

*Mileva GJUROVSKA*UDK: 305:316.344.2
Original research paper

GENDER AND ECONOMIC LIFE THROUGH THE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Abstract

New conceptions of gender built on the foundations of individual perception and freedom in the choice of gender roles have achieved rapid affirmation, among other things, thanks to the public policies that have shaped the so-called political feminism. The sociological analyzes of this instant and uncritical approach in the development of the concept of "post-gender society" emphasize the need to connect it with the analyses of the existing social structures, which indicate an enormous increase in social inequalities. The text below elaborates on some sociological dilemmas about the state of the social sciences in relation to public gender policies, dilemmas regarding the position of women in the sphere of economics where discrimination is significantly present despite the outreach programs and budget lines for public policy making.

Keywords: *Gender, public policies, gender roles, gender equality, social inequality, gender rationality.*

Introduction

As science, sociology reached its peak in the 1980s. At that time, the main topic was still social stratification, which explored social inequalities (Carroll Bacchi, 2009) European sociology has long used the conceptual discourse of Max Weber where the key term was social power (political, economic and symbolic).

Contemporary tendencies in sociology and other social sciences increasingly emphasize the importance of applied knowledge. Today, it is difficult to distinguish between social sciences and public policies created by administrative bodies (national or international). Sciences are applicable, and the creation of public policies is based on the application of scientific methods. Many public policies are basic knowledge in some areas appearing as a reference in scientific papers. It seems that the "era of public policies" that experienced expansion at the beginning of the 21st century significantly faster promoted the gender mainstreaming as a specific field of research, creating a kind of so-called "political feminism". According to some analysts, these policies are a reaction to gender inequality, while according to others they are not only reactive, but also creative and strengthen the so-called *gendering* - a

process that shapes (produces) gender without defining any special relations regarding sex, i.e., the body (Carroll Bacchi, 2009). Such approaches focus significantly more on the methodology of public policy making, and pay insignificant attention to their effects on their implementation.

The social sciences of the twentieth century, although seriously dealing with the factors of social inequality, completely neglected the gender dimension. In terms of gender issues, sociology has been under the influence of American sociologist T. Parsons for half a century. He explicitly stated that there is no basis for thinking about social inequality between men and women because these are positions determined by biological traits that are complementary to the natural order, while this order cannot be the subject of sociological analysis. Therefore, the roles of women that Parsons calls expressive are naturally determined, while they are associated with giving support to family members. The roles of men are instrumental and are mainly performed outside home. Gender blindness of this kind is also observed in other social sciences. Particular conservatism is observed in political science, which even today shows a low degree of sensitivity to gender issues. Despite the vast political science literature, the problem still boils down to: unmasking bias by men in political concepts and practices, and measures to increase women's political participation in state institutions (Jane H. Bayes, 2012). However, the main problem of political science is the limitation of the political phenomenon, reducing it to the well-known issues related to the state and gender, public policy and the state, public political institutions, social movements, elections, participation. Great credit goes to feminists who have shown that the political phenomenon also extends to the family, quality of life, position in the field of labour and other fields that traditionally belong to the private sphere (Nancy Burns, 2002). Public policies and legislation have already penetrated deep into the regulation of the sphere of morality by intervening with special legislation that governs sexual orientation as well. The sphere of private life is approached as if it were self-regulating, i.e., as if it were based on the individual experiences and the private specific needs of the individuals, which is not true because here the influence of the decisions by the state is visible (salaries, working hours, parental leave, social security, family benefits, etc.).

Feminist studies have been particularly credited with studying relationships between men and women as inequality relationships, contributing to the construction of a gender approach as a new analytical mainstreaming in the study of social phenomena. Even conservative sociologists are no longer disturbed by the fact that gender mainstreaming is in a continuous process of change.

