
Undoing Gender with Institutions. Lessons from the German Division and Reunification

Claudia Senik*¹, Quentin Lippmann², and Alexandre Georgieff¹

¹Paris School of Economics (PSE) – PSE – PSE, 48 bd Jourdan, 75014 Paris, France

²Paris School of Economics (PSE) – PSE – PSE, 48 bd Jourdan, 75014 Paris, France

Abstract

Social scientists have provided empirical evidence that "gender trumps money", in the sense that gender norms can be more powerful than economic rationality in shaping daily arrangements between spouses. In particular, it has been shown that when they deviate from the "male breadwinner" norm, women react by "doing gender", i.e. overplaying their feminine role by increasing the number of housework hours that they accomplish. It has also been shown that the risk of divorce increases when a woman earns more than her husband. This paper shows that, however powerful, these norms are cultural and can be trumped by institutions. We use the 41-year division of Germany as a natural experiment and look at differences between East and West Landers in terms of gender behavior after the German reunification. As most countries of the socialist bloc, the former GDR had designed institutions that were much more gender equalizing than their counterpart in the former FRG. We show that these institutions have created a culture that keeps influencing behavior up to the current period. In particular, in East Germany differs from West Germany in the sense that a woman can earn more than her husband without "doing gender" and without putting her marriage at risk.

JEL codes: D13, I31, J16, P51, Z1

Keywords : Gender norms, Culture, Institutions, German Division, Household economics

Keywords: Empirics

*Speaker