluralism which are the surface manifestations of a latent economic and cultural colonization of the ‘non-western’ world.⁸⁴

Indeed, the main problem is how to address the local without falling into old colonial trends and how to address the global without falling into cultural relativists platitudes. Like sixteen years ago, Chandra Talpade Mohanty is today still engaged in criticizing discursive colonisation made by Europe and the US “on the lives and struggles of marginalised women”⁸⁵. For instance, she reports how George W. Bush put in place a pervasive propaganda machinery prior to the US attack on Afghanistan. The main theme of the propaganda consisted in advertising an imperialist war asserting that it concerned the liberation of Afghan women.

In fact, the link between political economy and culture remains crucial to any form of feminist theorising. Maybe behind this statement there were some economic reasons, as economics is nowadays pervasive in all life spheres. As a matter of fact, Mohanty warns on the fact that transnational feminism should focus more on justice rather than on economic rules. She underlines how international economic institutions (like the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) and main cross-national governing bodies, like the MAI (Multinational Agreement on Investments) produced “devastating effects” on poor people around the world. She goes even further, arguing that women and girls are bearing the worse effects of globalisation (i.e. environmental degradation, wars, famines, privatization of services and deregulation of governments, the dismantling of welfare states)⁸⁶.

When these specific effects of globalisation are ignored by international institutions, women and girls of the south actually become invisible. Mohanty points out

⁸⁴ Ivi, p. 82.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Ivi, p. 514.



that women and girls constitute an important part of the antiglobalisation movement, trying to resist ongoing injustices⁸⁷.

Hawkesworth in her book *Globalization and Feminist Activism* asks:

In what sense can unelected, self-selected feminist activists claim to represent women? Which women and which interests tend to be represented in the diverse interactions of global feminist civil society? What cleavages surface in intergovernmental and in transnational sites of feminist activism? In the face of persistent disagreements, whose views and interests prevail?⁸⁸

The author asserts the staple of transnational feminism has been: the political contestations concerning claims made on behalf of women, the conditions under which such claims are made, who makes the claims, for whom they are made and whose interests are served by particular articulations of women's needs and interests. The author, reports that the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD) in 1982 declared to "reject the approach of Western women who insist on prioritizing problems of inequality between the sexes as the fundamental issue facing all women". According to these African feminists, the existing difference in power, material resources and interests among women could not be denied in the name of a global sisterhood. Focusing on power differential between women and men means to focus only on a selective commonality. Again, AAWORD underlined how:

While patriarchal views and structures oppress women all over the world, women are also members of classes and countries that dominate others and enjoy privileges in terms of access to resources. Hence, contrary to the best intentions of 'sisterhood', not all women share identical interests⁸⁹.

Jacqui and Parisi address this issue in depth in their contribution to the book *Feminist Strategies in International Governance*. They move five main critiques both to the concept and to the implementation of Gender Mainstreaming:

1. Institutional actors often undermine the intended effects of Gender Mainstreaming;
2. Gender equality impacts and outcomes of mainstreaming are at best challenging to monitor and evaluate;

⁸⁷ Ivi, pp. 499-535.

⁸⁸ M.E. Hawkesworth, *Globalization and Feminist Activism*, Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006, pp. 111-112.

⁸⁹ Ivi, p. 1.



3. Gender Mainstreaming has often been instrumentalised in order to reach other goals rather than gender equality, i.e. economic growth;

4. Women's movements and civil society's organisations have always been excluded from the international debate;

5. Gender Mainstreaming if often based on a single gender perspective, i.e. the western one, would lead to the reinforcement of gender stereotypes.

The two authors assert: "Gender Mainstreaming has been frequently criticized for reflecting a single gender perspective, often based on Western, heterosexist norms of appropriate gender relations"⁹⁰. Gender Mainstreaming does not take enough into consideration intersectionalities and it is often a synonymous of including all women only addressing the experiences of the dominant women, rather than those of the marginalized ones. The authors report the paragraph 46 of the *Beijing Platform for Action*⁹¹, which is considered the point of reference for the international community. We can find here just a weak attempt to acknowledge diversity and multiple discriminations. Indeed, according to Jacqui and Parisi the "gender-as-intersectionality discourse is accompanied by a strong liberal gender equality discourse in the document"⁹².

