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*Market vs Society? Human principles and economic rationale in changing times*

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Paper Presentation:

### **“Market vs Society through gender discrimination”**

*“All animals are equal. But some animals are more equal than others.”*

*George Orwell (1945-Animal Farm)*

### **Introduction**

Contemporary regimes have totally adapted the principles of economic globalization, which were dictated by the concept of liberalism. The sovereignty of the capitalistic system and its values has transformed market and has inevitably made society undergo radical changes. It seems that somehow society is extruded from market's forces. Karl Polanyi's claim is being confirmed: economy has gained an independent life. By extension, market and society form a bipolar scheme, two controversial spheres, which are defined in terms of conflict.

Market appears to be the enemy of the society, as it threatens it. The more unfair competition the market logic demands, the more individualistic social subjects become. When market displays the opportunistic speculation, fair play languishes. The new forms of work, which require flexibility, yield anxiety and uncertainty. Market turns to be more and more demanding concerning productivity, without caring about how increasingly insecure social life under these conditions ends to be. In this context, economic rationale gains ground against human principles. Moreover, state-led employment policies tend to be impersonal by weakening the protection, which the welfare state used to provide to the society. The foundations of the society are thus undermined and as Venieris once stated “social rights do not change, but they are being challenged” (Venieris 2009).

Within this framework, competition in the field of employment raises social discriminations or even strengthens the existing ones. In this paper we will try to focus on the gender discrimination that is observed in the working sphere. Undoubtedly, women are the victims of the changes that take place at work. For that reason, the contradictory points that derive from the conflict between market and society, will be attributed to the difficulties that women face in the working place and to their attempt to balance their professional with their family life.

### **Theoretical context**

First of all lets clarify our theoretical context. The term “discriminations” has – according Bossuyt(1976)- negative connotations in the legal dictionary, as it appears with the meaning of unfair, arbitrary or illegal different treatment. Social discrimination is, according to the definition of Hughes and Kroehler, the action that deprives members of one or more social groups and categories, of privileges, prestige, power, legal rights, equal legal protection and other social goods that other groups benefit (Hughes,Kroehler 2007:394). It can derive from bias and prejudices, but it does not coincide with them. The sociologist Robert Merton noted that on one hand there are people without bias, who -despite that fact- show discriminations, and on the other hand there are prejudiced people who do not show social discriminations (Merton 1968).

Gender discrimination refers to the inequality between men and women. The problem of gender discrimination is usually named as “women’s issue” and it is an existing social problem, which can be detected in everyday’s life (Skouteri-Didaskalou 1991:14). The raising interest on this topic, points out its significance. During the recent decades social sciences, as well as anthropology<sup>1</sup>, are “exploring” the gender. In other words, they note that the cultural meaning of the relationship between the categories of “men” and “women” varies and that gender has a determining influence on social relationships (Papataxiarchis 1992:12).

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<sup>1</sup> Indicative of that fact is the “anthropology of gender”. One of its aspects is the feminist anthropology. According to Moore: “Feminist anthropology is more than the study of women. It is the study of gender, of the interrelations between women and men, and of the role of gender in structuring human societies, their histories, ideologies, economic systems and political structures. Gender can no more be marginalized in the study of human societies than can the concept of “human action” or the concept of “society”. It would not be possible to pursue any sort of social science without a concept of gender” (Moore 1988:6).

Gender can be considered as a criterion according to which the hierarchy of social relationships is constructed, because it is defined more politically than sociologically. The male is dominant, while the female is subjected to it. If we also take into account the element of economy, then we will see how radically it influences the relationship between men and women. It would therefore be very difficult to achieve an equality of rights and obligations between men and women in the family and kinship relationships, in order to eliminate the sovereignty of the male over the female. And to simplify Godelier's thought, that is because the fundamental challenge of transformation of the unequal relationships of gender, transcends family and is found in the position which men and women hold in political relationships.

Political relationships occur in the politics, where women also face discriminations. The political element, however, is obvious in the sphere of family and employment, where the male wants to be in the ascendancy over the female.

### **Gender discrimination in the spheres of family and school**

To start with, the family is the core, where the mentality that leads to gender discrimination is (re)produced. Little girls are grown up with the "purpose" (or maybe the "dream"?) to get married, to be good mothers and to follow a "female" job, while little boys aim to follow a job with career prospects. Children play with games according to their gender, and they spend their leisure time in the same way. Other toys are for boys and other for girls, so as to develop better their "special" skills. The role of parents is crucial, because the way in which they behave to their children can reinforce or reduce gender discrimination.

