

Can We Talk about Conflict from the Feminist Economy?

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Abstract

In this theoretical paper we are going to try to argue whether it is possible to talk about conflict from the point of view of the Feminist Economy. We start from the fact that we consider that the idea of conciliation is the result of applying value judgements of the Market Economy and that those judgements deeply affect our life and, frequently, they hide a remarkable androcentric character.

We can make a relationship between the word conflict and the concept of “personal and labour life balance”.

1. Introduction

In this paper we are going to argue whether it is possible to talk about conflict from the point of view of the Feminist Economy, starting from the point that we consider that the idea of conflict is the result of applying the judgements of the market economy and that those judgements deeply affect our lives and, frequently, they hide a deep androcentric character.

If we talk about life balance is because we are accepting that personal and labour life are not only different circumstances but also opposite. Sometimes we use the concept “family and personal balance with labour life”, others, we make it more complicated talking about “the balancing of the personal, family and labour life”, so that we are accepting that personal and family life are also different, opposite.

We use the word “balance” supposing that family life is included into the personal life. And the fact of considering personal and labour life as opposite leads us to the concept “conflict”¹.

We will use the term “balance” accepting that family life is included into the personal life.

The paper is divided into three parts. After this introduction, we discuss the family-work and work-family conflict from the point of view of the Market Economy and the point of view of the Feminist Economy. Finally, we introduce some conclusions.

2. Discussion

The fact of considering personal and labour life as opposite leads us to the concept “conflict”.

¹ In Spanish the words conflict and balance are different, whereas in English, in this context there are no differences.

Study areas related to balance in the area of business organization appears in two ways: family-work conflict and work-family conflict. And it is considered that both of them negatively influence productivity, as it increases absentism, stress, the lack of compromise or personnel rotation, what even may produce a loss of talents. But feminine talents, as it rarely happens if we talk about masculine talents.

In order to solve these problems, human resources departments try to find policies that take control of these negative effects, that is to say, try to find “family-friendly policies”, which usually turn around flexibility (time and space flexibility), being the most commonly used flexible labor timetable, telework, part-time job or shared job, leave of absence, ...

In the society this is seen as something “natural”, nonetheless, we think that it is not, but they are influenced by the values that underlay in the market economy and which would not exist if we analysed the world, and specially, the concept of work, from the point of view of the Feminist Economy.

2.1. Balance from the point of view of the market economy

Market Economy explains the difference between labor life and personal life through economic concepts, that is why it is not considered the work done inside personal life as work, as there is no a salary paid for it (taking care of children, taking care of elders, housework, cooking, ...). The explanation of the behaviour of women in their job and at home developed the “New Home Economy” in the USA in the 60’s (Becker, 1965; Mincer, 1962), which introduces the option of domestic work as part of the dichotomy leisure-work.

Economic science, as other sciences, keep those androcentric bias (Rodríguez, 2010) which mainly appear in the dualism that characterized economy: economy versus non-economy; work versus non-work (leisure), reason versus intuition, market versus family, public versus private, ... give an unreal representation of the world. For the economic science, the first component of this duality is present in the economic study, while its opposite corresponds to ambits outside our study. On the other hand, there exists a hierarchy process which overestimates socially and individually the first concepts of each dualism respect to their opposites; even in some cases we could say that the second ones are invisibles for the economic science.

Even more, it is appreciated that these dualisms present a clear gender component being associated the first ones, and more valued, to the masculine and the second ones, are invisibles to the economy, to the feminine.

The most significant example, as we have already said, is the one represented by the dualism work versus non-work.

