

Autonomy should be our keyword: Feminisms from the South and subaltern cosmopolitanism in Social and Solidarity Economies¹

Luciane Lucas dos Santos

CES, Centre for Social Studies

To begin with, I would like to share with you all the standpoint from which I speak: as a woman and a feminist from the South, as a scholar concerned with epistemological questions and their political impacts in the bodies of different subaltern women.

I was wondering which contributions I could bring to this discussion today. And I decided to focus on the second part of the question: how can we think of a road towards international solidarity? I thus try to answer one of this panel's issue: how to expand the emancipatory potential of non-capitalist and solidarity-based initiatives?

I think it would be nice to bring to the centre of the debate a concept developed by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2006), which is the concept of "subaltern cosmopolitanism". It means, ultimately, the possible and healthy articulation between subaltern people around the world in order to think of innovative forms of organising material life beyond the capitalist market and to fight against the common enemies: large landowners, loggers, mining companies etc. I remember a moment in which the Popular University of Social Movements (UPMS), in the context of the Alice Project, assembled people and movements from different countries who were affected by Vale do Rio Doce and its policies of production. It is just an example of what international solidarity may be in economic terms. And here I remember the words of Gibson-Graham (2002): there are different ways of producing, redistributing and exchanging values. There are different ways of performing a job, of paying for a job, of distributing surpluses. I question: to what extent have we put it into practice when thinking of social and solidarity economies?

Coming back to the idea of subaltern cosmopolitanism - which is just a way of trying to answer the issue on international solidarity - I would like to share with you five key concepts, from my perspective, which may point out possible directions.

¹ This presentation as speaker at the Panel "Democratically owned enterprises: a road towards international solidarity?" (3rd EMES-Polanyi International Seminar) was possible due to the financial support of the Centre for Social Studies (University of Coimbra). I would also like to thank the invitation by the organisers.

The first one is concerned with Solidarity Economy and the way this field has been (or not) formed, informed and challenged by other theoretical frameworks, for instance, the intersectional perspective (Brah and Phoenix, 2004). We have thought about inequality as a synonym of economic inequality... we should take into consideration that inequalities are indeed result of intertwined different hierarchies, of gender, of class, of nationality, of race (with respect to this, see Rio). That is to say, we are used to discussing economic vulnerability but there are many factors provoking economic vulnerability which are not be exactly economic. So I question: how can social enterprises go beyond economic efficiency and even social goals, being compromised with other aspects which also deepen social inequalities? This is the political in the economic.

The second idea is concerned with an usual assertion in Europe regarding Solidarity Economy. I have listened this kind of observation many times: that solidarity economy is more focused on facing poverty in Third World countries. I would like to remember that Europe is not so homogeneous as our imaginary suppose - there is a South in the North. There are invisibilised bodies here, right now - migrant undocumented women, muslim women, black people, indigenous people, refugees, Roma peoples. And I question: to what extent has Solidarity Economy been concerned with this South in the North?

The third aspect has to do with autonomy and the pivotal role Social Economy may play in it. Social Economy, despite having some different goals and perspectives when compared to Solidarity Economy, plays an invaluable contribution not solely for their solid presence and work in Europe but also for clearly demonstrating the economic content and value of some activities taken as merely social reproduction. In this sense, it can be said that Social Economy and Feminist Economics may have some issues in common. Considering the relevance of Social Economy in Europe and the inquiry about international solidarity, I question: is it possible for Social Economy institutions to foster the citizens' autonomy and have it better valued?

The forth aspect is the political alliance to be fostered between Social Economy and Solidarity Economy in terms of this citizens' autonomy. Whereas, from one hand, Solidarity Economy values autonomy but, on the other, comes up against the informality of some economic arrangements, Social Economy institutions meet favourable conditions to foster citizen groups to deal with their own problems. Besides, both perspectives may benefit from different ideas and frameworks regarding economy. For instance, some challenging issues proposed by Gibson-Graham (2002) relative to creative ways of exploring commensurability or redistributing surpluses.

To end up: microlevel may be tremendously political and matters since it may foster different logics of belonging and producing social meanings - something very important when we think of the circulation and consumption of goods. I thus end up with a short story: in a peripheral exchange fair organised “for and with” users of mental health service, the history of a schizophrenic young boy called my attention. He was used to being kept apart from the living room. One day he demonstrated his satisfaction in acquiring social currencies. He said: “Now I can buy the pasta for our Sunday’s lunch”. That is it: social and solidarity economies are not just about facing structural unemployment or economic vulnerability. They may be about something usually taken as minor detail, lesser things: from a safeguarding network to make you know you are not alone to the possibility of social recognition within one’s own family. That is why I say: autonomy should be our keyword.

References:

Brah, Avtar; Phoenix, Ann (2004), “Ain’t I A Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality”, *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, 5 (3), 75-86.

Ferber, Marianne and Nelson, Julie. 2003. “Beyond economic man, ten years later,” in Marianne Ferber and Julie Nelson, eds. *Feminist economics today: beyond economic man*, pp. 1-32. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Gibson-Graham, JK. 2002. A diverse economy: rethinking economy and economic representation. Available at: <http://cscs.res.in/dataarchive/textfiles/textfile.2007-11-30.8168238051/file>.

Lucas dos Santos, Luciane. 2016. "Polanyi through the lens of Epistemologies of the South and Postcolonial Feminist Economics: different glances at the concept of disembeddedness." in EMES (org.), *Selected Papers - 2nd Polanyi-EMES International Seminar.*: EMES, pp. 1-12.

Meneses, Maria Paula (2010), “Outras vozes existem, outras histórias são possíveis”, in Regina Leite Garcia (org.), *Diálogos Cotidianos*. Petrópolis: DP et Alii, 247-265.

Santos, Boaventura de Sousa (2006), *A Gramática do Tempo: para uma nova cultura política*. Porto: Afrontamento.

Santos, Boaventura de Sousa. 2014. *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*. London: Paradigm Publishers.