ABSTRACT

GENDER TROUBLE AND FERTILITY DECLINE.

GENDER IN DEMOGRAPHY

Irene M. Tazi-Preve

Vienna Institute of Demography, Austrian Academy of Science

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Ever since the rise of the modern state, issues of population policy have been of national interest in every country. Ongoing negative fertility rates in most European nations have even given them growing attention within the general public for the last few years. The relatively recent science of demography is concerned, among other subjects, with recording, analysing and evaluating trends in fertility. In this contribution I intend to describe this discipline in more detail and analyse its approach to women’s childbearing behaviour.

We assume that “gender inequality” is an important category within population science. Therefore the cultural and economic concepts of demography have to be critically scrutinised by this category forming the basis of surveys. When demography is concerned with fertility it tends to reduce a most complex human activity to a clearly measurable phenomenon in which women are fatally ignored as the ones who guarantee reproduction. Social statistics means the presentation of supposedly incontrovertible statistical facts. Morality is supposed to be absent within its parameters but it lurks, unacknowledged, in its categories, i.e. in the questions chosen for investigation.

Within demographic research households are usually considered to be an undifferentiated, harmonious units. Therefore the issue of power is central to an approach that would illuminate not only political/economic power issues but also the previously neglected distribution of power within households. So considerations of changing power relations among the sexes are important when discussing the fertility decline.

Finally I will present some of the results of the Austrian project “Population Policy Acceptance Survey” by testing the hypothesis that the perception of inequality in the public field as well as the imbalance in sharing family duties might have an effect on childbearing decisions.