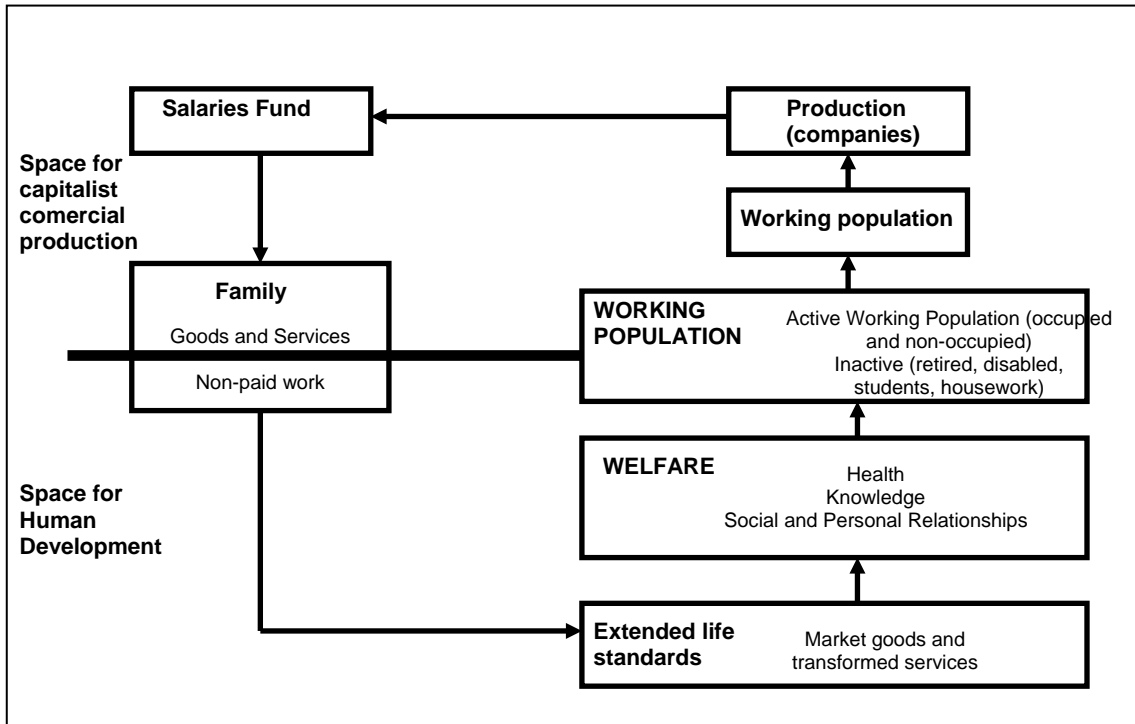
The term work is defined as the paid employment in the labor market, whereas the concept non-work or leisure encompasses all the activities not subject to the market laws.

The exit point to define work offer (and what is taught in the Economy faculties) is that people use their time in two activities: work and leisure. So that all the activities from the personal life are encompassed into the category leisure. But the most important thing is that domestic work and the work of taking care of people, and which are necessary for life sustainability (Carrasco, 2001), are outside the study area of the economic science. A clear sample of this can be seen if we observe the “Encuesta de Población Activa (EPA)” which is done in Spain by the “Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE)”, and which classifies housewives as “inactive” and, therefore, unproductive.

2.2. Feminist Economy

Feminist Economy is based in the suppression of these dualisms and propose a scheme which has into account all the activities necessary for achieving human wellbeing, giving place to the named “broaden rent circular flow” (Picchio, 2001).

Graphic 1: Broaden circular rent flow (Feminist Economy)



Source: Picchio, 2001.

Graphic 1 presents such scheme which, apart from the traditional production functions, known and recognized in the economic area, introduces social reproduction functions.

Specifically, it introduces non-paid work, that is to say, that realized inside the family and which realizes three economic functions:

1. The function of extension of the monetary rent (extended life standards): non-rewarded work transforms goods and services into real consumption (for example, cooking, washing-up, ...)
2. Expansion of the extended life level (effective welfare), which assures that transformed goods and services correspond to individual necessities to achieve adequate levels of education, health and social welfare (for example, cooking food taking into account the tastes of each family member, to maintain a certain order at home, offer personalized cares which are impossible to be offered by the system, ...)
3. Reduction function: selects the members of the family unit who will offer their services to business in exchange of a salary (occupied population). It is precisely

non-paid work the one which will allow that selected people to comply the requirements of the business jobs.

If we do not accept this, we are accepting the capitalist model based on the sexual division of work (Pérez, 2011: 137): *"that imposes as standard worker model that characterized as the "mushroom worker" (that which blooms everyday completely available for the market, without necessity of own care nor others care responsibility, and disappears once out of the business)"*.

