

Can erotic capital subvert masculine economy? Aesthetic work and the post-feminist approach to economics

*¿Puede el capital erótico subvertir la economía masculina?
Aesthetic work y el enfoque postfeminista hacia la economía*

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to elucidate whether and how the theory of erotic capital may function as a feminist tool to subvert the hierarchies and relations in current economy in favour of the empowerment and liberation of women. Thus, by analyzing the ways in which white, liberal feminism directly constructs its claims and petitions through the absorption of liberal epistemological dogmas, we intend to search the direct relation between the ideology developed by white, cisgender feminists and liberal economics and politics. This article demonstrates how a theory of erotic capital does not lead to a feminist subversion of economy, but reinforces the liberal economic and political system that relies on a masculine and androcentric epistemology. The subjectivity that women can achieve through the exploitation of erotic capital is only as consumers and not as productive agents.

Palabras clave: feminist economics, aesthetic work, erotic capital, feminine identities.

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es arrojar luz sobre si el capital erótico puede ser considerado una herramienta feminista para la subversión de las jerarquías y relaciones económicas y favorecer una liberación de las mujeres. Para ello, observaremos cómo el feminismo blanco

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y liberal, ha construido sus peticiones sin cuestionar los principios fundamentales de la economía liberal con el objetivo de demostrar la relación que existe entre el feminismo blanco liberal cisgénero y el sistema político-económico liberal. Este artículo demuestra que la implementación del capital erótico no conduce a una subversión feminista de la economía, sino que fortalece el sistema económico y político liberal que se fundamenta en una epistemología masculina y androcéntrica. La subjetividad a la que acceden las mujeres por medio del capital erótico es en clave de consumidoras.

Key Words: economía feminista, aesthetic work, capital erótico, identidades femeninas.

INTRODUCTION

Catherine Hakim's theory of *Erotic Capital* (2011) has been widely claimed by several scholars and non-scholars as a strong theory for women's liberation and economic independence. We aim to examine whether Hakim's theory actually responds to a new empowerment of the feminine subject both in economics and politics.

This article thus has two main objectives. On the one hand, it seeks to analyze Catherine Hakim's gender approach in her theory. On the other hand, although Hakim does not aim to offer a deep analysis of economics in particular, we believe that the introduction of a new type of capital might have an impact on economics. Therefore, we aim to study whether Hakim's theory offers a new type of economic and social empowerment for women in strictly economic terms.

This article places the theory of erotic capital within the specific and narrow frame of white, liberal feminism. To clarify what we understand as white, liberal feminism we will analyze the chronological axis that establishes feminism as a current to be divided in three stages as it has widely been accepted by the academia. Nevertheless, this article does not aim to reinforce such a unilineal approach to feminism but uses this historical narrative to show how white feminism has been traditionally used as a tool, by economically advantaged, white, heterosexual, cisgender women to achieve power in Central societies.²

² «Central societies» is a term that aims to appeal to what has been widely perceived as «Western». This article avoids terms such as «Western» or «Eastern», since they contribute to maintain epistemological hierarchies. «Central» will substitute «Western» while «Peripheral» will appeal to «Eastern» to refer to the way in which knowledge is imposed.

Therefore, we will use this given chronological order to show the relation between white feminism and the maintenance of the economic status quo. After having analyzed how first and second-wave feminism reinforced exclusionary economic systems, we may confirm that white feminism conveniently leaps from second-wave feminism into post-feminism. Post-feminism will be defined as the current trend of white, liberal feminists that aims not only to reject the idea that feminism is still needed—as the use of the prefix *post* already claims, but also to create a narrow approach on gender that leads to create an exclusionary, empowered, feminine agenda within the strong, androcentric, masculine system that is capitalism in these days.

Therefore, this article will be divided in the following parts. Firstly, we will briefly take a look at the connection between white feminism and liberal economics and politics, in order to show how such connection is still clearly present in what we call post-feminism. Secondly, we will explain how post-feminism is depoliticized by the adoption of liberal dogmas such as individualism. With this purpose, we will base upon the dimensions of post-feminism developed by Rosalind Gill (2007) so as to analyze the theory of erotic capital. Thirdly, we will study how the theory of erotic capital can be assembled around several approaches of feminist economics with the intention to clarify whether we can talk about a theory of economic empowerment for women.

Lastly, the article will conclude that the theory of erotic capital plays a key role on the reinforcement of capitalism as an androcentric, masculine system in which feminine dimensions of work are invisible. Such conclusions will be grounded in the fact that erotic capital does not provide feminine agents with a position of social value within the productive system. Instead, erotic capital implies a new, invisible work—aesthetic work, that will grant specific feminine agents only an identity of consumers within the current economic system.

