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Gender Dualism between Platitudes and Half-truths¹

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Abstract

In modern economic systems, discrimination – and the resulting allocative inefficiency – occurs when “individuals with the same economic characteristics receive different wages and the differences are systematically correlated with certain non-economic characteristics of the individual”. A significant example of this is occupational segregation: the gender stereotypes from which it originates reduce the efficiency of the economic system and the prospects for development, determining, on the one hand, under-utilization of the female workforce and, on the other, a distortion in the investment in human capital (Hartmann, 1976). The former can be translated in terms of the gender pay gap (articulation of the more general global gender gap index) even though there has long been a decrease in the gap in the employment rate. Female employment remains more concentrated in precarious, low-skilled, and therefore low-paid jobs. This depends not only on the glass ceiling (which hinders the careers of professional women) but also on a greater inequality among women themselves, between high-skilled and low-skilled workers. It entails the risk of producing feedback effects that not only perpetuate the gender gap but feed, within the female population, the same dynamics found between men and women. On these premises, this paper investigates how two factors - the widening economic gaps and the crisis of the last decade - have impacted on the gender gap trend. We will also consider the consequent structural and socio-cultural changes.

Keywords: gender gap, work, female employment, discrimination.

1. The female labour market: essential features

One of the most important economic and social phenomena in the European countries from the 1950s onwards was the return of women to

¹ The first draft of this paper was presented at the 16th AISPE Conference, “The Rise of Economic Inequality. Contributions from the History of the Social Sciences”, 11-13 April 2019, Bologna. The work is the result of a common reflection and has been carried out in close collaboration; however, sections 1, 2, 4 are attributed to Carmen Vita and sections 3, 5, 6 to Elvira Martini.

the labour market, in search of non-domestic and paid work (Gallino, 2012). It is a 'return' of the female component in the labour market in the sense that, at the beginning of the industrial development, its contribution was significant in both agriculture and textile manufacturing. Furthermore, during the two world wars, women replaced in factories the men fighting abroad. Subsequently, following the rural exodus and, above all, the development of heavy industry, women reduced their participation in the labour market. This trend was halted with the beginning of the Tertiary Society, to which female employment is now closely linked.

In Italy, the female presence in the labour market began to decline from after the Second World War, reaching its nadir in the early 1970s. Several factors contribute to explaining this 'estrangement', including the stable and adequate levels of income reached by an increasing number of male breadwinners, the weak diffusion of services, both private and public, and new domestic technologies, and a low level of female education. In the following period, both the activity rate and the employment rate started to recover. From 1972 to 1992, the female employment rate increased by almost 7 percentage points. This growth stopped from 1993 to 1995 and then resumed and intensified from 1995 to 2007 when the employment rate of women aged 15-64 increased by 9.2 percentage points. However, this growth has been very uneven, especially from a territorial point of view: from 1995 to 2007, the employment rate of women grew by 11-12 percentage points in the Centre-North, but by only 4.5 points in the South (Svimez, 2012). Concerning the type of employment, in the period under examination, women are employed mainly in the public sector, marked by better and higher guarantees. Since the 1980s, the rate of feminization has reached 60% in the public sector and 50% in the larger public sector (Isfol, 2005); about 26% of women have a stable job in the public sector compared to less than 18% of men. In addition, the growth of the business services and consultancy sector, together with the increasing level of education of women in employment, has led to a substantial increase in the number of self-employed women. To these, we must add the emerging collaborations, project-based contracts, and work-for-hire which, regardless of legal regulation, have the characteristics of both self-employment and unstable employment.

2. The crisis and its gender effects: current situation

The most recent statistical data (OECD, 2012; Etui, 2018) show that in Italy just over a third of the employed are women. Although the Italian female employment rate has increased in recent years, reaching 48.8%, its growth remains slow; Italy is among the worst countries in Europe in terms of female participation in the labour market².

