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## **SPECIAL SECTION:**

### ***Women's Entrepreneurship in a Globalizing World***

**Guest Editor: Subhadra Mitra Channa**

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#### ***Introduction***

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The papers that follow were included in a Panel titled 'Women's Entrepreneurship in a Globalizing World', which was part of the International Interdisciplinary Conference on *Issues of Legitimacy: Entrepreneurial culture, Corporate Responsibility and Urban Development* that was held in Naples in September 2012. The Conference was promoted by the Commission on Urban Anthropology (IUAES). I convened this Panel on behalf of the Commission on the Anthropology of Women (IUAES) with the specific aim of reflecting on the effects of economic globalization, rapid urbanization and environmental changes on individual lives and communities, especially from a gender perspective. An important goal was to investigate the mechanisms of survival and the livelihood strategies employed by women in order to cope with these problems from 'material, experiential and daily-life level' (Mohanty 1991: 21). The papers presented in the Panel offered detailed ethnographic examples from urban societies across the continents providing kaleidoscopic insights into the responses of women to challenging situations.

**Keywords:** Gendered entrepreneurship, globalization, urbanization, agency, livelihoods.

#### **Introduction**

The articles included in this Special Section of *Urbanities* are revised versions of the papers presented in the Panel on 'Women's Entrepreneurship in a Globalizing World'.<sup>1</sup> They are based on ethnographic investigations by the respective authors. Of the six papers presented at the conference, three are reproduced here in full; the other three are presented as abstracts at the end of this Special Section. Taken collectively, these papers account for different social worlds and cultural representations that mark gendered divisions of social life in a variety of cultures spread across the globe, from Italy to Mexico and from North East India to Indonesia. Methodologically, they are based on anthropological fieldwork, substantiating the applicability of the ethnographic method to urban and complex societies, beyond the discipline's traditional concern with small scale society (Pardo and Prato 2012: 20). Theoretically they are critical of possibilities of individual emancipation and growth for

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women under neo-liberal economy which 'seem to have overstated individual agency within reflexive modernity and overlooked the role of power in shaping individual subjectivity' Belliappa (2013: 35).

There is a general acceptance that individual subjectivities operate within structural constraints of patriarchy and other forms of inequality. At the same time, the optimism about human possibilities and inner power are not altogether lost. The articles in this Section, while reflecting upon the structural constraints faced by women, are also hopeful about the manner in which women deal with their oppressive life conditions and negotiate the best possible solutions to their problems of survival.

Accepting that there cannot be value free research (Bristow and Esper 1984, Harding 1987, Mies 1981), the articles that follow also move away from the 'oppression model' towards an examination of how women successfully cope with their life situations (Cook 1983). All the authors highlight that what women do is worth talking about, and what they do is also informed by logic, strategy, common sense and knowledge, providing an effective critique of the perspective that excludes women from both enterprise and logical thinking (Hekman 1990).

### **Globalization and Feminist Anthropology**

To situate women within the discourse on globalization, especially with respect to the flow of capital and economic opportunities, one needs to take cognizance of Appadurai's comment that these flows are 'not coeval, convergent, isomorphic or spatially consistent' (Appadurai 2011: 624) and it is precisely these disjunctions that 'produce fundamental problems of livelihood, equity, suffering, justice and governance' (ibid.). For instance, resource-bases for subsistence are sacrificed when environments are degraded for the sake of mega dams and mining. Implementing new technologies and outsourcing leads to job losses. Structural adjustments put maximum burden on the marginalized sections of society, particularly women. A variety of unexpected transformations take place as side effects of new job opportunities or when remote areas are connected by roads and opened to tourism. In spite of their varied locations and contexts, all these changes have disturbingly similar effects on existing structures of class, ethnic, gender and racial divisions. An almost universal trend is that power relations are rarely restructured as globalization often tends to re-affirm and even deepen existing chasms based on classic forms of discrimination, including those that are gender-based (Harrison 2004, Nash 1994).