1. A BRIEF CONTEXTUALIZATION OF WHITE FEMINISM

Trying to situate feminism in a specific timeline and ideological spectrum requires facing two problems. On the one hand, we have the problem of the chronological frame of feminism and its categorization. To describe feminism in terms of time, it is necessary to place feminism on a linear axis. Such axis differs from the reality of feminism, since feminist dynamics and evolution are not linear, but rather cyclical due to the existence of several approaches and

opinions within the movement. This diversity of approaches makes it difficult to define feminism through only one particular idea. As Misha Kavka affirms «Lacking a single definition to guide its trajectory through temporal history, feminism can be best thought of as multiple practices that share historical links to an umbrella term» (2002: 32-33). Victoria Browne suggests a non-linear reading of feminism while different forms of historicism may produce a «master narrative» (Browne, 2014: 1).

At the same time, we must face the problem of establishing the ideological base of a pluralistic movement. Reducing a multidisciplinary and multidimensional movement—that has an extensive spatial expanse and is therefore permeated by different cultures, into ideological terms can lead to misunderstanding.

Nevertheless, the unilineal historical narrative that divides feminism in stages has been widely accepted among scholars. This unilineal narrative has given the main role to white feminism and has established the white, cis-gender, heterosexual woman as the main subject of feminism. As Walter Benjamin stated in his seventh thesis on the philosophy of history (2007), those who appear in history are the victors. This article does not try to reinforce or support the type of historiography that Browne (2014) rejects, as we do not only find it problematic but also view it as a form of power. Moreover, instead of analysing waves as belonging to specific time periods, we analyse them as generations that can be overlapping in a same given period of time, as Kristeva (1981) does. We try to show how the way in which historicism treats feminism is also the way in which we can observe how white feminism has functioned as a tool for the maintenance of liberal politics and economics. In other words, the same historical narrative that has been used by white feminism allows us to develop a critical reading that makes the relation between white feminism and the economic and political status quo visible.³

Since the author of this article understands post-feminism as a branch that is mainly developed within the white and liberal branch of feminism, using the hegemonic historical narrative of white feminism—a hegemonic discourse also when engaged into gender studies in Central societies, allows to point out the role that white feminism has played on maintaining exclusionary economic and political systems.

³ It is necessary to clarify here, that this article does not have the intention to undermine the achievements of suffragettes or other women's movements but tries to construct a new perspective to see how women's rights did not embrace all types of women thus converting rights into privileges.

1.1 First-wave Feminism

This movement mainly focused on women's suffrage, but also on equality in education, employment and marital rights. Nevertheless, first-wave feminism was mainly formulated by white, middle-class women and targeted that same female profile. Ethnocentrism and the influence of currents of Social Darwinism on this movement made clear that this idea did not embrace all women.

As Maria Valverde states in her paper *When the Mother of the Race is Free*, first-wave feminism was «[...] not only ethnocentric but often racist [...] this led to the exclusion of Native women and women of color from a movement which claimed to be based on gender, with negative political consequences reverberating in our own day» (1992: 3). This racist dimension has two key sources. On the one hand, we find ethnocentric ideas stating that civilization can be measured in stages. Central societies are defined as the highest representation of human life, while the periphery is merely seen as an under-developed world, which is categorized by a lack of morality and disrespect for human life. The other key source is the use of Darwinist ideas.

First-wave feminism, as Valverde affirms in her paper (1992), fought against sexist Darwinist ideas, but while doing so, reinforced racist Darwinian ideas. First-wave feminists fought for white women's rights by stating that women deserved rights due to the evolutionary and reproductive importance of white women for continuing the Anglo-Saxon race. The importance of this reproductive role for the race led to the creation and exaltation of «quasi-maternal public and private roles» (Valverde, 1992: 3) for women. First-wave feminists «[...] also used utilitarian and organicist arguments that grounded women's cause in an affirmation of their role in biological and social reproduction» (Valverde, 1992: 3).

This fight against Social Darwinism's poor treatment of women gave birth to the idea of the *mother of the race*. Women then became the main and unique source of purity for the race. Reproduction, and therefore sexuality were not individual choices, but rather collective and racial issues. As we can see, women are clearly thought of as the key source to maintain a political and economic system that is inherently racist and classist.

1.2 Second-wave feminism

When we appeal to second-wave feminism, we refer to the mass-based feminism built by white, middle-class, cisgender women from the early 1960's to the early 1980's. In the Anglo-Saxon tradition it is widely accepted that the second wave started in 1963, the year in which Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* was published. This book questioned women's traditional role within and outside the home.

