

## The Determinants of Women's Labor Force Participation: A Life Story-Based Analysis in Congo-Brazzaville

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### Abstract

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We analyze women's labor force participation, in which the social system, by and large, accounts for the inflow of women entering the labor market. The method used breaks with the traditional approach, which has long been based on quantitative techniques. From five women's life stories, the current qualitative approach identifies information asymmetry, the family environment of housewives rearing their children and the disrespect of their rights in labor markets as handicaps for women to reach labor force participation. Conversely, both their education level and the informal sector favor their participation in the labor market.

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**Keywords:** Congo Brazzaville, Women, Job, Labor Market, Life Story.

**JEL:** O55, J16, J21

### 1. Introduction

The last two decades have been characterized by the resurgence of armed conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa. The combination of both political and social tensions has weakened social structures and strengthened inequalities among the population. However, life requirements related to the satisfaction of basic needs, such as safer sanitation, balanced diets, and so on, compel individuals, and especially jobless mothers, to apply for remunerated jobs. As such, labor markets have become a matter of new concern. The analysis of women's labor force participation has been less addressed in this context, namely, in a post war society with humanitarian and insecurity problems. In addition, the dearth of available data on the inflow of women into labor markets is also remarkable.

Meanwhile, qualitative analyses involving life stories emerge as an adequate tool to survey women's labor force participation. Based on interviews, these life accounts constitute both enriching and innovating experiments as they facilitate a quick understanding of a culture and an environment (Tchouassi, 2000). Accordingly, they are both a good vector and vehicle for an intercultural dialogue. Indeed, life stories entail frank discussion and dialogue that lead to an overall understanding of behaviors and strategies. Based on this methodology, the current study seeks to identify the determinants of women's labor force participation in Congo-Brazzaville. From this perspective, that is, the identification of both nontraditional and unquantifiable determinants of women's labor force participation, one can see that the issue of sampling is unimportant here.

The respondents were chosen based on the peculiarities of their life stories, namely, the possibility for each of them to highlight, besides the traditional determinants, those who had not previously been taken into account or had simply been ignored in quantitative approaches related to the analysis of women's labor force participation. For this purpose, five life stories were retained, namely, those of *Nadege E*, *Hilda G*, *Madam Scot*, *Annette* and *Rebont F*.

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Each of their stories emphasize an important characteristic of women's labor supply. The story of *Nadege E* retraces the situation of women who did not benefit from a well-structured family system and kinship. They are obliged to apply for a job to take care of their children.

As far as *Miss Hylda G* is concerned, her story presents a woman who enters the labor market to undertake her own activity. In contrast to *Nadege E*, *Madam Scot is married*, but she entered the labor market to take care of her children. The account of *Miss Annette was* selected because it provides interesting experiences due to her extraordinary mobility in the labor market before obtaining a stable job. Likewise, the case of *Miss Rebout F* is in the same vein and helps us understand the need for working in a public office.

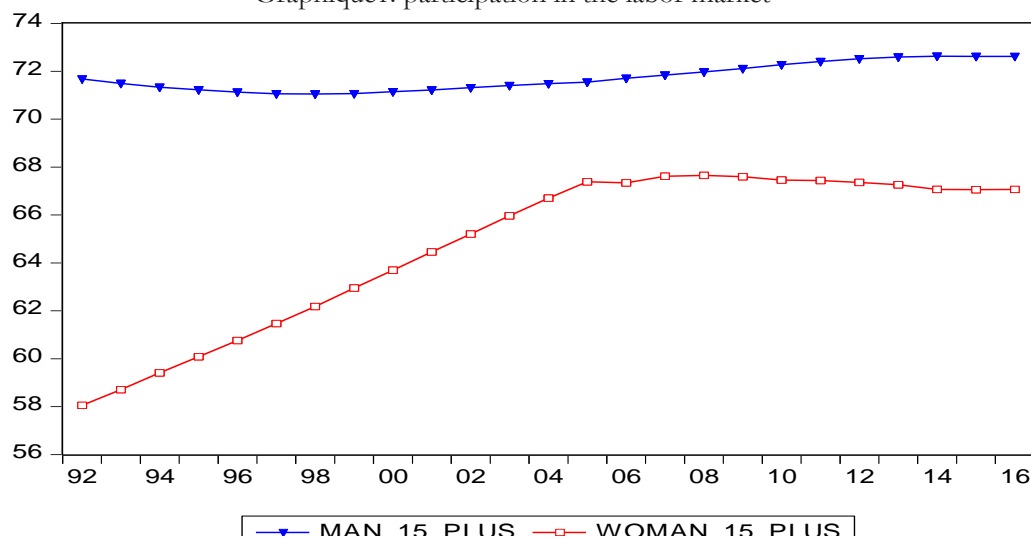
These women were met either at their workplace or at their home. They provided their own perceptions (past and /or present) of their employment experiences, including their activities, difficulties and strategies for facing the situation. It is worth noting that the women were not accustomed to this type of investigation. Convincing them to collaborate in such an investigation required long explanations and a great deal of patience. In addition, schedules meetings were not always kept. Some issues related to family life and that were said to be private were perceived as a meddling, namely, when the issues was related to what they earn in the labor market or their contribution to the family budget. However, the accounts reported here in the form of life stories were produced essentially in their entirety. The respondents 'families (parents, children, etc.) helped in the collection of information.

The importance of this paper is twofold. First, the importance of information asymmetry and the disrespect of women's rights are found to be two explanatory factors of women's labor force participation. Second, the analysis notes the importance of traditional factors related to the family context as relevant to women's labor force participation. The relevance of these factors has already been emphasized in the quantitative empirical analyses related to women's labor issues. In this paper, the value added is in showing the way that these factors operate in the real world and affect the lives of women. The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The situation of each gender's labor force participation is presented in the second section. The third section is devoted to a literature review of the determinants of women's labor force participation. The fourth section is aimed at presenting the life stories, and the fifth section is devoted to the analysis of these stories. Conclusions are presented in the last section.

