Gender Norms and the Economy: Insights from Social Research

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ABSTRACT

Feminist economics has taken up the concept of gender norms, most commonly conceived as a constraint on women's voice and gender equality. This contribution examines the concept of gender norms and summarizes key insights from sociology and other social sciences. Norms do not float free: they are materialized in specific domains of social life and are often embedded in institutions. An automatic process of "socialization" cannot explain the persistence of discriminatory norms. Norms change in multiple ways, both in response to broad socioeconomic change and from the dynamics of gender relations themselves. Restructuring of gender orders, and diversity and contradictions in gender norms, give scope for activism. The rich literature on normativity supports some but not all approaches in feminist economics and indicates new possibility for the field.

KEYWORDS

Norms, gender relations, feminist economics, sociology, interdisciplinary

INTRODUCTION

Among the most pervasive features of modern economies are gender divisions of labor, gender inequalities in income and wealth, gender hierarchies in industrial enterprises, gender differences in rights of ownership, and gender differences in conditions of employment and patterns of unemployment (Heidi Gottfried 2013). Yet gender questions have been marginalized, and often ignored, in mainstream economics. This absurdity has been solidly critiqued by feminist economists, who have developed fresh ways of describing and analyzing economic realities.

In making their critique, feminist economists have frequently drawn on the concept of "gender norms." Gender norms are often mentioned as a feature of intrahousehold bargaining; as an influence on women's labor force participation; as determining women's access to land and resource rights; and more. Here feminist economists are drawing on sociology, social

psychology, anthropology, and cultural studies, as well as the international policy discourse on gender equality, which makes frequent reference to gender norms as a hindrance to gender justice (Raewyn Connell and Rebecca Pearse 2014). In these fields there is a rich body of research, theory and applied knowledge that illuminates the idea of norms and its specific application to gender. Norms, to a first approximation, can be understood as collective definitions of socially approved conduct, stating rules, or ideals; and gender norms are such definitions applied to groups constituted in the gender order – mainly, to distinctions between women and men. A more extended discussion of the concept is below. Gender norms are embedded in social life and institutions and should be understood relationally. There is a risk in sociological argument, especially in "socialization" models, of underestimating the agency of social actors. This can be overcome by recognizing the historicity of social process. We emphasize the collective agency of feminist activism in securing social change, as well as the multiple directions of change.

In this contribution, we first consider how feminist economists apply the concept of gender norms; then we turn to how norms can be conceptualized and where the idea of norms sits in gender analysis. We then examine the research literature across the social sciences, describing key empirical studies and findings that bear on three broad themes: how gender norms are realized in social life; how gender norms persist; and how gender norms change through time. Finally, we reflect on the implications of this literature for understanding contemporary economic life.

We draw deliberately on a wide range of research and debate from across the world. Our study arose from discussions in a recent United Nations forum; and even if it had not, we consider that the prioritization of Global-North experience and theoretical work in the social sciences must be challenged (Raewyn Connell 2007). However imperfectly, we seek to connect knowledge arising from different parts of the world economy.

THE IDEA OF NORMS IN FEMINIST ECONOMICS

Feminist economists take issue with the androcentric bias in mainstream economic theories, whether neoclassical, institutionalist, or Marxist. In making this critique, the idea of gender norms has come into play in two different ways. Feminist economists have highlighted the gender norms underlying theoretical concepts and judgments about what constitutes good economic scholarship. They have also developed alternative theoretical models for economics, in which the concept of gender norms plays a substantive role.

We shall be brief about the first point, which is now familiar in feminist economics. From the 1970s, feminists began drawing attention to the gender norms of their disciplines. They cast a critical eye on the

overrepresentation of men in economics, the intellectual neglect of issues that impact women, and the neglect of gender in economic analysis of issues such as poverty (Marianne A. Ferber and Julie A. Nelson 1993). Julie A. Nelson (1995) has argued that economics is based on conventionally masculine and Western beliefs about objectivity, logic, and abstraction. Key tenets of neoclassical economic theory are based on a stylized model of rational economic man, who is constructed as a self-sufficient adult.

In much economic analysis, the family is not so much ignored as subsumed under a presumptively male "head of household," a move that disguises power and exploitation within family relationships (Elizabeth Katz 1997). Gary Becker's (1981) "new home economics" was based on a Victorian-era model of the heteronormative family, ignoring the massive diversity of real households and families (Barbara Bergmann 1995). The feminist economic critique is also directed at Marxist and Weberian economic analysis, which depict care work as happening inside the family and outside the market (Nancy Folbre 1986, 1994). Marxist feminists pointed out that women's care labor made the current and next generation of workers productive – homemakers, as well as paid workers, were required for the extraction of surplus value.

In a variety of ways, then, unrecognized gender norms were shown to underpin the major schools of economic analysis. Since the 1990s, an alternative feminist political economy has been forged. There is now a sophisticated literature on care and labor markets (for example, Diane Elson [1999], Paula England [2005]) and on gender relations and macroeconomic policy (for instance, Diane Elson and Nilüfer Çagatay [2000]; Stephanie Seguino and Caren Grown [2006]). The new feminist economics has been much concerned to forge new and more explicit connection between normativity and economic analysis (Lourdes Benería 2003; Ingrid Robeyns 2003).