According to Picchio (2011: 130), the most important thing in this scheme is that goods and services obtained with the salary and domestic work are rigorously interdependent, as well as the people that contribute with them.

No person may reach an adequate degree of welfare without an adequate combination of both kinds of activities.

From the point of view of the Feminist Economy, there exist certain works which do not have a substitute in the market, mainly those jobs related to the care of others. For example, we could hire a person who could take care of our ill father or who took our children to school, but sooner or later, our father will expect us to go to see him or our children will expect us to go and pick them up ... (can we maybe go to the market when our partner asks us for attention?)

To recognize that this kind of care activities do not have price, that is to say, they do not have value. Nonetheless, as Carrasco (2011) argues, this work "is basic for surviving, socializing and life quality and, in consequence, essential for market labor to be done". On the other hand, the concept dependency is broaden. When we talk about dependent people, we always refer to people unable to do a productive work, mainly in the labor market. But are not we all dependent? Everybody needs to feel they are loved, supported, recognized in their work. Could a person do an adequate productive work if he did not have an adequate emotional equilibrium? (could someone reach to be a perfect mushroom?) Is not it inside the family unit (it does not matter its composition) where we reach such an equilibrium?

In this scheme does not exit balance. There is a clear interdependence between goods and services obtained with the salary and the non-paid works which are realized at home which would not lead to any kind of conflict.

Why does conflict appear? Because market economy only takes into account one part of this flow, what takes part of the "space of capitalist business production" and leaves out of the analysis all the activities that belong to the space of human development.

This separation has a hierarchical process, where all the activities that appear in the upper part of the scheme are more valued than those in the lower part.

Nowadays, people's success is measured by their achievements in the monetarized labor market. Even more, it also has a clear gender bias. Functions in the space of human development are made mainly by women and men continue to ignore these tasks.

Amaia Pérez Orozco (2010) asks for attention about a data which detach from the questionnaires of the use of time: "The time dedicated to non-paid care work by heterosexual women, married with underage children, is higher than that dedicated by those who live on their own with children (that is to say, sharing their lives with a man does not mean to reduce work, when sharing it, but assuming more work, as they have to take care of them)"

3. Conclusions

In this paper we have studied the theme of balance as a term that emphasizes in itself the idea of conflict.

While the “fictitious” division that promotes market economy continues creating two opposite dimensions (personal life and labor life), the conflict is not going to disappear and the sensation of conflict will directly be related to the degree that a person feels that he is responsible of one or another dimension.

Of course, the solution comes on the hand of “responsibility”, but only recognizing, not only the importance of this domestic work and/or of cares, but also its absolute necessity to achieve human welfare, we will be able to progress in this way.

If we get to convince (and convince ourselves) that domestic work and cares work have the same value as market work, men will be ready to assume it.

4. International and managerial implications

The model contributes to two big changes:

- a) it recognizes non-paid work as “necessary” in order to achieve human welfare
- b) it recognized the economic functions of non-paid work, so it makes it susceptible to have an economic value.

Both changes are going to have impacts in the social and business ambit.

- a) As necessary work it will be a responsibility of every person (non-dependent) independently to his sex. Therefore, businesses will have to recognize anybody who makes a paid work, at least those that do not have a market substitute, and they will also have to put the means in order to the people to be able to realize their job without deterioration of their health².

The volume of this kind of non-paid work will vary along the life cycle and the personal circumstances, for example, when they have dependent people at their charge who need cares (children, elders and/or ill people). These circumstances can not be considered as personal options, what often justifies women discrimination and makes them renounce to their professional careers. On the contrary, society in a collective way needs these kind of works if we want to maintain a quality human capital that guarantees our survival.

- b) The fact that this kind of work has an economic value, mainly at a social level, implies that the Society in its total must assume its degree of responsibility, so that the cost is not assumed by the companies or the workers, as it happens nowadays.

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Footnotes

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³ This would justify different ways of flexibility and specifically telework

Acknowledgments

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