## 2. State of labor force participation

The labor force participation rate is a measure of the proportion of the working age population of a country that is actively engaged in the labor market, either by working or looking for a job. Its importance as an indicator lies in the fact that it provides a global indication of the available labor supply or the relative size of a country's productive potential. Provided by the World Bank over the period from 1992 to 2016, this indicator allows the following changes to be observed:

Graphique1: participation in the labor market



Source: Produced by the authors from the World Development Indicators, 2017

This graphic shows that the participation of men in the labor market is higher than that of women over the entire period from 1992 to 2016. Nevertheless, the significant increase in women's participation has remained below 70% of the female labor force. The participation rate of men, even after the decrease between 1992 and 1999 because of the crisis, made a strong comeback in 2000 and 2014 with the improvement of the economic situation in the country.

To explain the gender differences in labor force participation, one needs to consider a broader set of factors (Elborgh-Woytek and al. 2013; Kapsos S., Bourmpoula E. Silberman. A., 2014, Krause, E. and Sawhill I. 2017). These include, but are not limited to, non-economic factors (e.g., family preferences, differences in cultural expectations, and religion) and economic factors such as the prevailing industrial mix and relative demand for female workers, stage of economic development, institutional features including differences in wage setting (more or less decentralized economic system), and differences in policies (e.g., labor market, tax and transfer, and family).

In addition to the aforesaid factors typically mentioned in the literature, this work emphasizes the problems related to adverse selection and moral hazard to explain the low participation of women. Precisely, it is the aim of the study to shed light on how those factors work over the lifetime.

### 3. Literature review

The analysis of the determinants of labor force participation has raised concerns amongst economists, social planners and policymakers. The economic theory devoted to this issue, evolving primarily a maximization framework, was aimed at identifying the economic factors that determine equilibrium in the labor market. In fact, the decision to participate in the labor market results from the standard utility maximization process where an individual is liable to trade off leisure and market goods subject to a budget constraint (Chaykowsky and Powell, 1999). In taking the decision about how to allocate its time, an economic agent will compare the market value of his time or his wage rate, to the non-market value of his time, referred to as his reservation wage. He will participate in the labor market if and only if his wage rate exceeds his reservation wage.

Recently, the analysis of women's labor force participation has been a matter of renewed interest to the extent that bringing more women into the labor force is expected to increase the gross national product. Theories related to this issue are premised on both demand and supply factors. On the supply-side, the participation of women in the labor market, as suggested by both theory and the empirical literature, is due to socio-economic variables, such as the wage rate, non-wage income, the presence of children in the household and child-care costs (Chaykowsky and Powell, 1999). Nakamura and Nakamura (1992) argue that children affect both the *reservation* and *offered* wages of women. Many authors (Cleveland et al. 1996, Powell. 1997, Krause, E. and Sawhill I. 2017 and Sandra E. Black S.A., Schanzenbach D.W. and Breitwieser A., 2017) have noted that child-care costs have a significant negative effect on the probability of labor force participation by married mothers with preschool aged children. Powell (1998) puts forward the differential impacts of child-care costs on the work status of mothers: child-care costs were found to be a greater deterrent to full-time versus part-time work.

As such, female labor supply models have been expanded further to incorporate the cost of child care. In this setting, mothers are assumed to maximize utility, which is a function of not only consumption goods and leisure but also the quality of child care. This model predicts that women compare the market wage with the value of time spent in leisure. The model also predicts that the relative costs and merits of maternal and non-maternal child care enter into a mother's work decision. Thus, an increase in the wage of the mother is expected to increase the probability of employment, while an increase in the cost of child care is expected to lower the probability of employment.

Some surveys, such as Smith and Ward (1985) and Andres Luis A. Dasgupta B. Vinoj G.J. and Correia A.M. (2017), explicitly measure the contribution of demand factors to the increase of female labor participation. Others, like Goldin (1990) and Elborgh-Woytek and al. (2013), carried out a survey through which the relative importance of supply and demand factors were found to explain women's experiences in the labor market over the last century. This increase was specifically due to the rise in real wages.

The supply-side explanatory factors of women's labor force participation, as noted by previous studies (Semyonov, 1980; Shapiro and Mott, 1978), were related to economic development, a high fertility rate, the divorce rate and the social systems. In fact, economic development in triggering industrialization creates new opportunities for which women's skills are required (Collver and Langlois 1962; Wilensky 1968).

This element is expected to positively influence women's labor force participation. Conversely, the high fertility rate and, to some extent, the first birth of a child, remain a major transition for women. In addition, there is uniform agreement that when fertility is high, women are more likely to be occupied with household responsibilities and, therefore, are less likely to be able to join the labor force (Collver and Langlois, 1962; Youssef, 1972, 1974). This factor explains why the rates of women's labor force participation vary in different countries.

If the high fertility rate is the outcome of a well-organized family and kinship system, women have less need to work outside their homes in so far as the social system provides elements for a safer life. Conversely, in countries where the family system is not stable, where individuals are less likely to marry or to stay married, and where they cannot fall back on kin for support, women survive through joining the labor market to be self-sufficient (Youssef, 1974). In other words, social structures, may influence the inflow of women in the labor market. In many cases, the literature devoted to this social issue sometimes notes the impact of divorce rates on women's labor force participation; or to a large extent, the drawbacks of social stratification, characterized by income inequalities, is aimed at lowering the labor market participation of women.

