

I. Research Question

The aim of this research is to identify those factors that lead to different labour market patterns for women in post-industrial countries. The specific question that I have in mind could be formulated as follows: *Why is the distribution of labour market outcomes more egalitarian for the women's group in some countries than in others, and how has it evolved during the last decades?*

Looking at female labour outcomes has traditionally implied a comparative perspective of some women's indicators (be it in terms of participation, of different types of jobs, wages...) with those of men –gender comparison. What I intend to do is not a study of gender inequality regarding labour market in different countries, but rather a study of inequality among women in different institutional settings.

II. Theoretical Background

There is a huge theoretical and empirical corpus dealing with social stratification for the society as a whole across countries and over time. These analysis have extensively tried to identify patterns of upwards or downwards, intergenerational and intragenerational mobility in an industrial context –in origin- and in a post-industrial one, as well as the poverty and social exclusion patterns. It has sometimes been claimed that woman has not been fully and/or properly integrated in these kinds of approaches. On the one hand, in the conventional class analysis (Goldthorpe, 1983) “first, the appropriate unit of analysis is the family, not the individual, and, second, the class position of the family

derives from the position occupied by the male head of household in labour market and/or production units” (Breen and Rottman, 1995: 163). On the other hand, the relationship between stratification and gender has also been questioned, giving rise to an open-ended debate about the theoretical and empirical implications of the role of women in stratification schemes.

There is also much work about the positions that women can get in the labour market compared to those enjoyed by men. Some scholars have found institutionalized patterns of occupational sex segregation (see Charles, 1992 for a cross-country comparison connected with the development of a large service sector and a rationalized economy; see MacEwen Scott, 1994 for an overview on the British case). There is also a solid literature about the gender wage gap (Morris and Western, 1999) that seems to be a pervasive phenomenon in western countries despite its decrease in the last decades. Gender differences have also been studied regarding employment patterns. From the seventies on, new employment patterns (the so-called atypical forms of employment) start to become more present in western countries, facing the challenge of the high rates of unemployment and the phenomenon of de-industrialization and the growth of the service sector. Women have been analysed with respect to their presence as outsiders, with few employment protection/security and a great presence in unemployment (Segura et al., 1991). Similarly, they have been studied as main holders of temporary contracts (Kalleberg, 2000), part-time jobs (Rosenfeld and Birkelund, 1995) and public sector workers (Gornick and Jacobs, 1997).

Other works have looked at those institutional factors that affect women regarding labour market. Departing from his seminal analytical three-actors model (state, market and family), Esping-Andersen (1999) has identified different labour regulations responding to different dilemmas and the consequent (re)distribution of social risks and benefits. Cousins has analysed female employment patterns in Southern Europe as a response to the Amsterdam Treaty commitment to a high level of employment and the consequent promotion of flexible working arrangements (Cousins, 2000), with the apparent result of the integration of women in the worst conditions regarding activity sector, type of contract and informal economy. The causal link, however, between policy directions and female outcomes does not seem clear at all. There is also some interesting -but non-conclusive- evidence on the influence of leftist governments on different labour market outcomes for women in different countries (Nordic countries, Great Britain, Japan, USA, Canada, Australia and Germany). The presence of a leftist government has a positive influence on women's employment in service sector as well as on women's employment in public sector (Rosenfeld and Birkelund, 1995). These works, however, have usually disregarded differences among women and have lacked longitudinal data.

Finally, some well-known studies have tried to look for heterogeneity inside women's group. Hakim's controversial work (1996) explained women's heterogeneity through their different degree of work-commitment, with two female archetypes as a result: fully career oriented and secondary earners, but the scope of the analysis is restricted mainly to the British case and the mechanisms operating in the causal explanations seem often to remain hidden among the aggregate data. Burchell and Rubery (1994) have also

identified –only for the British case- different clusters of women, one more career oriented and the other composed of several types of secondary-segmented workers. Cousins (2000: 118) also makes a point about the increasing divergence among women as workers, at least in the Spanish case, but does not explain why this should be the case, does not even try to describe the phenomenon.

Despite the huge amount of literature related to the topic, the connections are, nevertheless, only partial. There seems to be little –and not very systematic- concern with how women have evolved as a social group regarding labour market and why their (in)equality patterns should be divergent in different countries. This is exactly where my proposal stands in front of the literature and this is the theoretical and empirical gap that I would like to fill.

III. Variables and Research Design

In this section I dedicate some lines to the research design and the type of variables that I consider. Different alternatives are available concerning my *dependent variable*. It can be the inequality in:

- a) The distribution of a labour market good (i.e. female income through Gini coefficient)
- b) The distribution of a labour market outcome (i.e. female income, female unemployment rate, female participation rate¹, female percentage in temporary

¹ Participation in the labour market is not probably the most fine-grained information available, but maybe it should be considered, at least in a first step, to avoid the selection bias in which I could incur if I concentrated only on active women. Selection bias has been a recurrent problem in most of the sociological research regarding women's work.

contracts, female type of jobs, female exits from activity.... *with respect to social class or other group reference*).

- c) Alternatively, it can be patterns of career trajectories (i.e. transitions from unemployment to employment, from inactivity to activity, from employment to unemployment and so on).

Regarding my *independent variables*, different levels must be considered. On the one hand, women's personal characteristics such as educational attainment, class origins, marital status, partner's characteristics and labour position, children and some indicator of attitudes towards work... On the other hand, institutional factors, such as labour market reforms² (with direct and indirect effects on women and implemented to face different problems) and welfare provision (that can enhance or inhibit their participation and labour attainment).

The most interesting fact of the kind of **research design** that I have in mind is its dynamic approach (dealing with individual data for women's trajectories over time) combined with the introduction of macro-level variables that also vary over time and that interact with the individual-level ones. This aim implies a diachronic analysis within countries that I would like to complement with a comparison of two or three countries among each other. Time-sensitivity of the model is especially powerful to distinguish cohort effects from timing effects, i.e. differences in behaviours and

² The introduction of the reforms seems to be rather problematic. On the one hand, different countries have implemented diverging kinds of flexibilization policies –trying to face probably not identical challenges- and the consequences for female inequalities can be diverging depending on which one is finally considered. On the other hand, I might find it difficult to disentangle direct from indirect policies (as well as intentional from unintentional effects) on women's participation and labour attainment.

outcomes among age-groups and differences regarding calendar, the moment in time in which outcomes are attained.

The specific form of the comparative method (be it a most similar cases design or a most dissimilar cases one) is still an undecided issue. One of the possibilities is to select similarly regulated labour markets that end up in different patterns of female inequality; alternatively, I could compare countries with diverging degrees and/or kinds of labour market regulations but similar patterns of female labour (in)equality. Of course, alternative country selections can be made up attending not to the degree/type of regulation but to other relevant variable.

IV. Available Data and Techniques

As far as I know, the data set that provides with the best comparable longitudinal information for women is the FFS (Family and Fertility Survey), but it lacks a great part of fundamental labour data for my research such as the type of contract, the wages... European Household Panel fits more with the women's labour and human capital variables that I need, but has very little information on partner's history, for example. The treatment of time-varying contextual/institutional variables and their introduction in the micro-longitudinal scheme will be subject to several difficulties that I cannot overcome at this stage of the research. The use of *Event History Analysis* seems to me, at this moment, the most useful statistical technique to deal with the kind of model that I have outlined.

V. References

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