This vision of women's needs did not reflect the reality of millions of women who were not cisgender, heterosexual, white or who did not enjoy an advantageous socioeconomic status. Avoiding the discussion about the differences among women kept intersectional ideas out from the movement. It did not matter whether some women had profited from colonialism or whether they were racist. The movement would not intend to question the working conditions of the usually non-white nannies. The fact that the role of non-white, low class women who had already engaged within the labor system avoided a deeper discussion on the structural sexism upon which economics and politics relied.

Consequently, second-wave feminism only embraced the idea of a sisterhood without ruptures. Women had to think of themselves only through gender, leaving aside class, ethnicity and sexual identities.

As a response to this failure of second-wave feminism, personal narratives appeared to make the cracks of this movement visible. Personal narratives denounced the coerced position that non-white people were in,

[...] I noted the tendency of those in power to categorize those of us on the margins as women or minorities as if these were two mutually exclusive domains. This tendency was supported by educational research that consistently analyzed data by race or gender with little attention to intersections between the two (Biklen et al., December 2008: 461).

It is easy to see how this tendency eliminated intersectionality within feminism and women's studies: «In fact, it appears that the idea of intersectionalities of identity have come quite slowly to the discipline. In the 1970's and early 1980's, women of color were largely ignored» (Biklen et al., 2008: 463).

Nevertheless, not only was ethnicity being left behind by denying intersectionality, class and sexuality were also forgotten. Although there were

movements during those decades that challenged the traditional idea of women's reproductive function through pro-choice and free-love movements, such ideas did not question the profoundly androcentric political and economic system that white liberal feminism was reinforcing.

1.3 Third-wave Feminism

The 1980's are the decade in which we set the beginning of the early third-wave feminism. In 1981, bell hooks published *Ain't I a Woman?: Black Women and Feminism* (1981), the first book that directly challenged the absence of intersectionality within the feminist movement. During this decade, Judith Butler also published her first essay *Performative Act and Gender Constitution* (1988) in which the idea of gender as a performance broke with the traditional idea of the cisgender women from second-wave feminism.

It is believed that it is precisely during this moment that white feminism starts to fear antagonism within the Central societies in which it operates. Thus, this article does not see third wave feminism as a different stage of white feminism that believed and reinforce the role of white cisgender women in society, rather than that, it questioned all feminist dogmas that were excluding non-masculine subjects from the feminist movement.

Thus, in the early 1980's the first literature that radically challenged second-wave feminism appeared. The reason why we chose the works by Butler and hooks as the beginning of a new moment in the history of feminism is clear. Their work shows the two main ways in which women decided to challenge traditional feminist views. Firstly, hooks challenges feminism through the idea of intersectionality being directly related to identity politics. Besides, Butler's work, as a good sample of a post-modern, post-structuralist approach, challenges the traditional ideas of binary gender and identities as such.

Although many of the early writings that shaped third-wave feminism appeared during the 1980's, it wasn't until 1992, when Rebecca Walker published her article *Becoming the Third Wave*, that third-wave feminism became a term. The article was a response to a situation which, we believe, was the beginning of post-feminism. During the 1990's many women thought that feminism was no longer needed or useful. But, cases such as the trial of Anita Hall against Clarence Thomas were a sign that made it clear to Rebecca Walker that feminism was still needed (1992).

The appearance of the band *Bikini Kill* in 1990 and the birth of the Riot Grrrl movement also shows how feminism was still not only alive but also necessary within society for the younger generation.

Heterogeneity is one of the salient features that characterize third-wave feminism, as we can find different approaches: from girly feminism and black feminism to transfeminism and Marxist feminism. Although they differ in their approaches, they converge on the necessity of feminism as the tool to end all sexual or gendered oppression. Thus, it can be said that third-wave feminism advocates for a collective movement with a strong socio-political dimension. Such heterogeneous, rebellious and critical approach to patriarchy and androcentrism posed in risk the claims and privileges of white feminism. Consequently, we affirm that white liberal feminism responded in two different ways to block the fall of the privileges. On the one hand, a lot of women began to deny the need of feminism since they perceived that formal and *real* equality had already been achieved. On the other hand, a new gender approach to feminism that was ensuring white women's role in economics was growing as well. These two responses to intersectional feminism developed in the third wave is what we consider post-feminism.

2. WHAT IS POSTFEMINISM?

The abrupt apparition of different feminisms redefined gender struggles in a more complex way. The fact that race, sexual identities, class and sexual orientations were being introduced as identarian and struggle axis, was perceived by many white feminists as an attack to *real* feminism. These new mass-based feminisms within Central societies posed a risk to the status quo in which some white, high class, cisgender, heterosexual women had already achieved a better off position. These new feminisms were posing new questions and redefining the way in which the feminine was constructed around the idea of the white cisgender female.

