



CHAPTER 1

Introduction

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In the context of the crisis of social reproduction, impoverishment and growing inequalities, subsequent to the neo-liberal financialized capitalist system, solidarity economy initiatives are emerging and bubbling up, at different levels. They are acting for change and constituting paths of resistance to capitalism and to its destructive consequences.

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This book presents thoughts and practices in the field of solidarity economy. It is particularly innovative by demonstrating how a feminist analysis renews the perspectives in this field. Indeed, although there has been a growing interest in the field of solidarity economy by both academics and politicians, it has remained so far gender-blind, even though these practices are highly gendered and women play a major role in them.

Solidarity practices privilege the quest for solidarity (among producers, between producers and consumers, in their territories and environment) over individual (or group) profit and rent seeking behaviour, now and for the future generations. These practices intend to articulate democracy, sustainability and the economy. They shed light on different ways of doing economy, constructing innovative social relations and of doing politics, reimagining decision-making processes, sometimes contesting development institutions and public policies. These are critical issues at a moment of growing consciousness of ecological, social and democratic crisis worldwide, subsequent to the financialization and dehumanization of capitalism as well as of its severe fragility, as the coronavirus pandemic and profound present global crisis is highlighting.

The book offers timely contributions to the thinking on resistance and alternatives to the economic (mal)functioning, not only by shedding light on innovative forms of production, consumption, exchange and financing and on women's struggles for their rights in these endeavours, but, and this crucial in these times of deep turmoil, also by focusing on the reframing of work and social reproduction.

Through a series of concrete analyses of women's and/or feminist organizations and practices in Latin America and India by scholars and activists working in these countries, this book brings new and valuable insights to the thoughts on these critical issues and rays of hope on possible spaces for change. Grounded in research with grass-roots women's organizations on solidarity practices that are often part of broader social, environmental and political movements, and addressing them from a feminist perspective, this book contributes to the empirical and theoretical debates on *social reproduction*, demonstrating that it is a key issue to the transformation of a patriarchal and unequal global capitalist system. When based on solidarity-driven relationships and democratic practices that consider gender, class and race power relations, solidarity economy has the potential to put the enlarged reproduction of life at the centre.

Solidarity economy makes it possible to contribute to the transformation of this system through the reorganization of social reproduction. This requires that it be based on relationships based on solidarity—and not on inequalities, submission and exploitation. It also requires it to build democratic practices that question gender, class and race relations and integrate the political objectives of gender equality and more equitable and inclusive power relations. When based on solidarity relations and feminist and inclusive democratic practices, solidarity economy has the potential to put the enlarged reproduction of life at the centre.

This book presents the results of a collective feminist research project, “Feminist analysis of social and solidarity practices: views from Latin America and India” (2015–2018), coordinated by Christine Verschuur, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, co-coordinated by Filipe Calvão (Graduate Institute), funded by the Swiss Network of International Studies (SNIS). Our deepest thanks go to the women in the solidarity economy initiatives with whom we worked together during this research process and to the many other people from the multiple organizations involved. This book would not have been possible without the theoretical and empirical contributions of all the researchers of this network, expressed and enriched in the many meetings and exchanges throughout the research. The members of the network who have been particularly involved in the field research work and writing are, besides Christine Verschuur, Isabelle Guérin and Isabelle Hillenkamp: Ivonne Farah, Kaveri Haritas, Santosh Kumar, Marisa Lis Fournier, K. Kalpana, Erika Loritz, Rajib Nandi, Miriam Nobre, Gabriela Ruesgas, Sheyla Saori, Fernanda Sostres and Govindan Venkatasubramanian. Filipe Calvão contributed significantly to the various analysis workshops and to the revision of the quality of the texts. We want to warmly thank Yira Lazala, research assistant and Laïs Meneguello, assistant for the video production (both at the Graduate Institute, Geneva), as well as Valeria Esquivel and Ibrahim Saïd (UNRISD), Jean-Louis Laville (Conservatoire national des Arts et Métiers, CNAM-Paris) and Fernanda Wanderley (CIDES-Bolivia), all of them for their important contributions during the course of the project. Our deep thanks go also to Barbara Harris-White (Oxford University) and Lourdes Benería (Cornell University), whose seminal writings in feminist economics and intellectual, critical and friendly encouragement have inspired us so much.

