

Care Work, Gender Roles and Family Policies between Social Reproduction and the Market – The Case of Germany

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1) The perspective of feminist economists is a holistic view on the whole of the economy, of labour and value creation: on households and markets, on paid and unpaid work, on production and social reproduction. The market process of value creation constantly takes those social processes of reproduction for granted, appropriates them as natural flexible precondition of the economy but calls them unproductive and outside of the economy. In this logic, only market-based remunerated work counts for the GDP and is productive, while it is assumed that child care and care for the elderly is unproductive, outside of the economy and does not create value. Unpaid care work neither appears as costs of the value creation chains in macro-economic statistics, trade balances and balance of payments nor does it show in the prices on the market. These are hidden costs of the market economy. (Elson/Cagatay 2000)

The care economy and social reproduction follow their own rationale of provision, satisfaction of needs and well-being while the logic of the capitalist market economy is efficiency, growth and profit. While care work has been increasingly integrated as remunerated labour into the market, it can not be subordinated completely to the market rationale of efficiency and growth: you can't speed up the process of feeding kids or of education like an industrial process. The more this kind of work is governed by norms of productivity and efficiency the more of its human and social essence gets lost. However, it is exactly this what makes a society running and makes for its social capital. (Bakker/Silver 2009)

2) Who provides care? Everywhere women are the main caretakers and responsible for social reproduction. In the EU, the gender care gap means that women e.g. in private households provide double to more than triple the number of hours of unpaid care work for children and other dependants compared to men. Four institutions can be identified as main care giving institutions in society: the family, the community/neighbourhood/non-profit-organisations, the state/public sector and the market. Shahra Razavi (UNRISD) calls those four institutions the “care diamond”. This is a flexible arrangement and division of care work within a social-democratic, conservative or

liberal welfare system (Esping-Andersen 1990). For example in case of a fiscal squeeze when the state is not able or not willing to invest in public services, certain reproductive tasks and care work are transferred to the market or to the families and communities. This shift to the private sector or to the private sphere of the family or community has been called a double way of privatisation. E.g. in the EU, public health services are cut down: people who can afford expensive treatment and nursing consult private clinics and rehabilitation centres, those who can't afford have to provide care for the sick people in the family.

Due to the increasing hegemony of the market rationale, cuts in public services due to fiscal squeeze, along with changes in family forms and gender roles, many societies face severe problems of social reproduction and care.

3) In the framework of the objective "more and better jobs" formulated in the Lisbon treaty, EU-policies for gender equality aim at an "adult-worker-model" and "work first" for women as core of equal opportunities. The first objective that women's employment rate should reach 60 % in 2010 has been achieved (next time target is 75 % in 2020). However, there has been not much change with regard to the gender segmentation of the labour market, and the gender pay gap which is on the average 15% in the EU. Most of the jobs women got recently are part-time, flexible and informal employment while women can't break the glass ceiling to executive and boardroom positions. (Giullari/Lewis 2005)

In order to allow the reconciliation of paid work and care work in the family, the EU formulated in its so-called Barcelona objectives that in 2010 child care facilities for 1/3 of all children under three, 90 % of all pre-school children should be provided. This target was by far not reached! A number of young mothers who would prefer to go back to paid work or work for longer hours can not do so because of the lack of childcare facilities and day schools (except Scandinavia, Eastern Europe and France).

Still the EU lacks a coherent equal opportunity policy in the market and the care economy, across households and the market.

4) Germany has been a conservative welfare regime with a lot of consequences for its family policies, gender roles and the care work regime. Different from the social-democratic welfare system in Scandinavia and the liberal system in the USA and Great Britain, the characteristics of the conservative welfare regime are

- family is the unit of entitlement to welfare
- social security is based on the breadwinner model and on waged employment
- non-employed women are insured through the husband
- private insurance increasingly complementary to public insurance system
- single mothers get little allowances. (Esping-Andersen 1990)

Accordingly, German welfare policies centred around the male breadwinner and his “housewife” who performed as unpaid work all the family and house work and sometimes worked as “additional income earner”. Tax policies are in favour of the male breadwinner model, as it doesn’t pay if women work full time because they have to pay proportionally higher taxes.

However, in the past decades more women and in particular more mothers got into wage employment which changed and flexibilised women’s role and made them economically less dependant from the husband. Most young women plan to combine paid work and family work. In a parallel development families became less stable, the number of divorces increased and new patterns of family composition occurred. Additionally to the rise in single parent families who are most of the time single mother families, new patchwork arrangement developed. One patchwork option is that after the separation or divorce of a couple, newly formed couples live with children from different mothers and fathers. Or children live four days per week with their mother and three days with their father, or join the father over the weekends only. Additionally, the heterosexual family norm is eroding. Same sex parents, a lesbian or a gay couple raising kids from earlier marriages or their own kids – adopted or engendered by new reproductive technologies as a new pattern of family life – are being increasingly accepted at least in urban areas. This brings the old gender-bound division of labour and traditional gender roles to an end.