In this literature, a second use of the idea of gender norms has become prominent. Bargaining has been used in attempts by economists to model household decisions, and feminist scholars have used norms as a means to broaden the "bargaining" metaphor. Katz (1997: 37) proposes that paying attention to social norms will provide guidance on the expansion of the formal economic model, which usually assumes a unitary household, to multiple family members.

There are differences in the extent of revision. Shelly Lundberg and Robert A. Pollak's (1993) work on intrahousehold bargaining assumes that norms are exogenous to decisions in the home, whereas Bina Agarwal (1997), Amartya Sen (1990), and M. V. Lee Badgett and Nancy Folbre (1999) treat norms as endogenous to households. Sen calls these alternatives "qualitative bargaining frameworks." They paint a picture of the household as a site of negotiation, even contestation, over gender norms and the distribution of resources among family members.

A crucial feature of these revisions of the bargaining model is that gender norms are treated as constraints on behavior that have important material aspects. Folbre depicts norms as a feature of what she calls "structures of collective constraint," which include gender, race, class, age, sexuality, and nation, and span production and social reproduction, the market, the workplace, the family, and the state. There are

> sets of asset distributions, rules, norms, and preferences that empower given social groups. These structures locate certain boundaries of choice, but do not assign individuals to a single position based on ownership of productive assets. People occupy multiple, often contradictory positions, because they belong to multiple groups. (Folbre 1994: 51)

Agarwal (1997: 15) proposes an expanded conceptualization of norms. In relation to intrahousehold bargaining, she argued norms can operate in four ways: norms set limits on what can be bargained about; they determine or constrain bargaining power; they affect how bargaining is conducted (for example, covertly or overtly, aggressively or quietly); and they constitute a factor to be bargained over, that is, social norms can be endogenous, themselves subject to negotiation and change.

In such arguments, material resources are firmly linked to gender norms, including norms that become contested in household bargaining. The idea of "norms" becomes a way of including in the analysis the social patterns of gender that impinge on economic processes but have been either disregarded, or presupposed, in conventional economic reasoning. At times, authors make reference to gender norms and "gender roles" interchangeably. Terms like "socialization" and "social reproduction" are frequently used, but rarely discussed in detail. A common-sense sociology is, in effect, used to challenge the common sense of mainstream economics.

There are risks in this approach. One is that norms can become a static variable in formal bargaining models still faithful to the rationalist view of human behavior (Deborah M. Figart 1997). Another is that women's resistance to gender norms becomes implicitly understood as a rational strategy to make the most of "rules of the game" (Deniz Kandiyoti 1998). Yet another risk is that a sociological structuralism creeps in and removes women's agency from view (Naila Kabeer 2002). There are feminist approaches that treat norms in a more dynamic way, such as Stephanie Seguino's (2007) study of international changes in gender norms. But Seguino's reliance on data from international survey research that uses a highly abstracted method of studying values raises other difficulties. In contrast, Kabeer (2002) and Bina Agarwal (1994, 2010) use a mix of qualitative and quantitative data to create fine grained data about the

dynamics of gender norms. The result is a "middle ground" that recognizes the mutual interdependence of structure and agency (Kabeer 2002: 47).

To make further progress in understanding the dynamics of a gendered economy requires a more searching examination of the conceptualization of norms and the social-scientific research on normative processes.

THE CONCEPT OF GENDER NORMS

The social-scientific literature and policy discourse that speaks of norms has a very wide scope. "Norms" may refer to values, attitudes, preferences, conventions, assumptions, ideologies, traditions, customs, culture, rules, laws, beliefs, or even rights. The term is vague and often ambiguous. It can however be given a more precise meaning.

The meanings just listed all refer to the symbolic or cultural domain of human life and involve practices of interpretation, communication and meaning giving. This domain is one of the four dimensions in the conceptual model of gender relations that we have proposed (Raewyn Connell and Rebecca Pearse 2015). The other dimensions are power relations (the political, understood as present in all social institutions including the family), production and distribution relations (the economic, not confined to the money economy), and cathexis (emotional attachment, negative as well as positive). These dimensions can be analytically separated though in social practice they are constantly interwoven.

"Norms" are specific to the symbolic dimension. It is important to recognize that normative analysis does not account for the whole of any social process. That is the basic flaw in the concept of "sex roles," which reduces social structure to a question of conformity to norms.

Within that domain of symbolism, norms may reside in the consciousness of an individual. Economists who try to calculate preference schedules are treating norms this way. But norms are more fundamentally properties of a community, society or organization. That is to say, they are features of a *collective* life. Gender norms in this sense may be embedded in the promotion rules of a government department, in a television station's definition of what information counts as "news," or in an advertising company's imagery of fashionable women. The implicit gender norms of institutions are an important feature of modern gender orders. Modern cultural studies have shown how a normative assumption of heterosexuality runs through whole discursive systems and provides hegemonic definitions of gender for many societies (Kristen Schilt and Laurel Westbrook 2009).

