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(Un) doing the gendered economy

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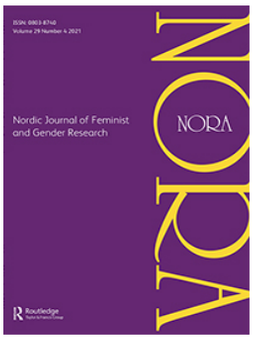

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It's Not All 'Bout the Money: (Un)doing the Gendered Economy

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ABSTRACT

During the past decade, gender equality has increasingly been motivated by economic gain, and has been described as a key to economic growth and "good for business". This article draws on an ethnographic study of professional gender equality consultants in order to explore the effects of *market feminism*. The participants use entrepreneurship as a form of activism and try to make a difference regarding issues of gender by selling equality as a commercial service. By understanding markets as "performative", the article characterizes the relationship between markets and feminism as one that is multi-facetted and plural, in order to explore the possibility to "take back the economy". Many of the consultants who were interviewed for this study talked about making money on feminism as empowering and subversive, and as something that actually added value to gender issues. They claim that this is done by questioning what is valued in a society, and who should be paid and for what. The purpose of this article is to examine these gender consultants' "ways of performing" the relationships that exist between markets, money, and feminism, and the feminist agencies that these performances afford them. In performing market feminism, these consultants create a disruption in established narratives within the economy, private enterprise, and economic growth. The article thus points to the importance of challenging these narratives in order to build more feminist economies.

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Market feminism; Gender equality consultancy; Economic performativity; Commodity feminism; Entrepreneurship

> We cannot achieve a social Europe without gender equality. Gender equality is a basic right and a prerequisite for economic growth, a well-functioning labour market, and welfare.
>
> *Åsa Regnér, Swedish Minister of Gender Equality, at Equality Works, an EU minister conference preceding the EU social top summit in Gothenburg, in 2017.*[1]

During the past decade, gender equality has increasingly been motivated by economic gain, and has been described as a key to economic growth and 'good for business'[2] (Petersson McIntyre, 2015, 2021). A growing market for issues related to feminism and gender has emerged, and to which feminists turn to pursue matters of relevance to gender and gender equality, a development Kantola and Squires (2012) refer to as *market feminism*. At the same time, there is a growing interest in feminist, and gender issues, which is both the result of, and has led to new forms of [online] activism, something which is sometimes described as "the fourth wave of feminism" (McLaran, 2015; Rivers, 2017). The process is however double and feminism has become both more popular, and more contested, particularly in the domain of social media (Gill, 2016; Martinsson, Griffin, & Giritli Nygren, 2016), as the #metoo movement and the reactions to it testify. During the same time, female empowerment has more and more been linked to economic success and entrepreneurship. Ahl et al. (2016) coined the term *FemIncIsm* to capture the phenomenon of "feminist activism through enterprise" and the potential that exists for women (and men) who use entrepreneurship to

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achieve feminist change. This is an endeavour which they see as risky, because it favours individual empowerment at the expense of collective struggle (Ahl et al., 2014; Alnebratt & Rönnblom, 2016; Berglund et al., 2018; Liinason, 2018).

This article explores the relationship between markets and feminism based on an ethnographic study of professional gender equality consultants. While agreeing with the critique of individualization and entrepreneurialism, it also examines the possibilities for collective gain. These consultants utilize commerce in an effort to make a difference with respect to issues of gender, and view entrepreneurship as a form of activism. The article thus argues that the commodification of feminism does not necessarily mean that feminism is co-opted by the market, it can also mean that feminism is redefining the economy. By drawing on ideas of "economic performativity" market feminism is examined for its potential to "take back the economy" (Gibson & Scott, 2019). As I demonstrate, many of the consultants who were interviewed for this study spoke about making money on feminism as empowering and subversive, and as something that actually added value to gender issues. Thus, although entrepreneurial feminism may reflect a greater sense of individualization, it also involves challenging *practices of valuation* (Bandelj, Wherry, & Zelizer, 2017). The practices encompass questions concerning *What is valued in a society?*, *Who is paid?*, and *What is being paid for?* The purpose of this article is thus to examine (i) how gender consultants make sense of the commodification of feminism and (ii) what feminist agencies this practice affords them. As one consultant reported, in relation to the #metoo-movement, "business has never been better, everyone gets jobs now".

Sweden, the context of this study, has, just like the other Nordic countries, employed "a state feminist approach" which has entailed the implementation of measures that work for equality through the means of state policy. This system has operated alongside a (proportionately) high number of women who work for the public sector. In recent decades, however, Sweden has transformed from following a social-democratic welfare state model to neoliberal, market-based forms of national governance with a high degree of privatization of what was formally the public sector (Ahl et al., 2014; Edenheim & Rönnblom, 2012; Olivius & Rönnblom, 2019). Neoliberalism views private enterprise, deregulation, and competition as ideal practices that emphasize the role of individual choice as the guarantor of freedom and quality of services. In such a system, market principles are used to govern various aspects of public life, including welfare institutions (Brown, 2003). This adoption of a neoliberal economic system has led to an increased use of independent consultants who are tasked to solve issues of inequality. As argued by Olivius and Rönnblom (2019), gender equality consultants have subsequently become key actors in the implementation of Swedish gender equality policies. This development has been criticized for leading to a state of depoliticization and bureaucratization, and has given rise to the question of whether market-based feminism is at all compatible with a critical analysis of power (Alnebratt & Rönnblom, 2016).