Post-gender society

There are many definitions about gender in literature. The general conclusion is that gender refers to socially created roles that define men's and women's patterns of conduct. Gender is an identity in which social structures such as duties, attitudes, expectations, emotions, and of course sexual orientation are internalized. It should be noted that gender is a fluid structure that changes under the influence of social change. Thus, the classic definition of gender that we would extract from textbooks in the last decade has already been surpassed and does not reflect new reality. The claim that gender is a social construction of roles in the coexistence of men and women has become debatable (Hollander & Howard, 2000). Also, the connection between gender and sex has become completely irrelevant, i.e., that gender and sex in most cases coincide - as was the case with classical gender analyses. Modern tendencies in the notion of sex and gender show that, in essence, gender creates sex, otherwise sex would be deprived of meanings and could be reduced to any other physical difference. Biology already deviates from its arguments: nature is no longer given, but constructed, claims Christine Delphy (Christine Delphy, 2013). Modern concept of gender provides an opportunity to create social relations based on the individual (personally specific) perception of differences. This is about freedom in choosing the content of gender roles. Those who advocate this concept argue that such an approach to itself leads to the elimination of all forms of gender-based domination. Thus, gender precedes sex by creating conditions for the formation of a transgender society, which means that it is not biology that determines sex, but society itself. The bottom line is that biological reality is understood as a social construct. This theory, also known as "L'Utopie du non-sexe", advocated by French sociologist Christine Delphy, has faced great criticism. The criticism primarily points to the straying of the concept of gender from the problem of inequality and political domination that are significantly present in reality. This concept rarely talks about the hard work and low wages of women in industry. Heterosexuality, which is the core of this conception, is said to be a political institution whose goal is to establish control over the sexual order (Juliette Grange, 2010). The new view of gender does not arise from the feminist criticism of gender norms, but from the criticism of all norms that govern sexual orientation. This is the new sociology of gender that also joins the adventure of extreme social determinism created by foundations that financially support research in this field. However, these new determinations are not far from the research logic of Emil Durkheim who pointed out that what men and women do in the family, or outside it, is not due to their biological predisposition, but to the social division of labour (M. Gjurovska, 2015).

In this sociological framework of gender, the understanding of P. Bourdieu is missing. According to this author, gender is a naturalized social construction, i.e., sexual habits acquired during socialization. Gender production and its transformation into sex is a naturalized social fact, says Bourdieu.

If new concepts reflect changes in practice, then Bourdieu advises sociologists not to use existing models of thought, which themselves are a product of logic of domination, but to focus their collective action on resisting legal and political reform (Pjer Burdje, 1991).

Gender does not only define individuals, but also the different levels of social structure. Thus, gender mainstreaming revitalizes the topics of social power as a reason for unequal access to certain social positions, not only for women, but also for other marginalized groups. Gender from *concept of diversity* was transformed into *concept of non-equality* in context of constructing a platform for creating many policies for achieving equal opportunities, becoming a concept - sui generis.

“Homo economicus” - gender perspective

It seems that economy has not shown great interest in gender mainstreaming. However, this does not apply to the liberal economic paradigms that at the very beginning of the industrial society advocated the employment of women in industry. Hiring women workers made the production process more economical because women had lower wages, were not unionized, and as such were less problematic. One of the main goals of modern economic policies is to increase economic activity, which is taken as the first indicator for measuring gender equality. Why is that important? If more women stay home and start knitting, weaving or cooking, then we should close our factories, said one entrepreneur in the early 20th century. Allow women to develop a market economy, further advocate economists (M. Gjurovska, 2008).

Many economists have tried to explain the economic significance of certain gender issues. Among them is Nobel laureate Gary Becker, who tries to explain the pay gap between men and women in context of human capital. In his opinion, women earn less because they are not motivated to invest in development of their own skills due to maternity and high probability of discontinuity in the work process. They are therefore rational and choose less skilled occupations whereby they can get employed faster in order to reduce the opportunity cost of different trainings (Gary Becker, 1991).

The so-called “objectivity” of economy advocated by economists hides a subjectivity that ignores the specifics of the gender factor. Thus, economic success is measured by monetary measures that underestimate and even hide many activities without which social and economic development would be impossible. This refers to household chores that are still largely the responsibility of women today. A 19th century economist noted: *“If a person does not see the true value of household chores, he is either very rich or very poor. If a woman is a real housewife, then in 10 years we will be richer by 10 million* (G. Bok, 2004). Furthermore, most of the volunteer activities in context of community work are conducted by women. The unprecedented development of various forms of solidarity economy in the world owes much to the initiatives and creativity of women.

