

What Has Feminism Got to Do with Economics? The Sixth Pan-Africa Newsletter (2023)



Wangechi Mutu (Kenya), *You Are My Sunshine*, 2015.

Dear friends,

Greetings from the desk of **Tricontinental Pan-Africa**, this week in collaboration with the **Nawi – Afrifem Macroeconomics Collective**.

In 2020, the 22 richest men in the world owned more wealth than all 325 million women in Africa combined. This was the crushing – albeit unsurprising – figure **calculated** by Oxfam. Although we live in the information age and women make up half the Earth’s population, figures like this and economic studies that aim to understand and quantify women’s economic status retain a relatively marginal position in public discourse.

Women make up the bulk of the workforce in low-wage sectors, such as domestic work, and global supply chains, including the garment industry, the horticultural sector, and in plantation agriculture. Yet, despite

contributing over half of the GDP of the sub-Saharan region, women’s significant productive contributions, such as being the majority food producers on the continent, are often statistically invisible.



Odili Donald Odita (Nigeria), *Mamba Negra*, 2019.

On a spectrum of marginalisation, African women’s thought on the economy arguably remains the least visible, a convergence of the problems that dominant economic traditions have with both gender and Africa. There are many reasons for this lack of understanding, which is also evident within other technical fields where African women suffer from a low level of recognition. As Fatimah Kelleher **writes**, the neo-coloniality behind all this cannot be overstated. Especially because African feminist thought often challenges the extractive and patriarchal model of neoliberal capitalist production – and, in turn, challenges the extractive and patriarchal *theoretical* model that substantiates that production. These models have resulted in increased wealth and inequality gaps, and reduced public spending on much-needed services and infrastructure, while our countries accrue more **debt** from international financial institutions and other extra-continental actors.

Over the last four decades, the dominance of capitalism and neoliberal economics has attempted to push other viewpoints to the periphery, reducing the visibility of more pluralist viewpoints and limiting wider engagement on economic issues by those outside its confines. By identifying the impact of patriarchal capitalism and recognising the diverse ways in which it operates, feminist perspectives offer alternative

economic systems that prioritise equitable distribution and environmental sustainability in general. We believe that by drawing from these approaches, societies can diversify their perspectives and create more comprehensive approaches that move away from the harmful limitations of a single, dominant worldview.