In the introduction to a special issue of the *European Journal of Politics and Gender* on "gender experts", Kunz and Prügl (2019) demonstrate how gender expertise is rife with tension and division. Gender experts have been characterized as the Trojan Horses of the feminist movement, people who have "battled patriarchal structures from the inside, learned the master's tools in the hope of dismantling the master's house, faced co-optation into state agendas, but also achieved small victories against considerable odds" (Kunz & Prügl, 2019, p. 5). Furthermore, gender experts have been criticized for "lacking accountability [. . .] to feminist activist constituencies" and for "co-opting feminist empowerment agendas" (p. 5). They have been accused of reducing the struggle for gender equality to checklists, gender-training toolkits, and to the "gender washing" of policy documents. According to Kunz and Prügl, critics have feared that gender experts do not actually serve feminist goals, but, instead, turn feminist insights into "managerial solutions" that do not properly address structural gender inequalities (p. 6).

Being self-employed, gender consultants are subject to precarious work conditions, low or irregular pay, and are expected to "love their jobs" (Petersson McIntyre, 2014). Entrepreneurialism thus clearly relates to what Brown (2015) calls "the ethics of neoliberalism". Neoliberalism does not only change the role of markets, but it also changes the way people live—or make sense of—their lives (Du Gay,

2007; McNay, 2009). "Neoliberalism" is then seen as a form of governmentality; i.e. something more than the principles of free market forces, including the organization of subjectivity. Entrepreneurship, in this context, has become much more than merely a professional and economic role; it has grown into an identity, an emotional desire, and an aspiration that certain individuals strive for (Berlant, 2011; Du Gay, 2007). Scharff (2016) argues that the call to entrepreneurship particularly targets young women. Entrepreneurialism and the use of markets to spread issues that are related to feminism is part of these consultants' constant process of self-improvement and their struggle to make themselves employable, and constitutes what neoliberal subjectivity signifies.

Entrepreneurship, as numerous studies testify, is also strongly associated with men. Capitalism has even been described as gendered, with a clear, gendered divide existing between the spheres of work/family, public/private, and market/household (Ahl et al., 2014; Ahl, Berglund, Pettersson, & Tillmar, 2016; Lewis, 2006; Alsos, Steen Jensen, & Ljunggren, 2010; Pettersson, Ahl, Berglund, & Tillmar, 2017). Therefore, entering into entrepreneurship also entails crossing lines of gendered expectations for many women.

Market performativity

The relationship between markets and feminism is complex and many feminist analyses of markets have been dominated by a critical perspective of the complementary relation between capitalism and patriarchy (cf. Friedan, 1997). The term *commodity feminism* (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Goldman, Heath, & Smith, 1991), along with the terms *post-feminism* (McRobbie, 2009; Negra & Tasker, 2007) and *choice feminism* (Lazar, 2017) has been used to critically approach the individualization, de-politicization, consumerism, and celebration of individual economic success, or entrepreneurialism of commoditized feminism. The term *post-feminism* refers to the idea that inequalities have been overcome and feminism is now merely a matter of women's right and ability to achieve self-realization, which is often related to entrepreneurship and success. Gill (2016) has termed the development a "post-feminist sensibility"—a kind of emotional responsiveness that is deeply enmeshed in a neoliberal message.

Furthermore, scholars of marketing, for instance, have noted how advertising has been approached as a negative force in women's lives (Catterall, McLaran, & Stevens, 2001), which has made it difficult for professionals who insert feminist content in commercial products to be taken seriously. Despite the fact that, in recent years, an ever-increasing number of market actors use feminism to sell their products and services (Petersson McIntyre, 2018), these efforts are often met with indifference.

The discussion of the role of markets in the promotion of social and environmental issues is more developed, however more often in relation to products than services. The term *concerned markets* addresses the dynamics of markets that have social concerns as the basis of their creation. This discussion borrows from Latour's argument regarding what are "matters of fact" versus "matters of concern" (Latour, 2004), in which he argues that reality is not defined by matters of fact. Instead, the critically-minded should take matters of concern as a stepping stone (p. 232). Thus, "a concerned market" is one in which participants seek to develop "democratic and technical procedures" that may facilitate "socially, morally and politically acceptable combinations" (Geiger et al., 2015, p. 4).

