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DEBATES ATUAIS NA SOCIEDADE CONTEMPORÂNEA

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WOMEN AND TIME: ONGOING DEBATES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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Abstract: This paper captures an overall picture of the concept of time. Time has become a hermeneutic subject opened to debates and discussions at different levels in diversified disciplines since the beginning of the 20th century. Time sociologists have formed their own pathway to ground up a comprehensive theory of time. Social time and clock time have been a battlefield for humans, who struggle to balance between qualitative time and quantitative time, a demand from their social and economic life. The linear time or clock time has transformed human society so quickly since the Industrial Revolution, reducing time into a commodity, having money as the exchange value, and money can be used to buy time. The debates on time, unavoidably, also intersect with the gender matters, particularly, when they discuss about women's time, which is so much different from clock time, marginalizing women's time that is spent on reproductive work. The political implication of women's time is evident in terms of valuing more women's invisible and unnamed works. On the other hand, researching and analyzing women's time are needed for further discussions on methodologies.

Keywords: women's time; clock time; social time; time constraints.

MULHERES E O TEMPO: DEBATES ATUAIS NA SOCIEDADE CONTEMPORÂNEA

Resumo: Este artigo captura uma visão geral do conceito de tempo. Desde o início do século XX, o tempo tornou-se um assunto hermenêutico que se abre para debates e discussões em diferentes níveis em disciplinas diversificadas. Os sociólogos do tempo formaram seu próprio caminho para fundamentar uma teoria abrangente do tempo. O tempo social e o tempo do relógio têm sido um campo de batalha para a humanidade, que luta para equilibrar o tempo qualitativo e o tempo quantitativo, exigidos pela sua vida social e econômica. O tempo linear ou o tempo do relógio provocou rápidas transformações na sociedade humana desde a revolução industrial, sendo reduzido a uma mercadoria e tendo como valor de troca o dinheiro e este, por sua vez, podendo ser usado para ganhar tempo. Os debates

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sobre o tempo, inevitavelmente, também se cruzam com as questões de gênero, particularmente, quando se discute o tempo das mulheres que é muito diferente do tempo do relógio, marginalizando o tempo das mulheres que é gasto no trabalho reprodutivo. A implicação política do tempo das mulheres é evidente em termos de valorização dos trabalhos invisíveis e sem nome das mulheres. Por outro lado, pesquisa e análise sobre o tempo das mulheres são necessárias para aprofundar as discussões sobre metodologias.

Palavras-chave: o tempo das mulheres; a hora do relógio; o tempo social; as restrições de tempo.

INTRODUCTION

In the modern time, nowadays, we always listen to people's complaints about 'lacking time', 'running out of time' and 'there is no time'. Why has time become an issue to be discussed? Why have we, as men and women, frequently encountered a number of tensions, pressures and trade-offs relating to time? Time has been discussed and mentioned daily from an individual to a national level, both in developing and developed countries. Time has become a parameter to measure people's success, an instrument to reduce human labor into a quantity of commodities produced, and the cruelest of all, into money, and now is a dominant concept all over societies (Levine, 2008). In some countries, workers are paid hourly, daily, weekly and monthly. In the other hand, there are communities where the people's works are not necessarily converted into cash payment but labor exchange. Time is not only spent for working, but also for leisure, in order to enable human relations and for the development of other non-economic activities. Time concept has been perceived differently in line with cultures, with history and with the degree of socio-economic development of each country. A number of researches proved that perception of time could also be perceived differently in terms of class, gender and other collective and personal factors (Schouten, 2008).

In the academic world, the researches or writings on the topic of time and gender are various. However, scholar researches and writings on this topic in Timor-Leste are still new and open areas for discussion and debate. Feminist

literature has emphasized the aspect of time as an important resource for women, and yet, very few scholars' writings on gender and time can highlight the tension between women's time – considered as social time, without finite unit of time – and clock time – considered as linear or machine time which is translated into commodity and money. This paper aims to contribute to enriching academic references on the concept of time in sociology and gender studies. At the same time, it opens the debate on gender injustice, from the perspective of time in Timor-Leste.