The gender gap narrowed slightly in 2018 as regards wage equality (reached in 51% of cases) and the number of women in upper-level positions (34% globally). However, proportionally, fewer women have joined the labour force or participated in political life. The infrastructure needed to help women enter or re-enter employment – such as childcare and care work support – is underdeveloped and unpaid work remains mainly the responsibility of women (Dire, 2018). Therefore, part-time employment has also grown, and women rely on it much more than men, especially after having children. According to ISTAT data for the first quarters of 2019, 32.8% of women work part-time (compared to 8.7% of men). One of the reasons lies in the imbalance between partners in managing work and care. Rather than being a helping tool, the increase in part-time employment is mainly due to its involuntary component. In the first quarters of 2019, it exceeded 60% of the total compared to 34.9% in the same period in 2007 (Istat, 2015b, 2020). Involuntary part-time, accompanied by precariousness and increasing over education³, denotes the worsening of the quality of work for women (Istat 2020). In general, the quality of employment in a country relates also to the possibility of reconciling paid work with family care needs.

Motherhood represents an additional element, after precariousness, identifying the Italian female labour market. Throughout the country, the lack of participation in the labour market for mothers with children under

² In the Netherlands, two-thirds of all employed women work, in Germany half. Only Greece performs worse than Italy, with only 45% of female employment. The result is that, according to the latest Etui Report (2018), the gender employment gap in Italy reaches 18%.

³ ISTAT measures over-education as a percentage of the employees with a higher qualification than that required for that profession out of the total number of employees. While this percentage increases for both genders, women, despite achieving higher educational qualifications, find it more difficult to find an appropriate job.

three years is high because nurseries are less widespread and available than kindergartens. As the number of children increases, the employment gap increases, up to over 14 percentage points in the case of mothers with two children: 69.2% and 54.8% in the EU27 and Italy respectively (Istat, 2013). In Southern Italy, 2012 saw an increase in the employment rate of women with young children due to strategies aimed at supporting family income in the face of job loss from their partner. However, this indicator fell again in 2013, more than that of women without children, widening the considerable territorial gap in the ratio of rates (10 percentage points). Despite a general reduction over the years in the traditional asymmetry of gender roles within the family, in couples with children, the female contribution to family-related needs continues to be much higher; especially in Southern Italy, where childcare services are much less widespread. This is reflected in the uneven distribution of working women in economic activities, with a concentration mainly in low-paid jobs compatible with the management of domestic responsibilities (close to the place of residence, with flexible working hours, etc.) – what the relevant literature calls ‘horizontal segregation’: concentration of female employment in a small number of sectors and professions. The four main causes of occupational segregation in Italy (measured by the rate of the feminization of employment) are: family roles, sexual discrimination, training choices, and the mechanisms regulating career paths in hierarchically structured organizations. Employed women are concentrated mainly in few occupations, often linked to social (not to say anthropological) stereotypes and traced back to the traditional roles of domestic and care work. They are teachers, secretaries, clerks, hairdressers, nurses, shop assistants, social workers, cashiers, dieticians, etc.), a sort of ‘familism by default’ (Albertini, 2009) (see tab. 1). In summary, catering employees, sales staff, secretarial assistants, and nurses are the professions with the highest positive balance between entries and exits from employment (Istat, 2016). These jobs entail low pay, low qualifications, and limited career prospects but are more compatible than other activities with the management of family responsibilities⁴.

⁴Another significant element is that the increase in female employment (especially in the South) is due to women with a lower social status who are employed in unskilled professions. These are the so-called ‘breadwinners’, *i.e.* family members whose earnings are used to support other members. The percentage of families in which the woman is the sole