The policy documents that use a concept of gender norms generally invoke the idea of custom or stereotype, a fixed and discriminatory pattern that needs to be changed. An example from the Beijing Platform for Action, 1995:

124. (k) Adopt all appropriate measures, especially in the field of
education, to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of
men and women, and to eliminate prejudices, customary practices
and all other practices based on the idea of the inferiority or
superiority of either of the sexes and on stereotyped roles for men and
women.(United Nations Women [UNW]1995)

A "norm" in this sense specifies what is customarily proper practice, what
is socially required of a particular social group. The idea is one of accepted
rules of conduct. "Gender norms," specifically, mean differential rules
of conduct for women and men, including rules governing interactions
between women and men. (Gender norms may also specify conduct and
define relationships for specific groups of women or men, for instance
fathers, soldiers, heterosexual men, or footballers; this paper is mainly
concerned with broad divisions between women and men.)

Many such rules specify the social spaces or arenas that are proper for
men versus those that are proper for women. In education, for instance,
significant parts of the curriculum are coded this way. Mathematics, physics,
computing, and engineering are widely coded masculine, while drama,
art, literature, and psychology are coded feminine. Vocational education
is strongly gender-coded, with strong effects on enrollment: programs for
engineering, computing, and mechanical training are taken up by boys,
while personal services and training for office work show concentrations of
girls (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2012).

Much of the time, such rules may be barely articulate. They become
sharply defined when openly enforced – such as the implicit rule of women
being sexually available only to men, enforced by the violence against
lesbian women by gangs of men that the media call "corrective rape" (Mary
Hames 2011: 88–9).

With gender norms understood in this way, two issues become
immediately relevant. The first concerns the idea of "socially required"
conduct or "accepted" rules. In much of the policy literature, and in the
older sex-role literature, social consensus was simply assumed. But that
assumption is dangerous – both empirically and conceptually. Empirically,
because in a given society there may be little agreement about gender
prescriptions or even open disagreement. As we shall show later in this
paper, norms acting as hindrance to gender equality are not the only
kind of gender norms that exist; there are also norms that support
gender equality. Different, even contradictory, norms can exist in the same
society. Indeed, we would argue this is usually the case in contemporary
societies.

Conceptually, the *appearance* of consensus may reflect not real social
agreement in the symbolic domain, but the operation of power and the
achievement of hegemony. For instance, much public discussion of "the

male role" – defined in terms of dominance, aggression, competitiveness, lack of emotion, and so on – reflects not a universal pattern in men's lives so much as a hegemonic masculinity that is ascendant for the time being. It is fully enacted only by a minority and coexists with other patterns of masculinity (Raewyn Connell 2005).

The second issue concerns the relationship between norm and practice. Policy discourse assumes that norms do shape practices, and as we have seen, economics commonly treats norms as constraint on choice. Normative analysis would indeed be an academic exercise if there were no such connection. But we must not assume that the connection is always direct or tight. The very fact that there are mechanisms of enforcement for rules – policing, both informal and official – shows that conformity is often lacking. Even the old literature of roles in sociology and social psychology spoke of the latitude that existed in individuals' conformity to norms. We are now more conscious of the active and collective *contestation* of gender norms in social movements – from feminism, to queer activism, to the new men's activism against gender violence (Abhijit Das and Satish K. Singh 2014).

But if we abandon the assumption of a direct translation of norm into action, we should not do that by simply softening the idea of norms. The symbolic – and specifically, the prescriptive – element in social practice remains important. Social practice is not just the repetition and reproduction of existing patterns, though that is what is emphasized in conventional social theory. Social practice is, to use the expression of the Czech philosopher Karel Kosík (1976), ontoformative: it brings social reality into existence, through historical time. This is precisely applicable to gender: gender can be defined as the ensemble of social practices through which human reproductive bodies are brought into history and become part of the formation of human society (Connell and Pearse 2015). The *steering* of this process is an important determinant of what happens in our lives; and that involves the realm of normativity, the specification of proper practice, the collective determination of the directions along which human lives should unfold through time (Raewyn Connell 1987; Sarah Fenstermaker and Candace West 2002).

This points back to another element in the policy documents about gender equity. As well as custom and tradition derived from the past, "norms" can also refer to the way things ought to be in the future. Thus, UN Women's recent strategic plan included that

A comprehensive set of global norms, policies and standards on gender equality and women's empowerment is in place that is dynamic, responds to new and emerging issues, challenges and opportunities and provides a firm basis for action by Governments and other stakeholders at all levels. (UNW 2011)

36

Norms, that is to say, also have an element of transcendence. They may express social utopias, the imagination of how things could be.

At a social level, such norms express symbolically (in language, discourse, or representation) the element of purpose and transformation in human practice; they specify vectors of historical change. This is not only at the macro level. When we speak of the gender norms embedded in an institution, such as a school or a corporation, we are fundamentally speaking about how this institution's gender arrangements are projected through time, in the practices of the people and groups who compose it. It is not surprising that there is so much tension and contestation around gender norms.

When examining either research or practical experience, it soon becomes clear that norms are a realm of debate, dissent, and sometimes, contradiction. Even with very broadly framed ideals, it is rare for every member of a society to share the same beliefs. Many modern communities are far from homogeneous. At a deeper level of investigation, norms in the sense of individual beliefs are complex, often inconsistent, and sometimes contradictory. Emotions can contradict principles, attachments are ambivalent (to use the psychoanalytic term), and contradictory views can be held side by side. For all these reasons, norms are subject to historical change.