For all these mentioned reasons, the author attempts to explore several existing literature about time that sociologists have been discussing for the past decades, and, specifically, on the nature of women's time. It will, firstly, discuss the overall basic concepts of time, mainly in sociological writings and attempt to shed a light on the following themes: the differences between social time and linear time; the intersection between different concepts into a more profound discourse of women's time. Secondly, it aims to discuss the way social and linear time affect society's perception of women's time and explain the reasons for constant pressure on women's time scarcity. And, finally, the paper discusses and points out some possible dilemma in strategies to promote gender equity in terms of time.

EVOLUTION OF TIME CONCEPT IN SOCIOLOGY

In relation with the evolution, only by the 1970s, time has become an important subject to be studied and discussed. Even though some prominent sociologists discussed time, they did not allocate it as the main theme to be studied. Therefore Luscher (1974, p. 102) referred to it as: "Time: A much-neglected dimension in social theory and research". By the mid of the 1970s, the literature about time has crossed cut with other disciplines, such as cultural anthropology, history, psychology, and ethology. Time study has become an interdisciplinary subject that drew more attention from scholars across social sciences.

Several studies explored the passage of time, the perception of time from different individual, cultural and social contexts. Since early times, human civilization's time was dichotomized into two contrast concepts such as day/night, now/not-now, traditional/modern. In our ancestor time, the rhythm of life processed in relations to the environment. However, the first sociological approach to time can be traced to the work by Durkheim and his followers. Durkheim believes that time as a symbolic configuration, which embodies the arrangement of society via temporal flow. He and his followers emphasize time as a collective event – as a product of collective awareness. Later, Sorokin and Merton (1937), more than agreeing with Durkheim that “units of time are often fixed by the rhythm of collective life” (Hassard, 1990, p. 3), they extend a step further, outlining important analytical differences between social time and astronomical time, which is also known as clock time.

Since then, the contemporary, nowadays, is governed by the two dominating concepts of time, which are social time and clock time. These two types of time have the power to dictate all our daily activities. In general, the two dominating themes in time sociology are social time or/and clock time (Hassard, 1990). The differences and intersections of these two concepts of time need further discussion, in order to further explain the dilemmas of considering women's time in the light of the dominating mainstream clock time in this globalized world.

SOCIAL TIME AND CLOCK TIME

Social time is defined by Gurvitch (1990) as:

The time of convergence and divergence of movements of the total social phenomena, whether the total social phenomena are global, group or micro-social and whether or not they are expressed in the social structure. The total social phenomena both produce and are products of social-time. They give birth to social time, move and unfold in it...thus social time cannot be defined without defining the total social phenomenon. (Gurvitch, 1990, p. 67).

An individual may experience one's unique time in a biological and psychological period and the recurring rhythm of social activities where all individuals find their common-time. Levine, R. & Norenzayan (1999) discovered the Indian's annual festival can be meaningfully understood in term of "gathering time", "singing time", 'intermission', and 'meal time'.

In rural area, people estimate time by looking at the movement of the sun. They can feel changes in daytime and nighttime of certain months of the year. For example, there are some changes in May and October. Common Vietnamese people do not know how to explain the phenomenon, but they formed their own popular songs to describe it as: "*Tháng năm chưa nằm đã sáng, tháng 10 chưa cười đã tối*" (In May, one not yet go to bed the sun already rising, in October one does not laugh yet the sun is set). This popular saying tries to describe the fact that the night seems shorter in May, compared with other months of the year, and, in October, the day period seems shorter.