Indeed, the shape of this stratification is at the origin of segregation systems which handicap women within the framework of their job. This social fact, to some extent, is persistent in many Sub-Saharan countries, and especially in those experiencing post conflict situations.

This review of the literature underscores several traditional determinants, such as income, education, fertility, and so on. These traditional determinants are well known, and their importance in terms of women labor force participation varies according to the specificities of each country. This paper will show the way these factors operate and affect the lives of women in the real world. Another lesson to be drawn from this literature is the non-consideration, or the ignorance, of some determinants, such as information asymmetry. The current study thus provides the first elements of discussion on this issue, which may take a considerable dimension in the current situation of crisis that is characterized by a massive shortage of job offerings.

#### 4. Presentation of Life Stories

The stories collected here may not be representative of the entire population of women. They were selected because they show the problems faced by women when they attempt to participate in the labor market in developing countries, in general, and specifically in Congo. Through their stories, *Madam Nadege E*, *Miss Hylda G*, *Madam Scot M* and *Miss Annette M* give us the opportunity to understand how some factors operate in the labor market and how they impact the lives of women.

##### 4.1. The story of Nadege E: A trainee in a restaurant

Born at Brazzaville in the republic of Congo, *Nadege E* is a single woman of a family composed of three children. She is a 30-year-old housewife and the mother of two girls, aged 13 and 7 years. She lives with her spouse in one of the districts of Brazzaville. She attended her primary and secondary educations up to the fourth year of secondary school. After four poor performances on the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), she decided to be educated in the hotel trade at a hotel school for four years. Her training courses were implemented in two restaurants and hotels. Later, she worked in a restaurant as a trainee for two months before becoming engaged. She worked eight months with no satisfactory salary.

Consequently, she left the restaurant for a hotel where she was well remunerated. Her job as a chambermaid lasted only two months because of her dismissal for subjective reasons regarding her boss<sup>3</sup>. Vis-à-vis this situation, she managed to be employed in a small restaurant that opened during the Pan African Festival of Music (PFM). After the FPM, she was jobless for a few months before being recruited by a network company as a cleaning agent in charge of administrative structures. Here, she was well remunerated in comparison to the previous jobs. Unfortunately, owing to financial problems related to the functioning of the company, she was dismissed again. It's worth noting that each time she did get a job, she succeeded in reconciling both the job and her domestic tasks. She was doing these tasks before going to bed or earlier in the morning before work. She was living with her mother and they were helping each other in performing the domestic tasks.

<sup>3</sup> The boss wanted to hire his relatives. For this purpose, he reduced his personnel to decrease expenses.

Since she married, she stopped applying for jobs because of the birth of her baby. Apart from her husband, she does not receive assistance from anyone in her child-rearing. She will look for another job when her daughter reaches school age. Meanwhile, she undertook a small-scale manufacture of yoghurt, which enables her to survive with her daughter. In the frame of this activity, *Nadege E* benefited from the assistance of her parents, namely, the use of both their parcel and freezer. She is helped in the preparation of the paste when she is sick or busy. She allocates her earned income to her parents, children and especially to her husband whenever he has financial difficulties. Admittedly, she argues that the job plays an important role in her day life. Although it is very tough to get a job in Brazzaville, she will continue to apply for a new job once her baby is old enough to attend school.

#### 4.2. Hylda G's story: an individual entrepreneur

*Hylda G* is twenty-eight years old and the mother of a one and half year-old daughter. She is the boss of a micro enterprise. She lives with her parents in her enterprise. She is specialized in design, photography editing and images. She reached this level after attending program up to the upper sixth form in mathematics and biology and obtained her "baccalaureate<sup>4</sup>" in 1997. She started her undergraduate studies at the faculty of law. Owing to sociopolitical events that occurred in Congo, she went to Abidjan in Cote d'Ivoire where she was trained in montage, photograph editing and images for a year and half instead of pursuing her law studies.

After her training, she worked for six months in a tiling company, where her wage was unsatisfactorily at the beginning, but was doubled because she was employed as both marketing and secretary agent. It was a good experience she argued, even though it did not last owing particularly to her going back to Congo for reasons related to her health. In 2001, she was engaged by an advertising company where she was in charge of marketing. She was well remunerated. When she had a baby, her boss (a lady) demanded her presence at work a week following the childbirth. She refused and claimed one month of leave. It was difficult for her to leave the one-month old baby. *Miss Hylda Gestates* that she breastfeeds her baby exclusively.

Accordingly, she went to work in the morning and, during the break (from 12 to 14 h pm), she came back home to suckle her child. In the afternoon, she worked until 5 pm instead of 6 pm later, as was usual. During this period, she benefited from the assistance of her parents. Her parents were retired and were taking care of her baby while she was working. Thanks to this family assistance, she succeeded in overcoming this situation. She stated that it was necessary for her to work to take care of her baby because her husband was absent. Unfortunately, this last experience in marketing did not succeed. She was temperamentally unsuited to work with her boss, who was very authoritarian and did not allow workers to have freedom.

Sometimes, she worked the whole day without a break. In addition, her boss imported articles to sell, but the product was not appreciated by customers. This situation led her to regularly dispute her boss's decisions, so she finally resigned. However, she did not remain unemployed long. Ten months before, she had applied for a loan aimed at funding a house specialized in design, photography editing and images at the Development Agency of Small and medium-sized firms. This structure had received a subsidy to grant credit to artisans. As such, nine months later, and a month before her resignation, she received the financial support to realize her project. Nevertheless, she did not agree with the statement she left the advertising company because of her fund. Working in this company would have been advantageous if, in creating her own production structure, she was engaged with the manager. In doing so, she would have continued to work in the advertising company and earn money from both sides.