THE SOCIAL REALIZATION OF NORMS

Gender norms can be stated abstractly, as they are in opinion-poll items; but what really matters for the economy is the way norms are materialized in social life. There is a wealth of research that bears on this process, in different institutional realms. We will consider examples from education, manufacturing industry, rural society, and the public realm.

Education systems are among the most important sites of recent change in gender relations, as documented in the excellent UNESCO report *Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality* (2003). A massive worldwide growth in girls' participation in school, women's literacy, and women's access to advanced education has occurred, both in global North and South (Madeleine Arnot, Miriam David, and Gaby Weiner 1999; Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi and Valentine M. Moghadam 2005).

Yet education is often defined as the transmission of existing culture from one generation to the next, and is widely viewed as crucial to the reproduction of gender norms. The growth of educational access for girls and women has not been smooth. In some regions, it has been halted by neoliberal economic restructuring; in others, contested by fundamentalist religious groups. As the UNESCO report pointed out, many normative forces might operate to hold girls back: social expectations about education and employment; family decision making in which women's interests were

37

subordinated to men's; girls' household labor and care obligations, such as during the HIV/AIDS pandemic; early marriage or rites of passage; sexism in the curriculum; the cost, or inadequate supply, of schooling; and more. Yet the same societies have found the resources, and the collective will, to make a vast change happen.

It is clear that children do receive norms from the adult world but not passively. They are active in reproducing and making norms, and enforcing them among each other, for instance by ridicule (Máirtín Mac an Ghaill 1994). The active construction of gender norms creates informal gender hierarchies within each gender, defining hegemonic masculinities and desirable femininities among youth and contrasting them with abjected or marginalized groups. Studies as diverse as C. J. Pascoe's (2007) recent ethnography in a racially diverse working-class high school in the United States, Fengshu Liu's (2006) description of schooling in rural China, and Bagele Chilisa's (2006) close-focus study of sex education in a Botswana high school, show these processes in fine detail.

In the world of work, divisions of labor often associate women's work with normative definitions of women as caring, gentle, self-sacrificing, and industrious – that is, as good mothers – and men's work with normative masculinities embodying physical power, authority, and mechanical skill. These stereotypical views need not correspond to actual psychological differences between women and men, which are much smaller than popularly supposed (Janet Shibley Hyde 2005). Striking evidence comes from Judy Wajcman's (1999) study of women managers in high-technology multinational firms based in the UK. Women in management are required to act like the men – and they often do so. They too work long hours, fight in office wars, put pressure on their subordinates, and focus on profit. Women rising into management therefore must reorganize their domestic lives so that they, like men, can shed responsibilities for childcare, cooking, and housework. Wajcman found no support for the assumption that women in management carry out a more caring, nurturant, or humane approach to the job.

In their study of Italian corporations, Sylvia Gherardi and Barbara Poggio (2001) identify another important process where women have arrived at a management level. When they did, a "dance" of adjustment and compromise with men played out (Gherardi and Poggio 2001). Women enacted attitudes and behaviors that put men at ease. Showing meekness, having a posture of humility, and refraining from competitive behavior can allow women to defend their space within organizations. In this case, normative gender order was reconstituted through organization rituals, where people acknowledge their membership of the gender order.

Below the managerial level, gender relations are more diverse. The dominant economic form of our period, the transnational corporation, is a gendered organization with a complex internal gender regime,

linking transnational managerial masculinities with local gender-divided workforces (Juanita Elias 2008). The complex politics of gender norms in factory settings is shown by Nancy Plankey-Videla's (2012) ethnography *We Are in This Dance Together*, based on nine months' observation, and a decade of interviews, with workers and management in a high-end suit factory in Moctezuma, central México. This study traces a major reorganization in the factory from individual piecework to teamwork. The teamwork arrangements fostered a "motherist" work culture, which allowed arrangements to accommodate women with childcare responsibilities. In this case the workers made use of local gender norms to create a better employment situation for women.

Gender inequalities in agrarian society materialize within the household and in both formal and informal agricultural work. There is now a rich body of research on land and gender relations. Agarwal's (1994) extensive work in South Asia has shed light on the complex dynamics behind rural women's poverty. Agarwal argues that women and children's risk of poverty depends on women's direct access to income and resources, and that a key dimension of gender inequality is inheritance customs and laws favoring men.

But Agarwal also shows that norms are the subject of extensive bargaining, in households and communities. A group's position in bargaining is influenced by "their economic situation; the link between command over property and control over institutions that shape gender ideology; and group strength" (Agarwal 1997: 21). Those with wealth or property can exercise influence over institutions that shape gender ideology, such as schools, religious organizations, and media. For instance, a women's group in Bangladesh observed that elite village leaders define purdah practices that restrict women's access to legal, administrative, and economic institutions. In this case, collective organizing allowed women in the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee to challenge purdah as it is defined by elites.