Polls show that there is still a division of labour based on sex. Economists usually speak in a general way about the labour market, making no distinction between women's and men's workforce. There is still no such macroeconomic analysis that separately assesses the capacities of the women's and men's workforce. This suggests that there may be labour substitutions regardless of gender. However, in a recent interview, Christine Lagarde, a world-class economist, would point out that *if the disparities between men and women in the sphere of economy are overcome, the GDP within the EU would increase by 35%*¹ giving full legitimacy to gender discrimination in the field of economy. But the conclusion would be in favour of feminists, especially those with a Marxist orientation, who for more than a century have indicated that emancipation of women in society would go through emancipation in the economic sphere.

Economists studying the economic behaviour of men and women in household management reveal the factors that determine the economic success of women. Women who were in a better negotiating position in the family found it easier to access the resources they needed to do their job productively (authority to hire household members, access to raw materials and other resources, freedom of management). When women have a weak negotiating position and insignificant power, they fail to get the basic resources to get things done efficiently. These economists also concluded that when women's incomes are higher, then their negotiating power is greater. Mostly women spend their income on food, clothes, or education of their children, while men spend a significant part of their income on alcohol, cigarettes, entertainment, etc. (Duflo & Udry, 2004).

Comparative research shows that countries with a low gender gap achieve higher ^{labour} productivity, thus affecting wage growth for both men and women, while welfare costs are reduced. Some studies also highlight the positive impact of women in the fight against corruption. According to these data, when there is a larger number of women MPs, corrupt activities are reduced, while public money is then used for the effectiveness of development policies. This is not the case in our country where in proportion to the increase in the number of women MPs (38%) corruption has not decreased (Dollar, Fisman & Gatti, 2001).

Given the fact that there are differences in the way women and men practice the so-called homo economicus (a pattern of behaviour in which individuals are highly rational, selfish, and profit-oriented), there is a high risk of poor efficiency of economic public policies. According to many research findings,

¹ Les bienfaits économiques de l'inclusion des femmes sont même plus élevés qu'on ne le pensait

Christine Lagarde et Jonathan D. Ostry, le 29 novembre 2018, <https://www.imf.org/fr/News/Articles/2018/11/28/blog-economic-gains-from-gender-inclusion-even-greater-than-you-thought>

the economic behaviour of women presupposes a different kind of rationality than that based on selfish calculation. If the difference in economic rationality between men and women has not yet been firmly defined and established, it raises then numerous epistemological problems in economic science (Gjurovska, 2008).

Women are not a minority, but they are present in small numbers in areas where power is exercised! Why?

Statistically, women cannot be a minority because almost the same number of women and men are born. In principle, statistics still has the same mission since its inception: the state should count, and then measure to make a strategy for the implementation of public decisions and policies. However, it is necessary to distinguish between sex-based statistics that provides an overview of the numerical representation of women in the total aggregates and the so-called gender statistics that produces indicators, which evidently present the differences (Labelle Micheline, 2015).

To dominate, one group does not have to be the majority. Dominance is achieved through the instruments of exercising authority. When it comes to domination by men, it is not achieved through violence, aggression, although they are not excluded. Domination by men, according to Pierre Bourdieu, is reproduced through the so-called *habitus*, which is a system of norms, laws, customs, morals, or symbols in the implementation of which in everyday life men and women equally participate. Such violence is covert and unintentional, subtle to the point that it does not evoke a desire for revenge or liberation on the part of the victims. The reasons for this are deep in the social structures (social order) that shape space and time, but also the division of labour that reduces the chances of greater representation of women in areas where decisions are made in politics and economy. Thus, gender becomes a principle of classification that organizes sex, while simultaneously ruling the perceptions of the world. This ruling will be overcome when the structures in which men are embedded are overcome, concludes Bourdieu (P. Burdje, 1991).

Today, analysts are faced with a new concept of gender that deviates significantly from Bourdieu's epistemological framework and which, by developing individualism and universalism, leaves little room for analysis of social structures, thus making the analysis of the causes of current social conditions unnecessary or undesirable. The Universalist concept of gender eliminates dichotomies (for example, masculinity/femininity, good/bad and passive/active), i.e., it supports the thinking matrix with no sexes whatsoever. It seems that it was an idyllic period when feminists sought the causes of domination of men by finding it in *the patriarchy*, still achieving success only in discovering and systematizing the contents of subordination of women, but without the capacity to make changes to the structures that control resources.

