

## Book Review

**Gottfried, Heidi (2013) *Gender, Work, and Economy: Unpacking the Global Economy*. Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press.  
ISBN 978 0 7456 6458 3**

*Reviewed by Laura Rama Iglesias, University of Kassel, Germany*

Drawing on theories from economic sociology, geography and political economy, sociologist Heidi Gottfried offers a unique analytical framework for the study of global political economy from a feminist perspective. Her book contributes to an interesting development in the field of gender studies which advances the feminist analysis of globalisation in all of its multidimensional and multidirectional forms.

Feminist studies of globalisation increasingly aim to explore the structural, subjective and symbolic dimensions of globalisation, as well as to challenge static and dichotomous conceptions of social phenomena. In this vein, Gottfried's analysis – carried out at both the theoretical and empirical levels – focuses on work and the ways in which economic structures and processes are gendered and have gendered effects. Her use of a feminist lens is essential for shedding light on frequently unacknowledged situations, mechanisms and ideas that explain the persistence of gender inequalities and their transformations in an interconnected world.

Case studies from global cities in industrialised countries, such as London and New York, as well as cities in developing countries, such as Shanghai and Dubai, illustrate the impact of global processes at a local level and vice versa. Gottfried challenges dominant conceptions in economic analysis and argues that a broader definition of the economy is necessary. This definition should include the reproductive economy – traditionally carried out by women – which is indispensable for the functioning of the productive economy and life in a broader sense. She argues that organisational research on social reproduction should take into account different reproductive bargains characterised by different histories and locations, together with interconnections between nationality, race, class and gender. These interconnections influence citizenship rights and the collective imaginaries that configure (and are configured by) social relations.

Economic transformations influence the way in which people work and live, bringing both challenges and opportunities for gender equality and justice. Emphasis on these aspects demonstrates the author's commitment to feminism from both an academic and a political perspective. The interdisciplinary approach of the book, alongside the manner in which Gottfried grasps the complexities of globalisation and its many faces of power, make *Gender, Work and Economy* a relevant book for scholars and researchers interested in gender studies, as well as students across the social sciences.

The book is divided into three main parts and comprises twelve chapters. Part I includes two chapters that review traditional theoretical issues of work sociology and political economy, including

both feminist and non-feminist accounts. A summary of the sociological classics is provided in order to situate the foundations of contemporary studies and point out the gender gap in this literature. The evolution of feminism and the attempts to fill this gender gap are explained through a description of the contributions made by the three feminist waves.

Third-wave feminists – as the book itself does – adopt a broader definition of the economy and focus on care work and reproductive labour. Interconnections between inequalities are also explored in order to propose an integrative framework. Along these lines, Gottfried provides a feminist political economy perspective for the study of structures and the processes of economic transformation, which integrates the structural and interactional foundations of inequalities. Within this framework, the incorporation of social geography enables the author to study geographies of power, as well as similarities and differences in gender inequality across time and space.

Part II contains five chapters which provide case studies to explain new forms of organising work and persistent patterns of segregation. Third-wave feminists explore the historical and cultural roots of both horizontal and vertical segregation. An enduring social process of devaluing women's work and skills, and the consequent divisions, are manifested in current situations and demonstrated using data on the glass ceiling effect and the gender wage gap. Theories that focus on the role of organisations and women's socialisation concerning work, together with cultural aspects and historical analysis, are important for understanding divisions and gender inequalities. However, they are inadequate in so far as they fail to analyse economic transformations and relations between spaces in an increasingly globalised economy.

Importantly, the trajectory of the current global economy is shifting towards the service sector and commercialising more aspects of life such as care work. An understanding of gender is central for exploring both the distribution of jobs and the characteristics and effects of this distribution for different groups. Inequalities are shaped by micro practices and organisational arrangements which undervalue the workforce. In the new service economy, care and reproductive work, predominantly performed by women, is still perceived as having less value than productive work.

Feminists study the organisation of social reproduction and point out that productive work is dependent on reproductive work, and based on the traditional role of a male breadwinner without household responsibilities. However, as more women occupy positions in the productive sector, care work becomes commercialised through market relations. Previously unpaid care work is now increasingly (albeit poorly) paid, while unpaid work remains unevenly distributed between women and men, with important consequences for both inequality and for the ability of women to participate in the labour market.