Hence, we believe that white feminism did not stem from second-wave feminism and into third-wave feminism, but instead, it was rebuilt around the notions of post-feminism as a response to new feminist formations that directly threatened the status quo upon which a lot of white cisgender women relied. Therefore, this part of the article is determined to show how postfeminism creates its theory around a masculine conception of epistemology and

how it turns into the creation of a theory of false economic liberation for the feminine subject in Hakim's work.

Let us now define what post-feminism is. Postfeminism is not only a current that establishes itself as *post*, i.e. *after* feminism, suggesting that feminism is no longer needed. But more importantly—and it is here where this article poses its main critique, post-feminism is a tool that has been developed from white liberal feminists that states that within the current liberal and androcentric system there is room for a real feminist liberation.

Postfeminism thus, depoliticizes and commodifies feminism by emptying feminism from any further critical components. This depoliticization is driven by the convergence of a narrow definition of women—it is only designed for women who are already better off, with the epistemological foundation of liberalism. This is done by targeting the feminist subject as an economically strong, independent woman who will function as a special consumer of products that help liberate herself leaving aside any kind of political or collective action directed towards the end of sexual and gendered oppression. This exaltation of the liberated woman as the liberated consumer also converges with the denial of the necessity of feminism as the prefix *post* clearly affirms. It also demonizes any other branches of feminism, labeling them as radical currents.

The following sections of the article have thus two different objectives. Section 3 will develop an analysis to show how post-feminism is a theory that has been impregnated by Central elements of the masculine thought and compare such dimensions to Hakim's theory. Section 4 will look into whether we can consider Hakim's erotic capital as a real advantage for feminine agents in economics and discuss whether Hakim is giving a new value to reproductive work or not.

3. POST-FEMINIST DIMENSIONS AND THEIR RELATION TO MASCULINE EPISTEMOLOGY

After having defined post-feminism we need to see the dimensions that will characterize this movement. Our hypothesis is that post-feminism has acquired the dogmas of liberal philosophy, such as individualism and detachment, as the core of its approach to gender struggles. In order to show such transformation, we will examine post-feminism using Rosalind Gill's enumeration of what she considers to be the key elements of what she defines as the sensibility of post-feminism:

These include the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; an emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and self-discipline; a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; and a resurgence of ideas about natural sexual difference (Gill, 2007: 146).

Firstly, by affirming that femininity is a bodily property, a direct relation between sex-gender-femininity is established. This rejects the inclusion of non-binary and, in most cases, of transgender agents within the feminist movement. It also reinforces the idea that sex equals gender, the binary structure and the subsequent hierarchy that it leads to. In her book, Hakim does not only avoid writing a critique about the traditional assumption sex=gender. But she also ignores the non-heterosexual data and supports this decision by claiming that non-heterosexual sexual relations are not common enough to be relevant data (Hakim, 2011: 44). Her refusal to use certain statistical data and to consider certain gender identities and sexual orientations as irrelevant also shows the lack of a critical approach when it comes to statistical results that may be contaminated due to the cultural context. Consequently, at first glance, we can clearly assume that Hakim's theory does not question the heteropatriarchal gender/sex structure.

There is another consequence of addressing femininity as a bodily property. Gill concludes that in post-feminist media culture the possession of what is considered to be a *sexy body* is the key source to construct and develop a feminine identity (2007: 150). Whatever the features of the *sexy body* are within a given society in a specific period of time, to succeed in having a such type of body is to fit in those beauty standards imposed mainly by mass media and culture. It is interesting to point out how fashion is also used as means of cultural privilege, as appears on the critique carried out by Baudrillard (1981) and state whether a theory of erotic capital has racist components as the hegemonic beauty standard relies on white conceptions of beauty.⁴

Hakim's theory endows *sexy bodies* with a key role. In her theory the body becomes the main source of erotic capital. Women must exploit their beauty and transform their bodies on behalf of constructing and preserving their erotic capital. We should not forget what Hakim enumerates the following as dimensions of the erotic capital: attractiveness, sexual attractiveness, social

⁴ Cultural appropriation through fashion and the imposition of white features but also the fact that certain features of non-white beauties are only valid once they have been introduced by hegemonic fashion as acceptable.

skills, liveliness, social presentation, sexual abilities and, in some cultures, fertility.