Studies of agrarian change in several parts of the global South paint similar pictures, with regional permutations (Carmen Diana Deere and Magdalena León 2003). In Africa, land reforms instituting private property regimes see many women lose rights they formerly had, for instance use rights on previously communally shared plots (Susana Lastarria-Cornhiel 1997; Ann Whitehead and Dzodzi Tsikata 2003). The process of campaigning for land rights, and ensuring equitable realization of reforms, is itself a struggle to change gender norms and practices. The campaign for women's land rights in Brazil illustrates this. Carmen Diana Deere (2004) documents a decade of struggle for women seeking land rights in the wake of gender-ignorant agrarian reforms in Brazil. Deere shows that normative change followed from sustained organizing for women's participation within the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra

(MST; Landless Workers' Movement) across the 1990s. Gender equality norms and recognition of the importance of women's land rights have been partly incorporated into the MST.

THE PERSISTENCE OF NORMS

Over the last few decades, theories of the persistence of norms have shifted away from monolithic sex role theory to more dynamic conceptions of gender normativity in practice. We argue that even in more recent theories of gender socialization, the evident diversity and contradictions in social practice can be lost, and therefore possibilities for change can shift out of view. The persistence of particular gender norms must be understood relationally, as part of a larger social process. A variety of gender norms persist over time, not just patriarchal norms.

There is a familiar view of how norms persist. The concept of sex roles was developed in the era of Margaret Mead and Talcott Parsons, when it became common in anthropology, social psychology, and sociology to use the analogy of a dramatic script to talk about learned behavior. Various "socializing agents" – parents, peer groups, schools, mass media, and so on. – apply positive and negative sanctions for role performance. As they grow up, the children internalize the society's consensual rules of conduct (the role norms). They behave accordingly; and in their turn, they socialize the next generation into the norms. Thus the reproduction of norms across generations is thought to occur in a more or less automatic and conflict-free way.

Gender role theory had a revival in North America from the 1970s, for instance in the work of psychologists Alison H. Eagly, Wendy Wood, and Amanda B. Diekman (2000) on "sex-typical" roles performed by women and men. In this line of thinking, gender role performance prompts women to acquire role-appropriate skills, which is then taken as an explanation for gendered divisions of labor and gender hierarchies. Gender role theory continues to influence social science research and is echoed in the "norms as constraint" definition common in feminist economics. In European social theory, socialization, or some analogous concept, remained an underlying theme. Pierre Bourdieu (1977), for instance, treated social reproduction as a process of acquiring a *habitus* – a set of tastes, way of thinking, and lifestyle that he understood as the embodiment of social structures. *Habitus*, according to Bourdieu, is not a uniform phenomenon; instead he argued it was a generative structure formed through individuals interacting in particular social "fields." Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant (1992) described these interactions as a process of learning "rules of the game." These models of the reproduction of gender norms have had an influence on recent feminist thought.

Other feminists have found them less than convincing, given the realities of what happens in "agencies" like schools, and the need to account for the dynamics of change at the same time as continuity (Raewyn Connell, Dean Ashenden, Sandra Kessler, and Gary Dowsett 1982; Julie McLeod 2005). In the last half-century, researchers have found major difficulties in socialization models. These models generally assume a strong consensus in society about values and role definitions, which is not found in practice. Research persistently finds differences within societies in gender-related attitudes and role definitions: differences between social classes, between rural and urban groups, between ethnic and religious groups, between generations, and notably, between women and men (Norma J. Osores Fuller 1997; Emily W. Kane 2000). And even within such groups, there is diversity of attitudes.

Socialization models generally assume a passivity on the part of the socialized, which does not correspond to what we know about children as learners. Children are agentic in learning: they are selective in perception, curious, often in conflict with adults, and uneven in their acquisition of norms even when these are clearly articulated (Ute Eickelkamp 2011; Elena Caneva 2014). Close-focus case studies of schools show this in relation to gender learning (Barrie Thorne 1993; Mac an Ghaill 1994; Pascoe 2007).

Socialization models propose a smooth path of normative transmission and gender development. But human development is contradictory and often turbulent at an emotional level, as the case studies of clinical psychology have long shown (Anne Fausto-Sterling 2012). This turbulence is further evidenced by the tremendous variety of non-normative sexualities and gender enactments (Suparna Bhaskaran 2004). Ethnographic accounts of patriarchal communities routinely report that more pressure is put on girls than boys for conformity, obedience, and submission to norms (for example, Mamonah Ambreen and Anwaar Mohyuddin [2013]). But attitude surveys of adults usually find that women as a group are *less* supportive of patriarchal opinion items than men as a group (Henny Slegh and Augustin Kimonyo 2010; Gary Barker et al. 2011; Lynne L. Manganaro and Nicholas O. Alozie 2011). Clearly, the "internalization" of norms is not an automatic process.

How then does persistence occur? First, norms are not just embedded in personal attitudes and conduct, but are also embedded in institutional arrangements. Gender segregation in schools, gender divisions of labor in the workplace, separation of home from workplace, different pay levels for men and women, and differential legal ownership of land are all arrangements that embed gender norms, and all may be reproduced by routine institutional functioning. Studies in Scandinavia, where there is a strong public culture of gender equality, nevertheless show the persistence of gender divisions of labor, hierarchical inequality, and conventional

understandings of masculinity and femininity in the everyday life of organizations (Ewa Gunnarsson, Susanne Andersson, sand Annika Vänje 2003).