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The concrete analyses of concrete situations and processes, intersecting critical feminist theories and a substantive approach to economics, have contributed to lively conceptual debates within the network of researchers, based in the Global South and Europe, either in the field or in workshops or other forms of exchange and writing. This collective process and comparative analysis fed the theoretical discussions at the heart of the book and the results of this research with the network. Collective writing often characterizes feminist work but is not easy. We have chosen to proceed in this way, referring to the people most involved in each chapter, while acknowledging the substantial theoretical and political contributions of each to the whole. All the chapters effectively address the discussion, informed by local feminist practices and thoughts, of the redefinition of the meaning of work and social reproduction in the collective experiences of working women, but also of power.

The book is structured as follows. As the question of the organization of social reproduction is key to understanding the transformative potential of solidarity economy, it was fundamental to start by discussing this concept. Inevitably, elements of this question, dealt with theoretically in the first chapter, come back in the second conceptual chapter—the feminist analysis of the solidarity economy—informed by the contributions of the various initiatives studied, and also run through all the chapters. By revisiting the discussions on social reproduction and the solidarity economy through a feminist framework, our aim is to weave them together, even if we make each of them explicit beforehand.

The main objective of the first chapter is therefore to clarify the theoretical bases of the debate on social reproduction. It seeks to show how a feminist analysis of social reproduction renews its understanding. It

argues that social reproduction is a powerful concept for understanding the possibilities of social change. It also clarifies the theoretical differences between care and social reproduction and addresses the issue of the politicization of social reproduction, illustrated in each of the other chapters. This chapter also briefly discusses the feminist epistemologies and decolonial perspective that inspired this research on solidarity economy practices in the Global South.

The main objective of Chapter 2 is to lay the theoretical foundations to a feminist approach of solidarity economy from a critical and “possibilist” perspective. This will contribute to inform the discussion on the field of study called solidarity economy that is less used in some countries, especially in the Anglosphere and in Asia. The theoretical discussion in Chapter 2 also revisits some debates on solidarity economy and feminist studies, two fields that have tended to pay too little attention to each other and not acknowledge enough each one’s theoretical inputs (see also the afterword).

Chapters 3 to 9 concern the case studies, situated in countries have quite vibrant solidarity economy initiatives—even if sometime not labelled as such—and strong feminist or women’s movements. The concrete analyses of concrete situations and processes, intersecting feminist critical theories and a substantive approach of the economy, contributed to lively conceptual debates among the network of researchers, either in the field, in workshops or other forms of exchange. This collective process and comparative analysis fed the theoretical discussions at the heart of the book. These chapters present and discuss the reframing of the meaning of work and social reproduction in collective experiences of women workers, either as construction workers (Chapter 3, Tamil Nadu, India), as urban care-workers, either home-based (Chapter 6, Kerala, India) or community-centre based (Chapter 7, Buenos Aires, Argentina), in bakery, greenhouses or handicraft organizations (Chapter 5, Batallas, Bolivia), as fish sellers (Chapter 8, Udupi, India) or as peasants in environmental care and agroecology (Chapter 4, Changalpet, Tamil Nadu; chapter 9, Vale do Ribeira, Brazil). These chapters have not been organized according to a geographical logic but according to the specific issues addressed, which echo to one another across continents. This allows us to insist on common structural aspects, beyond contextual differences.

To conclude, in Chapter 10, the book draws cross-sectional analysis from the case studies on how integrating a feminist perspective of solidarity economy practices contributes to the renewal of public action and

policies for the reproduction and maintenance of life. The afterword rebounds on the results presented before, engages in further considerations on how the cross-fertilization enriches feminist and solidarity economy theories and suggests the necessity to pursue research on these issues.

Through our feminist analysis of solidarity economy, we hope to enrich these two bodies of literature, solidarity economy and critical feminist theories. Drawing on ethnographies, interdisciplinary analysis and comparison between various parts of the world, this book revisits the *empirical and theoretical debates on social reproduction*. In doing so, we reaffirm that social reproduction is a key issue to understand the reproduction of inequalities and the political and economic debates on gender, development and social change