Therefore, if a *sexy body*—and how this body behaves, is to be thought as the key source of feminine identity and female agency, only those people able and willing to construct their identities following the hegemonic beauty and sexual patterns will be able to be considered as successfully constructed feminine agents. Thus, Hakim impedes the construction of a feminine identity to subjects that place themselves beyond heteronormative and binary codes. This also implies another element of risk, the idea that bodies can change limitlessly to fit within beauty patterns. Thus, the body is conceived by Hakim as an independent and individual entity that has no relationship to what surrounds it. Hakim does not mention the inherent necessities of a body such as exterior infrastructures that allow and facilitate its development or the existence of other bodies that enter in direct relation to ours. Hakim's rejection to conceive the body as limited—as if having limits would actually show that her erotic capital is only an element to be found in specific subjects, is completely opposed to theories of the body developed by Butler (2006, 2009, 2012). Such theories that have stated that bodies depend on material conditions in order to be safe and healthy, while we are also conditioned by social conventions and regulations in order to construct and give visibility to our identities. The fact that Hakim also neglects to address the natural limits of the body and its dependence takes us to the liberal principle of individualism.

This complete separation between body-body and body-exterior can be perceived as the heritage of modern masculine science by white feminism. As Susan Bordo affirms, the Cartesian revolution implied a complete division in which the self and the universe are separated (1986). This epistemological separation has an influence on the way in which the body is conceived. The body is seen as not having relations with other bodies and not relying on exterior conditions. The proliferation of eating disorders clearly shows one of the pernicious results of an ideology that considers that the body has a limitless possibility to change. This limitless conception of the body converges with a constant pressure to fit in that beauty pattern, which can lead to psychological disorders as Moreno Pestaña has recently investigated (2016).

The imposition of having a *sexy body* becomes an internal battlefield for women, a body conditioned by external desire and pleasure. This coercive situation has a deeply harmful impact over not only women's physical health, but also their mental health. First, we need to keep in mind that beauty patterns come before the body. That is to say, beauty patterns exist prior to the

existence of the body. Women must adjust their natural shapes and features to already existing beauty patterns imposed by mass-media and the market. Consequently, this obligation to fit within an already established beauty pattern which changes without women's consent makes it necessary for women to put themselves under strict self-control and self-discipline in order to fit within the beauty canon. This leads women to develop an extreme self-control and self-surveillance, which maximum exponent can be seen in the theory of erotic capital. Catherine Hakim affirms that erotic capital is a potential element to be found in every woman. Even a person who is not naturally and genetically graceful can become a *belle laide* or a *beau laid*, that is, they may acquire attractiveness, i.e. they may attain erotic capital, by making an effort (2011: 109). This statement converges with the fact that femininity is to be achieved by means of the perfect body. This way, Hakim's theory develops an element of responsibility on women, they have the responsibility to constantly monitor their bodies if they want to construct a successful female subjectivity.

Hyper-individualism and hyper-responsibility can be both seen as consequences of the Cartesian revolution upon the way in which humans have to see and define themselves as separate from the universe. This detachment is understood by Bordo as the loss of «The original model of epistemological security (which Descartes knows cannot be fulfilled—and thus the need for God) is a constant state of mental vigilance over the object» (1986: 446). Hence, we believe, as Bordo does, that the anxiety which is produced by separation is transformed into control, «[t]he pain of separateness is thus compensated by the peculiar advantages of separateness: the possibility of mastery and control over those on whom one is dependent» (Bordo, 1986: 452). In this case women hyper-control their bodies as a way to fight the pain that results from the impossibility to create a successful female agency within an androcentric and masculine model that is exclusionary to them.

The responsibility, the feeling of control and the sense of individuality is what leads Hakim and other post-feminist theorists to build an image of choice and empowerment and to believe that the makeover paradigm is not only possible but also our responsibility and duty as potentially successful women.

The last element of post-feminism that Gill mentions is the resurgence of the idea of a natural sexual difference. This element can be easily seen in Hakim's idea of the universal male sexual deficit (Hakim, 2011: 47) where she supports the old-fashioned idea that women want sex less than men do. This idea leaves aside the fact that social difference and material conditions exist and

have a greater weight on the construction of sexual identities and sexualities (see Author in following papers). They also ignore the importance of phallogentrism when considering and classifying whether a relationship is sexual.

To conclude, by rejecting the existence of non-binary agents, post-feminism is able to create an exclusionary feminist subject in which only cisgender, heterosexual women fit and they must subdue to a heteronormative conception of *sexy*—heteronormativity is the axis of *sexy* patterns in our society. The fact that women must also regulate and change their bodies in order to exploit their erotic capital and become successful women leads Hakim to create a theory of empowerment that may only work for certain women who already have an economic advantage or women who naturally fit within beauty patterns. We need to remember that beauty products targeted to women are usually expensive. Too often white women as beauty patterns respond to white beauty constructs and leave little room for non-white women who can only develop their beauty following patterns of fetish. This is to say, post-feminism only relates to white, cisgender, heterosexual women with time and money to be invested in achieving erotic capital. By adhering to biological claims, to the idea that sex=gender=sexual orientation, Hakim rejects to develop an extensive and deep critique on the parameters of patriarchy and androcentrism. Liberal conceptions of individualism, responsibility and control lead post-feminism to produce a depoliticized conception of feminism in which collective action is no longer needed or desirable.