Another way of circumventing polarizations between feminism and commercialism is to approach markets as "performative", as if they are made through specific practices that have effects. Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity is well known in the gender field. It views gender identity as constituted in material-discursive enactments, "a kind of becoming or activity . . . an incessant and repeated action of some sort" (Butler, 1990, p. 112). Gender identities are performative citational practices, which are the result of complex discursive practices in which gender, sexuality, and desire are co-produced. These citational practices reproduce discourse, but can also work subversively. However, only a few gender scholars have directed their interest towards matters of economic, or market performativity. Both versions of performativity use Austin's (1962) theory

of "performative utterances" as a source, but there are some differences in their approach to this (see Cochoy, Giraudeau, & McFall, 2014 for an overview).

The idea behind economics as being performative and the idea that the discipline of "economics does not describe an existing external 'economy', but instead brings that economy into being" stems from Callon (1998). As Callon argues, "economics, in the broad sense of the term, performs, shapes and formats the economy, rather than observing how it functions" (1998, p. 2; see also Cochoy et al., 2014; Mason, Kjellberg, & Hagberg, 2015). In a similar manner, thinking with respect to markets has been developed to see markets as shaped in, and through, *practices*. In this context *markets* are defined as plural (Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2006). Markets are social constructions that are created and shaped by how they are assembled and acted upon. A market may be thus defined as a socio-material assemblage, where agency emerges from within this assemblage (Cochoy, 2014). An assemblage may, in turn, be defined as temporary amalgamations of heterogeneous material and semiotic elements, amongst which capacities and actions emerge, not as properties of individual elements, but through the relationships established between them (Canniford & Bajde, 2016). Consequently, "market performativity" entails that a market is made when it is acted upon. A market for feminism is made when it is acted upon.

According to Cochoy et al. (2010), the discipline of economics has long resisted seeing itself as performative. Rather, the discipline has emphasized economic forces as being subject to natural forces (similar to the *natural* sciences) and has been part of a historical struggle to establish economics as a scientific discipline by separating it from matters of politics and religion. The pursuit of market interests and self-interest turned economics away from political struggle and war. Cochoy et al. (2010) describe how what they call the great divide between politics, economy, and society is "revealed as the partial and provisional outcome of a long historical project of separation. More concisely, politics and economies are not so much separate as they are *made separate*" (p. 141, original italics). Thus, market forces have, just like gender, been construed as based in nature. Given this, I claim that a framework of performativity helps us to see how the belief that the economy is subject to nature-like forces is the result of material-discursive practices, instead of the reason behind this belief. The extension of market logics to issues of gender equality does not just erode the boundary between politics and the economy (cf. Brown, 2015), it also highlights how boundaries are *created* between different spheres, and that such boundary-drawing is a practice that is open for re-configuration.

Performing the economy differently

Linking gender and market performativity, or economic performativity, together in this manner thus facilitates the analysis of how the construction of markets and the construction of gendered subjects within the same markets are connected. Discussions of economic performativity have mostly been centred on materiality, in the form of checklists, objects such as shopping trollies, calculation sheets, or cash registers (Callon, 1998; Cochoy, 2007), but rarely have these discussions included matters of the body and gender. Bringing together different theories on performativity enables us to show that the market of gender consultancy is connected with the formation of embodied gendered subjectivity. "Performing market feminism" is thus related to performing as a feminist in the market, with a specific body and gender.

The performativity perspective of the economy with respect to gender has been primarily developed by Gibson (Gibson & Scott, 2019) and Gibson-Graham (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Roelvink, St. Martin, & Gibson-Graham, 2015). These scholars have focused on how the economy can be performed in what is described as "different ways that matter". Part of this endeavour is to question the ways in which "the economy" is viewed and represented, and disclose the fact that there is a gendered nature to narratives about economics. Gibson (Gibson & Scott, 2019) exemplifies the way that workers who work in production are seen as the "real" workers in an economy, and how their activities function as the dynamics of an economy, while people at homes are seen as

merely doing "support work" or "reproduction". Today, Gibson argues, economies are largely represented as financial sectors, which means that people who do not have shares or play the stock market do not feel they are part of the economy (Gibson & Scott, 2019, p. 3). Such an understanding is not "the truth" of course, it is a representation, a narrative, or boundary-drawing practice. Further, one effect that such representations have is that they allow us to see certain kinds of market dynamics as more important and influential than others, thus allowing and encouraging certain forms of actions (Gibson & Scott, 2019, p. 2). Consequently, we are exhorted not to view the capitalist economy as natural, but, instead, as performative and a "doing".

There are two important additional consequences that fall out from this way of thinking: (1) The way the economy is perceived financially is related to an extremely male-dominated sector. The financial sector relies on a masculine narrative that emphasizes aggressiveness, competitiveness, and risk-taking, and is dominated by careers that are not possible to combine with the responsibilities of caring for others, such as children (Gibson & Scott, 2019; McDowell, 2008). (2) Gibson introduces an ethical perspective in which we can ask ourselves how the narratives that inform economies stand in the way of thinking about finance differently. She proposes that we develop a new language of economics so that we can imagine other ways of understanding the economy, as well as a different politics of the subject and the politics of collective action. Economies should be reframed in terms of things that matter to people, such as living well. We should engage in what she calls "counter-hegemonic projects" and promote a "collective disidentification" with the ideological fantasy of capitalism (Gibson & Scott, 2019; Gibson-Graham, 2006, pp. 55–56).