After the crisis, the employment rate gap has narrowed substantially to 18.9%, but the situation worsens in case of children: 11.1% of mothers with at least one child have never worked. At the same level and in the same jobs, the wage gap remains at 7.4% in 2019. Moreover, the higher the level of education, the greater the gap: if a male graduate earns 32.6% more than someone with a high-school diploma, a female graduate earns only 14.3% more. Besides, as already mentioned, women are faced with many difficulties in progressing their careers (Istat 2020). However, this picture requires further consideration. While, during the crisis, female employment has interested mainly low-skilled professions, particularly carers and domestic helpers, in the last four years, the growth saw an increase in qualified professions⁵. In the second quarter of 2017, the number of women employed in the intellectual professions is 19.2% of the total (+1.4 points compared to the second quarter of 2013), with a growth of about 200 thousand employed, particularly secondary school teachers. There is a significant growth also in the professions linked to commercial activities and services (an increase from 25.9% to 26.1%), mainly due to catering service providers. The group of technical professions also shows an increase, albeit modest (incidence increases from 16.2% to 16.4%), mainly due to the nursing professions. The group of executive professions in office work remained substantially stable, dropping just from 18.4% to 17.8%, despite an increase in the number of employees in secretarial and general affairs. For what concerns the various sectors, in family services around nine out of ten employees are women, in education more than three quarters, and in health care the female component is at about 70%.

As shown in the latest Gender Gap Report, the current problem in Italy does not lie in political representation or female presence in Parliament but, rather, in opportunities and participation in economic life, followed by

source of income increased: 12.9% (compared to 12.5% in 2013) (Istat, 2015a), including women who have returned to work, after being a housewife, for personal or family needs. However, as for men, the number of unemployed and 'discouraged' women is increasing: with the economic crisis they end up settling for minor undeclared jobs as maids or beauticians, often working from home (Gambardella, Morlicchio, 2005).

⁵This could also be explained by the fact that women over the age of 50 remain in employment because of the increase in the retirement age. There is, therefore, a reduction in the employment of Italian women between the ages of 15 and 34, while the employment of foreign women between the ages of 35 and 49 is increasing, mainly concentrated in family services.

unequal pay: Italy ranks 125th out of 153 countries (World Economic Forum, 2020).

3. *Economic issue, social issue*

The traits of the female labour market show a social issue lurking behind the purely economic question. The under-utilization of the female labour force translates into the gender pay gap, an articulation of the more general global gender gap index, whereby a woman and a man enjoy the same access to employment and pay, but this formal equality masks a substantial inequality.

*Women are becoming more and more 'equal', the power is in women's hands, therefore, they remain false myths, commonplaces within a society that preaches equality but that in fact experiences inequality, marginalization, sexism, inequality of access to health, education and political emancipation (women vote less, work less, participate less in political life)*⁶.

Two further factors affect female employment [and career prospects]: automation, which is having a disproportionate impact on the roles

⁶Iceland is the best-performing country in terms of equality between men and women. The data suggest a regional divergence depending on world areas, with 22 Western economies witnessing an improvement in political empowerment for women compared to the rest of the world. This means that the 'gap' in Europe is narrowing. For example, when it comes to women in Parliament, these Western economies – which collectively closed 41% of the gap – saw reverse progress in 2018. After Iceland, we find countries such as Norway (with 83.5%), Sweden (3rd, 82.2%), and Finland (4th, 82.1%), as well as Nicaragua (5th, 80.9%), which has increased by one point, and Rwanda (6th, 80.4%), whose steady multi-year rise has stopped for the first time. The newcomer among the top 10 places is Namibia (10th, 78.9%), the second country in sub-Saharan Africa to do so. Among the group of G20 countries, France once again took 12th place (77.9%), losing a position compared to last year, followed by Germany (14th, 77.6%), the United Kingdom (15th, 77.4%), Canada (16th, 75.5%) and South Africa (75.5%). The United States lost two positions to 51st place (72%) and other countries fell below the 100th position, such as China (103rd, 67.3%), India (108th, 66.5%), Japan (110th, 66.2%), the Republic of Korea (115th, 65.7%), Turkey (130th, 62.8%) and Saudi Arabia (141st, 59%). Italy is among the last places in the ranking as far as Europe is concerned: only Greece, Malta and Cyprus perform worse. In absolute terms, compared to 2017, Italy goes from 82nd to 70th place, but it is surpassed by Nicaragua, Namibia, Costa Rica and Honduras, where enormous progress is being made in terms of access to education and the possibility of exercising working autonomy (World Economic Forum, 2018).

