

OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION OF WOMEN IN RURAL INDUSTRY: THE CASE OF CASTILLA Y LEÓN

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I. INTRODUCTION

The incorporation of women to productive work has occurred with hardly any changes in their relationship to reproductive aspects, with the burden of what Palmer refers to as «reproductive tax» and, above all, without adaptation of labour market structures. Gender-based differences such as social construction determine different entry modes to the labour market conditioned by factors such as: the burden of reproductive work, dominant family and social models, existing preconceptions with regard to differential skills related to each gender, the lack of recognition of female knowledge as a qualification etc. The result is a process of labour entry marked by the segregation of women both horizontally and vertically and, as such, considerable discrimination in pay, access to power and economic decision-making.

II. ACTIVITY AND FEMALE WORK

When referring to female work it must be remembered that we are referring to a far more complex fact than a salaried activity as a self-employed worker or as an employee. It is the requirements and rhythms of reproductive work that dictate the ways and strategies of labour entry by women in such a way that the problems originating from reconciling the needs of family life and work can condition the type of work and, above all, the type of working day chosen (always from amongst the options offered by the local labour market to which each woman has access).

Although there is no doubt regarding the progress made by women in joining productive work as seen over recent decades, it is also true that significant conditioning factors continue to exert their influence thus limiting it. The unquestionable incorporation of women to productive work, that has undoubtedly affected a large number of them is, nevertheless, a process that has been led by the youngest amongst them and in particular by those living in urban areas. Nevertheless, this leap to productive work has been fraught with difficulties,

in particular originating from the inflexibility of labour markets where many stereotypes continue to persist with regard to «female» and «male» work and, of course, from the constraints influencing labour and social progress by women that are imposed by structures that are clearly masculinised, the so-called «glass ceiling».

1. Horizontal Segregation in Female Work

The persistence of stereotypes with regard to female and male activities has traditionally guided women towards work related to services for the population and the ethics of care such as shops, hotels and catering or education and health. This fact has been reinforced during the last decade by restructuring processes in agricultural and industrial activities and the strong boost to services that has led to substantial changes in the characteristics of the Spanish labour market, with particular emphasis on the case of female productive work.

On the whole, it can be said that more extensive training of the population in general, and of women in particular, in conjunction with the improvement in lifestyle has stimulated an intense process of social and economic development that has enabled these women to join a progressively broader employment market better suited to their training. Nevertheless, the structure and mechanisms that dictate how this market operates clearly continue to be androcentric. Society, and women themselves to a large extent, have not accepted that their incorporation to productive activity must go hand in hand with changes in reproductive roles. Thus, women have come to a crossroads that forces them to accept masculine labour structures with regard to rules, times and methods, however without relinquishing their reproductive functions. The result is a difficult balance that translates into sacrifices in both areas and that, in the specific case of productive activity, significantly limits their full occupational development and contributes to maintaining a strong vertical segregation in the labour market.

2. Vertical Segregation in Female Work

Vertical segregation is as important as horizontal segregation, and perhaps more significant from the viewpoint of gender discrimination. Understood as the progressive reduction in the presence of women at the most executive and valued employment levels, essentially managerial positions, it shows the serious difficulties experienced by women in reconciling working days that are increasingly long and demanding on an individual's availability with a desire to respond to their family responsibilities. This is an even more serious fact because it affects all kinds of jobs since «...*regardless of the labour sector analysed, including the most feminised ones, the proportion of women decreases as one goes further up the pyramidal hierarchy, to the extent that their presence in positions of power and their assumption of labour responsibilities is minimum.*» (Sarrió et al. 2002, 56). This is referred to as the «glass ceiling...the invisible limit that prevents women from joining men on the same level» (Gallego 1994, 21).

The result is that female candidates are hardly ever considered for executive and/or appointment positions (with the exception of public positions where the ideal of equality is gaining ground) and, in some cases, it is women themselves who reject these positions since,

as far as they are concerned, the gains (power and capacity of decision) do not outweigh the losses (personal relationships and family life). As such, a tried and tested fact is that women who occupy executive positions do not often have family responsibilities (especially young children) compared to men who are happy to show off their families, even large ones (Freixas 2004).

Women therefore, contrary to the great diversity of opinions by men, have almost exclusively only two labour access channels: either through unskilled work, preferably in services and industry, or through a high level of training (generally in higher education) that qualifies them for positions of responsibility. However, in this case they prefer to work as employees and, in particular, in the civil service where they are offered objective access, even if their subsequent career is not exempt from the limitations imposed by the «glass ceiling», in addition to problems of disadjustment of women for the positions they occupy for being overqualified.

