

Restructuring of european societies



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Over the last number of years we have seen changes in the structure of gender relations in European States. Has this restructuring had continual effects on other aspects of European Societies or has it been an isolated incident? This is what is in question here. In order to assess as to whether the restructuring of gender relations and employment has led to a restructuring of European societies we must look at what is meant by gender relations and how it has changed.

The first aspect of gender relations that we can look at is the theories of gender difference. It is important for us to go back a number of years in order to see how these theories have developed and transformed into gender differences, as we know them today.

Patriarchy is one of the first and most prominent theories of gender differences. This theory is based on the historical belief that men are better than women. This can be seen in the way that institutions and organisations were established and in the way society initially only allowed men to vote, etc.

Patriarchy was also attributed to the biological differences between men and women. It was believed that women's maternal instinct led them to be weak and caring and could be overpowered by men, while men were aggressive and dominant and so would fight for their positions and to keep them.

The biological differences also contribute to women's lesser role in society through the fact that they were the ones who bore children. In order for society to grow and develop it was necessary for there to be ongoing growth and high fertility rates. This was the women's role, as well as caring and

watching over the children and ensuring that they developed into contributing members of society. Historical patriarchy can explain much of the male dominance in society but cannot be said to apply from the 1960's onwards.

The changes that came about in and around the 1960's can be explained through Hakim's Preference theory as explained in her article 'Women, Work and the Family in Europe'. She bases the differences in gender on five different factors:

1. Contraceptive Revolution
2. Equal Opportunities Revolution
3. Expansion of White Collar Jobs
4. Creation of Jobs for Secondary Earners
5. Increasing Importance of Attitudes, Values and Personal Preferences in Lifestyle Choices of Prosperous Liberal Societies.

The first two factors came about due to changes in science and values. They allowed women to control their fertility and made it a precondition of actual choice whether to have a child and if so when. This allowed women to enter the workforce and control when they left by controlling when they had a child. The Equal Opportunities Revolution was a precondition of the feminist movements of the 1960's, which changed values about gender equality, and therefore changed how women were treated in the workforce.

The final three factors in Hakim's Preference Theory are also important in looking at whether the restructuring of gender relations and employment has led to a restructuring of European societies. The expansion of white-collar jobs and the creation of jobs for secondary earners in essence give women a more actualised choice to get a job for income. This is important in the realisation that employment has changed, as it has now made it possible for women to both hold a job and look after a family.

The final factor in Hakim's Preference Theory refers to a move to individualisation, whereby one's identity is not formed by one's social group but by oneself. This can be attributed to Post Materialist Values. This is an important factor as it points to how women began to make choices that suited them and not just do what they felt they must do in society.

Each of the factors in Hakim's Theory point towards the end of the Historical Patriarchy Theory of gender differences, as women were becoming more independent, were being given more freedom in relation to biological differences and also more opportunities.

Another theory that could be applied from this point, where we saw changes in the labour market in relation to gender, onwards is the Marxist theory. This theory is based upon a dual market theory. From a capitalist workers point of view they wanted to divide the labour market into two segments and pit them against one another so they were more likely to get better results.

This was also a method to develop skilled and unskilled labour. It was mostly men in this work force but in times when factory owners required more workers they would call in a 'reserve army of labour'. This is where women

came in, as they would work when it was necessitated for them to work, but not all the time. This theory again does not go as far to explain the situation, as we know it today in Europe as we can see today that both men and women work and that it is not just a 'reserve army of labour' that is required.

The most developed and established theory of gender differences, and also possible the most appropriate in European Societies today, is the Weberian theory. This theory is based on the belief that different social groups compete with each other to gain positions of class status and political power. Women can be seen as a social group in their own right and so can be one of the groups who compete against others, i. e. men. This can be said to be the theory of gender difference in society today as shall be seen later we now see women competing alongside men for employment.

So far we have looked at the gender differences in society, but it is also necessary for use to look at other aspects of gender relations. Another of theses is gender equality. Today there are a couple of different theories of gender equality in Europe. The first of these, and also the most minimalist of these, is equality of opportunities in public sphere. This means giving women equal opportunities as men in regards to gaining access to jobs, through education, labour market, politics etc.

The next step on from this is equal opportunities and outcomes in the public sphere. This is the same as the previous theory but also allows for equal outcomes. This means that provisions are made to ensure that both genders receive equal treatment in the public labour market. This may be through

state creation of jobs with quotas or laws and enforcements of gender equality.

These two theories can be related to liberal market based approach to society. These societies can be said to take a minimalist approach to gender equality, either only focusing on equality of opportunity or else only considering equality of treatment or outcome to be of very little importance. In some countries the equality of outcome will only go as far as to mean no sexism or sexual harassment, and sometimes this may be regulated through laws.

Examples of some countries who employ this approach to gender equality are Ireland and Great Britain. These societies have an understanding of what gender equality is and understand that it must be addressed, but do not have an extensive move towards complete gender equality.

The final theory of gender equality and also most extensive theory is equal opportunities and outcomes in both the public and private sphere. This refers to the attempts to ensure equality of opportunities and outcomes in the public sphere, but also in the private sphere. This can mean provisions for childcare, parental leave, etc. allowing both men and women to compete with as much equal footing as possible.

This theory of gender equality is most closely associated with the neo-Corporatist approach to gender relations. In this respect the state assumes the role of creating gender equality and makes a number of extensive provisions to allow for equal opportunities and outcomes in almost all areas of society through the resources of the welfare states.

