



Women and science: a political economy preface

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(I) *As Editor-in-Chief of *Economia Politica. Journal of Analytical and Institutional Economics (EPOL)**, I have been strongly involved in promoting this Special Issue on a theme that is both contemporary and critical. I am honoured to write the Preface for what I consider to be, in this very difficult period, a crucial special issue of this Journal. The COVID-19 pandemic is not yet over. The world is grappling with its immediate impact and its repercussions are expected to last a very long time. The magnitude of this pandemic has few parallels in recent times. It has affected virtually every conceivable activity in our society, across all spheres and regions, and highlighted the precarious nature of socio-economic systems. And certainly women, especially in the Global South, are among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. It has also posed important questions to researchers in the field of political economy and forced them to reconsider much of the received wisdom.

Let me present this Special Issue by quoting a sentence from Prof. Amartya Sen's Editorial: "*I felt very interested when Prof. Alberto Quadrio Curzio asked me to author a paper on women scientists in our precarious world endangered by pandemics. It is clear that pandemics demand scientific departures, and I was looking for my Marie Curie—or to be more realistic, a collectivity of scientists who could add up to being a Marie Curie.*" Amartya Sen explains other personal reasons for mentioning Marie Curie; however, I simply wish to stress here the crucial role of collaboration between all the sciences and all scientists, men and women.

Moreover, Prof. Sen in accepting to write the Editorial and to be one of the Guest Editors was the crucial starting point of this initiative. Bina Agarwal gave the Special Issue an inspiring appeal with her essay and provided admirable support for the selection of articles and coordination of the review process with two other Guest Editors, Floriana Cerniglia and Ragupathy Venkatachalam who, with competence and rigour, made fundamental contributions. Finally, Jennifer Thomson brought in the admirable institutional role of the Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD). To all go my warm thanks.

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(II) *This Special Issue also has roots in previous initiatives of mine on the role of women in science for progress and human development.*

I mention here only two recent events which had the participation of outstanding women who are both scientists and Lincei Fellows: Fabiola Gianotti (physicist) and Bina Agarwal (economist). I had collaborated with them previously, when I organized (with the cooperation of Marco Fortis) the Conference Series <<Fondazione Edison Expo 2015, Milan>> where they and Amartya Sen gave keynote presentations. Moreover in 2018, during my last year as President of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, I promoted a series of lectures by eminent women experts in the fields of natural sciences (Fabiola Gianotti, Elena Cattaneo, and Emmanuelle Marie Charpentier -2020 Nobel laureate- who was introduced by Maurizio Brunori, Lincei Fellow) and in the humanities (Bina Agarwal, Marcella Frangipane, and Berit Reiss-Andersen). I intentionally decided to conclude my presidency of the Lincei Academy with that series of lectures, as I explain in my book *I Lincei:fatti progetti e sfide 2015–2018*, where I also recall Rita Levi Montalcini, Nobel laureate in Medicine, 1986. I had the honour of knowing this amazing “role model” as a Lincei Fellow, who, among her many endeavours, also started a Foundation that bears her name for the early education of girls and the professional training (especially in the health fields) of women in Africa.

(III) *I would now like to outline some of the other founding factors that led me to embark on this initiative that focuses on the impact of pandemics on women and their responses to it, particularly in the developing world. Though various scholarly studies have analysed the current pandemic and its devastating effect on our societies from different vantage points, the Special Issue is unique in that it focuses on two key stakeholder groups who have traditionally been overlooked in the study of political economy: women and the Global South. The recent pandemic has showcased the fragility that is inherent in our modern, interconnected world and reminded us of the need for well-designed, robust economic policies to reduce the vulnerability experienced by these stakeholders. It is worth remembering that these economic policies are deeply related to political choices—a theme that this Journal has striven to advance for the past several decades.*

(IV) *Let me now point out other specific, crucial and interconnected reasons and persons that lead to the Special Issue.*

*One is that I have followed for many years the pioneering work of Prof. Bina Agarwal who has championed the cause of bringing gender-related issues, particularly from the developing world and agrarian backgrounds, into the mainstream discussion of the economics profession. I had the privilege to write in EPOL 1/2018 the “Correspondence” which introduces her Editorial on “The Challenge of Gender Inequality”. This essay is, with slight revisions, the *Lectio* she delivered at the Ceremony for the 2017 Balzan Prize for Gender Studies awarded to her with the following citation: “For challenging established premises in economics and the social sciences by using an innovative gender perspective; for enhancing the visibility and empowerment of rural women in the Global South; for opening new intellectual and political pathways in key areas of gender and development.”*

I wish to quote from her Editorial: “To conclude, gender inequality remains one of the deepest forms of persisting inequalities today, especially as it intersects with other forms of inequality such as class, caste, and race. And it adversely affects not only a country’s economy but also its social and political institutions. As scientists and practitioners, we need to continue exploring its many dimensions and seek pathways for its elimination. I hope that in time, with shifts in economic policies, laws, and social attitudes, all forms of gender inequality, including those highlighted by the Indian women farmers I cited at the start of my talk, will be consigned to history!”.

For these reasons and because Prof. Bina Agarwal is a co-editor of *EPOL*, I soon discussed with her my idea for a Special Issue. Her positive response was another critical step forward and led to her graciously accepting the role of Guest Editor.

