

Gender Relations and Poverty in Advanced European Welfare States – Lessons to Learn from South Africa

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1 Introduction

In the past two decades South Africa has experienced tremendous social change. The long-lasting fight against the apartheid regime has finally been successful. In 1994, free elections and an equal right to vote as a major path to democracy were introduced and a new government was elected by the people of South Africa. As my colleague Elaine Salo from University of Pretoria, South Africa, has pointed out in her impressive key note address to this conference, the resistance of the African National Congress (ANC) and other social movements in South Africa was carried out to a broad extent by women, who play an important role in political movements in South Africa. The resistance of the people of South Africa against the apartheid regime has not yet, however, resulted in overcoming corruption and the old structures of social inequality. However, the social movements of South Africa have shown that change is possible.

In this article I want to show that the chances of bringing more women into science and especially into the field of the technology, the natural sciences and mathematics are pre-structured by the political and social structure provided in each single nation-state. I suggest that looking at women in science requires a multi-level gender perspective. We have to take into consideration how the political system, the political institutions and the social benefit schemes shape gender relations in a way that supports or prevents women from labour market participation and, in particular, from proceeding in their careers to attain higher positions in science, in private business or in the public sector by setting up both direct incentives as well as barriers for women when they are building their professional careers. The first level of analysis refers to the social and political structures erected in science institutions and within which women and men carry out their

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job orientations and professional careers. Secondly, in order to explain women's participation in science we have to look at the institutional level in the sciences and describe the logic of the rationality of institutions in science. We need to identify institutional barriers for women to access the sciences and we need to analyse factors that promote women's careers in science. On the third level we look at the micro-level in order to shed light on how women develop their job orientations and their personal careers.

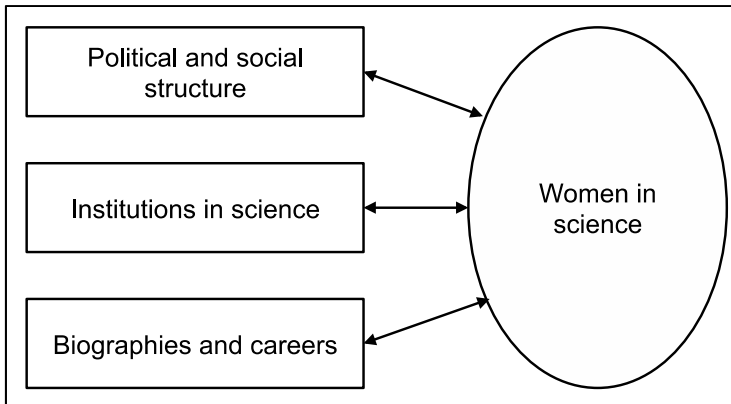


Figure 1: Levels of a multi-level gender perspective on women in science

In this article, on the first level of analysis I focus on the political structure of advanced European welfare states in order to shed light on the interrelation between political structure and women's labour market participation, as well as women in science in particular. The following contributions of the first section in this book are mainly focused on an analysis of the second level, the institutional level, in order to explain improvements as well as the still existing lack of participation of women in science in general and in the field of engineering and technology in particular. The second part of the book gathers contributions which look more closely at women's careers in science and address the third level of gender analysis of women in science. Finally, Dorian Woods and Karin Bodewits/Philipp Gramlich return to the focus on the political structure, namely, the family support for women in science provided or not provided by diverse welfare states.

2 The political structure of the German welfare state – wage centred and marriage oriented

In Germany at the beginning of the 20th century women did not even have the right to vote. Women had to fight for this right, which was only granted in Germany in 1918. The beginning of the 20th century was also a time when German universities slowly opened up to women, although one should not overlook the fact that we do find some women in science in Germany even earlier than that. Today in Germany, if we look at the formal rights bestowed on women, we speak of formal equality between men and women. Formally, men and women have equal rights to vote, equal access to schools and universities, equal rights in the labour market and equal rights to social benefits in the welfare state. However, the way the German welfare state is designed leads to a situation where, in the end, we are still facing factual inequality between men and women in the labour market, as in all earning-related benefits provided by the German welfare state.

This observation can be explained as follows: The German and the Austrian welfare states were among the earliest in Europe. Along with industrialisation around 1870, the workers' movement and its socialist ideas became stronger and stronger in Germany. Bismarck wanted to pacify the workers' movement and, in 1883, introduced compulsory health insurance in Germany. In 1884, statutory accident insurance was introduced, followed in 1889 by a statutory pension scheme. Mandatory unemployment insurance was introduced later in 1927 as a result of long negotiations between employers and unions about financing it. Additionally, a more sophisticated idea of solidarity based on a distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor delayed the introduction of the unemployment insurance in Germany. In Europe we maintain that, in those countries that introduced social insurance schemes relatively early, such as Germany and Austria, a strongly worker-oriented social security scheme can be observed up to the present day (Kaufmann 2003).

