

Call for papers

(In)equalities, (In)justices The value of women *Genesis*

Anna Bellavitis, Monica Martinat

Inequalities have always been present in human societies in various ways. They are at the very foundation of hierarchies of wealth, prestige, honour and culture..., but also at the basis of those ideologies that legitimize or condemn them, in general and in particular.

The problem is at the forefront of the agendas of many historians and economists, who may either look at the more or less distant past, or take into account the present and future outlooks. To mention but a few works that have enjoyed widespread attention, one can think of, for example, the recent volume by French economist Thomas Piketty who, starting from a harsh critique of current capitalism and its contradictions, considers directly and explicitly the theme of equality and its history (Piketty, 2021). Similarly, historian Walter Scheidel's work, published a few years earlier (2017), pays particular attention to when and why the curve of inequality has turned in the history of human societies. The 2019 annual conference of the Datini Institute in Prato, dedicated to economic inequalities in pre-industrial societies was explicitly inspired by these two works. The aim in this case, was to address from more specific and local perspectives the same theme which is rightly considered a central issue in the contemporary debate (Nigro, 2020), to which legal historian Aldo Schiavone made an important contribution, by tackling the legal implementations that accompany inequalities over time (Schiavone 2019).

These studies all have in common a certain indifference towards gender inequalities which admittedly have always been present in history, also from an economic point of view. This silence implies, among other things, a deformation of the general perspective of the analyses: the history of the path towards equality seems to concern exclusively the male gender without questioning the validity and legitimacy of analytical and political viewpoints that evaluate the world as more or less just, regardless of the substantial inequality between men and women, which is taken so much for granted as to become (once again) invisible. A long- or very long-term perspective and the attention to (macro)economic aspects of inequality further unites these studies.

How can we correct these perspectives that seem to take women out of the equation, once again dismissing their relevance in measuring the progress or regression of human societies with respect to (in)equality? Such an approach revives a type of historical analysis that forgoes to consider the conceptual contributions of women's and gender history.

A double "course correction" may be taken in order to modify this deformed image of history. On the one hand, we should scale down the historical and economic analysis in order to trace the countless paths designed by and for (individual and collective) protagonists within societies dominated by specific conceptions of inequality, based in turn on distinct perceptions of justice and equity that are not only manifested in economic spheres. Precisely for this reason, on the other hand, we should bring to the forefront of history the interrelation of different dimensions of life and social practices. If the economy has been, at least until the "Great Transformation" described by Polanyi, systematically and effectively integrated into a broader social framework, it is then necessary to re-acknowledge the importance of this dimension in explaining facts and the behaviors (including economic ones) of social actors. This broader framework has a great influence in defining possible ideological scenarios, the categories within which action is thought and evaluated, and justice thought and reworked.

The aim of this issue of *Genesis* is therefore to collect papers that allow to redirect the analysis in a more adequate and open direction of inequalities in general history starting from the partiality of women's history, as well as from a critique of the existing historiographic and economic literature.

The subtitle: "The value of women" already suggests the direction that should be followed, focusing on the analysis of the economic, legal, social value... attributed to women - their work, their words, their legal, intellectual, political capacity - in different periods and cultural contexts. This value attributed by institutions, legal systems, as well as by social norms and standards, can be quantitative (as, for example, in the case of wages), but it may also refer to more intangible aspects (the value of female testimony in the courts, or the value of female prayer in some religions, for example). This can be observed from the point of view of both norms, and individual and collective actions aimed at "correcting" inequalities created by such norms when these are perceived as unfair, contrary to a subjective idea that justice should be enforced on the basis of case by case evaluation.

This perspective opens up another one, concerning the implicit ideas of justice and injustice that support redistributive practices, whether on a collective and institutional, or individual scale. What criteria determine the relative position of individuals and "groups" (including women) within a given society? How is women's inequality systematically reiterated, affirmed and reproduced in all fields - from economics to politics, from rights to religion, through culture and access to education? What discourses and practices underpin it over time? How do these conceptions evolve and affect the fundamental social transformations from which they are themselves generated? At what levels - individual, collective, normative or informal... - can redistributive actions be registered that show, among other things, women's agency in restoring particular forms of equity?

The transition to contemporary times, to the age of equality as a shared prospect, is certainly an essential field of study, which should be revived starting from the analysis of the criteria that govern the persistence of fundamental inequalities (in law and in practice) now inscribed within a perspective that, contrary to the pre-contemporary period, envisions equality as possible if not desirable. How do women behave in a world in which proclaimed equality is echoed by actual unrelenting inequality? What kinds of actions are taken to redress a state of affairs that contrasts with an ideal right, and what are the outcomes?

The article proposals must address these questions through specific case-studies or through critical reinterpretations of the more or less recent economic, historiographic and historical-legal bibliography related to the issues of inequality, from a gender perspective.

Bibliography

Guido Alfani e Matteo di Tullio 2019, *The Lion's share. Inequality and the Rise of the Fiscal State in Preindustrial Europe*, Cambridge UP

Céline Bessière e Sibylle Gollac 2020, *Le genre du capital. Comment la famille reproduit les inégalités*, La Découverte

M. Bracke, R. Clifford, C. Donert, R. Glynn, J. McLellan, & S. Todd (2019). "Women, Work and Value in Post-War Europe: Introduction", *Contemporary European History*, 28(4), 449-453

Laura Lee Downs, "Wages and the Value of Work. Women's Entry into French and British Mechanized Industries Under Conditions of Inequality (1914–1920)", *Travail, genre et sociétés*, 2006/1 (No 15), p. 31-49

Giovanni Levi 2003, "Aequitas vs. Fairness. Reciprocità ed equità fra età moderna ed età contemporanea", *Rivista di storia economica*, 2, p. XX

----- 2015, "Breve storia della società ingiusta", *Psiche*, 1, p. XX

Hélène Périvier, 2020 *L'Economie féministe. Pourquoi la science économique a besoin du féminisme et vice-versa*, Les Presses de Science Po

Thomas Piketty 2013, *Le Capital au XXIe siècle*, Le Seuil

----- 2021, *Brève histoire de l'égalité*, Le Seuil

Walter Scheidel 2017, *The Great Leveler. Violence and the History of Inequality from the Stone Age to the Twenty-First Century*, Princeton UP

Aldo Schiavone 2019, *Eguaglianza. Una nuova visione sul filo della storia*, Einaudi

Proposals for unpublished articles, in Italian, French, English or Spanish, should be of about 3000 characters (400 words) and should reach the editors of the issue Anna Bellavitis (anna.bellavitis@univ-rouen.fr) and Monica Martinat (monica.martinat@univ-lyon2.fr) by March 1, 2022.

They should contain an indication of the sources used and some bibliographical references, and be accompanied by a brief bio-bibliographical note of the author.

The articles selected for publication, which will be sent by e-mail, must not exceed 50,000 characters (8,000 words), including spaces and footnotes, and must be sent to the editors before June 15, 2022.

The texts will be subject to an editorial and double-blind peer review. Publication of the 2/2022 issue of the journal is scheduled for December 2022.