traditionally performed by women, and female underrepresentation in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) areas of growing employment. Analyses, broken down by gender, on the levels of education reached and the subsequent school-work transition, well represent the low use of human capital in Italy, particularly for the female component. Young women have significantly higher levels of education than their male peers; however, there are large differentials, to their disadvantage, in employment rates on leaving school. In percentage terms, women graduate more than men, but not in the disciplines of IT and engineering. This insidious imbalance risks increasing the work-related gender gap since IT and engineering are the basis of many of the professional skills of the future. Low participation of women in the development of the digital world, moreover, risks making it less open and inclusive, incorporating stereotypes and prejudices typical of a male-dominated culture into the software systems and algorithms that will regulate societies.

Table n. 1 shows that women work to a much greater extent in education and health care, but less so in STEM, which, as mentioned above, record a 76.9% of male employees compared to 23.1% of women.

Table 1 – Employees and salaried workers by profession and gender – 2016

<i>ATECO sections 2007</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men %</i>	<i>Women %</i>
<i>12-entrepreneurs, administrators, and directors of large companies</i>	122	102	20	83,7	16,3
<i>21-specialists in mathematical, computer, chemical and natural sciences</i>	185	142	43	76,9	23,1
<i>22-engineers, architects, and similar professions</i>	156	128	28	82	18
<i>26-training and research specialists</i>	1.136	229	907	20	80
<i>31-technical professions in the scientific, engineering and production fields</i>	951	809	143	85	15
<i>32-technical professions in health and life sciences</i>	619	178	441	29	71
<i>41-secretarial and office machine employees</i>	1.217	329	887	27	73
<i>51-qualified professions in commercial activities</i>	1.072	394	678	37	63
<i>53-qualified professions in health and social services</i>	218	37	180	17	83
<i>54-qualified professions in cultural, security</i>	929	343	586	37	63

<i>and personal services</i>					
<i>71-industrial plant operators</i>	301	254	47	84	16
<i>82-unskilled professions in domestic, recreational, and cultural activities</i>	446	52	393	12	88

Source: Personal elaboration on ISTAT Labour market survey data

The gender segregation in the workforce has been increasing over time, as shown by the trend in Charles' index⁷. In the years 2004-2008, the index remained stable at average values below 1 (0.87) but it has systematically increased since 2009, reaching 1.04 in 2019. As already highlighted, the most feminized professions, those with the higher percentages of women, are domestic, recreational and cultural activities (88.8%), training specialists (79%), office work or customer care (70.3%), education, health and family (65.2%), which have remained stable in recent years. There has, however, been an increase in intellectual, scientific, and highly specialized professions, with an increase of 44.4% with the decisive contribution of women (Istat, 2020). Table 2 shows the trend over the last four years.

Table 2 -Employees and salaried workers by profession and gender – 2016-2019 – (in thousands)

Period	2016		2017		2018		2019	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Ateco 2007								
Total	13.233	9.525	13.349	9.674	13.447	9.768	13.488	9.872
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	644	240	643	228	638	234	673	235
Total Industry (b-f)	4.710	1.234	4.746	1.240	4.779	1.280	4.754	1.289
Total Industry Excluding Constructions (b-e)	3.395	1.146	3.422	1.148	3.465	1.188	3.503	1.200
<u>Constructions</u>	1.315	89	1.324	92	1.315	92	1.251	89
Total Tertiary (G-U)	7.879	8.050	7.959	8.206	8.029	8.253	8.060	8.348

⁷ The Charles or Ratio Index is the sum of the deviations of the logarithm of the gender ratio of each professional category from the national total. If its value is zero, it denotes the absence of segregation. The index then measures the over- or under-representation of women in specific professions, depending on whether it is positive or negative (Charles, 1992).