5) Presently, welfare, family and gender equality policies are informed by a competing system of value systems: on the one hand there is the old conservative family and gender ideology based on heteronormativity, the gender division of labour, and the model of the male breadwinner and the housewife/additional-earner. On the other hand, along with more liberal values for a patchwork and non-conventional family life, the “adult-worker-model” is promoted. The increase in labour market participation is only because of informal and part time employment, so-called mini-jobs, self-employment and small-scale entrepreneurship meaning they got integrated into the labour market but structurally discriminated against at the same time. The gender pay gap in Germany is much above the EU average, actually 23 %. Private companies refuse an equal opportunity law and quota in executive positions, and after many controversies the government gave in.

At the same time, the government promised to build day care centres, kindergartens and day schools in order to encourage mothers to look for employment. This has to be seen also in the context of the demographic developments in Germany. In the wake of low birth rates and an ageing population, biopolitics encourage young people to produce babies. One instrument is an allowance paid per child, another was the recent introduction of “father’s time” as paid leave from the job. Altogether twelve months parents’ time get paid. In the majority of families the young mothers spend twelve month with a basic payment with the baby. Nowadays, 20 % of the young fathers take two months leave from their job to take care of their baby (preferably during soccer world or EU cup) only very few fathers take more months. The perception that reconciliation of

paid work and care work is a problem of the individual mother is changing only very slowly while the “father`s time” is a first small step towards integration of men into care and family work as a precondition for young mothers to continue with their job. However, it has not brought about a turn around of the gender division of labour and the connotation that care work is female and a kind of natural skill of women. It strengthens the familiarisation of child care instead of setting up more public facilities in support of parents. Due to fiscal constraints and indebtedness of municipalities the planned expansion of public child care didn`t happen. The flexibilisation of gender roles is the way in which german policies reconcile the conventional family orientation with the neoliberal market-orientation.

6) The earlier perception of reconciliation referred to child care only. However, in an ageing society the question: who cares for the elderly? becomes more and more relevant. Presently, still 80 % of german citizens elder than 65 years are living in their families “at home” and are taken care of by family members when they get dependant or dement. As there is a tremendous shortage of care takers, the German government supports the familiarisation of the care of the elderly, similar to child care. People who nurse and provide for their old parents – again 70 % are daughters and other female relatives – gain small entitlements for pensions. Additionally the german government declared the family a space for women`s employment as so-called “day mothers” for kids, whose mother works somewhere else, and as care takers of the elderly. This job in private households has been taken up in an informal way – no decent wage, no social security, no regulation - predominantly by migrant women, in Germany mainly by Polish women. After an initial phase of “illegal” border crossing the German government quickly legalized the temporary migration of Polish care takers in order to avoid a care crisis in Germany. A new transnational redistribution of care work is taking place but not between men and women but between women from poorer households, and middle class women from more well-off households. This results in a drain of care and even emotional capacities and social capital from poorer countries to wealthier countries. This perpetuates the traditional feminisation of care work and the low appreciation attributed to this kind of work. In order to stress the value creation through care work, feminist economists called this shift of care capacities across countries “transnational care chain” analogue to transnational value chains in production (Ehrenreich/Hochschild 2003). The migrant women develop a new way of “transnational motherhood” and leave the care for their children, sick and old relatives at home to female relatives, neighbours or against even smaller salary to a migrant women from an even poorer country (Parrenas 2003), in Poland for example to women from the Ukraine.

7) During the recent crisis, German government coined the notion of “system relevance”, meaning: too big to fail. The government rescued those banks and industries which are considered to be

relevant for the functioning of the whole economic system. Amazingly, all system relevant sectors – banks, car and machinery industries - are male dominated and based on the male breadwinner model. German kindergarden employees whose care work is miserably paid and not covered by a minimum wage regime, went on strike and asked whether their work is not relevant to the functioning of the system, saying: “We do not strike only for higher wages and better working conditions. We strike for more recognition of our work.” This vital question points at the need to revalorise work and economic sectors.

To overcome the various crisis situations in the care economy and in social reproduction, policies have to balance production and social reproduction, the market and the household economy. This should not be done at the costs of women as the crucial care takers in society but must be linked with a comprehensive gender equality policy. For this purpose a new social deal is needed which stops the downloading of social costs to the care and household economy, and puts up a social security net and essential public services. The key element of this new social deal must be a new gender contract which overcomes the old male breadwinner model, does justice to new family patterns and aims at a redistribution and a revaluation of unpaid and paid, of care and market work. Essentially, this would mean that the economy has to be re-embedded in social relations and has to be redirected towards the ultimate purpose of each economy: to provide, create the conditions for a good life for everybody and increase its human capacities and social capital.

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