*Miss Hylda Gas* been an entrepreneur since December 2001. She recognizes that her entrepreneurship has both advantages and drawbacks. On the one hand, she is free to operate. On the other hand, she is absorbed by work and the race for provisions. She must furnish her firm with quality paper and ink at cheaper prices, and she often has problems supplying photo paper. As a result, she sometimes has headaches. Finally, she recognized the difficulties that lie in reconciling her job with being a mother and the requirements attached to it. She sometimes begins working sessions late in the mornings owing to the presence of her daughter. In addition, at midday, she goes back home to take care of her child until 2 pm. Her daughter remains awake the whole day as if she was working with her. This situation does not facilitate the management of her enterprise.

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<sup>4</sup> Secondary school examination in Mathematic and Biology to qualify for entry to the university.

#### 4.3. The story of Madam Scot M: A part time teacher

*Madam Scot M* is thirty years old and the oldest of a family of seven children. Officially married since 1998, she is the mother of two small children. As far as her studies are concerned, she obtained her baccalaureate in 1991. She began her undergraduate studies at the Faculty of Science at the University of Marien Ngouabi of Brazzaville. After the socio-political turmoil that destroyed the structures of this faculty in 1993, she was transferred with other students to the University of Abidjan in Cote d'Ivoire, where she obtained a master's degree in genetics in 1998. *Madam Scot M* went back to Brazzaville in 2000. She states that over the period from 1998-2000, while she was in Abidjan, she gave birth to her first baby, so she was unable to look for job. She could not continue her studies either because she did not have anyone to take care of her child so she can apply for a job or when she goes to school. The idea of leaving her child with people that were not her kin was sickening to her.

As soon as she went back to Brazzaville, she spent two years at home, during which time, she had her second baby. Despite the presence of her mother-in-law, she did not succeed at applying for a job. She stated that she did not know how to submit a job application. With a master's degree in genetics, she expected to work in a laboratory where she would have an opportunity to advance her study. However, to be engaged in this structure is not an easy task because of the reduced number of opportunities and especially for those that graduated from universities abroad, disconnected from the network of local researchers evolved in the same field. With her children in school and the presence of her mother-in-law, *Madam Scot M* now applies for jobs even beside those of laboratories. In her search to find one, she was confronted with the problem of professional experience. Therefore, she teaches in private secondary schools in spite of the small remuneration she earns. She has been teaching physics and natural science since October 2002.

*Madam Scot M* works four days in the week. The exercise of this activity is not accomplished without difficulty. She argues that she is regularly absent, on average, one out of four times in the week. This is typically due to either one of her children, or herself or her mother-in-law suffering from a sickness. In all these cases, she is compelled to stay at home and take care of her children. As far as constraints are concerned, *Madam Scot M* states not being able to prepare her courses at home when the children are present. Otherwise, they disturb her. To manage this situation, she prepares her courses very late in the night when her children are asleep. Finally, *Madam Scot M* considers applying for a job compatible with her diploma. As such, she will earn a good salary that is required for a safer life, and which will be helpful to assist her parents who funded her studies.

#### 4.4. The story of Annette: the medical representative

*Miss Annette M* works as a medical representative for a pharmaceutical laboratory. She is thirty-four years old, and the mother of a child. As far as her studies are concerned, she states to have obtained a baccalaureate in mathematics and natural science in 1989. She undertook her undergraduate studies at the economics faculty where she obtained a bachelor's degree in 1993. Owing to a break in the whole educational system of the country in 1994, and further to the employment crisis, she decided to compliment her bachelor's degree in macroeconomics with professional training. Accordingly, she was trained in management and data processing, which did not lead to a job. In addition, she was trained both in management and secretarial office automation. Further to this last training, she was engaged by a specialized service provider enterprise (office automation and telephone).

*Miss Annette M.* considered her remuneration insufficient, so she left her first job when a better opportunity was presented. It was an import-export company where she worked for nine months as an executive secretary. The war of 5 June 1997 destroyed her working tools and compelled her to leave and settle down in Pointe-Noire, the second-largest city in the country. During this difficult situation, which was worsened by unemployment, she was safe only thanks to the recruitment of secretaries by an oil company to replace those going on holiday. It was a part-time employment and for two and half years, she received the statute of part-time worker. She was well remunerated, but the temporality of this job led her leave this company at the end of her last contract. She says that she had to hide the fact that she had a degree in economics each time she was engaged as a secretary. Otherwise, they would not hire an economics graduate as a secretary.

However, her senior in rank (a westernized man) in the oil company discovered that she has a higher academic standard than what she declared. One day he deliberately wrote a letter with many inaccuracies and asked her to correct it.

When she brought the corrected form, he was reassured about his suspicions, and asked her about her academic background. She then revealed her background to him. Further to these queries, he promised to engage her when an opportunity arose.

When *Miss Annette M*'s contract came to an end with the oil company, she became a trader, awaiting a stable job. She would travel to the countryside to buy foodstuffs which she resold at *Pointe-Noire*. When the war restarted in *Dolisie*, she became a seller in the market. The road was becoming dangerous because of the armed guerillas. She was performing this activity while looking for a stable job closer to her profile. This situation was not easy. Most of the time, the information reached her late, and when she approached the probable employer, it was too late. The recruiting test had already taken place; sometimes a day before her arrival. Her former colleagues at the oil company were shocked to see her selling at the market. Having been informed of her former senior in rank's promise to engage *Miss Annette M*, during the anniversary of the company, they invited her so that she could meet him. On this night, she learned from him that he had been searching the city for her in vain when there was a stable job opportunity. The individual who she expected sent somebody else and made her boss believe that she had left *Pointe-Noire*. After this sad evening, *Miss Annette* continued her trading activity.