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wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	1.927	1.315	1.946	1.342	1.948	1.339	1.923	1.363
transport and storage	864	221	886	223	897	233	907	236
hospitality and food service activities	682	713	718	733	719	741	732	748
information and communicationservices	387	175	395	170	430	173	435	183
financial and insurance activities	363	286	352	286	357	284	349	286
Business services (l-n)	1.336	1.255	1.319	1.248	1.359	1.279	1.386	1.322
public administration and defence, basic social security	843	420	826	434	807	435	808	435
education and health (p-q)	941	2.433	954	2.523	956	2.523	970	2.542
other collective and personal services (r-u)	536	1.233	563	1.247	555	1.246	550	1.232

Source: Istat- data retrieved 4 July 2020.

As a result, women in the labour market have more discontinuous careers and lower salaries due to lower access to top positions. These disparities, in turn, lead to harder economic conditions, especially for single mothers, and systematically lower pension benefits.

4. The gender gap through the lens of the economic theory

The data makes it possible to focus on one of the main effects of the crisis: the strengthening of the function of 'reserve labour force', or replacement, that women perform on the labour market, thus representing the workforce segment with the most precarious link with the market. From a historical point of view (Marcuzzo, Rosselli, 2008), analyses on the segmentation of the labour market investigating discrimination, both race- and gender-related (Reich, 2008), date back to the 1970s. However, institutionalists had already focused on the analysis of differences and

inequalities (Gilman, 1998[1898])⁸ and women's role depending on the economic development of the system. When reaching more advanced levels of development, the productive function of women seems to be reduced, in the sense that their predominant role shifts from producers to consumers (Veblen, 1899, p. 180). From this point of view, Veblen is a forerunner of more recent debates, from the negative effect of gender discrimination on economic development to the economic and social recognition of care work and women's domestic work in general (Veblen, 1894). Another significant aspect concerns the reflection on how culture and economy⁹ can promote the persistence of gender stereotypes and, at the same time, explain that of inequalities (Dugger, 1996). In this sense, Tilman (2004, p. 44) states that "The institutional needs of the patriarchy manifest themselves in the modern work organization through a striking level of occupational segregation where men often continue in their roles of domination by occupying the more predatory employment positions" (see also Tilman, 2003).

In recent decades, the model of women's participation in the labour market in Italy has changed, especially on the age at which women enter the market and their highest educational level (CNEL, 2012). However, the effects of the crisis and the consequent cuts in the education system have led to a 'discouraging effect'. This 'discouragement' is due to the increasing difficulties in capitalising on one's qualifications in the national context. Generally, the discriminated individuals who have a lower probability of obtaining a job tend to reduce their level of education, reducing, at the same time, their degree of competitiveness in the labour market (Myrdal,

⁸ This circumstance could be interpreted considering the recent diffusion of gender studies as an analytical category in the academic field, as well as the diffusion of feminist economics, but also the comparison and dialogue between the various heterodox schools of economic thought (Pauli, 2014). Feminist economics can be defined as an elaboration of economics aimed at improving the economic conditions of women (Strober, 1994). It is necessary to distinguish between feminist economics and gender economy. The analytical category of gender is understood in a weak sense as an element that accounts for the differences; in a strong sense as an element to identify, through gender, the difference in power between men and women in society, as well as the structures and constraints (including legal norms) that cause and uphold them (Robeyns, 2003).

⁹ According to Veblen, the economy and culture interact in the real economy, understood as a process of social reproduction.

1966[1944])¹⁰. This aspect affects mainly women, who thus give up one of the main factors of protection and competitiveness.

Regarding pay inequality, orthodox theoretical positions tend to explain its increase by emphasising the role of globalisation, migration, and technological change. However, Paul Krugman (2002), referring to the US context, argues that none of these motivations can convincingly explain this dramatic expansion and suggests an explanation linked to the increased tolerability of social norms in the face of growing inequality. Although these arguments are not specifically used to explain gender differences, they may be useful to analyse the gender pay gap (Piazzalunga, Di Tommaso, 2015). Indeed, studies on the subject often tend to neglect the social determinants of change and focus only on individual characteristics based on the theory of human capital. But focusing on individual characteristics neglects factors such as the working environment, the market itself and the economic context (Rubery *et al.*, 2005), following a new form of methodological individualism.