The social meaning of money

Money is the medium through which commercial and market exchange takes place. However, there is a gendered nature to money, too. Money is generally seen as cold and impersonal; the opposite of emotion and warm human ties (Hochschild, 2017; Zelizer, 1994). Gender conventions places femininity as the opposite of money; namely, femininity is said to encompass that which is personal, emotional, warm, and human. Moral judgements and emotional underpinnings are intertwined with how people think about and use money (Bandelj et al., 2017). Accepting money for services that are associated with the feminine sphere, such as love, or to mix emotion with economic transactions, is generally considered immoral. Thus, feminism is difficult to combine with money, when feminism is defined as the extension of femininity in terms of the private sphere, altruism, and occupying the moral high ground.

If we turn to Zelizer (1994), we can come to an understanding of money, in a manner similar to our understanding of markets, not as something that *is*, but as something that is made or done through the ways in which it is talked about and acted upon. Money is, according to Zelizer, not a neutral and simply fungible method for counting surplus. Instead, we should view it as something that is imbued with social meaning and attached to a variety of social relations, and giving rise to multiple effects (Zelizer, 1994, p. 25, in Carruthers, 2017, p. 74). Money evokes feelings and feelings are attached to money (Zelizer, 1994). Therefore, money's effect on social relations cannot only be instantiated by cold, impersonal calculation. Instead, money expresses, rather than suppresses, social relations (Carruthers, 2017, p. 73). Seeing money in this way places emphasis on its performative qualities; i.e. money as a "doing". Or, as formulated by Hochschild (2017), money is not simply standardized, but it is standardized by us, personalized, and made by us.

From this perspective, the motivation of gender equality in terms of economic gain and its description of being key to economic growth and "good for business" can thus also be seen as a way of taking back the economy, by claiming that feminism has the kind of value, i.e. economic, that "counts" in the world. By doing feminism on a market, I show that the consultants who were interviewed were part of an ongoing resistance to the exclusion of feminism from "the economy" and of what is seen as the driving force behind the economy. By performing market feminism, the

consultants also created a disruption in established narratives of valuation, concerning the economy, private enterprise, and economic growth.

Method

The methodology used in this study is ethnographic and relied on identifying patterns that make up a culture (Ehn & Löfgren, 2016). I traced a number of sense-making practices across a variety of media —spoken, written, and digital—and included text analysis, conversation analysis, and observations in my approach to the research area. This multi-sited approach recognizes that cultural meanings are not located in one field only, but move and evolve across multiple sites (Marcus, 1998). The ethnographic method employed here can be defined as "iterative-inductive research (that evolves in design through the study), drawing on a family of methods . . . that acknowledges the role of theory as well as the researcher's own role and that views humans as part object/part subject" (O'Reilly, 2005, p. 3). Ethnography is not just a method of observing or listening to human agents; it is a way of analysis that depends on theory and the researcher's view of the world (Pink et al., 2016).

Twenty in-depth interviews were conducted with gender equality consultants. The interviews lasted between one and two hours, the majority of which took place at the interviewee's office. The interviews were transcribed and coded for re-occurring themes. The informants were consultants who are operative within the broad field of gender, equality, diversity, inclusion, and "norm-critique". The only criteria for their selection and participation was that they were actively engaged in some form of self-employment or were employed by a private company. They were all asked to describe the field of gender consultancy in Sweden. Some of the consultants employed only themselves, whilst others employed up to five consultants. Two of the interviewees had worked as consultants for 30 years, while some of the others were relatively new to the field. Many worked with gender mainstreaming in public administrations, while others were consulted by private enterprises to help them with advertisement campaigns, product design, or issues related to the work environment. I conducted a number of participant observations during the training of new consultants and I also participated in a number of activities with clients, meetings, workshops, and lectures. I followed a closed Facebook group and examined a number of webpages and other materials, including books that were written by and used by consultants. Other tools, such as card games, were also examined. I also studied the organization that exists around the consultants and consultant networks. The combination of methods and materials that I took into consideration in this study entailed that I gained access to daily routines, as well as to the ideas and conversations that the consultants had with themselves and their colleagues. This approach provided me with a broad understanding of their views.

The interview questions that were used during the interviews emerged in response to my observations and interactions in the field. Even though the quotes in the following sections are in the form of questions and answers in interview situations, they are representative of the ethnographic field. Some of these question-answer turns were taken from my field diary on occasion. Certain cultural processes are cited in the interview situations and thus cannot be easily separated from the participant observations.

The following article is structured in terms of three ways of performing market feminism: (i) market feminism as something "bad"; (ii) market feminism as something "neutral"; and (iii) the market feminism as something "good". These three ways are understood as assemblages, collections of things, words, and people, which afford and prescribe different forms of agency, depending upon the way the assemblage is put together. These assemblages are not tied to specific individuals, but to forms of agency. Different individuals can act in all three assemblages. There are, however, certain tendencies that can be identified. Consultants who prefer the public sector and identify politically with the left and with the women's movement tend to think of market feminism as "bad" to a higher degree than consultants who prefer the private sector and identify as market liberals. These individuals (more often) view market feminism as "good". This latter group were also generally a little younger than the former. This

classification of ways of doing "the market" should, however, not be seen as a characterization of individual consultants, but, instead, as a way forward to discuss the effects market feminism and as an exploration of possible ways of doing market feminism "in ways that matter".