It is a historical reality that in most parts of the globe women have had less than their share of resources and opportunities. It has only been under extenuating circumstances such as war, migration and depopulation, including that caused by AIDS, that women have been required to move into the public domain of economic possibilities. The increasing poverty and political upheavals in 'Third World' countries have forced women to work and participate in the market economy, yet seldom on favourable terms (Perutz 2008). More often than not, they are forced into situations where even mere survival requires an intense investment of labour and time. Under such circumstances the meaning of entrepreneurship also takes on a different significance. Entrepreneurship for women often translates into survival strategies and is not

associated with the enhancement of status; it is about just to being able to live rather than making greater strides in life.

### **Women as Entrepreneurs**

Entrepreneurship is usually associated with increase and accumulation of capital and what is termed as success in an economic project. However, scholars of urban societies such as Pardo (1996) have redefined the limits of entrepreneurship to include moral and spiritual dimensions and where the concept of rational is not focused on the material alone but is inclusive of non-material aspect of life, such as sentiments about 'significant others', faith in God and sense of worthiness and fulfilment. Pardo (1996: 12) brings in references to Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic capital' to criticize Barth (1963), who in his discussion of entrepreneurship opposes normative to instrumental values. Pardo prefers to use 'entrepreneurialism' to describe a combination of economic, material, spiritual and cultural objectives that serve to establish a person's sense of worth, of identity and of social recognition in addition to economic gain. In his description of entrepreneurship, he includes a series of practices reflecting a cultural and subjective assessment of good and bad, right and wrong. Classically, an entrepreneur was defined as a person with qualities such as hard work, intelligence, a capacity for planning and strategizing, a vision about achieving a desired end and the ability to succeed. But in real situations, as these papers show, this 'category' includes persons who are able to manipulate, negotiate and stretch available resources by all possible means, sometimes even beyond the permissible. Such an understanding of entrepreneurship applies particularly to women, who often find themselves unable to access formal resources in society and to avail of the legal avenues to do so.

With reference to Naples, Pardo (2000) writes that southern Italians feel justified, in view of the discrimination meted out to them by banks and economical institutions, to raise capital and do investments by means that may not appear to be ethical by mainstream business standards. Yet, they too follow their own ethical system, which brings to mind the *havalala* trade; a trade that operates in India outside all formal banking and financial institutions primarily on the moral strength of 'word of mouth'. As rightly pointed out by Pardo (1996, 2000, 2009, 2012), people's relationship with the state plays a key role in how the economy is managed. If the state appears corrupt and unjust, people develop their own sense of moral judgment and their own pathways to deal with the situation. Lobo (in this Section) quotes Ribeiro (2006) to discuss a concept of '(il)licit' that describes practices that are socially licit but illegal. This is the way in which Pardo broadened the definition of entrepreneurship to include the moral and ethical re-interpretation of what is possible and what is not.

The papers in this Section also indicate that social capital in terms of networks, knowledge and sociability plays a key role in entrepreneurship, especially at the ground level and at the margins. Women sometimes become players in the informal areas of the economy, where 'making a living' may involve simply moving things from one place to another. Social skills are used to form networks and create pathways for actions that enhance the value of an item by simply transferring it from the rural to the urban or from remote areas to city markets. Fowler (in this Section) describes how women use their in-depth knowledge of local

conditions and their social skills to their economic advantage by moving goods to generate profit. This parallels Pardo's contention (1996: 17) that the 'power of action from below' is often derived from information gathering and social networking. Again, everything in such movements may not fall within the official version of legality (Lobo, in this Section) but for the marginal, who are often women, they are legitimate ways of feeding their families.

This effort to survive against immense odds can also be viewed as 'entrepreneurship' for here the arithmetic does not start from zero but from a negative count.