3. Lessons from the Past and New Challenges regarding Participation

Dissertations about how to get to an inclusive participation of the locals (especially of women) into the development process has been the argument of tons of books and

⁹⁰ T. Jacqui and L. Parisi, "Gender Mainstreaming Strategies in International Governance", in G. Caglar, E. Prügl, and S. Zwingel (eds.), *Feminist Strategies in International Governance*, London, Routledge, 2013, p. 42.

⁹¹ Par. 46 of the BPfA states as follows: "The Platform for Action recognizes that women face barriers to full equality and advancement because of such factors as their race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion or disability, because they are indigenous women or because of other status. Many women encounter specific obstacles related to their family status, particularly as single parents; and to their socio-economic status, including their living conditions in rural, isolated or impoverished areas. Additional barriers also exist for refugee women, other displaced women, including internally displaced women as well as for immigrant women and migrant women, including women migrant workers. Many women are also particularly affected by environmental disasters, serious and infectious diseases and various forms of violence against women".

⁹² T. Jacqui and L. Parisi, "Gender Mainstreaming Strategies in International Governance", cit., pp. 40-43.



papers⁹³. Of course, we do not pretend to solve this issue in the following paragraph. Anyway, an overview about the theme will be presented, being aware of the fact that probably there is no straightforward answer to this question.

According to Cornwall and Gaventa: “The concept of participation, of course, is not a new one in development. Over the last thirty years it has acquired a spectrum of meanings and given a diversity of practices”⁹⁴. Lister asserts participation should be considered as a basic Human Right as it involves citizens in decisions, which will affect their lives⁹⁵.

In the same way in the “north” people’s inclusion into the political life took place during the 1960s and 1970s, Cornwall and Gaventa argue for a broader participation of the “southern” population into developing projects, in order to better assess their needs. Then, they support the idea of a changing in perspective regarding the “beneficiaries” of development, from users and choosers (market-led version) to active participants of the social policies, engaged in shaping their future⁹⁶.

As reported by Stubbs, a specific bottom-up approach can be a powerful tool in order to achieve Gender Mainstreaming. However, this could only really be effective if integrated in a multilevel stakeholders’ participation: starting from the grassroots with women’s movement ending with the international organisations. What the author suggests, is the need to newly address women issues, on the basis of each specific context. Indeed, in today’s globalised era it is easier for civil society to establish linkages with bigger organisations, with the State and supranational institutions. As a matter of fact, in latest years women’s NGOs and women’s groups on the ground could establish themselves, consolidate and expand, in the triangle with international cooperation agencies.

⁹³ See, for example: R. Chambers, *Whose reality counts? Putting the first last*, London, Intermediate Technology Publications, 1997; S. Hickey and G. Mohan, *Participation, from tyranny to transformation? Exploring new approaches to participation in development*, London, Zed Books Ltd., 2004; M. D. A. Rahman, *People’s self-development: Perspectives on Participatory Action Research*, London, Zed Books, 1995; J. E. Stiglitz, “Participation and Development: Perspectives from the Comprehensive Development Paradigm”, *Review of Development Economics*, 6 (2002), pp. 163–182.

⁹⁴ A. Cornwall and J. Gaventa, “From Users and Choosers to Makers and Shapers. Repositioning Participation in Social Policy”, *Brighton: Institute of Development Studies*, (2001), 127 (working paper).

⁹⁵ R. Lister, “Citizen in Action: Citizenship and Community Development in a Southern Ireland Context”, *Community Development Journal*, 33 (1998), 3, p. 228.

⁹⁶ A. Cornwall and J. Gaventa, “From Users and Choosers to Makers and Shapers. Repositioning Participation in Social Policy”, cit., p. 1.



In this sense, it is fundamental that financial institutions, governments and women's NGOs recognize the importance of gender equality. As emerged along this paper, Gender Mainstreaming is not easily implemented and also Stubbs recognises that it does not happen automatically, instead it requires a new framework for being developed, and this cannot be a purely technocratic or technical one⁹⁷. NGOs play a central role. Indeed, they are considered: "More participatory [than governments and supranational organisations], less bureaucratic, more flexible, more cost-effective, with an ability to reach poor and disadvantaged people"⁹⁸.