In Timor-Leste, the farmers calculate their time through the stages of agriculture cultivation. There is time for "*hamos rai*" (clearing the land preparing for sowing maize seeds) and time for '*Sau batar*' (time to harvest the maize) and, interestingly, none of these types of time can be compatible with clock time. In this society, the construction of the sacred house (*uma lulik*) usually is done during the dry season, because in this season farmers are free from the agriculture works and the weather is good for collective gathering and working on an open space. The social gatherings in Timor-Leste, whether they are wedding parties, mourning in funerals or other types of social gatherings, are not limited in hours, it depends on the many existing factors that contribute to the duration of the event. According to Sorokin's (1937) researches on time perception of many societies, the week can be measured from three days to sixteen or more days. For example, the eight-day week of the *Khasi* is based on their system of trade, as they hold a market every eight days. Bourdieu, in his study with the *Kabyle* of Algeria, has noted that the society created its own pattern of time, there is no set time for eating and they hate to be in hurry or be restricted by clock time (Hassard, 1990).

After the industrial revolution, linear time or clock time governed our social lives deeply. Instead of being evaluated by stages or events, much social life now is measured by quantified temporal units like hours, days, weeks, months, years

and decades. The industrial capitalism and the colonial administration has transformed human's mentality about time. The wasting-time acts are seen as sinful in a workplace. In urban and industrial regions, the social and economic rhythm is far different from the rural ones. The working sequence, day by day, has nothing to do with the phenomenon of nature; it is largely governed by the speed of the time machine system, whose rhythm does not follow the rhythm of life. Hassard (1990, p. 12) described the characteristics of linear time or clock time: "the past is unrepeatable, the present is transient and the future is infinite and exploitable. Time is homogeneous: it is objective, measurable, it is related to change in the sense of motion and development; it is quantitative".

Under the influence of capitalism, time appears as a limited good. It is valuable due to its scarcity. The common metaphor we hear every day in our society is that: "time as money". Further on, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) remarked important economic traits of time and money in which time increasingly turn into convertible commodities: money can buy time. Indeed, time has become a precious and exchangeable resource; when time passed it will not return and tomorrow is another day in its own new agenda. Therefore, our contemporary society is governed by a new standard of time. People are more aware of time pressure in their daily life, as Levine put: "Today's global technology demands finer and finer timekeeping, tighter and more coordinated schedules and increased pressure to make every moment count" (2008, p. 15).

In the plethora of different time perspectives, one could wonder how time perceptions and practices are different among individuals, notably, women and men. The following section will describe the meticulous characteristics of women's time, and how it is in conflict with clock time.

THE CLASHES BETWEEN WOMEN'S TIME AND CLOCK TIME

The hegemony of clock time is the reason to make women's time become so marginalized in the contemporary life streams, due to the distinctive characteristics of women's daily roles and functions that are different from men's in terms of time spending. Women's time is task-oriented, which means that the whole task has to

be accomplished, regardless the number of hours it may take. A popular “*chiche*” is that “women’s work is never done”. Women’s work, such as rocking the babies to sleep, feeding them until they are full, managing the household chores and other endless lists of tasks, are activities that a woman has to accomplish in one day. Women, exactly, operate their works in 24 hours, they are available at servicing children, the husband, and other family members. All these activities embody the idea that women’s time is not compatible with clock time, as Adam (1998) argues that women’s caring, educating, and loving time can’t be reduced to commodity or money. The author unfolds the complexity of women’s time, struggling to entangle into the linear, machine time world:

Their household management and maintenance time, their female time of pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause, are not so much time measured, spent, allocated and controlled as time lived, time made, time given, and time generated. It is rarely personal time/ own time but shared time, a relational time that is fundamentally enmeshed with that of significant others and as such it has to fit into the clock-time world of timetables, schedules, and deadlines. (Adam, 1998, p. 24).

Adam has brought to light the invisible layers, displaying the intricacy of all the hidden webs of working, making and generating time in which women are the unique actors. And yet, their time is unrewarded and undervalued in a commodification world of modernization and globalization, where time is reduced to money.

The following section attempts to analyze the two different working conditions that show how women feel their time constraints in developing and developed countries. Whether it is informal, non-employment or formal employment, women in different economic conditions, women from these both sectors are facing common challenges that have largely influenced their well-being.