Therefore, although we can now observe greater symmetry between the lives of women and men, this convergence has been substantially unilateral. This “asymmetric convergence”, together with gender segregation and the pay gap, contributes to increasing disadvantages for women in the labour market and their earnings and retirement income. This perspective raises questions about the comparative value and status of work and how wages are determined. Assuming wages are partially determined by social norms, we can then analyse the link between pay and the social value of different forms of work. Such a link, indeed, is central to gender equity issues (Grimshaw, Rubery, 2007). On the other hand, attracting women workers in sectors with low feminisation rates entails the need to implement policies to support the organisation of working time with services and infrastructure for harmonising work and personal life.

¹⁰ Particularly about racial discrimination. See, for example, the Appendix to *An America Dilemma*, where we find an analysis of the racial problem in the United States in which it is possible to grasp some suggestions that compare the condition of women and that of American blacks in the society of the time.

5. *Women's work in the cognitive economy*

Dualism and segmentation allow us to understand how the structure of the labour market has developed, with peculiarities depending on the country. The theory of dualism explains why a significant proportion of workers remain excluded from improvements in working conditions and job stability. In a nut shell, we observe the formation of a 'primary labour market' made up of privileged and well-paid workers, and a 'secondary market' characterised by precarious, underpaid workers and generally weaker categories.

The transformative scenario of the labour market is linked to the new paths of the global economy or the new cognitive capitalism¹¹ (Castells, 2002; Vercellone, 2006; Fumagalli, 2007) within which the issues of gender gap and feminisation of labour occupy a prominent place, also in the light of the above considerations.

Saskia Sassen postulates "the existence of a systemic relationship between globalization and the feminization of waged labour": "production structures that cannot transfer offshore and must function where there is demand can use female labour, while structures that can transfer abroad can use low-wage labour in less developed countries" (Sassen, 2002, p. 126, personal translation).

All this can be translated into a consequential process of feminization of labour. On the one hand, for "an exponential implementation of low-cost labour in global markets, on the other hand, in the Western context, because it signals the trend towards the progressive inclusion of women in tertiary production (women from the South of the world are transformed into waged reproductive substitutes for women from the North, to the detriment of their reproductive capacity/will; women from the North are

¹¹The production of wealth is increasingly based on immaterial elements, *i.e.* intangible goods, which are difficult to measure and quantify and which *derive directly from the use of the relational, sentimental, and cerebral faculties* of human beings.

pushed towards production and even towards the horizon of artificial and/or sterile life)" (Morini, 2010, p. 2, personal translation).

Work performance changes both quantitatively and qualitatively: working hours increase and tasks often cumulate, marking *the disappearance of the separation between working hours and free time* and a greater individualisation of working relationships. Moreover, work performance is becoming more and more immaterial: *relational, communication and cerebral activities* are becoming more and more co-present and important. "Women seem to represent a model to which contemporary capitalism looks with growing interest, both in terms of the *forms* of work (precariousness, mobility, fragmentation, low pay levels) and in terms of content, given the new anthropological centrality that work claims to assume through the intensive exploitation of quality, skills and individual knowledge (relational skills, emotional aspects, language, propensity to care)" (Morini, 2010, p. 3, personal translation).

In other words, cognitive capitalism appropriates the polyvalence of women's work, exploiting all the experiential value of women (typical of the Fordist era and made up of silent, loving and invisible support activities for production) which today is subsumed by production and therefore commodified. The idea of infinite adaptability and flexibility (double and triple roles) on which cognitive capitalism insists are well known to women. There is a female tendency to transfer modes and logics of care work, particularly the mother-child relationship, within professional work; and "this cultural attitude of women becomes functional to the needs of contemporary corporations. The work-sphere pretends to be a living body, which needs all the time, all the care, all the words and all the actions. If life itself (bio-economic accumulation: see also Martini, Vespasiano, 2013) joins the economic game, women are pushed to divert all the time, all the care, all the words, all the attention towards the *enterprise-living body* all the time" (Morini, 2010 p. 10).