The regular functioning of institutions may further create new supports for gender inequality. In the last two decades there has been a striking growth of eroticized representations of women in mainstream advertising (including billboards) in Australia, like other affluent Anglophone countries (Tom Reichert and Jacqueline Lambiase 2006). Add music videos, cosmetic surgery, the diet industry, and celebrity journalism, and we see an emerging, highly sexualized, body normativity for women. Normative persistence may also result from conscious resistance to change. Suzanne Franzway and Mary M. Fonow's (2011) close study of the experience of women activists in Australian trade unions shows that their attempts to change the agenda of a movement that for so long has been controlled by men and focused on men's concerns are widely resisted by men who benefit from the status quo, through practices that range from trivialization of women's concerns to outright sexual harassment.

Unequal gender norms can be reinforced rather than undermined by economic change. Janne Tienari, Anne-Marie Søderberg, Charlotte Holgersson, and Eero Vaara (2005) conducted interviews with the top executives of a transnational finance corporation created by mergers between Scandinavian banks. The executives came from countries with strong public norms of gender equality. But the world of international finance is strongly masculinized: top managers, who typically work long hours and travel extensively, enact breadwinner/housewife norms. The senior executives of the merged bank, interviewed after the mergers, had adopted these norms. They took management to be naturally men's business and practiced a managerial masculinity that was competitive, mobile, and work driven. These shifts seem to have undermined any commitment to Scandinavian public norms of gender equality.

The diversity of gender norms visible across the world mean that it is important to be specific about which gender norms are being appealed to. Kopano Ratele (2013) has made a powerful critique of the careless – though widespread – assumption that "traditional masculinity" means only patriarchal masculinity. Non-patriarchal masculinities that support respectful and nonviolent relations with women are an important way that gender-equality norms may be realized; and as Ratele argues, non-patriarchal masculinities have traditions too. Gendered societies were not monolithic in the past; there are multiple currents in tradition, and there is perpetual reinterpretation of tradition.

This argument is relevant in other contexts. Kathryn Robinson (2009) emphasizes the highly varied *adat* (customs) of the Indonesian archipelago, including matrilineal communities, women's industries, diverse women's organizations and agendas. Obioma Nnaemeka (2005)

points to traditions in African communities that emphasize women's strength, where motherhood becomes a source of authority rather than subordination. And this diversity has, historically, been a basis of social contestation rather than simple reproduction.

SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF NORMATIVE CHANGE

More than a century of feminist activism has shown the world that changes in gender norms is possible, even common. Gender norms can move in multiple directions; change should not be simplified as a shift along one single continuum. Feminist economists know better than most that measures of gender inequality correlate with a complex of social and economic variables. The key message from social research is that normative change occurs through both internal and external forces undermining prevalent patterns in the gender order.

It is common to think of change in gender as resulting from forces external to gender relations themselves: economic requirements, technology, modernization, democratization, and so on. There is truth in this, but it is very important to recognize that gender also has internal dynamics of change. A gender order, as we have argued, is a structure of human relationships, necessarily being created and recreated through time. Structures develop crisis tendencies, that is, internal contradictions that undermine current patterns, and force change in the structure itself (Connell 1987).

Contradiction around norms is often visible. A recent survey-based report notes "the apparent contradictions in men's responses that support gender equality in the abstract while resisting it in practice" (Barker et al. 2011: 60). A close-focus study by Cecilia Espinosa (2013) of an unemployed workers' movement in Argentina shows how contradictory norms can generate change. The umbrella organization Popular Front 'Dario Santillan' (FPDS) brought together both women's and men's groups. Women and men had an equal normative place in FPDS's struggle for social justice. But in practice the leadership was mostly men, and in accordance with wider social norms, women were assigned domestic roles within the organizations and in participants' homes. However some of the *piqueteras* (women on picket lines) began to articulate gender issues – in the face of resistance and some violent confrontations – pointing to the contradiction with FPDS's principles of equality. An *Espacio de Mujeres* (women's space) was created, forcing change within the organization. After a few years of pressure, the FPDS declared itself anti-patriarchal in its basic goals.

Mala Htun (2003) carried out an instructive study of laws governing family life and gender relations between the 1960s and the 1990s in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. Htun argues that the outcomes are shaped by the interplay of four normative traditions in Latin America: Roman

43

Catholicism, socialism, liberalism, and feminism. These traditions have different models for women's and men's roles, reproduction and the family, and the appropriate use of state power. Over time, gender equality within the family has become a point of agreement among them. Opposition to legal abortion is a point of agreement between Catholic, liberal, and socialist groups. Catholics remain divided from liberal, feminist, and socialist traditions on divorce.

It is widely assumed that economic modernization in itself is liberating for women, a view often associated with naive understandings of modernization. Seguino (2007) takes a more sophisticated view, offering macro-level evidence that women's participation in national economies is correlated with later movements of public opinion in favor of gender equality. The review of evidence by Naila Kabeer (2014), however, questions whether economic growth as such generates gender equality: gaps in labor force participation may be reduced, but occupational segmentation remains strong.