WOMEN’S TIME IN INFORMAL AND NON-EMPLOYMENT SECTORS

The majority of women in the world get involved in informal or non-employment activities and only a small percentage of women participate in professional employment in developing countries. Further, the number of women involved in vulnerable employment is more severe, reaching 76,4% of

the total employment in developing countries (ILO, 2018). Agriculture works and informal income-generating livelihoods are opted by a large number of women in developing countries. Women work intensively from early sunrise to sunset on the fields and continue to work in their own households until they go to bed. Women's time used in agriculture is not the same as men's, as women farmers do not follow clock time; traditionally, they still follow biological time (when they feel hungry) or follow the movement of the sun (they estimate time by looking at their own shadow under the sun). This reflects how people's sense of time is based on the natural movement of the sun and moon. Some rural societies sense of time relies on the circulation of the sun and on the development of the stages of the crops.

People in rural areas divide time into phases, according to the whole process of agriculture activities like cleaning land, sowing seeds, pre-harvest, and post-harvest. For women farmers, their day seems longer, and their night seems shorter because, after the working time on the field or home gardens, they continue doing domestic works in the house.

The sexual division of labor, traditionally, has separated women in the private sphere and men in the public one. This clearly has an impact on time for both women and men. In terms of the private sphere, it always relates to women. Society believes that in the private sphere we use and manage our own private time which, as our understanding, formally is not regulated and organized by a third party. For married women, private time does not mean that the time is only for them. In practice, it is used for the service of others, especially for the other elements of the domestic household, where, implicitly, governs the norm of female availability for 24 hours. For example, in Greece, domestic work, whose coordination, organization and execution is attributed to the women, does not consist only of tasks that can be accomplished within a certain period (Schouten, 2008). All methodologically valid surveys of time use in the Western world revealed that women have "time-dependent tasks", *i. e.* tasks they cannot expect, while men's jobs can be performed at any time, but they are more visible and spectacular jobs, while women are given the routine tasks. On the other hand, society perceives that women are good at the

time – consuming works. Women who are less educated have a tendency to work more on handicraft works. Timorese Women work for hours to produce a basket. It takes them one month to knit a small shirt, a week to embroider a tablecloth or half a year to weave a *Tais*.

In the research done on women's time use in Sub-Saharan, Kes & Swaminathan (2006) developed a very useful conceptual framework that can be applied to gender time analysis in developing countries. The authors classified two main areas of work: market and non-market. Market work can be understood as a production of commodities and services in both formal and informal employment that have market exchange value. Unlike market work, which is usually calculated in GDP, the non-market activities are composed of production for household consumption, reproductive work and volunteer work (Moser, 1989).

Women's reproductive work not only refer to childbearing and child caring but also include the whole domestic drudgery such as cleaning, sweeping, household maintenance, arranging inside and outside the house, preparing meals, buying food, collecting vegetables and other grains from the gardens, collecting firewood and water. Reproductive roles of women are not limited to taking care of their own household or children; for instance, many women in developing countries also traditionally look after their in-laws and take care of the sick and the aged in the extended family (Nguyen, 2012). Therefore, in regions that lack adequate infrastructure, feeder roads, water and sanitation systems, energy sources or under-provision of services women will be imposed of work burdens and will prolong the time to perform activities related to household survival and economic production.

Voluntary community work comprises unpaid activities in the community and civic associations. It can be shaped in other forms like assisting in service work for the community such as water management, road construction, and other kinds of involvement in religion, political and social organizations. Voluntary community work, most of the time, involves a form of voluntary unpaid work, which occupies the 'free time' of women.

WOMEN'S TIME IN FORMAL AND EMPLOYMENT SECTORS

In modern, industrialized societies, in the last decades, women's participation in formal and paid employment has been increased significantly. Despite that, women continued to perform the unpaid domestic works like any women who are in informal and non-employment. Alongside the professional and paid jobs, they have to do a "second shift", "dual burden", or "double day". Kwan (2000) noted that increasing female participation in the labor force does not significantly change the gender roles and space-time constraints women face in their everyday lives.