In general, one can say that there is a close connection between labour market participation and the social security system in Germany, which in the main consists of social insurances. Eligibility to benefits in the Germany social insurance scheme is based on three preconditions: firstly, only those who have worked in the labour market are entitled to benefits, secondly, those who receive benefits have to prove that they are willing to re-enter the labour market as soon as possible, and thirdly, the level of someone's prior earnings in the labour market determines the level of benefits in the case of eligibility. These three precon-

ditions lead to a structural priority of the labour market towards the social benefit system as an income resource, and benefit recipients are constantly oriented back towards labour market performance (Vobruba 1990).

The wage-centredness of the German insurance scheme has outlasted the foundation of the German Federal Republic, as well as Germany's reunification. Today the normative idea behind the existing compulsory social insurance scheme relies on an ideal of normal employment in the labour market, which is based on the following assumptions (Mückenberger 1985):

- Regular work in the labour market is dependent on gainful employment.
- Regular work is full-time employment of, nowadays, around 40 hours per week in Germany.
- Regular employment is continuous employment.
- Regular employment is based on an unlimited work contract.
- The worker is the male breadwinner of the family.
- The wage is high enough to sustain a family.
- The worker's life follows the life course of education, labour market performance and retirement.

Up to today, the strength of the German social insurance scheme is the fact that it provides decent social security for those who fulfil these normal assumptions in their work career. The weakness of it is the risk of poverty to all those who do not fulfil these assumptions in their work performance in the labour market. Because of labour market flexibility, we are seeing more and more employment that does not fulfil the assumptions of normal work. Over the last few decades, employment has become less secure and irregular, intermittent work in the low-wage sector has become more and more common (Pioch 2011).

Moreover, looking at these assumptions, it is obvious that female employment and women's work careers have never met these criteria of formal employment within the scope of the national insurance scheme in Germany. The employment rate for women in formal employment has always been lower than for men and the proportion of part-time employment is much higher among women than among men. In addition, the low-wage sector is predominately a female employment segment. Two-thirds of those employed in the low-wage sector of the labour market in Germany are women. In Germany, wages in general measured by real purchasing power have been going down over the past decades. Whether wages are high enough for families to only have one bread-

winner greatly depends on the person's position in the labour market. In recent years, irregular work, precarious wages and limited work contracts have been increasing especially for women. For many women continuous employment careers have never been a reality as long as child care and care work is left on the shoulders of women. As long as women are hindered in getting access to better paid jobs in the areas of technology and engineering, where wages are higher, but are forced to remain in the lower paid care and educational sector, female wages will not be high enough to gain enough social benefits in the social insurance scheme to cover living costs independently from their husbands' income.

Nowadays we are faced with a situation where, on the one hand, labour market flexibility has increased, so that employment that does not conform to the normative assumptions still underlying the social insurance scheme has become widespread. On the other hand, the individualisation of society raises the question of whether a flexible, highly individualised labour market can still be embedded in a social security scheme preventing poverty and providing social security to all in need. The question is how to adjust the social security scheme in order to prevent people, especially women, from falling into poverty within the German welfare state.

3 Poverty risk in the German welfare state

If we talk about poverty in advanced welfare states one needs to be aware of different measures for looking at poverty. Firstly, there is the perspective that looks at poverty in terms of extreme poverty. In terms of this view of poverty a threshold is defined as an absolute poverty line. This threshold indicates the minimum level of income someone needs in order to literally survive. The common international poverty line has in the past been roughly \$1 a day. In 2008, the World Bank came out with a revised figure of \$1.25 at 2005 Purchasing Power Parities. For South Africa in 2009 the Data of the World Bank report a population of 13.8% living on less than \$1.25 a day at 2005 international prices. In addition, the percentage of the population in South Africa living on less than \$2 a day at 2005 international prices was 31.3% in 2009.² A definition of an absolute poverty line is supposed to be an objective measurement. However, one has to keep in mind that an extreme poverty line is always an arbitrary poverty line. As

2 cf. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.2DAY>.

you move it to the top, the percentage of the population below the absolute poverty line increases.