Labor migration and technological change are other economic processes that can affect gender norms. Scholars of migration have long noted different gender norms and practices in countries of origin and countries of reception and the tensions that arise between first and second generations in migrant families, as seen in Gillian Bottomley's (1992) research on Greek migrants in Australia. David W. Livingstone and Meg Luxton (1989), in a classic study of Canadian steelworkers, show shifts in the male breadwinner norm as women arrived in the workplace, and as a masculinized shop floor culture was eroded by technological and organizational change.

Economic change may also involve reorganization of whole economies. There is debate about the impact of neoliberal restructuring on gender relations and gender norms, with little consensus reached – partly because the effects are actually varied (Seguino 2007; Susan Braedley and Meg Luxton 2010; Marianne H. Marchand and Anne Sisson Runyan 2010). New gender hierarchies are created within corporations and non-egalitarian masculinities are constructed in expanded finance industries (Raewyn Connell 2010). But in circumstances where economic restructuring has demolished male-dominated heavy industry or public-sector employment for men, families rely more on women's earnings, and normative masculinities are called into question (Matthew C. Gutmann and Mara Vigoya Viveros 2005).

A fascinating oral-history study by Heidi Tinsman (2000) describes the export-oriented fruit industry created in Chile under the Pinochet dictatorship, when the turn to neoliberalism led to a search for foreign trade and opening the economy to capital flows. The companies concerned recruited rural women as workers, on a large scale. But the consequences were not as expected. Rural women's command of an income and

44

ability to make shopping trips and purchasing decisions changed the balance of power with husbands. The segregated work groups created by the employers provided an alternative to domestic isolation, and led to new relationships among women. In both respects the process eroded the dictatorship's official patriarchal ideology, which defined women normatively as domesticated mothers.

Gender dynamics are always in interplay with other processes of change. In South Africa, for instance, gender reform emerged as a dimension of the struggle against the authoritarian Apartheid regime (Robert Morrell 2005). In the transition to *Reformasi* in Indonesia, the Suharto dictatorship's apparatuses, which had promoted a deeply subordinated place for women, were disrupted by grassroots women's movements around economic crisis, by a social outcry against the organized rape of ethnic Chinese women, and by a multiplication of new women's organizations (Robinson 2009). These mobilizations won new legal ground on domestic violence and rape, though they soon faced attempts to redomesticate women.

It has long been recognized that deliberate social action can shape gender relations. Projects for normative change range from school classrooms to public politics. Bronwyn Davies (1993) in Australia, for instance, devised ingenious writing lessons in primary school in which children can themselves explore gender discourses and stereotypes, as they invent stories that play with identities and narratives. Farzani Bari (2010) interviewed Pakistani women who had newly taken up parliamentary roles. Though their participation was stymied by a lack of resources and training support, women's parliamentary interventions increased over time and on a broad range of issues. Here a complex institutional apparatus was involved: Parliament itself, the political parties and their electoral machinery, the voters, the legislation. It is hardly surprising that the pace of change is slow. Normative reform through the institutions of government depends heavily on social demands and pressures "from below."

That such pressure will mainly come from women reflects the fact that most gender orders in the world today, as in the past, tend to privilege men and disadvantage women. This pattern underpins the widespread finding in attitude surveys where women as a group show more support for change toward egalitarian gender principles, and men as a group show less. There is a broad history of women's activism, in the colonized and postcolonial world as well as in the global metropole. This history has been marginalized, but it is increasingly being documented and recognized (Manisha Desai 2005; Robinson 2009). Lucia Sorbera (2013), for instance, describes the sustained history of women's activism in Egypt, as part of the revolutionary movements of 1919, the 1950s, and the Arab Spring of 2011, as well as the specifically feminist organizing that produced the pioneering *Ittihad al-Nisa'i al-Misri* (Egyptian Feminist Union) in 1923.

45

Such movements attempt a societal learning process, visible in historical change on the large scale and the institutionalization of a more democratic gender order. The effects are difficult to measure. It seems likely, however, that mobilizations such as the Egyptian struggles and the women's liberation movement of the 1970s in the Global North have resulted in long-term shifts of public opinion toward gender-equality norms. Some empirical support for this view is provided by oral history research, such as Chilla Bulbeck's (1997) interviews with three generations of Australian women. Some conceptual support is offered by Sonia Montecino's (2001) argument, based on Latin American experience, that collective gender identities are formed in projects of change.

A feature of contemporary gender struggles is the existence of pro-equality movements among men. These are rarely on the same scale as mobilizations of women, though they sometimes overlap, as in the 2012–13 outcry against very violent rapes in India. Some are small and informal, such as the group of men in Nkomazi, a rural area of South Africa, who set out to create a more respectful and gender-equal practice in their own families (Tina Sideris 2004). Others are more formally organized, such as Men Against Violence and Abuse, founded in Mumbai in 1993 (R. P. Ravindra, Harish Sadani, V.M. Geetali, and S.N. Mukund 2007), Promundo in Brazil, founded in 1997, and Sonke Gender Justice in South Africa, established in 2006. In recent years, NGOs involved in gender-equality work among men have been linked in a global network, MenEngage (http://menengage.org). All these groups are seeking normative change among men and redefinitions of conventional masculinities in accordance with gender-equality norms.