Another reason is my close involvement with OWSD (of which Prof. Jennifer Thomson is President and Dr. Tonya Blowers the Programme Coordinator) since I was nominated its Ambassador in 2019. It has been a rewarding and illuminating experience. OWSD’s mission is to reach, recognise, collaborate, support, and promote women in the Global South in the scientific and technological spheres. It is a UNESCO Programme Unit. I got to know OWSD since its offices are based at the World Academy of Sciences for the advancement of science in developing countries (TWAS) in Trieste. In 2017, I was appointed Member of the TWAS Steering Committee by the Italian government and was warmly welcomed by its President and outstanding scientist Mohamed Hassan. In an *EPOL* joint Editorial “Women, science and development: The leading role of OWSD” that I wrote with Tonya Blowers (the OWSD Programme Coordinator) and Jennifer Thomson (President of OWSD), we discussed some of these themes in detail [(2020) 37:1–12]. In that article, the authors state that the “programmes OWSD has developed over 30 years are designed to address the ‘numbers problem’, by increasing the opportunities for women from developing countries to do advanced STEM research at international level as well as increasing their visibility and recognition. OWSD programmes can be seen to fall into four [...] fundamental categories that any organisation working in the field of science and development can use to map out an effective strategy to increase participation in science: Community, Mobility, Capacity, Visibility.” I will return to these aspects at point (VI) of this Preface. I invited Prof. Jennifer Thomson (who is also Emeritus Professor of Microbiology at the University of Cape Town) to join the team of Guest Editors and I am very glad she accepted.

*A further reason, certainly no less important, is that when I proposed and discussed the idea with Professors Floriana Cerniglia (co-editor of *EPOL*) and Ragupathy Venkatachalam (Associate Editor of *EPOL*), I received not only their enthusiastic support, but also the certainty that the Special Issue would be done.* In fact, they are two outstanding young economists with whom I collaborate, they have impressive competences in many fields of economic theory and empirical analysis and also have strong convictions on the role of social sciences for human development. They, along with Professor Agarwal, sacrificed time from their research to undertake the arduous task of organizing the process of the call for papers, editorial review activity and the final selection of articles. They played a very important

role to ensure that the Special Issue was finalised in time, despite several challenges posed by the pandemic.

The structure of the Special Issue is clearly explained in the Introduction written by B. Agarwal, R. Venkatachalam and F. Cerniglia. In brief, after the leading and illuminating article by Bina Agarwal, there are 12 original research articles that investigate a range of themes concerning pandemics: gendered impact on labour market outcomes, food security, nutrition, agrarian life in the global south; resilience of women scientists; care work and feminist political economy; gender-sensitive policy responses; movement building responses, to name a few. The articles that utilise plural methodologies, rely on primary and secondary data. They also cover a range of countries across three continents.

(V) *I would like now to go back to point (I) of this Preface by quoting the Nobel Prize laureate in Economics, Amartya Sen, who is one of the senior members of EPOL's Advisory Board and also a senior Fellow of Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Among the many crucial points mentioned in his Editorial, I wish to focus on the following: "Gender economics is a relatively new area of study, but its relevance is particularly strong when the lives of women are especially disrupted through the loss of household income, lack of medical facilities, the need for physical separation (as a part of prevention strategy for the epidemic), and particularly the deprivation of resources and opportunities for child care. I must point to the special need for concentration on gender economics in the context of pandemics. Even though there is not enough opportunity in this paper to go into the subject in detail—the special issue that is being planned by Alberto Quadrio Curzio for which this paper is being written, will happily have substantial expertise in this field, including the presence of very distinguished economists (such as Prof. Bina Agarwal) with appropriate specialist knowledge. It is important to remember that the needed women scientists may have to be economists and sociologists too—not just biologists and doctors".*

(VI) *This brings me back full circle to the need for men and women scientists in all disciplines to cooperate for progress and human development. Since these are also the aims of OWSD, let me conclude by sharing some important news. OWSD held its 6th General Assembly and International Conference on "Women, Science and Development" from November 8th—19th, 2021. I had the honour of addressing the Conference three times: on November 8th as OWSD's Ambassador and as a representative of "Aspen Institute Italia" announcing the contribution of a two-year Early Career Fellowship grant for OWSD; on November 9th presenting this Special Issue, and at the closing ceremony on November 19th when the OWSD "Italy National Network" was launched. I may mention that two of the three keynote speakers (the third was the British award-winning science journalist and author Angela Saini who spoke on "Including Sex-Gender Variables in Scientific Research") were Bina Agarwal who talked on "Rethinking the way we farm" and Fabiola Gianotti, CERN's first woman General Director, who spoke on "Scientific research: a key asset for the future of society" (see <https://assembly2021.owsd.net/>). At these meetings for women scientists from the Global South (which were made largely possible by Jennifer Thomson and Tonya Blowers), I had the confirmation that natural sciences and*

social sciences are two crucial elements needed for human development, as Amartya Sen also eloquently explains in his Editorial. Therefore, I hope that in the near future, *EPOL* will dedicate a special issue to sustainable environment and climate change also from the perspective of women and the need for cooperation in science for human development.

(VII) *Since EPOL is a journal of political economy*, I conclude by pointing out that, generally speaking, the “economics profession” has regrettably disregarded many of these issues for the ‘Global South’. It has predominantly focused on the ‘Developed North’ and on market mechanisms everywhere as the “true engine” for progress and development. My hope is that this Special Issue will contribute to motivating scholars to delve more into these critical issues. Our understanding of political economy would not just be incomplete, it would be remarkably poorer, without detailed knowledge of the damage caused by gender barriers everywhere and ways to overcome all forms of discrimination in order to promote true human development.

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