A few times later, she was informed by her cousin of the recruitment of a medical representative by a pharmaceutical laboratory. She presented herself to the oral examination. After examining her documents, the recruiting agent says that she has a secretary profile due to her professional experiences; whereas the laboratory needs a sales manager. In spite of her attempts to convince him of her ability to learn, this reasoning did not change his position because of the requirement of the laboratory to engage an immediately operational worker.

Owing to the vacancy of personnel in another laboratory, she applied for the post where she was admitted to take the recruiting test. This one has regularly taken place, but the results were never published. She learned thereafter that a medical representative coming from a neighboring country had been imposed on the local boss. Finally, the third attempt was successful. She succeeded at the recruiting test, and since 2000, she has worked as a medical representative for a pharmaceutical laboratory. She highlighted that she lives well in exerting this job. According to her, what imports in this job is not so much the wage itself, but what accompanies it: expenses relating to the damping of the vehicle, premiums when the objectives are achieved.

It's worth noting that during her period of instability, which was devoted to looking for a stable job, she benefitted from help from her family. When she started as secretary, she was living with her older sister who was a housewife. As such, she was able to work without being concerned with domestic tasks. Otherwise, she was taking care of herself. When she arrived at *Pointe-Noire*, she was also living with one of her sisters and was not concerned with the housework due to the presence of a charlady. Owing to a misunderstanding with this last sister, she decided to rent out a house, which she found at random (she also cared for her sister's baby because she was unable to take care of him).

During this period, she was working for the oil company where she earned a good salary. This leads her to engage a cleaner to assist with her nephew. Owing to her work schedule at the oil company, the charlady worked from 7 am to 6 pm from Monday to Friday. As such, she would only look after the baby on week-ends. When her contract came to an end, she also ended the employment of the charlady and her younger sister came to live with her. That reduced the volume of the domestic tasks. In addition, she argues that even when she had her baby at the age of twenty-one, her parents took him after eight months to allow her to study further. Today, she enjoys what she does because it enables her to be clever. She is in touch with people of a certain education level (medical personnel) and she is always compelled to challenge herself because her collaborators are highly qualified, and they require well-educated behavior from her.

Finally, she argues that transitioning from the economics faculty to the medical delegation occurred without much problem. She quickly adapted, especially because of her baccalaureate in mathematics and natural science. *Miss Annette M*. advises her younger sisters not to join the economics faculty because of the drama in the department, but she was able to adapt to be able to perform administration, data processing and management tasks; however, her ability to adapt was due to her graduate education and, particularly, to her role in the economics faculty.

#### 4.5. The story of Rebout F: A doctor to be

*Rebout F* comes from a family of six children (four girls and two boys), of which she is the eldest. She is thirty-four years old today and single without a child. She is fatherless, and since the departure of her Mum to Europe for reasons related to her health, she is the head of a household of four people. She started her primary education at the age of five and obtained her baccalaureate in mathematics and physics in 1990, after two failures in 1988 and 1989.

During the same year<sup>5</sup>, she succeeded in passing the recruiting test for the faculty of medicine. She noticed that the doctor training program, planned for six and half years, had been lengthened to eight years owing to wars<sup>6</sup>. After graduating as a doctor in 2000, *Miss Rebout F* experienced a period of unemployment because she was not recruited immediately. She did not open a medical cabinet, as the others had done. Informed by acquaintances that a private medical cabinet managed by an expatriate was recruiting a doctor, she went to Pointe-Noire to take part in the recruiting test.

After her admission, she worked in this cabinet for two weeks before being recalled to Brazzaville to carry out formalities related to her registration into specialty in a western university further to her admission. However, the formalities did not succeed. Fortunately, she had been admitted as an intern at the teaching hospital of Brazzaville (CHUB), where she works. And yet, she earned a scholarship that was not consistent. She was compelled to accept to evolve in this structure, which was considered to be the most important of the country to acquire experience. A year later, she succeeded in passing the competitive examination to access a specialty. Since the beginning of the academic year 2002-2003, she began forming a specialization in medicine with the CHUB. Apart from her occupations with the CHUB, she works in private medical cabinets when she has the opportunity. The salary in these cabinets is not much, but is unimportant. What leads her to accept these opportunities is the possibility of meeting, within this framework, some current cases which are not met in the CHUB, and which are generally still alarming cases. She also simply goes there when the titular doctor is to be absent.

She also has a consultation space at her house to receive and diagnose patients. However, she recognizes that when there are many patients, she becomes overtired. For *Miss Rebout F*, the patient's consultation requires much concentration; consequently, after the work with the CHUB and in a private cabinet, she is already tired when she is back home, and any additional work may overtire her. To manage this situation, she reduced the frequency of her appointments at home with patients. As far as domestic tasks are concerned, she engaged a cleaner for this purpose. Since the dismissal of the latest cleaner, her unemployed sisters mostly perform the domestic tasks. She only helps them during week-ends and on other days when she can. Finally, she stated that her job enables her to be realized, to light up and to provide for the needs of her and the members of her family.

Moreover, her job allows her an overture towards the various layers of the society through the contacts with patients. She thinks that it is essential to work in the public office before settling for one's own account. In addition, she recognizes that when she graduated, she may operate as a private doctor. Whilst doing so, the quality of the service would have been rudimentary. Otherwise, she would not have the required financial means to obtain the adequate equipment; moreover, she would have worked without gaining respect for the necessary medical standards.

### 5. Analysis and determinants of women's labor force participation

To identify the explanatory factors of women's labor force participation, it is essential to analyze the various life stories by distinguishing four essential points: namely, access to the labor market, remuneration problems, training and education issues, the family environment and the protection of women's employment.