In advanced welfare states like Germany and Austria, the extreme poverty line of the World Bank is not able to indicate poverty in these countries. Therefore much higher levels of absolute income levels are being used here, often related to the level of social assistance. In general, a second perspective for looking at poverty, that is, poverty measured as relative poverty, is much more common in advanced European welfare state. The term 'relative poverty' is taken as an indicator of social inequality. This indicator does not measure wealth or poverty, but low income in comparison to other residents in that country. Therefore, relative poverty does not necessarily imply a low standard of living but rather social inequality in a country. Likewise, in the EU-SILC study, this measure relies on a definition of an at-risk-of-poverty threshold, which is set at 60% of the national median equivalent disposable income after social transfers. In the EU member states the proportion of the population living below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold ranged from 9% in Sweden to 21% in Poland in 2009, while Germany was somewhere at the end of the top third with 13% of the population living at or below the risk-of-poverty threshold (European Commission 2007: 10).

A third way of defining poverty in European welfare states is the measurement of living conditions. Poverty is defined by various dimensions of living conditions, which determine one's life chances, like education, health care, child mortality or political and cultural participation. In recent years this perspective has become famous as the so-called 'capability approach' proposed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum (1993). This way of looking at poverty overcomes a materialistic interpretation of poverty, but it is less objective and overall it is less useful for the international comparison of poverty rates.

Finally, a fourth way to define a poverty line is by way of self-reflective political poverty definitions. In research I conducted on the images of social justice held by political decision makers in Germany and the Netherlands, it was found that politicians argue strongly for the politically defined poverty line of minimum social assistance. Once this threshold is introduced, it becomes overwhelmingly the reference point for the poverty lines politicians refer to in their daily business of policy making as their ideas of social justice (Pioch 2000).

If we look at poverty in Germany in terms of social inequality we find poverty unequally distributed among population groups and regions. In general, in Germany figures on poverty show a higher at-risk-of-poverty ratio of the popula-

tion in Eastern than in Western Germany, as well as in the North than in Southern Germany. In 2012 the at-risk-of-poverty ratio, as defined by EU-SILC (see above), of the former German Democratic Republic was 19.8% compared to 14% in Western Germany. In 2012, the poverty risk in Baden-Württemberg was 11.1% and that in Bayern 11.2%, while there was a poverty risk of 23.1% in Bremen and 22.3% in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (Bundesamt für Statistik 2012). Thus, the poverty risk in Northern Germany is almost twice as high as in the South, and the poverty gap between North and South is remarkably higher than the poverty gap between East and West.

In Germany, the unemployed are identified as vulnerable groups for the living at-risk-of-poverty threshold. Their poverty risk is as high as 70%, while the average poverty risk of unemployment in Europe is only 46%. The poverty risk of unemployed people in Germany is considered to be higher than in other advanced European welfare states, because of the short duration of eligibility for receiving unemployment insurance benefits (Zeit 2012).

The risk of poverty is also relatively high for people with a migrant background in Germany. Among them the poverty risk ratio in 2010 was as high as 26.0%, almost twice as high as for Germans without a migrant background (12%) (Statistisches Bundesamt 2011).

The poverty risk of men and women is slightly higher for women than men in Germany. The poverty risk of women in 2013 is 16.8%, while it is 14.9% for men. In Denmark, however, there is no difference between men and women, with a poverty risk of 13% for both sexes (Eurostat 2013).

However, if you look at those receiving social assistance (Grundsicherung für Arbeitsuchende), in 2012 the proportion was 63% women to 37% men (Statistisches Bundesamt 2013). These figures can be explained by the cumulative poverty risks women are faced with during the course of their lives. Firstly, unemployment and low wages are a significant risk of poverty for women. This is indicated by the fact that there is a higher proportion of women (64.8 %) than men (35.2 %) among those working in the low-wage sector. Secondly, if one looks at single parents the poverty risk is extremely high, reaching as high as 35%. However, one has to keep in mind that around 85% of all single parents are single mothers. Among single parents, single mothers are significantly more often dependent on social assistance (26.3%) than single fathers (6.1%) (Bundesregierung 2004).

In sum, these figures are not intended to give a complete overview of all poverty dimensions in European welfare states, but they do indicate that, in the

German welfare state, social inequality exists and women are faced with an enormous risk of poverty especially if they display such cumulative risk factors as a migrant background, unemployment, single mother, and low wages.

Compared to absolute poverty in South Africa or even other parts of the African continent, the issue of poverty in Germany might seem to be a luxury problem. However, in the following section, I argue that poverty and social inequality in Germany are not just a question of material welfare, but rather are becoming a severe problem for democracy in Europe.