But, what are the consequences of erotic capital in economic terms? Does the inclusion of the erotic capital imply a revalorization of reproductive work that will help to improve the economic position of women in society? We intend to answer these questions in the following paragraphs.

4. THE EFFECTS OF EROTIC CAPITAL ON ECONOMICS. TOWARDS A FEMINIST REDEFINITION OF ECONOMY

Several favorable comments have been made about the theory of erotic capital as a way to redefine women's role in society as economic agents. The introduction of the notion of erotic capital has been seen as a revolutionary method that would not only improve the position of women within society, but also as a way to introduce reproductive work in the masculine realm of economy in which we live. Accordingly, it has been widely claimed that erotic capital can be seen as a feminist and feminine construction inside the current

economy. This section of the article aims to determine the impact of Hakim's theory in the field of feminist economics.

4.1 Feminist economics or gender economics

The division between feminist economics and gender economics was first developed by Ingrid Robeyns (2000). Following the division that Robeyns proposes we could affirm that «Feminist economics has developed on a growing dissatisfaction by feminists on the methodology, epistemology and (implicit) ontology which neoclassical economics uses, as well as the almost absolute authority which neoclassical economic methodology claims» (Robeyns, 2000: 4). She also suggests that feminist analysis should use a wider conceptualization of gender:

In that case, gender points at the power differences between men and women in society, and the structures and constraints that make these power-differences occur and persist. It also connects differences in power between men and women to power-differences between different entities, races, age-groups, social classes, groups with different sexual preferences and so on (Robeyns, 2000: 4).

In other words, feminist economics imply a subversion of the way in which economics have been traditionally conceived by neoclassical economics,⁵ and it should also imply an inclusive agent for feminism since questions of intersectionality and privilege are embraced within a wider definition of gender.⁶ On the other hand, Robeyns conceives gender economics as a current that, although it shares some paradigms with feminist economics, «[...] basically operates within the neoclassical, ontological and methodological framework» (Bordo, 1986: 2). Amaia Pérez Orozco says that:

The basic postulate of gender economy is the firm belief on the fact that it is possible to eradicate androcentric biases from the neoclassical economic discourse maintaining the unharmed the bulk of it. Also, it is possible to put an end to inequalities between men and women without questioning capitalism. This is why we define this approach as 'add women and stir'20 [...] It considers that the problem is the bad implementation of the

⁵ A good introduction to the subversion of economics from feminism can be seen in *Beyond Economic Man* (Ferber & Nelson, 1993)

⁶ Amaia Pérez Orozco (2014) supports that feminist economics can also be divided into different subcategories. Nevertheless, as we do affirm that post-feminism and Hakim's theory can be defined as a gender approach to economics we will not walk further into the subcategorization of feminist economics.

scientific method that allows sexist prejudices to arise and leaves women's experiences out of the scope as well as the data upon which validate and test hypothesis (2014: 42).⁷

That is to say, it believes in the neutrality of neoclassical accounts of economics or at least understands that within such postulates there is room for gender liberation. This would also imply to construct gender in a narrow manner in which the subject of feminism widely responds to the traditional category of sex=gender.

The lack of a wider definition of gender and the lack of a deep critique on androcentric elements of society and economics in Hakim's theory leads to affirm that in order to introduce erotic capital in economics there is no need for a feminist subversion of economics. Thus we can say that Hakim's account can be seen as an element that would converge within gender economics and not within feminist economics.

At the beginning of the article we defined post-feminism as the evolution of the current of white liberal feminism. Post-feminism is not only to be defined by the prefix post as a movement that aims to assert that feminism is over as it is no longer needed. We also defined post-feminism as a theory created by white cisgender women, who hold a privileged position in society. This helps to reinforce liberal economics and politics due to the fact that their lack of a deeper critique on androcentric biases reinforces a masculine and exclusionary system by stating that a complete feminine liberation is possible. Gender economics as analysed by Pérez Orozco:

It is characterized for inheriting values from hegemonic economy, mainly, the value of the individual (it understands women's liberation as the sum of individual processes and does not talk about patriarchy or capitalism as there is not a systemic approach (2014: 43).⁸

Thus, we see gender economics as the economic branch of the post-feminist approach to gender struggle. Pérez Orozco also characterizes gender economics as a branch that not only considers that gender equality is achievable in a liberal economy, but that it would also be enriched by it. As for gender economics «The barriers that impede women's full participation implies an absurd waste of human resources» (Pérez Orozco, 2014: 43).⁹ We can clearly

⁷ My own translation.