To a greater or lesser extend, the same happens at school. Girls are encouraged or sometimes forced to take different professional directions than boys. For example the job of the teacher, of the secretary and the nurse seems to be ideal for the girls, while the job of the mechanic, the doctor and the lawyer appears to be perfect for the boys. Surveys, which were carried out in 2002 in France showed that the orientations of the girls were undoubtedly less efficient concerning career and pay progression. The restrictions that girls face at educational level, continue to exist in the professional level. Moreover, school competition, which takes place in the frame of discriminations against girls, reflects the competition in labor market.

## **Stereotyped image of the “traditional family”**

From the above, it appears that the fulfillment of motherhood constitutes the peak of femininity. In the stereotyped image of the “traditional family”, the woman is at the same time the housewife and the mother, while the man is the breadwinner, the one who earns the family’s living. As we see, the man is the one who is strictly related to the market and the economical sphere, while the woman is more related to the social bond of the family.

But family has undergone many changes, not only as an institution but also as a form of “social cell”, especially in the years of modernity. With the secularization of the society, the church lost its monopoly on marriage. Since then, marriage would be possible even outside of the religious frame, with the form of the political marriage. State instead of the church would intervene to marry a couple. Moreover, family would be possible to exist even outside of marriage, so unmarried couples and partnerships tend to increase since 1960s.

At the same decade the proportion of the occupation of women starts making a significant and continuing progress, which would not be stemmed even twenty years later, when employment crisis was in full swing. Thenceforth, women still work even if they have children, because the tendency is no more the selection (between work or child raising), neither their alternation (work- interruption- again back to work), but their combination that implies simultaneously working and having children.

As we saw, the stereotypical image of the “traditional family” assigned the productivity sphere to men and the sphere of reproduction to women. The gender division of labor was characterized by that fact. Women were restricted in the private space of their house and they undertook the whole housework “naturally”, as it was supposed to be a “female” task. Women’s work was inextricably intertwined with their biological and reproductive role. Things changed only after the recognition of the housework as paid employment. This constituted the starting point that gave meaning to women’s work.

## **Housework**

Let's stay for a while to the definition on "work" before we move to the recognition of the housework. Projects execution, which require mental or physical effort that aims to produce good and services, which satisfy human needs, can be defined as work in sociology (Giddens 2002:418). From an anthropological standpoint, the concept of work refers to the social relations of people and to the resulting meaning, during the process of achievement of the conditions of social reproduction, acquiring, thus, a more extended, "animate" and complex content (Spyridakis 2009:17).

Although housework matches with the central point of those definitions, it used to form an occupation that was not paid. As it was somehow like an "aberration" from the model of the wage labor, it could not be considered as a main form of work. On the one hand housework was regarded as no work, on the other it was devaluated, because it was women who were involved in that and not men. The care of the household as well as the childcare, were characterized as offer, as acts of love and were of minor significance compared to the productive and paid male work. They belonged to the "inferior" kind of jobs and were carried out by women. Women were therefore identified with the non-paid and the non-productive work and because of that, they remained outside the economic system.

Women entered into the market in the beginning of 1980s, when housework was recognized as an economic and social matter and its financial value was calculated. A special emphasis on the role of the housework into the reproduction of labor force, was given during the decade of 1970, when the famous conversation about the housewife's wage took place. Chadeau and Fouquet defined housework as the total of the activities that are carried out without payment in the house and can be substituted from market work (Chadeau, Fouquet 1981). Giddens also points out that the non-paid housework has a tremendous significance for national economy (Giddens 2002:442).

## **Women in the workplace**

So that was the beginning of the women in the workplace. Since then, the working conditions have changed a lot. Gender inequality in the workplace exists and being an employee women means being a "special" worker. Women who enter in the workplace face various problematic situations.

First of all, they have to deal with the restrictions that derive from the horizontal discriminations. As we mentioned before, the perceptions of “masculine” and “feminine” jobs is still vivid and the different professional orientation in the educational process, has not completely disappeared. Furthermore, the efficiency of the degree varies according the gender. Employers prefer to employ men than women, because they cost less and are more productive, as they do not interrupt their career for pregnancy and children. So women, have to overcome many obstacles in order to gain access to employment.

Secondly, they have to face the vertical discriminations, which occur in the professional sphere. More concrete, they have to deal with the different kinds of restrictions that keep them to low level working positions. It is true that women are more frequent occupied in subordinate, temporary and precarious jobs compared to those of men. They are therefore underemployed, so they work less hours than they wished to, with whatever this subsequently means to their remuneration and employment and insurance rights.

A survey of Eurostat in 2002 on work forces, concerning the gender distribution of temporary and part-time employment, verifies that fact. More specifically, 14,3% of women versus 12% of men in the whole working population were temporarily employed and 33,5% of women versus 6,6% of men were part-time employed. In Greece in 2008 the percentage of the women who worked temporary is up to 50%, while three of the four persons who works part-time are women (Greek Ombudsman 2009: 68).