Increasing urbanization and modernization does not necessarily mean that women benefit as a category (Saunders 2002: 2); they may have to scavenge around the margins to get some scraps for survival. Women, more than men, may have to fall back on their own skills, sociability and manipulative strategies in the absence of formal capital and they may expend all their efforts and resources without producing surplus value. Why does this happen? Here we find that it is culture, not economics that is at work. Comparing the situation of women with that of people who are marginalized through cultural processes of stereotyping and negative images such as the southern Italians described by Pardo, one can see that women face discrimination not because of any objective data about them but simply because of the cultural constructions of femininity.

In India, for example, while the needs of globalization and modernity have pushed many women into the public space to work as an extension of their domestic duties, men in general still hold idealized visions of homemaking mothers as their 'domestic goddesses' and are yet to accept a woman in the public space as worthy of respect (Channa 2004). Donner (2008: 14) describes how there is a clear-cut relationship in urban Kolkata between class and perceptions of women in the public arena, whereby a negative view is attached even to respectable women who work outside their homes.

Even when women work and are active entrepreneurs, they may have to justify themselves. A woman cited by Pardo (1996: 42) said that she wanted to improve her household's position. In other words, a woman is often culturally not viewed as having the right to be an entrepreneur for herself but only for the sake of significant others. But such notions can be culture specific, for in many urban areas women may be viewed as holding almost equal responsibilities for running household economies (Pardo 1996: 26). Therefore, as observed by Pardo (*ibid*), it would be misleading to have any stereotypes one way or the other. In India, for example, as pointed out by Channa (2013), lower caste women who work in their traditional occupations hold a higher status vis-a-vis their own families than upper caste women, who are seen as economically unproductive. The value ascribed to the social appropriateness of performing a role is what is given recognition here, not the objective contribution of the performance. Even in a market that is supposed to be free and objective it is only social and cultural values that are translated into economic values. There is nothing objective about pricing. It is here that gender differences become starkly apparent when most of the work that is deemed feminine either has no monetary value or is priced much lower than masculine work even if it is identical or very similar.

Most of women's work is identified with what is called the women's domain. Thus, it tends to be classified under reproduction rather than production and is kept out of market

valuation. A simple example is the cooking that a woman does for her family and which is never given a monetary value; yet, when this cooking is done outside the home it is actually considered a masculine task that attracts big money as in the case of the high salaries drawn by hotel and restaurant chefs. On the other hand, women are, for example, often involved in handicraft production but this kind of production is defined as crafts-of-leisure rather than crafts-of-labour (Becker 1998 quoted by Ficky 2012: xviii). Often, what women produce — such as food and handicrafts — is marketed as home-based product and priced accordingly. Therefore, it is clear that although women are producers of many essential products, the fact that they produce the most essential of human resources, namely other humans, has masked their production as reproduction. In a capitalist commodity market, the value of their products is not acknowledged and they are not compensated as free producers but as part producers tied to their reproductive tasks.

Appadurai (1986: 8) quotes Marx, who said that 'in order to produce not mere products but commodities, a man must produce use values for others, social use values'. Simmel (1978: 73) had already ascribed to the notion of value a subjectivity that precludes any form of objective valuation of any object even in a so-called free capitalist market. Anthropologists are well aware that things are priced not according to their actual or labour or input value but according to abstract and culturally specific definitions of 'prestige' and 'aesthetics'; 'designer clothes' are a good example. Gender becomes an intrinsic dimension of value just because of the subjective nature of valuation. Thus, women are seen as situated in a context of what Sahlins (1972: 193) calls 'generalized reciprocity' where they give out love, nurture and care.

A woman's work outside her home is often seen as only an extension of her domestic roles, where the 'extra' that she may put in is not evaluated as part of a commodity exchange system but is seen as an inherent part of 'being a woman'. As Perutz (2008) has shown, women are pushed into looking for 'survival' in a situation of exchange, while men (even when supported by women) are seen as being gainfully employed in making a living. The cultural representation of men as breadwinners makes anything that they do meaningful and something meant to provide for their families. A woman, on the other hand, is seen as only a supplementary worker. Thus, women are often paid less than men or their enterprise is not taken as seriously as a form of economic activity.