⁸ My own translation.

⁹ My own translation.

see here the direct relation between gender economics and erotic capital. As the non-exploitation of erotic capital is seen by Hakim as a waste of feminine economic power.

Nevertheless, the introduction of the erotic capital within orthodox economics can be seen as a feminist disruptive tool. Hence, Hakim is aware that there is a gender bias in market economy as market economy excludes one of the main capitals that women can exploit in order to improve their socioeconomic status. This constant ability to create erotic capital, united to the idea of the male sexual deficit gives women an advantage according to Hakim's logic (Hakim, 2011: 71). She also understands that such an advantage is being left behind by radical feminism and patriarchy.

It is in this complex and controversial debate about the use of erotic capital as a tool to actually empower women—again, cisgender privileged women, that this article aim to analyze whether erotic capital can be defined as an empowering tool.

4.2 Redefining economy with erotic capital

By refusing to analyze gender in an inclusive way and the androcentric and patriarchal structure of our societies, Hakim produces a theory which is only valid in the heterosexual and normative reality of patriarchy. In this manner, Hakim's theory is based on the normative economic model of the Fordist nuclear family and the classic capitalist couple that reinforces the sexual division of labor between reproductive and productive work.

The Fordist nuclear family has been widely studied by several feminist authors as one of the most basic and main elements upon which capitalism relies. The Fordist nuclear family is defined as:

The heterosexual marriage with kids where the man is seen as the autonomous breadwinner and provider and the woman is seen as the dependent housewife, fully dedicated to her family. This has been (and still is, mostly) the hegemonic idea of what a family must be like (Pérez Orozco, 2014: 172).¹⁰

Whereas the notion of the Fordist nuclear family leaves out of the picture families without kids that are constantly mentioned by Hakim in her book. Maria Mies conceives the notion of the classic capitalist couple, which is

¹⁰ My own translation.

formed by a free waged worker or owner and his housewife. For her, the classic capitalist couple is:

[...] the strategic principle which is responsible for the fact that women in the various income-generating activities, where they produce commodities for the market, are not defined and paid as wage-workers, that, on the other hand, in land reform provisions they are not given independent and legal ownership of land, that they do not get access to other productive property, that in cooperatives they are often mere appendixes to the male members and cannot become independent members of a cooperative themselves (Werlhof, 1983) (Mies, 1998: 119-120).

Although these two notions define different models of family both relate to the idea that there is a division between productive work and reproductive work as defined by Sylvia Federicci (2009). This way, these two normative models impose a sexual division of labor which systematically excludes women from the productive and public domain and converts them into non-productive agents that will remain in the private/domestic realm. Both models conceive women, as Pérez Orozco affirms by quoting Michèle Pujol as having the following features:

1) They form part of the domestic realm, they are married (to men, as we would add nowadays) and also mothers. 2) They first depend on their fathers' salaries and then on their husbands' 3) They are housewives and are specialized in housework 4) They are not productive, since housework does not produce any value 5) They are irrational, as they are not led by egoism—the rational engine of market's growth. Instead, they are led by love and altruism towards their families, which is also morally desirable, but it is irrational and, therefore, non-economic (2014: 175).¹¹

Whether we use the notion of the Fordist nuclear family, the notion of the classic capitalist couple, or both, we see that this is the normativity in which Catherine Hakim relies in order to affirm that erotic capital is an important tool on which women should rely in order to improve their socioeconomic status. Hakim situates women in the domestic realm as married women or mothers that depend on the salary of their husbands and their fathers. However, Hakim also draws the figure of the successful single woman who still depends or at least relies on a masculine subject as long as she must condition her erotic capital to the male desire and gaze. Besides, considering that higher position in economics and politics are also taken over by males, we

¹¹ My own translation.

could also say that this successful, single woman is still depending on the approval of a male subject. The third feature, the specialization on domestic work appears transformed in Hakim's theory, according to whom women should not specialize on housework, but should actually specialize on the exploitation of their erotic capital (attractiveness, sexual attractiveness, social skills, liveliness, social presentation, sexual abilities and, in some cultures, fertility). Hakim seems to forget that domestic work positions would also be taken by other females. We could call this a specialization on aesthetic work. This transformation from domestic work to aesthetic work takes us to the fourth dimension, the idea that women are unproductive as they do not generate value (or surplus value).