Different arrangements between the state, the market and the private sector to organise reproductive care illustrate the socially constructed meaning and value of this labour and its different gender implications. In this vein, state and public policy have great power to shape gender patterns. Thus, Part II also reviews comparative institutional perspectives which provide an account of the different varieties of capitalism and welfare states, notwithstanding their predominant focus on class. The recent incorporation of gender into these accounts makes possible the study of the differences between social models in relation to the organisation of social reproduction and their impact on gender.

Comparative feminist perspectives assess the role of the public sector in pushing women's participation in the labour market, shaping labour regulations and pursuing women-friendly policies. Lastly, the second section explores women's "terrains of struggle" through a comparison between

the United States and Japan. The study shows the long history of underrepresentation and segregation of women in unions and how economic transformations open opportunities for solidarity and the organisation of new strategies for collective action.

The four chapters of Part III explore global connections and the nature and impact of the rise of the global labour market. Economic transformations are shaped by political interventions and configurations that have an important effect on the possibilities for governance. The first chapter of Part III offers a review of theories of internationalisation and globalisation and the critiques forwarded by feminists in response to “gender-blind globalisation narratives”. There is a necessity to move away from the category of “women” with the aim of exploring gender and class structuring, questioning the logic of hegemonic masculinity and analysing the bridges between production and social reproduction worldwide.

Globalisation tightens links between work spaces – as commodity chains exemplify – and unevenly incorporates women into the global market. In this regard, Gottfried argues that capital relocates labour-intensive and low-waged production in global spaces in a way that feminises jobs, not only in relation to the dominant female participation, but also in a way that undermines labour conditions and overlooks social reproduction necessities. A low-waged feminised workforce is one of the competitive advantages of many locations worldwide. One of the newest patterns of globalisation is the feminisation of migration which is closely related to the increasing demand for care work.

Although women are generally discriminated against at all levels, it is important to acknowledge that this discrimination varies between different groups of women, as is evident in global cities in which women from the Global South are employed by women (and men) from the Global North. This is possible due to the “care deficit” resulting from women’s participation in the market that remains unaccompanied by an increment in men’s participation in the household, and the lack of adequate public policies. Much of the work carried out by women in low-waged manufacturing activities and care work services is degrading and does not necessarily make these women more independent.

Gottfried argues that local patriarchy is increasingly replaced by structural patriarchal relations in the globalised labour market. One strategic place to explore these patriarchal global relations is in global cities as central places for the organisation and development of global economic processes, the accumulation of capital and the location of services. The value of these services is unevenly distributed according to gender, class and nationality, and it creates new patterns of segregation and exploitation. Although connected, the book illustrates differences between global cities moulded by different histories, as well as differing forms of intervention by states. For example, the way in which states regulate migration and labour is important for (the lack of) citizenship rights and social protection for migrant or temporary workers. The rise of a devalued working class in global cities also creates opportunities for new forms and sites of collective action such as the transnational and hybrid networks in which gender, class and nationality interact. The analysis of new geographies of power, which make governance increasingly complex, alongside the ascendance of neo-liberalism, show the importance of gender in this process, as well as the opportunities and challenges for social equality.

In sum, Gottfried’s piece of work is a comprehensive analysis which explores work and the economy by using a feminist lens to shed light on how gender inequalities are produced, reproduced and modified. Increasing interconnections (and effects) from the local to the global and vice versa are relevant in this process. Embedded in classical thought, productive work has often been analysed

independently from the necessities of social reproduction which are traditionally considered to be a female responsibility.

Gender segregation and its intersections with race, class and nationality remain a fundamental global challenge. In recognition of this challenge, Gottfried offers a valuable contribution that builds convincing theoretical arguments on the transnationalisation and externalisation of the conditions of gendered social reproduction using empirical evidence from case studies. As she demonstrates, the dynamics of gender are essential for understanding the way in which neo-liberal global capitalism rises and evolves, creating new opportunities as well as constraints for achieving gender equality. Further research could strengthen this contribution by identifying specific sources of power and strategies that feminist activists, social movements and policy makers could draw on to take advantage of the opportunities that have arisen for advancing gender equality in an increasingly globalised world.

### **BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

LAURA RAMA IGLESIAS is an M.A. Global Political Economy student at the University of Kassel in Germany. [Email: [laura.rama92@hotmail.com](mailto:laura.rama92@hotmail.com)]