### **Women, Economy and Urbanization**

Women's entry into the commodity market and in capitalist production always takes place from an unequal platform, as compared to men who often have the vantage position of not only being 'official' workers but also having access to resources that have value in a particular society. So, if a society is based on agriculture, men have access to and control over land; if it is based on commodity production, then they have access to and control over the means of production and on market forces. Here again we find that non-western, especially indigenous, societies often hold communal property or rights of use as opposed to total rights of possession. In such societies, women's rights are not too different from those of men. Two papers presented in the Panel discussed exceptions to the rule of male providers. Brara (see

Abstract) describes the mother's market in Manipur and Lobo in her article describes African women's entrepreneurship across national borders. Even in Fowler's description of women in Indonesia (see her Article in this Special Section) there is no explicit notion of patriarchy or implied male control, as women are responsible for exchanges in their own sphere. Both Brara and Fowler describe indigenous systems where women always had a role in the local economy and used their local knowledge for navigating the local landscape of resources, both natural and human. In the pre-capitalist economy where most resources either were free goods or were communally owned — as in the case of clan and community ownership — women had as much right of use as men and they also had access to traditional knowledge. In the initial stages of capitalist transformation women lost out on access to resources, for everywhere capitalism comes with a package of individual ownership and patriarchy. Historians in South Asia, such as Oldenburg (2002) have often discussed how the conversion of communal property to individual ownership transferred titles automatically to men, alienating women. Women in newly urbanized areas often find themselves at a dual disadvantage, as they are often required to work in the open economy but with the burden of traditions weighing them down. Urbanization has not really transformed the cultural values and perceptions of people across the world, whether it is Naples (Pardo 1996) Kolkata (Donner 2008), Delhi (Channa 1985, 2004) or Mexico (Perutz 2008).

### **Women's Freedom and Agency**

As discussed earlier, globalization and modernity are not necessarily conducive to women's liberation. Most ethnographic works reveal that the less influenced a society is by the norms and values of western global forces, the more freedom is observed among women. This is demonstrated by Fowler in this Special Section. Her article on indigenous women in Indonesia shows that they apparently suffer less from patriarchal restrictions than women in South India (Antoniello in this Section) or Mexico (Perutz 2008). Seligmann (2012: 122) describes how for the élite in the city of Cusco (Peru) the 'indigenous looking women' street vendors were a sign of embarrassing non-modernity but also that the women stood their ground and 'were hardly submissive'.

Thus, it would appear to be a western or élite fallacy that only women who are urban, westernized and formally educated have the capacity to be entrepreneurs. The uneducated 'mothers', women past their prime who manage to run successful businesses in the local market in Manipur, ordinary housewives who successfully set of food stalls in rural Mexico and intrepid women of colour who carry goods from one country to another, manipulating legal and border rules and regulations (Lobo, in this Section) all show a high level of intelligence, a capacity for negotiation and manipulation and an agency, resilience and patience that probably are truly feminine qualities. The women of colour discussed by Lobo are negatively stereotyped by upper class Brazilians in the urban areas, yet they make a profit transferring goods from where they are less valued to a place where they are more valued, thus making use of cultural differences as an entrepreneurial resource. The location of these women in a commercially highly developed island that bridges two economies is strategic. Here the women are primarily linking two urban areas and not a rural place with an urban

place. These almost illiterate women form part of the informal sector of an otherwise flourishing commercial centre, with no resources other than a capacity for verbal negotiations and a keen insight into the minds of those they deal with, both producers and consumers. They are capable of making some neat profits and carry out trades of considerable volume.