Worldwide, the patriarchal family still exists and is a “school” for democracy and the reproduction of traditional gender roles. The constant reduction of the private sphere and continuous and increased participation of women in the public sphere does not reduce gender inequality (M. B. Tahon, 2003). The concept of increased participation of women in various spheres of social life does not give the expected results. Thus, the increased number of women in parliaments and of women officials in the public sphere do not significantly change the quality of decision-making, which not only does not change the existing power structures, but also strengthens them.

A question is often raised why women represent the absolute majority in many economic areas. According to a study in France, only 17% of occupations are mixed, which means that the difference between employed men and women does not exceed the ratio of 60:40. There is visible economic gender-based segregation all over the world. Women are mainly concentrated in areas where the dominant occupations are nursing, upbringing, education, hygiene, home support, care, and so on. Only a small number of women are engaged in IT occupations, scientific research activities, the military complex, security, and senior positions. It is considered that there would be gender equality in the field of labour when a 60:40 ratio is reached (Clémence Boyer, 2018). In our country, the employment percentage ratio by gender, for example, in healthcare and social protection is 75:25 (women/men); financial activities and insurance - 66:34; members of state legislative and executive bodies, government officials, senior civil servants, diplomats, and directors - 34:76; experts and scientists - 56:44; technicians and related workers - 52:48.²

A typical example of occupation with an absolute gender majority in the Republic of Macedonia is the textile industry. There are 38,000 workers in 800 active textile factories, or 20% of all employed persons in private sector in the country. Almost all employees are women, except textile factory owners. Given the fact that there is a high unemployment rate (over 20%) the question arises whether men cannot learn to sew on a machine and work in a textile factory - where there is still a demand for labour. They could be employed as well, but it is not a worthy job for them, even for those who are out of work for a long time. Here the problem lies in the working conditions (working hours, labour intensity, and low wages).

Is political participation a solution to the problem?

Is it still worth thinking about the answers to the questions why most of the analysts researching gender issues are women? Why are great majority of the participants at the conferences where gender issues are discussed actually women? Why are most of the university undergraduate students who choose

² Државен завод за статистика, 2018, Анкета за работна сила. [State Statistical Office, Labor Force Survey, 2018, Skopje. (In Macedonian)]

gender topics for their graduation thesis women? If we return to Bourdieu's analysis, we will conclude that for men, gender mainstreaming is still a distant topic. Gender equality should be understood as a culture of living practiced by all in society.

Modern democracies, implementing the neoliberal paradigm in an orthodox way, produce a huge normative pile of laws, strategies, conventions, charters, the implementation of which is a serious problem. Contrary to the enormous production of laws and bylaws for which no money is saved, governments do not show political will when it comes to allocating money for their very implementation. Among the problems that lie on the road to their implementation is insufficient democracy. The huge enacted piles of laws and bylaws do not reach ordinary citizens and there is confusion in that regard. The application of law and exercise of rights and freedoms are still very expensive because this knowledge is possessed by a narrow circle of legal professions (lawyers, prosecutors, judges).

One of the important issues of global interest is dysfunction of democratic political systems, rise of populism, and above all the instruments used by political parties to seize power. Early parliamentary elections have become a regular practice worldwide. It seems that society is in a continuous election campaign that starts on the first day after the elections, and ends briefly only at the moment of counting the ballots on the Election day.

Particular attention is paid to the introduction of a quota system that should ensure equal representation of minority groups in the public sphere. In Europe, quotas are not very popular, but experience shows that political participation through quotas on lists of candidates for election has favourable effects on boosting women's political participation in parliaments. Analyses of quota systems show that resistance to their introduction in Western European countries is linked to the belief that quotas are contrary to the concept of liberal democracy and the principle of merit "let the best win". Gender quotas are a temporary measure. This may take some time, until all social, cultural, and political obstacles to equal representation are overcome.

According to the Report of the World Economic Forum for Gender Equality for 2021, Macedonia is on the 73rd place in the world ranking of countries. But, according to the economic participation, it is on the 97th place. In terms of women's involvement in politics and decision-making positions, Macedonia ranks 54th - a fact that is not surprising given the existing quota system for women's participation in parliamentary election lists. In this composition of the Parliament 34% are women (4% less than the previous composition). As in previous reports, the Nordic countries are at the top of the list.³

³ Benchmarking Gender Gaps: Findings from the Global Gender Gap Index 2021, efaid-nbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf

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