When market feminism is bad

Discourses which characterized markets as something cold and related to greed were frequently encountered in the interviews and during my observations. Gender issues were often represented as something that stood in conflict with money-making or were deemed irrelevant to commercial markets. Many consultants reported that "making money has nothing to do with gender equality". Similarly, in this context, sales pitches and marketing activities were experienced as difficult and unpleasant. Issues of gender were understood as belonging to a sphere of care and humanity, and quite different than the cold sphere of economic transactions. These two spheres were also clearly gendered, with care related to femininity and the market to (certain forms of) masculinity.

Interviewer: Why is "selling" such a bad thing, you mean?

Ellen: I guess it has to do with my background of working with care. You know, we are helpers, we support. I shouldn't be thinking "oh, I know something".

Many of the consultants described what they thought was a "natural" link between the public sector and the content of their work, while they thought that private industry was "only concerned with profit".

One of the interviewees, Birgitta, spoke to me about a workshop that she held for a major Swedish industrial company. Most of the workshop participants thought that making money was the main reason why someone might want to work with issues of gender, equality, and inclusion, even though some of these participants also said that the coffee room would become more pleasant if there were a mix of men and women present. For Birgitta, the incident validated her thesis that gender consultants and private industry are worlds apart. "They only think of money", she observed.

Importantly, we note that all of these utterances are performatives. They "do" rather than describe the market. The market is performatively enacted as masculine, in these utterances, thus simultaneously citing the things that women do, such as work with care, as support work, instead of as the driving force of the economy. This performance, in turn, entails that work with gender issues cannot be naturally considered to be a dynamic force within the economy (Gibson & Scott, 2019).

Feminist agency in a bad market

Notwithstanding the observations made above, many interviewees claimed that they "had nothing against profit in itself, as long as it wasn't *only* about profit" (Karin). Thus, to talk of payment in relation to working on gender issues was described as problematic only when it was experienced as compromising the interviewees' inner convictions or values. However, these representations of the market also meant the consultants regularly felt questioned by activists, gender scholars, and even themselves for having "sold out" (see also Kunz & Prügl, 2019). Many consultants carefully stressed that economic gain was not their goal. "I am not interested [in profits]" or "I don't do this to make money" was something that they reported. Their objective was not to sell a product, but to transform society.

At the same time, many also said they would like to—or *should*—move into private enterprise. Their reason for this was based on the idea that that private industry entailed opportunities for them, both in terms of making a living and in terms of spreading one's mission to a wider audience. However, many of them found such a move practically difficult since they did not possess the knowledge or experience to talk to people in private industry and neither did they know where to go, where to start, or what to say. Business clients were understood as "challenging", and many consultants felt out of place in the private sector. As Johan noted, "I just don't get the big contracts. I don't have the language, or the knowledge of the organizations. Doing an equality or diversity plan for a major organization is way easier than 'pitching

the sale'. Completely different attitudes and language". Private enterprise was connected with a certain language and set of skills, and, as Johan suggested, certain "attitudes" and ways of talking, being, and acting. Associations between masculinity and entrepreneurship are well covered in the literature (Ahl, Berglund, Pettersson, & Tillmar, 2016). Johan, who defined himself as a transgender man, did not feel included in those norms. The masculine narrative around economics and markets comes with specific expectations with respect to bodies—expectations that women and transgender individuals cannot always fulfil. The discursive connections between masculinity and the market were material and embodied in specific forms of (cis-) masculinity. In these cases the assemblage of economic gain and feminism worked to exclude.

The interviewees' experiences of not belonging *in* the market were surprisingly physical and emotional. Many said they *personally* felt discomfort, out-of-place, and fake when they engaged in sales talk. They referred to their personality and their own personal values as reasons for not being interested in making money. Working for the public sphere was more "natural" for many of them, because of their background and interests. A number of consultants said that moving from the public sector to the private sector had been painful on a personal level.

Unwilling entrepreneurship

Similarly, many interviewees were reluctant to identify themselves as "entrepreneurs". Entrepreneurship was referred as a necessary evil—"I do it [run a company] because I have to". Even if the consultants were self-employed within their own firms, several of them associated entrepreneurship with the idea of a greedy, pushy sales*man*, which meant that it was difficult for them to see themselves in such a role. Mia illustrates that, even if they are all "entrepreneurs" in some sense or other, only a few consultants identify with the idea of being an entrepreneur. Mia did, however, identify as such:

> Many of us have companies, but we never talk about ourselves as entrepreneurs, or about increasing profits. I do it, but no one else does. We only talk about assignments and what methods to use. We are different from other industries in this regard. We should probably talk more about these matters, to be sustainable.