#### 5.1. Access to the labor market

The literature distinguishes four main channels through which women participation in the labor market maybe understood. First, there are social standards and attitudes with regard to women which have evolved considerably during these last two decades (Austen et al, 2001; Lewis and Shorten,1997). These changes were characterized by the questioning related to the statute of the breadwinner, which was previously reserved for men. The share of the responsibilities in the search for subsistence means between men and women encouraged women to leave the domestic sphere to enter the labor market.

<sup>5</sup>She obtained her baccalaureate in 1990.

<sup>6</sup> These wars are those of 1993, 5 June of 1997 and December 1998



Second, the opportunity costs for a woman who is a mother are very high (Beggs and Chapman, 1998; Chapman and al, 2001; and Gregory and al, 1985). Third, the direct costs of having a child are also very high (Harding and Percival, 1999; Valenzuela, 1999). Fourth, the real income of men in comparison to women has substantially dropped since 1960 (Mincer, 1985; Austen and Birch, 2002; Borland and Wilkins, 1996; and Jenkins, 1992). Access to the labor market is analyzed through the life stories by distinguishing the formal sector (public and private) from the informal sector.

### 5.1.1. Access to the formal labor market

It is obvious that when the formal sector is considered, the issue is more interesting than when we consider the private one in so far as the capacity of recruitment in private sectors is limited, while that of the public are not subjected to a test or an examination. When Miss Rebout F addresses the issue related to public office entry, she speaks of the teaching hospital of Brazzaville, which has civil and contractual employees. As such, this structure can recruit according to its needs and budget endowment. The recruitment is special because it concerns the needs in terms of a precise service, and the service providers of this service for the concerned need are thus privileged. With regard to the private sector, tests are generally organized after a call for candidature. In both crisis period and unemployment, the recruitment process is biased due to the divergent interests of the agents in charge of the task.

Concerning the life stories that are at stake, we notice that the five women access the labor market with difficulty. There is a sort of attempt on the labor market stemming from women to the extent that they all pass through one, two or three precarious jobs before finding a stable one in the labor market. This precariousness is because they need experience before reaching both a stable and well remunerated job. It also comes from the employment crisis of the labor market, which compels women to accept inadequate employment with their basic training. Information on available employment is obtained from relations and not by way of press (television, radio, newspapers etc.) or billpostings. This is the case for Miss Rebout F with the private medical cabinet at *Pointe-Noire* and Miss Annette M for the pharmaceutical laboratories.

These examples affirm that owing to the period of the employment crisis, the networks or social capital determine access to employment. The operation of these networks sometimes leads to adverse selection and moral hazard. *Miss Annette M's* life story provides, in this perspective, an interesting illustration of the relation between her former senior in rank and the orderly expected to join her to fill the vacancy. For a better understanding of this situation, it is essential to obtain the informational defaults of the *labor market* at the time of recruitment.

### 5.1.2. Information default

The concept of anti-selection or adverse selection indicates a perverse effect of market operations due to specific informational defaults. Otherwise, as Schotter (1996) highlights, the problem of adverse selection occurs when a current agent on one side of the market is unable to know certain characteristics of the other side. This leads to a market failure owing to the lack of information. We also deal with this case with the problem of "hidden type". An adverse selection is equivalent to a perverse effect which excludes the best candidates from the recruiting process, or candidates with a better profile following the example of what occurs on the lemon market (Akerlof, 1970). When unemployment is important, the diploma is no more a perfect signal of the individual's qualification, seeing that for an identical diploma, it is possible to have several people of different competences.

Thus, in the absence of a diploma, to avoid adverse selection, job seekers resort to the theory of signal to announce their competence on the market. This theory aims at revealing signals to the hidden characteristics of certain applicants. As such, in a recruiting process, the confidence which tends to coordinate agents' activities involved in the recruiting task, does not completely eliminate their opportunism, which is engendered by information asymmetry between parties; hence the adverse selection problem for which the recruiting tests are likely to be carried out, especially between unskilled job seekers.

The phenomenon of information retention can illustrate this matter. Indeed, at the time of the recruiting process, some agents in charge of information dissemination may find it beneficial to make retention to give an advantage to their social networks by drawing aside the other potential candidates. Accordingly, tests generally take place in between the social capital of those working in the recruiting structure; and generally, these social networks do not provide the required qualifications for the profiles that are concerned.

### 5.1.2.1. Information asymmetry and moral hazard

The problem of moral hazard can also be at the origin of an abnormal operation of the labor market. For Schotter (1996), a moral hazard exists as soon as certain economic agents, are inclined to behave in such an unexpected way which is contrary to what one could want from them. In this case, one also addresses a problem of "hidden behavior". In a context of information default, the moral hazard stems ex-post from the opportunism of agents (or post-contractual opportunism). This is, for instance, the case of the relationship between the responsible party at the companies and the recruiting agent, or between this latest and the orderly expected to join the candidates.

Such relationships on the labor market indicate that the partner who cannot be supervised has the opportunistic tendency to behave on behalf his own interest (to recruit a candidate of his social networks for example). In addition, in case the misinformed agent (the boss) could have observed the behavior of his partner, he would not check its relevance.

### 5.1.2.2. Illustration through the principal-agent model

The objective here is to show that the informational default in the processes of recruitment constitutes an obstacle for women to enter the labor market. The relation between the former chief of *Miss Annette M* and her orderly can be explained through the theory of agency. In fact, the former chief of the lady is the principal and the orderly, the agent. The principal (the former chief of *Miss Annette M*.) was assigned to recruit and is not able to carry out this task alone. He then gives to the orderly a sense of responsibility to keep in touch with people expected to fulfil the condition for this job. Consequently, two types of costs related to the information asymmetry appeared in the process of recruitment. The first is obviously the cost of research. It relates to the difficulty, even the impossibility of the former chief to check if the orderly does his work correctly, particularly when he feigns to give an image of his sincere collaboration.