Hakim seems to conclude that this aesthetic work, this exploitation of erotic capital can be a source of economic value for women. Nevertheless, Hakim does not introduce a real analysis of the economic value of erotic capital. Thus, this aesthetic work—which will also converge with domestic work in the figure of the housewife, may not only be done without an economic compensation, but it will surely be invisible. Invisible work—feminine work, is the work that has no social value and that cannot be measured and therefore translated into statistical figures (Pérez Orozco, 2014: 177).¹² Therefore, whether erotic capital and aesthetic work can be seen as sources of monetary value, they are still seen as not having social value and therefore will not function as the subversion of an exclusionary economic system.

This invisibility of feminine work—whether we talk about care work, reproductive work, domestic work or Hakim's aesthetic work, reinforces the inexistence of women in the public domain. There is no subversion of the division between productive (masculine) and reproductive (feminine) work in Hakim's theory. Instead, reproductive feminine work acquires another dimension (aesthetic work) that still does not make women visible as workers.

The last feature defines women as irrational agents that do not lead their actions by egoistical and economic terms but guided by love and altruism. This conception of women as altruistic agents can be also seen in the neoclassical economic approach to men. Men are depicted as egoistical and competitive outside the domestic realm but also responding to altruistic drives when it comes to the domestic realm of the families. However, it is here where Hakim seems to introduce the most disruptive element: the rational woman.

¹² My own translation.

The rational economic woman in Hakim takes advantage of an erotic capital that can be achieved through means of an aesthetic work in order to obtain an economic profit. Thus women overcome their economic irrationality as they do not only follow drives of love and altruism, but they also respond to the masculine economic rationality that responds to the exchange and acquisition.

Once we have analysed Hakim's theory in economic terms we shall conclude the article by defining the successful feminine agent in Hakim's theory.

5. CONCLUSIONS. WHO IS THE EMPOWERED AGENT?

Firstly, we must define in broad terms the feminine subject. As stated above, the gender matrix that divides feminine and masculine in Hakim's theory is the same that we find in post-feminism: the homogenous and universal category of women. Hence, women are seen as cisgender and heterosexual women only. Although Hakim gives various examples of non-white women, we understand that the feminine subject that she targets is a subject who already holds an economic advantage that allows her to invest time and money in the exploitation of her erotic capital.

Secondly, after having observed the exclusionary and narrow approach on gender that both post-feminism and erotic capital hold towards the feminine subject, it is necessary to see whether the successful feminine subject can be considered as an advantage for feminism itself.

The figure of the prototypical successful woman in Hakim's theory has a high economic, ergo social, position. This position may come from a professional career necessarily enhanced by the use of erotic capital or it may come from her partner's economic resources. In both cases, the higher one's erotic capital is, the higher one's income will be. Namely, a woman will succeed in her workplace or will be able to get a richer husband. In both cases, the success of a woman will be measured in monetary terms. On the first example, the woman who holds a professional career enhanced by the use of erotic capital can be seen as the perfect and constant invisibilization of reproductive female work. In other words, she will not achieve any social value by means of her erotic capital. Erotic capital's aesthetic work is still an invisible work which does not enhance the social worth of women since economics will still be ruled by the accumulation of capital. In the second example this fact seems even more obvious. The housewives and the mothers will be invisible not only

by means of their domestic work, but they will also have a new invisible dimension, which will be their aesthetic work.

Women are thus still found in the non-productive realm of economics. In macroeconomical terms they will still lack labor rights and access to social security as workers. Their social and economic subjectivity does not respond to the subjectivity of the producer, but they are depicted as consumer agents. In other words, their economic enhancement can only be measured in respect of their consumption patterns. Even in the case of sex work, Hakim is unable to consider prostitution and other forms of sex work as work as she does not include erotic capital or aesthetic work in the definition of work itself.

Hakim affirms that «Society can accord different weights to the various types of capital, and they can be more or less convertible into financial benefits» (2011: 21). The lack of a feminist economic approach to erotic capital prevents Hakim from elucidating the economic consequences of the introduction of erotic capital. She ignores the fact that capital and labor do not only have a monetary value but also a social value that cannot be found in erotic capital. Therefore, as far as we are concerned, women remain invisible and still hold the label of unproductive agents. Moreover, economics and the neoclassical approach to economics do not value every capital and every work in the same way, if we do not leave the masculine approach to economics, feminine work and feminine capital will still be in a position of inferiority.

Thus, in Hakim's world, women are better off in society as long as they are able and willing to exploit their erotic capital and engage in aesthetic work. Such activities will not transform women into empowered productive agents. The impossibility of being defined as productive agents also blocks the possibility to develop a subversion of economy in which other feminine agents see an improvement of their situation. Women are only empowered consumer agents. Developing an empowered subjectivity as consumers does not imply the acquisition of rights and freedoms that will improve women's position in a masculine, androcentric society.

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