In addition to this, women fall victims to “informal working positions”, namely to all kind of occupations that contravene, in one way or another, whatever is considered normally as permanent contract of a full-time job. Apart from that, women also fall victims to the various dimensions of harassment at work, such as bullying, harcelement moral, bossing, mobbing, physical or psychological violence and sexual harassment (Spyridakis 2009: 45-48).

Another aspect of gender discrimination has to do with the pay gap. Pay gap refers to the inequality observed in the field of the salaries. For work of equal value a man is paid more than a woman. Furthermore, women are paid for a longer period of time and more frequent with lower salaries in comparison to men. They usually work fewer hours than men and thus they earn less money. It must also be noted that the

pay gap is more obvious at the higher rank of jobs than at the lower. Needless to say, the low salaries of women become less visible as they merge into the family income.

On March 3, 2009 the European Union started its campaign in order to raise awareness of issues of different payment between women and men, of their causes and to propose ways to combat this problem. The European Equal Pay Day has been established for that, as well. Nevertheless, in 2010 women across Europe still earned 17,8% less money than men for every working hour and that difference remains constant<sup>2</sup>. The National Committee of Pay Equity in the United States of America (U.S.A) has since 1996 established the 20<sup>th</sup> of April as the Equal Pay Day. However, according to census statistics of 2008 in the U.S.A., American women earned only 77cent for every dollar earned by men. This number drops to 68% for African-American women and to 58% for Latinas<sup>3</sup>.

Moreover, women rarely occupy a position of responsibility at the professional hierarchy. A survey, which was conducted in 2004 on enterprises of selected sectors in Greece, showed that the participation of women in senior positions in the professional hierarchy covers only 49% of the proportioned positions according to their total participation in the enterprises. It is particularly characteristic that the range of the “glass ceiling” increases the larger the size of the company is (KETHI 2004).

The phenomenon of the “glass ceiling” depicts the fact that the access of the women to senior working positions is significantly lower than the access of men. The interruption in the career development of women just before they reach the top leadership, on account of the barriers that arise in front of them and make their further progress uneven, is called as “glass ceiling”<sup>4</sup>. Generally, as Meurs and Ponthieux aptly put it: “ The image of the glass ceiling describes the “invisible” barriers that exclude women from the top positions in the professional hierarchy”<sup>5</sup>. Consequently, it inhibits the possibility of an upward movement in women’s career.

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<sup>2</sup> For more information visit: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=el&catId=41>

<sup>3</sup> See the article of Fitzpatrick Laura, Tuesday, Apr.20, 2010 “Why Do Women Still Earn Less Than Men?” on the website of Times ([www.times.com](http://www.times.com)).

<sup>4</sup> That is how Tsagarakis defines “glass ceiling”. For more details, look at Tsagarakis Panos, 8 March 2010, “The glass ceiling...” on the website of Reporter.gr . (<http://www.reporter.gr/Απόψεις/MarketingBrowser/Πάνος-Τσαγκαράκης/item/145483-H-γυάλινη-οροφή...>)

<sup>5</sup> See, Meurs D. και Ponthieux S. «Wage differentials» in: M. Maruani(eds) Women, Gender, Societies, 2008, pp. 343.

When the time of promotion comes, women do not have the same treatment as men from their managers. Although they might be as efficient as men, it is men who reach the senior positions and women appear to be trapped in their career, as they are deprived of their career prospects. The justification that is cited from their directors is that women are considered to be less responsible to their work, because they are burdened with their financial family responsibilities. Again the conflict between men and women about who has the main impact on housework plays a crucial role. Although it is proven that women are able to classify their professional and their family obligations, and at the same time they are as efficient as men to their work.

At this point we can see how the factor of “time” functions as a source of discrimination, concerning gender equality. Men work more hours, they are paid better than women and they enjoy high social recognition, while even more women have insecure employment with low income and receive little social recognition with limited social rights. So women are to the forefront of the management of their time in their daily life, as they have to find a balance among their working time, their family time, their household time, their social time and their personal time.

That is reflected to policy’s level with the appropriate legislation that has to do with the principle of equal treatment between men and women on issues of employment and work (Directive 2002/73/EC). In Greece it is enshrined in the law 3488/2006. One of its aspects is also the reconciling of family and working life.

It seems that the reconciling of family and working life, somehow depicts the controversial issues that arise from the “conflict” between society and market. If we attempt to match those elements, family life comes closer to the society as to those spheres human principles come first. On the other side of the spectrum, is the working life that obeys to the rules of market and to the economic rational, which is dictated by it. So the point is to achieve a balance between them, or at least try to achieve a harmonious coexistence, that is undermined in nowadays circumstances.