Sayer (2005) noted, in a research on women and men's time use in 1965, 1975 and 1998, that there were changes in public perception about the increased number of women who spent more time nowadays on the masculine work. According to the research, it is acceptable for women to perform both works, while it is maintained the perception that men spending more time in unpaid work is unacceptable. As Thompson and Walker (1995, p. 287) put it: "The unpaid work is not a gender-neutral bundle of chores that women perform out of comparative advantages or lower resource but instead integral to the reproduction of unequal power relation between women and men".

A research based on a database on mean hours of paid and unpaid work by gender from 10 developed countries (in 1980, 1982, 1991 and 1992), namely Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the U. K. and the USA, showed that women's mean hours per week on unpaid work was almost the triple of men's (Bittman & Wajcman, 2016).

Van de Lippe & Van Dijk (2002) argued that economic circumstances of a country can affect the individual choices of career. Most of the developed societies have more women seeking their professional choices, being more independent and more involving in paid work. However, Nisa (2013) pointed out that married women, whether in developing or developed countries, suffered the more negative impact of paid work than single women. Besides their role as a professional at the workplace, they have to play a wife and a mother role at home.

In reality, as what Nisa (2013) observed, women who have more children will spend more time performing housework, for women, even those who have high skills, usually earn less than their husbands, they often spend more time looking after the children and spend less time on paid employment. In this line, Offer & Schneider (2011) found that in family with dual-career parents, mothers work more hours during the week or at weekends. Another issue relating to women's scarcity of time is the high level of multitasking among professional women which increased a pressure of work-life balance and increased stress.

Expressing the inequality in time spent not only on productive and reproductive works of women and men but also in the quality of leisure time, several pieces of research on time have proved that the quantity and the quality of leisure time are also considered a measurement of quality of life in contemporary society. Taking some advanced countries where is assumed that gender equity and equality have achieved a certain momentum for decades, still do not yet achieve an equal proportion of leisure time between men and women. A research by Bittman & Wajcman (2016) proved that men's leisure time is longer than that of women's and men's leisure is likely less to be interrupted than women's. Adding to this line, Frazer (1997) proposed that the distribution of leisure time is one of the key principles of gender equity. Therefore, the competing argument recently focuses on the quality of women's leisure time.

Today, there are some social policy efforts in some developed countries to reduce the women's reproductive works. Geist (2005) argued that countries with good social services for families such as child care, greater livelihood support the outsourcing of domestic duties and enable women's involvement in paid work. Therefore, the welfare regime can play an important role in affecting the time spent by women and men on paid work.

CONCLUSION

The characteristics of women's time used in employment and non-employment are both demanding and tasks-driven. Women's time is not finite and cannot be calculated in a mechanic way. Their works are repeated routinely every day and there are some tasks that cannot be postponed to the following day; for

example, they cannot delay cooking time or feeding time. Women's time is, in a way, similar to social time, however, in the other way, it is not. Women are expected to be in service day and night. Women's tasks seem to have no end.

In the modern time, women are put under pressure to accomplish their productive, reproductive and community roles. The problems of time scarcity and daily stress are haunting women on a daily basis. On the other hand, time that women use for reproductive work cannot be reduced into money, their time is taken for granted and for free. Gender mainstreaming works, in many ways to achieve the gender equality, emphasize time as an important resource for women to invest in paid productive work. At the same time, there is another dilemma for gender experts and researchers to obtain certain empirical data that can be used for advocacy work. Their challenges are to *translate* and calculate women's time into clock times and it is undeniably a complex task. Feminist researchers found it pretty challenging to evidence women's tasks in time count, especially women working in agriculture who do not always refer to clock to calculate their time. Some researchers would have to do participatory approaches to observe and note down the time count on every activity the women do. This could result in high cost for the study.

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