The practices of entrepreneurship and profit-making were not only represented as masculine by the consultants, it was also politicized. As stated by Paula:

> Maybe I sound prejudiced, but many gender consultants are left-wing; it follows the nature of the industry. Solidarity, equity, fairness, stuff like that. Making money yourself doesn't really go together with that. And then to push the profit side. But I am not like that. And I see nothing strange in running a company with the intent to make a profit. And if you are going to talk to other companies, you have to talk money/profit with them.

Again, "nature" was referred to, now (in the extract above) in the relationship between fairness and left-wing politics. Many other consultants alluded to a "natural link" between the two; performatively enacting profit-making as "other" or outside of what is in the interest of the common good. Paula, who liked the idea of making money, therefore saw herself as an untypical feminist. For Paula, money was, clearly related to right-wing politics.

During my fieldwork and my observations, I repeatedly encountered similar sentiments. Many consultants described themselves as "left-wing", as observed by Paula. At the same time, other consultants, like Paula herself, told me that it is important to be able to work with these questions [i.e. gender], even if you are "right-wing". Market feminism was performatively enacted and entangled in right-wing politics. As Paula remarked, making money does not go together with "stuff like fairness". However, she felt that it was important to combine equality work with profit-making.

In summary, these ideas concerning market feminism can be related to feminism's original criticism of capitalism, but they must also be related to conventions for representing the economy through associations with finance and masculinity (Gibson & Scott, 2019). The risk of representing market feminism in this way is that matters of gender and equality remain understood as matters that are irrelevant to the economy, whilst financial sectors are seen as the real dynamic in an

economy, with (cis-)masculine bodies as its natural subjects, thus reinforcing the project of separation between politics and economics (Cochoy et al., 2010). However, to practice market feminism with bodies that don't embody normative masculinity, can work as a way of performing money, markets and profits as made in practice, and which means that it is possible to recode what a market is and what issues belong there.

When market feminism is neutral

A second way in which market feminism was referred to was as something neutral, a pragmatic adaptation to reality. Accordingly, money was simply viewed as a fungible method for counting surplus (cf. Zelizer, 1994). "Money is what it is and there is nothing we can do about it", many of the interviewees conceded. This meaning of money was even described as "natural". As Johan contended, "I understand that private industry has to make profits, making money is not a bad thing in itself. They have to. It is very, very natural. It has to be". When money was understood as something neutral, the market feminism assemblage enabled the consultants to act as "pragmatic entrepreneurs" who were market feminists when it benefitted them (cf. Olivius & Rönnblom, 2019).

Some consultants included themselves in the logic of making money, but for the majority it was important to maintain a boundary between what they thought was their inner drive and monetary value. Or, as argued by Birgitta:

> I can't come in [on a job in private industry] and say 'well you have to follow up on your results and divide them according to men, women, boys, and girls [referring to 'gender mainstreaming']'. It would be weird. They don't give a shit. They want to make money and we have to accept that. We don't live in a communist regime. We live in a capitalist society, so of course. I would too, if I had a big, bloody company, I would want cash, couldn't care less about the [gender composition on the] floor.

Thus, when seen as neutral, market feminism afforded the consultants two different ways of acting on the market: (1) They could place themselves to the side of the market and not care about money, i.e. not let themselves be "corrupted" by private industry, and not think that the market can solve patterns of inequality; and (2) They could argue that since money is neutral it has no effect on the content of their work, it is just a neutral means of payment. Viveka, who has worked as a gender consultant since the 1980s, argued that:

> The idea that it [gender consultancy] would be based more on solidarity, consideration, and so on [is faulty], it is no different from other branches. [. . .] I run a company. My basic idea is to make money. I have to make money to survive. I know that some [consultants] don't agree.

Both positions described above rely on a definition of market feminism and money as something that cannot be changed or re-coded. The only thing that can be changed, according to these views, is how the consultants choose to act. In this sense they repeat a neoliberal rationality by way of the self-improving entrepreneur who adapts to available conditions.

When market feminism is good

The consultants regularly had to balance cultural norms of money-making as a marker of the importance or quality of their services against the fear that they were selling their feminist soul. One way of dealing with this situation was to refuse to see it in terms of an opposition. Thus, a third way of performing market feminism and money-making was as something good.

One consultant, Susanne, argued that: "Gender work should not depend on public funding; it should be matters of such great concern that people are willing to pay for it." From this perspective, payment for gender equality work functioned as a way of signalling that the goods and services consultants provided are considered to be worth paying for. Money is used not only as the exchange or storage of economic value, but as a performance of social value (cf. Zelizer, 1994). Thus, when private

industry showed a willingness to pay for gender equality consultancy work, then this constituted a way of acknowledging that gender equality has economic value. Paula expressed a similar view:

> These questions [gender equality] become more and more important. Of course, earlier generations worked with these issues too, but it was often non-profit. You were meant to see it as a calling. You were supposed to work for free. Save the world and so on!