## Policy level

Moving forward to policy level, gender mainstreaming reflects the attempt to eliminate gender discriminations in the policy-making and its implementation. More concrete, gender mainstreaming refers to the process of updating the design, of implementation, of monitoring and of evaluation of a public policy, so that together with key policy objectives, gender equality is promoted (Stratigaki 2008:43). For the implementation of gender mainstreaming, gender budgeting plays an important role. Gender budgeting is a tool for the effective incorporation of gender mainstreaming from governments, in every aspect of economic and social policy. It can work towards the strengthening of the effectiveness of public policies and of economic growth, by reducing inequalities in the distribution of public resources.

A transnational research called EQUAPOL<sup>6</sup> that dealt with a comparative analysis of the progress and impact of gender-sensitive and women friendly policies, issued its results in April 2003. 8 countries were participating in EQUAPOL and these are the following: Belgium, France, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Spain, Sweden and Great Britain. We will focus on the categorization of those countries, according to the progress that they have made in the implementation of gender mainstreaming in public policies.

This categorization divides the countries into 3 groups. The first group is constituted from only one country and that is Sweden. In Sweden, gender mainstreaming has reached its peak. The main purpose was to combat the structural causes of gender inequality into the society. The case of Sweden is characterized by a great degree of innovation and gender mainstreaming has been officially adopted at high political level, something that is not observed in any other country.

The second group forms a less promoted model in comparison to the Swedish model. The following countries are in a very early stage of development concerning the incorporation of gender mainstreaming. Belgium and Ireland together with the regions of Andalusia, of the Basque Country and of Scotland consider the incorporation of gender mainstreaming more as a functional aim, than as a strategy in order to achieve gender equality. Those countries have laid emphasis on the technical

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<sup>6</sup> EU Research on social sciences and humanities, Gender-sensitive and women friendly public policies: a comparative analysis of their progress and impact, EQUAPOL, State of Art, EUR 21324 (ιστότοπος: [ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/citizens/docs/equapol\\_eur21324\\_ok.pdf](ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/citizens/docs/equapol_eur21324_ok.pdf)).

processes, on the organizational changes and on the changes of the implementation of the policy as well as on the range of the bodies that are involved. Unlike Sweden, where gender mainstreaming is strongly institutionalized and its future is not compromised, to most of those countries the future of gender mainstreaming remains uncertain.

The last group, which is the most numerous, contains France, Greece, Lithuania, Spain and United Kingdom. Those countries lag in the implementation in the incorporation of gender mainstreaming in public policies, despite the fact that it is mentioned in official government documents. Furthermore, they have not given an exact, clear and specific meaning to the term of “gender discrimination”. Additionally, the initiatives of gender mainstreaming are fragmented, as the related attempts are restricted into very specific fields and are not connected with the central policy of gender equality. For example in France, Greece and Spain there is too much progress on the education and employment compared to other sectors. Another characteristic that is common to the initiatives of those countries is that those initiatives are a result of attempts and insistence of individual women that are in key-positions or even of female organizations, rather than a result of decisions of high-level government that seek new approaches on the policy of gender mainstreaming.

What we have to point out here is that in the European’s Union policy, theory abstains from praxis. The target is considered to be that all the programs and the policies of European Union will contribute to the elimination of the inequalities, to the improvement of the equality between men and women and to the confrontation of the structural causes of gender inequality, such as in the case of Sweden, but in fact things are quite different. The goal is either implemented as an objective in itself, either it is used to achieve other objectives, such as market expansion and increased productivity. So, in the argumentation and practice of European politics, when gender equality helps the augmentation of productivity, it then becomes increasingly important.

Obviously market is dominated against society in the field of politics. The shift of policies on gender equality towards objectives, which are closely tied to the economy, especially to the labor market and the productivity, constitutes a possible obstacle in the fulfillment of the incorporation of gender mainstreaming. This obstacle can be generalized to the challenges and the adversities that social policy has to face in our days.

## **Concluding remarks**

To sum up, gender discrimination in the workplace is an unsolved problem, where society is dominated by market. In order to overcome the difficulties that deal with gender inequality, first and foremost the mentality that treats women as “second class citizens” has to change. Family and education can contribute to this direction. Secondly, in policy’s level, theory has to meet praxis in gender mainstreaming, as in the case of Sweden. Last but not least, it is difficult for women to achieve a balance between professional and family life, but if society structures help and if market rules permit it, then it can be possible.

To conclude, current recession has radically changed the scenery. Societies are in front of unprecedented changes that even disturb their foundations. Under these circumstances, gender discrimination not only exists but it is also reinforced. Nonetheless, people’s right to equality is at stake, regardless gender, as market deprives persons of their liberty and social rights.

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