From research conducted by the political scientist Armin Schäfer, we learn that voter turnout correlates negatively with unemployment (Schäfer 2010, 2012). In his empirical research, Schäfer looked at voter turnout in the city of Cologne for all three of the elections we have in Germany: national elections, federal elections, and elections for city councils. As always, the highest voter participation is observed in the national elections and the lowest at the community level. However, Schäfer's figures show striking results; that is, they show a significant correlation between a rising unemployment ratio in different electoral districts and a decrease in voter turnout. Heavy polling can be observed in districts with low unemployment, while low turnout is seen in districts with high unemployment rates. Thus, poverty undermines democratic participation by vulnerable groups.

Furthermore, from Armin Schäfer's research we can learn that democratic participation correlates not only with unemployment but also with the level of education. Schäfer looked at different forms of political action: voter turnout, signing a petition, public debate, citizens' initiatives, membership of a political party, critical consumerism, and rallies and online protests. Voter participation is a form of political action in which more than 80% of both the groups compared participated – those who hold a university degree and those who do not have a high school certificate. All other forms of political protest correlate significantly with the educational level. It is thus most unlikely that people with a low level of education will participate in an online petition or will become a member of a political party or will participate in a citizens' initiative. Signing a petition, participating in public debate and critical consumerism are all forms of political action that are much more likely to be undertaken by people with higher levels of education than with low levels of education. Again for Germany we identify a correlation between democratic participation, various forms of political action and the level of education someone has. Figures for Germany show that lower levels of education correlate with lower income and the risk of poverty. There-

fore, I draw the conclusion from this research that increasing poverty in the German welfare state is a threat to democracy. And as much as poverty affects women, the political participation of women in our democracy is likely to decrease.

In contrast to these findings, the complete opposite may be found in social movements and political action directed against the apartheid regime in South Africa, where social movements were driven to a large extent by poor women. In Germany, I argue that poverty undermines democracy and in particular prevents women from taking political action. In a local study conducted by the Institute for Interdisciplinary Gender Research and Diversity, we show that the lowest voter turnout for community elections in Kiel was among poor women with a migrant background (Pioch/ Thege 2011).

4 The gender gap in the labour market as a social security trap in Germany

Poverty and low income among women in the German welfare state is due to the close connection between social insurance benefits and labour market participation. The longer someone has worked and the higher his or her income in the labour market, the greater the benefits one is eligible for. However, if one looks at the German labour market, one observes that it is highly segregated between men and women. Two aspects of gender-specific segregation in the German labour market can be identified. Firstly, there is vertical segregation between higher income levels for men and lower income levels for women. Secondly, there is horizontal segregation between men and women according to the occupational areas that men and women are employed in. While women are overrepresented in the fields of low paid care work, men are more likely to be employed in the better paid technical jobs. In Germany, the gender pay gap, as an indicator of wage differences between men and women, is higher than the European average (Europäische Kommission 2006).

The lower income for women and the fewer chances they have for attaining higher positions in firms in the labour market, also referred to as the 'glass ceiling', has a tremendous effect in terms of the pensions women get in the German welfare state. In Germany, pension benefits are calculated on the basis of the duration of employment over the working life and the level of income someone has earned in the labour market. Because women interrupt employment more often than men because of raising children, they far less often fulfil the condition

of forty-five years of employment, which is assumed for a standard pension on a standard level, than men. Additionally, women's lower income in the labour market affects their level of pension negatively. This mechanism not only relates to the pension scheme, but also to all monetary benefits of the German compulsory social insurance scheme. Women receive lower benefits from the unemployment insurance than men owing to their lower income in the labour market. In the case of illness, statutory sick pay is also lower for women than men, also related to lower earnings in the labour market. In order to get an idea of the tremendous benefit gap in the German welfare state in this context one only has to look at the pension scheme. In 2012 the average pension of the long-term insured in the Western part of Germany for men was 1.180 euro, while for women it is only 554 euro. In the reunified part of East Germany the average pension of men was 1088 euro, while it is 651 euro for women (Sozialpolitik aktuell 2013). Men's pension is almost twice as much as that of women and women's pension in Eastern Germany is higher than in Western Germany owing to more continuous and better paid employment in the labour market.

5 Gender relations in European welfare states

The way paid work is distributed among men and women is also a question of gender relations in families. These are pre-shaped and influenced by the political structure given by the social security scheme and social legislation in each welfare state. In general, one can roughly differentiate four ideal ways in which gender relations are being shaped in advanced European welfare states (Pfau-Effinger 2000; Lewis 2001, 2004):

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>I</p> <p>Housewife model</p> | <p>III</p> <p>Double income</p> |
| <p>II</p> <p>Part-time work</p> | <p>IV</p> <p>Double care model</p> |

Figure 2: Gender relations in European welfare states

Paths to Career and Success for Women in Science

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