The adverse selection appears in the recruiting process due to informational default occasioned by *Miss Annette M*'s former chief's incapacity to observe the attributes of the orderly and to determine the contingencies under which he operates. The second cost is related to the monitoring. It appears when the actions of the orderly in reference to his task require surveillance to assure that this latter does not give up when executing his mission. Moral hazard appears in the recruiting process with the impossibility of *Miss Annette M*'s former chief to exert control on the behavior of the orderly in the framework of his activity. As we may notice, the informational default in the recruiting processes result in two negative effects. The first one stems from the structure of the recruits, in so far as recruiting agents may limit the possibilities of choice regarding human resources.

The second negative effect is at the supply-side of the labor market because the informational default deprives the potential candidates for employment, particularly *Miss Annette M* here, the opportunity to take the recruiting test for employment.

### 5.1.3. Access to informal labor market

The various life stories noted that when women were experiencing problems of insertion in the labor market in the formal sector, they were going to take refuge in the informal sector. In this perspective, we quote the experience of *Miss Annette M* who, after dismissal from the oil company, was unable to find another other employment for a while, and consequently led her to find refuge in the trade of various products at the market. This is also the case of *Madam Scot M*, who could not find a job related to her profile because of lack of professional experience and so she took refuge in a private secondary school, where she teaches natural science and life without declaring her employment contract at the General Inspection of Job and the National Office of Social Security (NOSS).

Finally, we note the situation of *Miss Nadege E* who was dismissed from the telecommunication company, and with the birth of her baby, she preferred being engaged in the trade of yoghourts and juices. These activities (trading various products, yoghourts and juice trade and teaching under irregular conditions) present the characteristics of the informal sector in their entirety. According to some authors (Jacquemot and Raffinot, 1993; Mbey A and al, 2017), what characterizes these activities, is their small scale, their low capital intensity, frustrated technologies, the absence of a permanent wage and the lack of modern credit institutions. In contrast to a current well-known idea, barriers to the sector, often ethnic at the origin, are important and the activities are subjected to a social control and regulation which, for not being written, is not less compelling.

More precisely, when we refer to the classification made by Niang (1997) starting from two indicators, namely, the profit-investment ratio and application that is affected in accordance to the released surplus, we can classify the activities undertaken by women in this setting into the survival informal sector. For this author, the activities which stem from the survival informal sector are activity-refuge<sup>7</sup>.

By and large, such activities have a null developing capacity owing to their own characteristics, and provide weak economic and psychological investment power from the sight of promoters.

## 5.2. Traditional determinants

There are traditional determinants of women's labor market participation, such as income, education and family context. What is important here is to understand the way each factor operates differently as far as women-specific experience in the labor market is concerned.

### 5.2.1. Income and women's labor market

From the various life stories, it is found that income is a justifying factor of women's mobility in the labor market. In fact, the five women concerned here state that they were not satisfied with the income resulting from their first employment. They accepted their latest positions for motives other than income consideration. *Miss Rebout F* accepts a job as a service provider at the teaching hospital (CHU) because it is a unique means for her to acquire experience through this structure. *Miss Scot M* accepts a job with a teaching service provider to lessen the absence of professional experience that is required in the labor market. Thus, access to the first employment is determined by the search for professional experience acquisition, the need for survival, which causes them to seize the first opportunity in an unemployment situation worsened by the employment crisis.

This situation, as M'bet et al (1993) noted, leads women to be present in all types of employment (permanent wage-earner, independent and temporary wage-earner). Consequently, it is observed that the passage from the first to the second employment is often justified by the income deficiency. *Nadege E* left the restaurant for the hotel because of the insufficient wages. Likewise, *Miss Annette M* left the house service of the import-export company for the same reason. Importantly, it may be stated that the issues related to income, becomes a matter of concern once one entered the labor market. This leads to understanding why poverty does not significantly determine the choice of the activities undertaken by women as is evidenced in the preceding chapter. This report is even more obvious through *Miss Rebout F's* life story. After being engaged at the teaching hospital (CHUB) as a part-time doctor, she diversified her services for training motives as well as for income considerations. Her scholarship at the CHUB is not significant.

Accordingly, the fact that she both devotes herself to an intense professional occupation in private medical cabinets and in her own space of consultation is aimed at increasing her income. A banal calculus may put this in relief. In fact, an out-patient's consultation at home costs CFAF 3500. For two out-patients on average per day up to thirty days' amounts to CFAF 210.000, this corresponds to 3.5 times her scholarship at the teaching hospital (CHUB). In what follows, one may argue that even if income considerations are not privileged regarding access to a first employment, they determine both the mobility and multiplication of women's activities in labor market.

### 5.2.2. Education and women's labor market

Education is the sole modality of human capital which is easily observed through the women's life stories. One often observes the existence of inadequacies between the diploma and the first employment (cases related to *Miss Annette M*, *Miss Hylde G* and *Madam Scot M*) except for those having vocational trainings. Accordingly, it's straightforward to notice that *Miss Rebout F* and *Nadege E*, adductor and a hotel keeper, respectively, exert in structures corresponding to their education backgrounds. For the other women, one rather observes a phenomenon of adaptation. *Miss Annette M* graduated in economic and adapts to secretarial work after a brief training in office automation administration<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup>That is activities in which one is compelled to exert, which do not correspond to the vocation of those imbedded in them, which no longer permit the production of a sufficient income to cover the reproduction needs of the labour force actors, and in which one is ready to give up for other remunerative activities or at least to associate them to others to earn additional income. Here, the authors are distinguishing informal survival sectors from those of subsistence, promotion and transition; these organisation efforts are systematic and effective well as when the search for profit is detached from extra-economic and social considerations.