Conclusions

The low participation of women in the labour market is largely due to the more general issue of the reconciliation of care hours and work hours (Saraceno, 2013). This means, on the one hand, the difficulty of combining domestic care and work and, on the other hand, the lack of services that make it possible to carry out the two activities (De Pascali, Forges Davanzati, 2014).

This research does not claim to be an exhaustive representation of data on female participation in the labour market. It aims to pinpoint, through data, the main critical issues that the recent economic crisis has brought to light in terms of gender inequality. The crisis has reduced gender differences in the labour market, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. On closer inspection, however, this is more linked to a worsening of the conditions of the male labour market than to a real improvement in working conditions for women – *i.e.*, a positive outcome due to a relative worsening for the male component. Female employment remains concentrated in precarious, low-skilled, and therefore low-paid jobs. And it is not only the question of the glass ceiling (which hinders the careers of professional women) but also a greater inequality between women themselves, between high-skilled and low-skilled workers (Saraceno, 2017, 2015). It entails the risk of producing feedback effects that perpetuate not only the gender gap but also, in the female population, the same dynamics existing between men and women. In addition, the austerity policies implemented in recent years because of the crisis have led to a general reduction in welfare, and specifically in gender welfare (Vincenti, 2012), with the consequent change in the age composition of the population. This had negative effects on the rate of productivity and, ultimately, economic growth.

Paradoxically, the crisis erupted at a time when more attention was focusing on the gender impact of public action, which has gradually faded. As a result of the crisis, old and new structural disparities seem to overlap (Eige, 2014; Bonomi *et al.*, 2013). The issue of reconciliation, and the way it has been addressed, reflects the degree of viscoseness of a market that insists on considering female unemployment as less problematic than male unemployment (confirming, in a sense, a traditional stereotype that men should work rather than women). We could go further and mention that

the way women are integrated into the market has not, contrary to expectations, dampened gender imbalances, worsening their real capacity for social negotiation. This could be a “false emancipation” or a “partially accomplished emancipation” (Bolzani *et al.*, 2010).

In the face of the objective difficulties, however, it should be pointed out that the typical characteristics of the new cognitive work have allowed the reorganization of two macro-environments that directly draw on the female experiential scope: space and time. On the one hand “the spatial reorganization: the home office or the domestication of work, outlines the new home landscape of work. Private and working life integrate within the domestic spaces and the two areas are transformed and hybridize each other. Does the home expand to encompass the work itself or vice versa is it work that violates an intimate and protected area?” See also the symbolic aspect of the aesthetic reorganization of workspaces inspired by the culture of difference and diversity, as Eleonora Fiorani (2003) notes. The office and the work station are becoming nomadic: “work and its geography are expressed through scattered, decentralized, virtually connected workstations and this configures, in relapse, the new changes of living” (Fiorani, 2003, p. 246). “[...] Secondly, the reorganization of time, time that by modifying itself annuls the difference between working time and free time, altering even that between waking and sleeping. Think of the end of the alternation of the various social times, the introduction of a day perceived as if there is practically no suspension” (Morini, 2010, p. 10, personal translation).

The survival strategies prompted by the crisis, precarious work, discrimination, and gender dualism, conspicuously complicate the existence of women, making the possibility to manage both the private and public sphere even more difficult than it had previously been. However, these same strategies make us “glimpse a greater capacity of women to *move on quicksand*, as Bauman would say (2005, p. 131). In other words, a greater adaptive capacity that makes them more resilient and reactive. Men – due to their current social-historical conditions, including a sexualized social construction – show more difficulty in adapting to the new multi-purpose and qualitative dimensions required by the new enterprise in the new world. Precisely those characteristics, therefore, that make women attractive for the current labour market, *precisely their adaptive capacity*, can potentially be transformed into the greatest limit with which the labour

market could be confronted soon”(Morini, 2010, p. 20, personal translation).

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