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Examples of countries where this approach can be found are in the Scandinavian countries such as Norway, Denmark and Sweden. In her article 'Dual Breadwinners between State and Market', Anne Lise Ellingstaeter makes reference to these three countries and their welfare states. She explains, " in general there are several models for modifying the tensions between employment and childcare. Three policy elements are central: (1) time to care, (2) money for care, and (3) care services." (Lise Ellingstaeter, 1999: 41) She then goes on to explain in some detail how the welfare state of these countries have restructured gender relations and employment by providing better care facilities, etc.

In order to understand why improved care facilities, money for care and time to care are so important in the restructuring of gender relations and employment we must realise that it was not always the case that women worked. For many years there was simply the belief that there was one breadwinner in a family, and that was the man. This can be related back to the historical patriarchy theory, but as we have already seen this theory on gender differences has developed into the Marxist theory and the Weberian theory, and we can understand that the breadwinner model has also developed.

In her article 'The Modernisation of Family and Motherhood in Western Europe', Brigit Pfau- Effinger develops the 'Beyond Breadwinner Model'. This model goes beyond Hakims Breadwinner Model to a less traditional Dual Breadwinner Model using gender division of labour and gender relations. The different models can be characterised as:

1. Family Economic Model
2. Male- Breadwinner/ Female- Carer
3. Male- Breadwinner/ Female- Part timer
4. Dual- Breadwinner/ State Carer, or Market Carer
5. Dual- Breadwinner/ Dual Carer

(Pfau- Effinger, 1999: 62-63)

The first of these models, the Family Economic Model, is the very traditional model that is most closely associated with farming and family orientated business. In this model it is believed that all members of the family take part in all aspects of the family life including generating income.

The Male- Breadwinner/ Female- Carer model is also a traditional model and can be said to be related to Hakims Breadwinner Model. This model places men as the earners in the family and women as the carers. While societies have developed from this what must be realised is that women still do have a choice in what they do, and that even though this model may be dying it can still be seen significantly in society today. 43% of households in Ireland still apply to this model. As already stated Ireland takes a Liberal approach to gender equality and so it may attributed to this. It may, however, have other factors to realise.

Hakim puts forth the theory that there are different types of women who focus on different aspects of life. She claims that 10-30% of women are home centred, i. e. that they do not want to work, but instead want to stay at

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home and look after the family. She goes on to explain that the other two theories are that 10-30% of women are work orientated and that 14-18% are adaptive. While the first group of women explains the Male -Breadwinner/ Female- Carer Model, the other two categories explain the following models.

In their article ' Employment, Careers, and Families: The Significance of Choice and Constraint in Women's Lives', Crompton and Harris put forward the theory that there are, " three 'qualitatively different' types of working women, the 'committed', the 'uncommitted', and the 'drifters' or 'adaptives'." (Crompton and Harris, 1999: 131) These different theories on the different types of workingwomen are contributing factors in understanding the different models of gender relations. What is also a factor that must be considered in this regard is the states approach towards gender relations.

The Male-Breadwinner/ Female- Part timer can be said to have developed from the growth of equal opportunities and the expansion of white-collar jobs. This model allows for women to be part of the work force while also taking care of the family. The growth of the model has come from the growth of the group of women known as 'adaptives' or 'drifters'.

The most dramatic changes of the structure of society in relation to gender relations and employment can be connected with the final two models. In both of these models women are dual- breadwinners. This means that these women would be 'committed' women in the sense that they part take full time in employment.

In the Dual-Breadwinner/ State Carer or Market Carer Model, it is the states approach to gender equality and relations that in effect defines who it is that

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looks after the children. As already stated the Scandinavian countries can be said to have the most overall approach to gender equality by providing for childcare. The state either provides direct childcare facilities or pays for childcare. This ensures that women have equal opportunities and outcomes in relation to employment.

Other countries, however, take a different approach, as they see child care as a market of its own. Ireland is a good example of one of these countries, as people pay others to look after their children so creating a demand for nannies, which then necessitates people to be trained to look after the children. The state can also take the approach of believing that it is women's jobs to look after the children and so will pay them to stay at home and look after them. This can be said to be not promoting the more progressive models and reverting back to the previous simple Male-Breadwinner Model.

The final model of Dual-Breadwinner/ Dual-Carer is the ideal model, which as of yet cannot be said to have been fully implemented in any country. The closest that has come so far are in the Scandinavian countries whereby equal opportunities and outcomes does not only apply to women, but also to men.

Overall what can be said is that over the last few decades there have been a number of changes in relation to gender and employment. This can be seen from the changes in gender development, gender equality, and also the changes in values, science and society. All these changes have led to changes and restructuring of European Societies through changing peoples

attitudes towards women working and also in how working women are treated and provided for.

This largely depends on the states attitude toward gender equality and treatment, and what has been seen is that different European countries take different approaches to this, and so while European Societies are restructuring they are doing so at a different pace. It not only depends on the states attitude, however, but also those of employers. While women may have so far shown themselves to be equally able as men in a number of jobs there are still number of obstacles in their way at management level, i. e. the 'Glass Ceiling'.

Another aspect of these societies that can be said to be changing is in the family life. Previously it was strongly felt that men went out and worked and that women stayed at home and watched over the children. The increased numbers of women working has changed this approach and now many children are influenced by members outside of the family and by school. It has yet to be seen how this will affect society in the future, but what may be seen is a reduction of the emphasis that is placed on the family.

And so while it can be said that there the restructuring of gender relations and employment has led to a restructuring of European Societies, there is still a way to go before we seen complete gender equality. As well as this there are also a number of changes to European Societies, which will inevitably come about due to this restructuring, and how this will be seen will be interesting to assess.