The converse of the above situation also holds true. When clients expect the consultants' services to cost very little, then work with issues of gender and equality are performatively enacted as something that is unimportant to the market; i.e. of limited value. One of the interviewees, Camilla, argued strongly for the idea that making money is a way of rejecting the current position that is given to women and equality matters in the present economy. She started her consultancy firm after completing a bachelor's degree in gender studies. The people around her kept saying "What good is your education?" and "You'll never find a job that requires gender theory!" This made her want to start her own business, "to show them" that knowledge about processes of gender, equality, and inclusion are actually worth something in the market. Camilla stressed the importance of making money. Then her critics' scepticism could, as she put it, be met with a firm rebuttal in the form of: "We make money, that is why we do it". This statement simply made her opponents "shut up". She explained that if gender firms make money, then their activities appear legitimate. Money opens doors and money makes anti-feminists realize that the "gender business" makes sense. Camilla argued that this was a way of saying "If we have to show that gender equality is profitable to be heard, then we will show that gender equality is profitable".

These remarks and observations that were shared by the consultants show that making a profit meant more than just the money it generated. Camilla's description of the significance of profit exposes how both individuals and occupations are valued in terms of economic gain, and how actions and subjects are compared and evaluated in relation to their money-making ability. These acts of comparison and evaluation are performed by individuals as well as by society. However, a performativity perspective position suggests that joining markets and feminism has multiple effects, including one which lets the consultants feel as if they are an important part of society. Making money endows status and respect and can signal that gender equality is something that is economically valuable.

The interviewees spoke of the thrill that they felt when they were able to say that they made money from their work on gender equality issues. They called this liberating, or, as Rita put it, "a big 'fuck you' to all who say you can't make money on this". From this perspective, making money by working on gender issues can be a performance of, what Ahmed (2014) terms, *wilfulness*. Ahmed defines this *wilfulness* as "a diagnosis of the failure to comply with those whose authority is given [. . .] and involves persistence in the face of having been brought down" (pp. 1–2).

The interviewees who were able to perform relatively many jobs for private industry often described these as more fun, free, exciting, and creative, compared to assignments that they received from the public sector. Public sector assignments were considered to be somewhat predictable and pre-determined. For example, Viola described these circumstances with the following: "The difference between private and public organizations is that in the private sector it is 'let's make money' and in the public sector it is 'let's not spend anything'. So it is completely different.". Thus, for many of the interviewees, the market feminism afforded them with a creative space where they could practice feminist entrepreneurship, which was enabled by a focus on money-making. A focus on profit, for these interviewees, did not stand in opposition to their feminist goals, but, instead, facilitated their achievement of these goals.

The subversive entrepreneur

To run one's own business was also talked about by the consultants in terms of independence, and as an opportunity where one could work on one's burning questions. Camilla said, in contrast to

Johan above, that her business had increased her confidence, and that she now felt she could run any form of enterprise:

> I have developed the kind of confidence I observe among men in private industry, that I can do anything. Otherwise, that way of thinking is not allowed [among women in the public sector?]. I don't know what to say . . .

Although Camilla's confidence must be related to her cis-gender performance, placing emphasis on the economic benefits of gender equality functions as a resistance to viewing the market as something that exists outside the gender field. The way the market feminism assemblage was put together and acted upon afforded some individuals the feeling of having the agency to reverse the money/power/gender balance and to challenge representations of the masculine entrepreneurial subject. Their activities may be interpreted in what Healy (2015, p. 104) refers to as engaging in a counter-performative discourse which has the potential to undermine the concept of "economy" as a monolith and "to performatively open a space for possibilities that come with economic difference" (Healy, 2015, pp. 104–105).

Counter-performing the market also entails performing *in* the market with a body that is different than the usual subject of entrepreneurship. Acting in a manner which demonstrated that feminism belongs in private industry had the effect that the interviewees felt that feminists did actually belong there. This perspective of performativity helps us, and them, to understanding how performing *in* the market also impacts on the production of subjectivities. The presence of feminist subjects is part of what Gibson & Stewart (2019) calls performing the economy in different ways that matter. This is particularly the case with respect to what I have termed *the subversive entrepreneur*. Camilla talked, for instance, about how she wanted to let menstruation be part of job assignments:

> Private industry is so very male coded. Sometimes it clashes. Being authentic means that sometimes I want to say, "Today I have my period". Maybe I don't always say it, but I want the feeling of knowing that the client knows why I am feeling down today. So it can clash and they think 'Oh my God, how private, messy, and feminine'. We understand that it clashes, but sometimes it is good to be completely honest.

Allowing an otherwise suppressed function of the body, such as menstruation, to occupy space on a job (even if the example given is mostly a hypothetical exercise) can be interpreted as a way of counter-hegemonically performing the market. This approach can function as a way of questioning the cultural associations between entrepreneurship, the private sector and masculinity, and a way of addressing questions concerning what body belongs in which place.