Another important aspect that the discussions offered here bring out is that entrepreneurship among marginal groups like women is better understood and interpreted from the bottom up than by taking a top down view. For example, ever since a Bangladeshi entrepreneur, Mohammed Yunus, received the Nobel Prize for his work on micro-credit to the poor, this particular form of extending credit to the poor and marginalized has become not only a much praised system but also a profitable system for large companies. Yet, a kind of informal banking has long been in operation in rural areas and communities in the less developed regions of the world, especially among less educated people — both men and women — who find it difficult to negotiate the formal banking mechanisms. However, as Antoniello shows in her article, what works well in an informal and face-to-face community, does not work so well when this system of providing loans is controlled by large companies who operate according to formal rules and regulations. While big companies tend to siphon off huge profits from the small contributions made by the poor, the women's cooperatives manage to extend actual help without any formal organization.

When women form their own self-help groups or pool money in a closed and intimate social network, things are very different from situations where large banks and corporations lure them into debt traps offering what appear as more reasonable terms, which in fact follow the same capitalist principles of making money as any other enterprise. Through her study of small town women in India, Antoniello demonstrates that women's entrepreneurship works best when they are themselves in control as opposed to when they are controlled or even guided from the top. In this sense, the close-knit primary group relationships characterizing small kin-based communities are more conducive to this kind of entrepreneurship.

### **Conclusion: Women in a Globalized World**

In its simplest definition, the recent phenomenon of globalization triggered by the capitalist market economy and political modernization, involves the movement of goods and people. Interestingly, the analyses offered here show how simple women with no special training or education have made strategic use of these avenues of movements of goods and resources and of efficacious modes of communication and travel to make a living and a profit. They are innovatively managing to survive in a world that is becoming more and more urbanized and more difficult to negotiate. As recorded by many scholars, globalization and the monetary economy have deprived many women of their traditional access to resources that were channelled to them mostly through the community and through common property rights. Since economic modernization emphasizes the individual as a key player for transactions of various kinds, the 'individual' most often than not translates as 'the man'. This situation has left women out of the reckoning for ownership of most property and resources. Yet, women continue to play the role of providers and nurturers for their families and communities. Thus, making a profit or having access to cash does not necessarily mitigate a woman's

marginalization. In situations of stress, like migration and recession, it is often found that women have to take on most of the burden of coping. The difficulties brought about in developing countries by structural adjustment programmes and economic recession as a whole make good examples. In conflict zones where men succumb to violence or drug abuse (as in Manipur) it is the women who take on the responsibility of caring for their families and the young people. Women from marginal communities are often pushed into entrepreneurial activities as they continue to carry the traditional burden of having to provide for their families no matter what comes to pass.

Another significant aspect highlighted in the discussions that follow is that women experience the differentiations and hierarchies of the world differently from men. Thus, while men tend to build walls, women try to negotiate with other women across racial and ethnic divides. For example, the migrant Muslim women studied by Delacourt (see her Abstract) in what she describes as a 'right wing', conservative Italian community are able to create a space for themselves and their families through cooperation and relationship building with other women in the host community. Women are able to negotiate better across divides of power because they appear *not to* represent the power holders. The African women studied by Lobo can manage to build trade relations across the racial divide with Mexican women because, as women, they share certain goals and aspirations and, as women, they do not represent oppression but come across, instead, as part of the universally oppressed, no matter where they belong. Even though such oppression may not exist in every situation, symbolically the possibility and acceptance of women as less powerful and less invested in power resources helps to advance them as mediators and builders of bridges. In a globalizing world such bridges often act as important resources for making a living and are an important aspect of gendered entrepreneurship. Fowler in her article on women who negotiate paths of resource transfers and use also makes clear that, while ethnicity is an important criterion in 'finding a path', women remain fluid and changeable just like the paths that they negotiate. Ethnicity when used strategically can be made into a resource.

So, women deprived by society of most conventional resources manage to create unconventional resources in terms of relationships and investments of their own efforts and time. Thus, whether they form group cooperatives to save money (Antoniello in this Section), make use of their energy and time to make up for money and power (Perutz 2008), or make use of cultural models (Brara's Abstract), they attempt to mobilize some capacity, some capability and some conditions to survive and make their way through a largely hostile yet demanding world. This is the true story of women's entrepreneurship and their courage and resilience in a globalizing world.



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