However, it is important to underline how NGOs may have overshadowed the importance of the informal (sometimes indigenous) forms of civil society organisations. Indeed, they usually fill the gap of service provision through informal networks and could potentially represent marginalised groups which otherwise would have been excluded from any development process⁹⁹.

Historically, one of the most popular methodology NGOs (and almost every development actor) used (and still use) to address the civil society's involvement into the developing process has been the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). Indeed, during the 1990s PRA gained space in the development arena. Absalom describes PRA as: "a growing family of approaches and methods to enable local people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act"¹⁰⁰. Eventually, in recent years also PRA's popularity fell down. Indeed, Cornwall suggests that: "not only the conflation of PRA with participatory development is problematic, but also that the category PRA is unstable, polyvalent, and reflects diverse possible practices"¹⁰¹. PRA came into the practice of many institutions and NGOs, but its usage has been often "abused": consultants co-opted PRA without really changing the old top-down practices.

⁹⁷ J. Stubbs, "Gender in development: a long haul – but we're getting there!", *Development in Practice*, 10 (2000), 3-4, pp. 535-542.

⁹⁸ M. Robinson and G. White, *The Role of Civic Organisations in the Provision of Social Service*, Research for Action 37, Helsinki, WIDER, 1997, p. 4.

⁹⁹ A. Cornwall and J. Gaventa, "From Users and Choosers to Makers and Shapers. Repositioning participation in Social Policy", cit., p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ E. Absalom *et al.*, "Sharing our concerns and looking to the future", *PLA Notes*, 22 (1995), p. 5.

¹⁰¹ A. Cornwall and G. Pratt, "The use and abuse of participatory rural appraisal: reflections from practice", *Agric Hum Values*, 28 (2011), p. 264.



The rhetoric of participation came into the development agenda without challenging the usual way “developmentalists” used to do projects. In Robert Chambers’ words: “the result is abuse and malpractice on a massive scale”¹⁰². Cornwall and Pratt assert that notwithstanding the good premises on which PRA is based, it ended in “reinserting the existing relations of power/knowledge without any semblance of challenge or change”, so: the debate on PRA should be reinvigorated [...] also to stimulate greater critical reflection on the politics of the practice of participatory methodologies for the generation of knowledge, information, plans and assessments for the new generations of practitioners who have now come to enter the field”¹⁰³.

Another quite recent methodology which can be useful in our analysis is the engendering of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Indeed, if PRSPs are not engendered, they: “implicitly reinforce unequal gender patterns that hinder development”¹⁰⁴. PRSPs are supposed to be country-owned, through a participatory process involving civil society organisations and not just as a government reflection¹⁰⁵. In Zuckerman and Garrett’s analysis of 13 PRSPs produced in 2002, they found that most of the PRSPs mentioned that participatory consultations took place within technical working group. It is worth noting that just Guinea and Malawi’s PRSPs mentioned the establishment of technical groups related with gender, but unfortunately they did not say much about the components’ origin (how many women/men? Were them government officials? Were them civil society organisations components?)¹⁰⁶.

Zuckerman¹⁰⁷ provides a useful insight on the importance of engendered PRSPs. She stresses the importance of influencing *ex ante* the political process through a real engagement of the civil societies’ voices into the PRSPs with participatory processes.

¹⁰² R. Chambers, *Whose reality counts? Putting the first last*, cit., p.8.

¹⁰³ A. Cornwall and G. Pratt, “The use and abuse of participatory rural appraisal: reflections from practice”, cit., p. 267.

¹⁰⁴ E. Zuckerman and A. Garrett, *Do Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) Address Gender? A Gender Audit of 2002 PRSPs*, A Gender Action Publication, 2003, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ Ivi, p.3.

¹⁰⁶ Ivi, p. 5.

¹⁰⁷ E. Zuckerman, “‘Engendering’ Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs): The issue and the challenges”, *An Oxfam Journal*, 10 (2002), 3, pp. 88-94. See also: E. Zuckerman, “Why Engendering PRSPs Reduces Poverty, and the Case of Rwanda”, *World Institute for Development Economics Research*, (2001), discussion paper 112; E. Zuckerman, *Evaluation Gender Mainstreaming in Advocacy Work on Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs)*, Oxford, Oxfam Great Britain, 2002.