3. Qualifications as Masculine «Creation» and the Lack of Recognition for Feminine Knowledge

When asking those who run companies the reasons for employing women, the answer given most often refers to the «skill» «care» and «know-how» of women for specific tasks. As such, and as indicated by Larrañaga and Echevarría «...company owners, and often employees themselves, perceive these acquired skills in the private scope of the family and, above all, in tasks of attending to others, as qualities that form part of their personal and feminine identity. In other words, it is considered that these skills are not acquired as the result of an effort to learn or from experience but that they correspond to «innate feminine qualities.» As a result, and given that their acquisition is not considered as the fruit of effort or training, it is assumed that they do not deserve a specific salary in the labour market» (Larrañaga and Echebarría, 70). For the specific case of industry, as early as in 1966 Madeleine Guilbert indicated that the characteristics of jobs occupied by women were similar to domestic chores: repetitive tasks, short sequences, meticulousness, nervous tension, (Guilbert 1966) contributing a series of «skills» that remain unrecognised in the qualification standards of jobs.

The result, as indicated by Fouquet, is «the lack of recognition of the qualification of female employment entails concealing inequalities associated with qualifications.... Professional categories, on the other hand, appear linked to those who occupy the position and not to its functions, which results in an undervaluing of the positions occupied by women.» (Fouquet 2003, 364).

III. OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION IN THE RURAL INDUSTRY OF CASTILLA Y LEÓN

1. Rural Industry and Territory in Castilla y León

The territorial organisation of the manufacturing fabric in Castilla y León is defined by the high selective concentration capacity of industrial functions in urban areas and the diffuse localisation of manufacturing transformation activities in rural areas. The vast majority of companies that comprise the rural productive fabric are local initiatives whilst the presence of national and multinational companies in the rural business fabric is very limited. The

predominant local nature of business initiatives also determines that the vast majority of companies are financed and managed by families and, therefore, the dominant model is that of a single-plant company that concentrates all industrial functions such as management, production, distribution, logistics and marketing in only one work centre.

Thus, this is a business structure with a tendency to facilitate the incorporation of women although the quantitative results are less than expected and the difficulties resulting from horizontal and functional segregation of the workforce because of their gender continue to be highly significant.

2. Women in the Rural Industry of Castilla y León

As far as the participation of women is concerned, industrial activity does not carry relevant weight in female employment in Castilla y León. According to the 2001 census, only 15,547 women who live in rural areas were occupied in industrial activities and, moreover, a large number of them, although rural residents, worked in companies located in urban and urban fringe areas. According to the field work undertaken, 29.4% of workers employed in the region's rural industry are women. Horizontal segregation is highly evident in the industrial work of women and can be seen in the concentration of more than two thirds of women workers in two types of activities: agriculture and food and textile. It is obvious that a role assignment remains that associates female workers to activities such as the selection and handling of food or the clothing industry that, in the collective imagination, continue to be linked to «women's chores».

3. Gender Stereotypes and Functional Segregation

When assigning functions in industrial companies, it is noted that the prevalence of productive tasks is higher amongst the male labour contingent than for female staff. Amongst women, however, more responsibilities are assumed in relation to management tasks, administration and R&D&I. In comparison to this tendency as a whole it shows that local companies, firms that are not family-run and large companies are more inclined to invert these gender differences by proving to be far more willing to recruit women in manufacturing facilities. For their part, in national and multinational companies, in addition to employing women for administrative tasks, the appointment of women for higher level functions and more responsibility is much more frequent.

From a qualitative point of view, the presence of women in quality control and research is outstanding and contradicts the classic model of female participation in unskilled work or administrative jobs. With regard to management positions, including in this category company owners to plant managers and managing directors, through to members of the boards of directors, in less than 25% of these cases company managers are women or there is a woman with an executive position. In various cases there are female company owners or members of the boards of directors whose presence is justified by «family inheritance». It is, however, interesting to take note of a certain number of young women who hold management or executive positions in plants where there is no personal or family relationship with the company, even in sectors that are traditionally masculinised such as metal.

4. Result: Instability and Complementarity of Income

The consideration and assessment of female work in rural industry are also explicitly determined by the nature of the contractual relations between companies and female workers, with there being considerable gender differences in the types of contracts offered. Amongst women, the signing of permanent contracts corresponds to 67%. This figure is almost ten points lower than for male workers. The high level of instability for female workers and their predominance in unskilled jobs, determines a relatively low level of income, in many cases discontinuous and, as such, insufficient for guaranteeing the economic independence of women workers. And, the idea of complementarity of female income is still very deep-rooted. This idea underlies both the perception of company managers and the female workforce itself to the point that female work is considered as complementary and secondary compared to male work, with men considered as the family breadwinners regardless of what they earn. It can be affirmed that the traditional male breadwinner model clearly persists in the language and behaviour of female industrial workers in rural areas.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The rural industry in Castilla y León clearly exemplifies the difficulties faced by women when trying to join a labour market defined by structures, organisation, time distribution and business mentality that are predominantly androcentric. Preconceived ideas regarding what a woman «can do» and «knows» exert a decisive influence, even on structures marked by segregation both horizontally and vertically, which are accepted to a large extent by female workers themselves. This is, perhaps, the most alarming aspect.