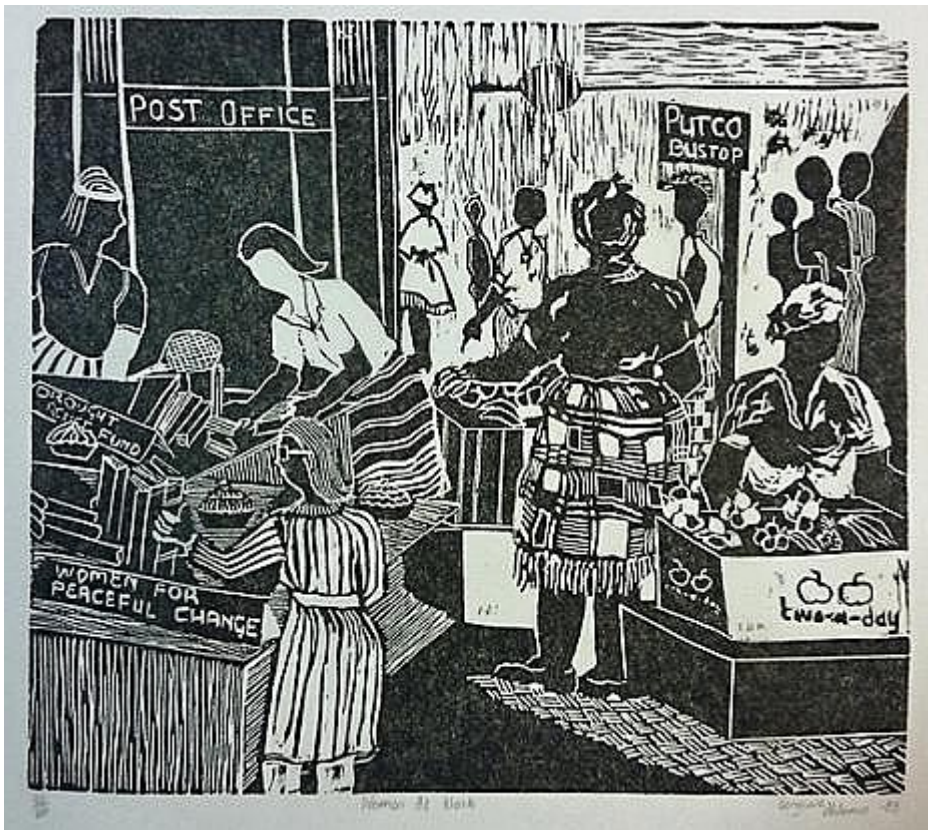


Billie Zangewa (Malawi), *Heart of the Home*, 2020.

Within Interventions 3, *Love or Labour: The Invisible Wheel that Turns the World*, we borrow from political economist Bhumika Muchhala’s **book**, *A Feminist Social Contract Rooted in Fiscal Justice*, where she asserts the urgent need for a feminist social contract that involves an intentional shift from viewing women as individuals to viewing gender as a system structuring unequal power relations, distribution, voice, and rights. We argue that the invisibilisation of women within the economy has left African women perpetually in the eye of economic storms. We argue for recognition and inclusion of the perspectives, realities, and needs of African women and girls within macro-level economic decisions. We show how social reproduction and the care economy are central to our economies and how African women’s bodies continue to carry Africa’s debt burden.

Our feminist praxis centres on the ability to reclaim and recreate a future. As African feminists, we must have a way to reimagine the ‘solution’. Of equal importance is the need to clearly understand what the problems *actually* are, the processes that drive them, and articulate questions from our positionality. This relies very heavily on our ability to dream, to unshackle ourselves from our current reality that is ordered by the logic of patriarchal capitalism. It requires us to be audacious enough to analyse against the dominant current and dream of new models, systems, and governance. This means letting go of and decolonising hierarchies of

epistemology.



Bongiwe (Bongi) Dhlomo-Mautloa (South Africa), *Women at Work*, 1983.

Within the framework of economic growth, how do we create an economic model that truly serves society at large? What is its theoretical basis? The answer relies on recognising that economic systems are not universal, but rather are shaped by specific cultural, historical, and social contexts; and engaging with indigenous knowledge, traditions, and practices that can provide insights. It also involves developing economic frameworks that are holistic and comprehensive – beyond measuring just monetary gains or gross domestic product. One such concept, the Gross National Happiness index used in Bhutan, gestures to a different path. Coined by its fourth king in 1972, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the concept of Gross National Happiness articulates an understanding and pursuit of development that moves beyond economic growth and incorporates multiple and interrelated social, political, economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions.

In the African context, what if economic analysis embraced Ubuntu philosophy, which is rooted in principles such as the interconnectedness of all things, and the spiritual essence of humanity? How could an economic system informed by the duality of collective and individual identity, the inclusive nature of family structures, the unity of mind, body, and spirit, and the profound value of interpersonal relationships foster prosperity and dignity for women and girls?



Mouna Karray (Tunisia), *Noir*, 2013.

As African feminists, we straddle many struggles against patriarchal systems of oppression, white supremacy, and neocolonial capitalism. Feminist perspectives involve re-evaluating cultural norms, traditions, and practices, illuminating these intricacies to address the complexities of power, gender, and identity that are often overlooked in mainstream narratives. If you are working on any models that do this, we invite you to contact us at joanita.najjuko1@gmail.com and help us deepen the discussion. We hope you enjoy reading *Love or Labour: The Invisible Wheel that Turns the World*.

In Revolutionary Solidarity,

Joanita



Joanita Najjuko is a Pan-African feminist activist dedicated to weaving new worlds. She is interested in challenging and dismantling structural inequalities in a world increasingly controlled by plutocrats, deploying intersectional feminist tools of inquiry to examine systemic injustices and their manifestations. She works with Nawi as the lead consultant on digital economies and the future of work, where she focuses on women's labour, the gig economy, and digital rights while contributing to other macroeconomic policy issues.