This approach can actually be considered quite innovative as in practice gender issues have often been marginalised from PRSPs.

Oxfam implemented engendered PRSPs in Vietnam and Uganda, but the political answer was not as they expected. In this sense a broad post-2015 agenda should be put in place, recalling the importance of an “holistic approach to gender equality in the new framework”¹⁰⁸. In this context, we recall that, even if potentially the different women’s groups could participate in the international debate – “filling the box of Gender Mainstreaming” with the content they prefer allowed by its vagueness –, this is not practically easy. Indeed, an international community commitment in involving civil society organisations is needed.

In fact, often, the local population does not really participate into the developing process, and this regards mostly women, which sometimes lack political/decision-making power within their communities. Moreover, it can happen that outsiders “manipulate” the participant according to their priorities (according to their beliefs, to accomplish with donors etc.)¹⁰⁹.

Indeed, if on the one hand also the OECD DAC highlights how every woman has the ability and should participate in the decision making processes within her society (both individually and collectively)¹¹⁰, Richey suggests that, more realistically, women should be put in the condition to be able to empower themselves starting from the recognition of the complexities and differences of the political environments, and recalling how international aids can play an important role in favouring such an environment. The author also stresses the importance of long-term and context specific intervention in order to achieve gender equality¹¹¹.

Richey writes that from a theoretical point of view, non-western women can advocate to Gender Mainstreaming concepts even when their interpretations are different, but she underlines that:

¹⁰⁸ OECD, *Gender equality and women’s rights in the post-2015 agenda. A foundation for sustainable development*, Paris, OECD publications, 2013, p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ A. Cornwall and J. Gaventa, “From Users and Choosers to Makers and Shapers. Repositioning Participation in Social Policy”, cit., p. 5.

¹¹⁰ OECD DAC, *OECD and post 2015 reflections*, Paris, OECD Publications, p. 11.

¹¹¹ L.A. Richey, “Gender Equality and Foreign Aid”, in F. Tarp (ed.), *Foreign Aid and Development: Lessons Learnt and Directions for The Future*, London, Routledge, 2000, pp. 401-405.



The fact that representatives from the world's richest nations are giving third world women the permission and the responsibility for effective participation in their own lives and societies lacks a recognition of the complexities and difficulties faced by such women in their personal or political realms¹¹².

As a matter of fact, even when people participate to the process, sometimes it is easy to fall in the old colonised/colonisers dichotomy. In a certain sense, who is running the developing projects, sometimes falls in the bureaucratic trap of the “old tyranny” veiled by civil society's engagement through PRAs, which often uses to reinforce existing inequalities and power relations¹¹³.

Conclusion

There is a urgent need to readdress civil society organisations' participation into the developing process. Sometimes international institutions (EU with CSPs and NIPs, WB and IMF through PRSPs) but also NGOs in general, tend to ignore civil society organisations or co-opt to their priorities the recipients of developing projects. Gender Mainstreaming can be used to reinforce the existing power relations between men and women – but also between the “north” and the “south” of the world – if genuine consultive-mechanisms are not going to be established into the development routine. Indeed, the instrumental approach to Gender Mainstreaming the EU is still using, reflects some “old” power relations.

Gender Mainstreaming should be considered, instead, as an inclusive and pervasive methodology in order to reach gender equality, in an actor-oriented way. If it is seen as an instrumental tool in order to foster economic growth, gender stereotypes will remain unchallenged and, more important, the actual needs and priorities of the different – often marginalized – women's groups will not be addressed. Indeed, these needs and priorities are related to every specific culture and cannot be imposed from outside as many international organisations as long as some NGOs are still doing.

¹¹² Ivi, p. 419.

¹¹³ B. Cooke and U. Kothari, *The tyranny of participation*, London, Zed Books, 2001.



In Sylvia Walby's words: "Gender Mainstreaming is always situated in the context of other diverse and intersecting inequalities. The practical recognition of such intersectionality is a current major concern"¹¹⁴.

Further on how to really incorporate civil society organisations in the drafting and ongoing process regarding any development projects are needed, in order to achieve gender equality avoiding neo-colonial dynamics.

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¹¹⁴ S. Walby, "Introduction. Comparative gender mainstreaming in a global era", *International feminist journal of politics*, 7 (2005), 4, p. 466.