<sup>8</sup> It is related to a brief training because that training lasts from three months to six months, even though the professional office secretarial qualification is obtained after two academic years.

*Madam Scot M* has a master's degree in genetics, but she adapted herself to teaching even though she did not undergo training in pedagogy, as is required in secondary and grammar schools. Finally, *Miss Hylda* specialized in photography editing and images and easily adapted to marketing and administration. This problem of inadequacy between training and employment results from the lack of coordination between the training intensions of individuals and the requirements in human resources in the various sectors of the country.

Through women's adaptation, the life stories demonstrate the important role of education in the access to the labor market. For having accumulated knowledge in the natural science domain, *Miss Scot M* can teach this field without any additional training. Likewise, to have been trained in photography and graphics, *Miss Hylda Gad* good knowledge in computers, which enabled her to exert the secretary profession?

### 5.2.3. Family context and women's labor market

The five life stories shed light on how essential the role of the home environment is in women's participation in the labor market. Three stories, namely, those of Annette, *Miss Hylda G* and *Miss Rebout F* exhibit the fact that the dynamism these ladies had in their job search, or even in the exercise of their jobs, was made possible thanks to the assistance each of them benefited from their kinship. *Miss Annette M's* parents took her eight-month-old baby so she could study freely. *Miss Hylda G* also benefited from the assistance of her parents who take care of the baby, and *Miss Rebout F* could only multiply her activities thanks to the assistance of her unemployed younger sisters who were executing the domestic tasks. These stories illustrate the extent to which the assistance in the domestic tasks determines women's labor force participation.

Conversely, when this assistance is lacking, women are limited in their job search or even in the exercise of an activity. The example of *Miss Scot M* who did not look for job in Abidjan after her master's degree and during the two years in Brazzaville owing to the presence of children is illustrative. Likewise, *Miss Nadege E* stopped her job search and began a small trade which also enables her to rear her child. It may also be observed that in the first three stories, the women did not have to take care of a child. Assuredly, when they had a baby, they had recourse either to their parents or a charlady. And yet, in view of the age of the children who are concerned, one may argue that babies especially constitute a brake for women's participation in the labor market. This finding is in line with many empirical studies, such as those of [Hyatt \(1996\)](#) and [Powell \(1997\)](#). They noted that costs related to very young children not yet in school have a significant and negative effect on the probability of married women's labor force participation.

### 5.3. Security and conflict in women's employment access

The first chapter of this work mentioned the legislative framework and shed light on the safety device of a woman once she is in the labor market. The safety device was designed according to an analysis of the various life stories that showed that these dispositions are much less respected, namely, in both the formal private and informal sectors. The dismissal of *Miss Nadege E* due to the recruitment of her boss's parents is a case of abusive which women often face in the labor market. Other cases related to the disrespect of the laws protecting women in the labor market can be quoted, such as that of *Miss Hylda G* in the advertising company. Indeed, when she was asked to start working a week after the childbirth, and this irrespective of the Congolese laws on maternity leave contained in the employment code, it an obvious disrespect of the employment legislation.

What is regretful is that even when they know their rights, they do not dare complain because the procedure, as they stated, will never go to its term; and consequently, they will lose their employment, that is, their subsistence means, and without any compensation. The conflict between *Miss Hylda G* and her boss also puts forward the lack of availability expressed by young children's parents and the conflict between employment and the family ([Bachman, 2000](#); [Méda and Orain, 2002](#); [Méda, 2003](#)). The literature on work place conflicts, (see, [Duxbury and Higgins, 1991](#); [Frone et al, 1992](#); [Kossek and Ozeki, 1998](#); [Lee et al, 2000](#); [Netemeyer et al, 1996](#); [Stephens and Summer, 1996](#)) identifies three types of conflicts ([Carlson et al, 2000](#)).

There are conflicts related to the management of time, conflicts of tension and behavior. The time conflict rises from extra work due to multiple roles ([Chenevier, 1999](#)) and the difficulty of coordinating the competing requirements of each of them. The conflict of tension stems from a tension experienced in the role, namely, that of relatives or the employees.

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The conflict of behavior appears when the specific behavior of a role is incompatible with the expected one in another role, and moreover the necessary adjustment is not undertaken, or cannot be made by the person. In the case of *Miss Hylde G*, it is especially the employment-family conflict which is highlighted. As already carried out in some previous studies (Guerin et al,1997; Chenevier,1996; Caussignac, 2000), this conflict has grown in size thanks to a failing organizational culture. Thus, *Miss Hylde G* felt penalized because of what she does for her child, and her boss having not accepted compromises to facilitate the conciliation of the professional life with the family life.

## Conclusion

The analysis addressed in this paper shows that some of the empirical factors are determinants of women's labor force participation. These factors have been underscored by life stories in a context characterized by the recurrence of social and political turmoil. As such, income inequalities appear to be a source of women's mobility in the labor market. This mobility is facilitated, in part, by the role played by human capital, especially education, which increases women's job opportunities. In the family environment, for example, in the supply-side approach of women's labor force participation, the presence of infants appears to be a blocking factor, while the existence of both well-structured kinship (father, mother, sisters, etc.) and charlatades positively influence this participation. Importantly, other factors that are not regularly mentioned in the literature were highlighted.

They concern informational default or information asymmetry, which may be exacerbated by the opportunistic behaviors in recruiting processes. Likewise, the role of the health of the family or that of the health of the woman herself may favor women's participation in the labor market. Taking these factors into account in econometric models may continue to produce ambiguous results because of the problem of measurability. Moreover, consideration of these factors supposes the introduction of demand factors into supply-side models of the labor market. Despite these technical difficulties, it is essential to integrate these aspects to determine in a more rigorous way the place of these non-traditional factors (in term of importance) among the other determinants of women's labor force participation.

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