CONCLUSION: GENDER NORMS AND ECONOMIC PROCESSES

Gender norms, in the sense in which we have defined them in this paper, are not the underlying basis of the gendered economy, but neither are they an insignificant superstructure. The symbolic dimension, in which norms are defined, is a major element in the weave of gendered social life, present in all forms of social practice and in all institutions.

The ethnographic, quantitative, and organizational studies reviewed in this paper show gender norms not just as attitudes in individuals' heads, but also as embedded in organizational structures and practices, discursive systems, commercial transactions, and collective identities. This is a complex social terrain, and the multiplicity of gender norms is one of the most important points to recognize. The variety of gender-equality norms is a key example of this diversity. Many social traditions exist in the world that support cooperation, tolerance, and nonviolence, and that can

be mobilized in struggles for gender justice. Normativity cannot be treated as only a hindrance to gender equality.

Normative plurality is not just a matter of cultural difference between societies. It is crucial to recognize that there is likely to be normative difference, and often normative conflict, within a society, an institution, or a social milieu. There is no irresistible process of socialization that embeds gender norms in every head and guarantees transmission between generations. An appearance of consensus is likely to reflect hegemony and the operations of power and privilege. The ascendancy of a hegemonic masculinity or the enforcement of an abjected norm of femininity always requires social action and is always to some degree contested.

The complexity of the social terrain is an important reason why norms can be difficult, and slow, to change. But it also means that there are many points in social life where change can start. The fact of normative change, in many different forms and in an enormous range of sites, is another fundamental conclusion from existing social research. We have argued that this change may not only arise from forces outside the gender order, as is widely assumed, but may also arise from the contradictions of gender relations themselves.

Historical change is turbulent, not one-dimensional; both practical experience and the research evidence show many regressions in struggles for gender equality. We noted the "dances" around the arrival of women in a masculine workplace that may result in the restoration of a slightly adjusted status quo. There are reinventions of sexism, as we see in recent commercial mass media. New intensities of gender-based violence, from femicide in Central America to female feticide in South Asia, have emerged. Political upheavals may result in regimes being installed that are more committed to gender segregation or male supremacy than the ones they replace, for instance in the former Soviet bloc.

It follows that gender normativity does not exist as a domain of social automatism, which can provide residual explanations for phenomena of economic life. In this, our review of social-scientific research strongly supports the approach of those feminist economists who have seen gender norms as the subject of negotiation within households or communities. We would suggest, indeed, that this should not be conceived as being just about the balance of advantage within an existing institution. The process of negotiation or contestation is likely to concern the future shape of the institution, given the historicity of gender practices that we have outlined above.

The research examined here does not support the treatment of gender norms fundamentally as a constraint on choice and thus a hindrance to gender equality. That can be one effect; but gender norms, as prescriptive statements, also *enable* action, and this may be action to contest gender inequality. This is most visible with transcendent norms, as described

earlier, but is also relevant to what we might think of as the operational norms of institutional gender regimes and societal gender orders.

To put it in a nutshell, there is not a simple opposition between gender norms and women's agency. This becomes particularly clear when we think of agency as existing at a collective level, not just an individual level. As the studies of women's activism cited earlier show, the collective agency that in the symbolic realm contests norms and establishes new identities, rests on the practices that constitute women as a group and specifically as a subordinated or oppressed group.

In the theory of gender on which our argument is based, the economic and the symbolic are understood as different dimensions of the gender order, constantly intertwined but not reducible to each other. In such a model we can see causation as flowing both ways in the historical process. Economic change produces new objects of symbolism (such as the breadwinner/housewife gender model created in the metropole in the nineteenth century, or the masculinized entrepreneurial subject of neoliberalism in the late twentieth century). At the same time cultural change alters the criteria and purposes of economic action, including industrial struggle. One of the fundamental flaws of the classical model of *homo economicus* was its ahistoricity. Gender is not a natural division that sits outside history, but a structure of social relations that is inherently historical.

In the search for gender justice, the economy is both a major terrain of struggle and the stake for which symbolic and political struggles are waged. We close with a reflection on the significance of this relationship for the broader conception of change. Normativity can be understood, in its transcendent sense, as the symbolic dimension in the bringing-into-being of a future gender order. To borrow a term from the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (2000: 12), feminism frequently works with an "untested feasibility" model of change. A recent paper by Jorge Knijnik (2012) uses the term to describe the activist strategy of Juliana Cabral, a celebrated soccer player in Brazil who has campaigned for years to break down the stark gender inequality and exclusion in this sport. Similar approaches can be found in other political contexts, such as men's anti-violence activism in India (Das and Singh 2014). Untested feasibility involves a realization by individuals and communities that they can go transformatively beyond their current experience of the world, to new and so far unrealized possibilities.

Feminist economics may be related to normativity not only as the consumer of facts about gender norms, as in the widening of bargaining models mentioned earlier. The discipline may also play an important role in clarifying the untested feasibility of changes in the gender order, specifying the consequences of different normative approaches, and helping in the complex task of designing the just social institutions we hope to create.

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