Other ways of performing the market counter-hegemonically concerns questioning norms surrounding work-life. Annicka claimed that: "I could make more money if I had full-time employment, but I don't want to. I like being self-employed. I like having my own office. I like not having a boss." Similarly, Paula reported on how she had been inspired by the opportunity to be self-employed as a way of deciding how to use your own time and to follow your own rhythms and body: "To rest if you are tired, you don't have the same pressure on you." Gibson (Gibson & Scott, 2019, p. 4), states that "Only when we step back and ask ourselves 'What is finance for?' can we start to reframe it and our relationship to it." From this viewpoint, gender entrepreneurialism may be seen as a way of performatively opening a space for possibilities that come with difference (embodied difference and economic difference) and to counter-hegemonically perform the economy differently in ways that matter.

Consequently, for the consultants who were interviewed for this study, being self-employed was not simply a matter of adapting to market logic, but of living one's life in ways that matter. Running a company was considered to be a way of standing outside the gendered labour market, where the consultant was freed from doing the tasks that women perform, freed from working for the public sector, and in a position to refuse to be a wage labourer. From this perspective, the consultants' activities must be understood in terms of resistance and as matter of taking control over one's economic life and increasing one's space for feminist agency.

In this way, the market feminism assemblage afforded the consultants the capacity to counter-performatively engage in actions that questioned representations of the economy, economic matters, and legitimate economic actions. The consultants insisted on confirming the economic value of feminism, and the idea that feminist bodies and subjects belong in every sphere of economic activity. Their actions can be interpreted as a way of performing the economy differently and of questioning the boundaries of whom and what is seen as the dynamic of an economy; including the determination of what kinds of markets are to be considered as important, and what actions these views prescribe. Their actions constitute a way of questioning how boundaries for markets are drawn, who should have the right to draw the boundaries, and who should be placed inside the boundary.

Although it must be noted that most of the interviewees were white middle-class, and were able to make choices from a position of privilege, that far from all individuals have the possibility to do. The point of my interpretation is to give a different perspective on market feminism to open up for possibilities to change meanings of money, profits and markets in relation to feminism.

Conclusion

Market feminism is often challenged in the context of gender studies for being uncritical and compliant with capitalism or for being so readily accommodating to neoliberalism. Drawing on a combination of market performativity and gender performativity, I have argued that seeing markets and processes of commodification as multi-facetted and plural processes can help to develop the thinking around new and emerging forms of market feminism. The space for agency that emerges out of the assemblages of markets and feminism is not fixed. In fact, this space enables different actions and subjectivities. In allowing gender consultants to describe the different forms of agency that practicing feminism on a market affords them, I have argued that there is no natural law that prohibits the combination of market logics with critical feminism. What determines this is how we choose to define the economy and that we recognize that what constitutes the economy is a boundary-drawing practice that is open for re-configuration. Therefore, treating gender equality as a commodity that belongs in the sphere of private industry also holds the potential to change the narratives of economic gain, growth, and capitalism. I have approached the connections market feminism as performative; descriptions of gender equality as "good for business" do not describe a reality, but, instead, they are part of bringing it into existence. Commodification of feminism has effects, including the production of markets, and "new" or different ways of understanding gender equality that may, or may not, lead to actual redistribution of gendered privileges. However, by forming new economic subjectivities it can function as a way of counter-performatively questioning the boundary-drawing practices that form the thinking around markets, the economy, bodies, and gender, and open up the discussion on what the effects of market feminism are and can be.

Three different ways of understanding markets and money figured in the field: (1) The market was experienced as something bad when it was seen to preserve structures and the status quo of inequalities, leaving the concept of "the market" for others to define. Money was associated with greed and aggressive masculinity, and thus something that the consultants felt they had to distance themselves from in order to form a feminist subject; (2) The market was seen as something neutral that exists independently of how we understand it. What can be changed, according to this view, was what consultants chose to do with the neutrality of economic value; and (3) The market was good, even subversive, when it was used to challenge structures and deepen the efficacy of equality work. In this case, the market helped the consultants question and challenge the boundary-drawing practices that place (i) production, masculinity, the public sphere, and disembodiment on one side of what counts as legitimate economic practice, and place (ii) reproduction, femininity, private sphere, and body, on the other.

I have argued that the first two views that are discussed in this paper risk characterizing gender matters as being irrelevant to "the market", by defining "the market" as happening somewhere else and where the performance of feminism is located outside of market dynamics. These first two views thus iterate the convention of "the market" without questioning or challenging it. The third practice,

however, is important because it has potential to challenge the boundaries of what market practice(s) should entail. To conclude, there is more to the neoliberal entrepreneurial self. New forms of agency emerge when feminism goes to the market, and if they play it right, gender equality consultants may also be one step on the way to "taking back the economy". It is only by engaging *with* the market that we can change what it does. Although, having said that, and as shown during my fieldwork, I must confess that this is neither an easy nor a smooth process.

Notes

1. https://www.regeringen.se/artiklar/2017/11/eu-ministerkonferens-i-goteborg-om-hur-jamstalldhet-bidrar-till-rattvisa-jobb-och-tillvaxt/, translated by the author.
2. (see for instance equalityworks17.se; https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2019/03/empowering-women-critical-for-global-economy-lagarde.htm).

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