



## THE SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE DIGITALIZATION IN THE EUROPEAN ECONOMY

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**Abstract:** The main aim of the scientific study is to find out all necessary conditions for the solution of the social problems. The issues have been researched in the context of two historical periods – The Victorian Age (1837–1901) and today’s mass digitalization. The social problems in the Victorian Age are viewed through the prism of fiction. The thesis that the different education of the two genders creates the social status of women is the basic plot line in the English writer Charlotte Bronte’s novels. In comparison to Victorian women, modern European women have equal access to education, and they choose their profession and job alone. Yet some social problems inherited from patriarchal society have not been solved as a whole. The global economy develops on the base of knowledge during the digital age. The qualification as a natural result of education is the basic factor for the solution of the social cause for the women for an equal participation in business, and a just payment of their labour.

**Key words:** gender segregation; digitalization; education; problematics; social cause.

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The choice of the topic is not random – it corresponds to the present economic reality. In the first decades of the XXI century the social problems inherited from the past, connected with the equality of the genders in the social-economic life, continue to be current.

The basic aim of the scientific study is to find out a solution to the social problems concerning the equal participation of both women and men on the labour market. In order to achieve a successful result, different scientific methods are used, rather than only one:

1. The traditional literary method of study synthesizes several lines – information, analysis and interpretation. Charlotte Bronte’s novels dwell on the social problems in the Victorian Age (1837–1901).

2. The scientific study is made in the context of two remote historical periods. In the Victorian Age one generation of brave women aims at an independent life in the hostile to them patriarchal social-political environment. Modern European women’s petitions are for an equal participation and a just payment of their labour.

3. The social problems are viewed through the prism of different scientific fields – literature, sociology and economy. The modern interdisciplinary (multidisciplinary) literary method and the contextual relevance to the social problematics create a network of experts. Their concepts and the ideas defined in the research are factors for the strategic decision of the social problems.

The thesis that the different education of the two genders creates the social status of women is the basic plot line in Charlotte Bronte’s novels. The Victorian girls from the middle class fall victim to the patriarchal educational system. They study at boarding schools popular at that time in Europe. There they receive basic knowledge in order to work as housewives, governesses and only in rare cases –

as teachers. Only the Victorian boys have the privilege to study at colleges, and to choose a job and a profession.

The main heroine in the novel *The Professor* – Frances Henri educates herself diligently in order to match the professional philological knowledge of her husband William Crimsworth who has a college education. The independent Lucy in the novel *Villette* reads constantly in order to fill in the gaps in her knowledge. Yet, the problem is most clearly defined in Caroline's metaphoric heartbreaking call in the novel *Shirley*. She asks the English men to remove the educational barriers from their daughters.

Women's social status is defined as early as their childhood in the Victorian family. Boys are traditional favourites in the patriarchal society. Mr Yorke's main concern in the novel *Shirley* is to ensure a profession for his sons. Mrs Yorke is in charge of the bringing up of the girls. She has to teach her daughters all that is necessary for a future housewife – to sew, to cook, and to behave in society in a sophisticated manner.

It is not only the patriarchal educational system that prepares the girls for their future marginal role in both the family and the social-economic life. The Catholic Church also aims at:

*There, as elsewhere the CHURCH strove to bring up her children robust in body, feeble in soul, fat, ruddy, hale, joyous, ignorant, unthinking, unquestioning* (Villette, 1993, p. 116).

In the cases when the girls could not access the desired marriage due to a number of reasons – outer appearance, a lack of dowry, they remain old maids. The single women usually live in the family in order to help with the household or devote themselves to negation in service of religion (Gilbert & Gubar 2000, p. 426, 427).

The Victorian woman craves professional knowledge in order to ensure an independent life for herself. Lucy Snowe in the novel *Villette* is bitterly sorry that she does not have the education of the Victorian men:

*There were times when I would have given my right hand to possess the treasures he ascribed to me... Oh! Why did nobody undertake to make me clever when I was young enough to learn, that I might, by one grand, sudden, inhuman revelation – one cold, cruel, overwhelming triumph – have for ever crushed the mocking spirit out of Paul Carl David Emanuel!* (Villette 1993, p. 332).

Women are discriminated even in the only available for them profession that ensures them a relative independence during the Victorian Age. As a teacher of English, Lucy Snowe:

*Madame raised my salary; but she got thrice the work out of me she had extracted from Mr Wilson, at half the expense* (Villette, 1993, p.72).

The innovative thesis that everyone can define their way ahead is proven through the construction of the identity of the independent woman. Lucy Snowe from the novel *Villette* heads her own way ahead, and achieves the only possible business for the woman – a school of her own. The message is that the modern European woman could create an independent life from man in both the family and labour by relying on her intellect, sense of enterprise and honest labour.

During the Victorian Age, a whole generation of brave women aims at the social cause of an equal access of the genders to education, respectively career development and a just payment of their labour.

Today, as a whole, the social-economic conditions are favourable to the intellectual and professional development of women. The modern educational system is reformed. Boys and girls study together in one and the same schools, and receive equal knowledge. In comparison to Victorian women, the modern European women choose their profession and job alone. Some social problems inherited from the past such as the gender segregation on the job market and the gender pay gap have not been solved yet.

About two centuries after the Victorian Age, the patriarchal dogmas ingrained deep in the mentality of the European societies have not been disrupted. The intellectual and professional abilities of women are still undervalued. The employers in the economic sectors such as machine-building, construction and information technologies avoid hiring women. The gender segregation in some economic fields and activities increases. The career imbalance is most clearly expressed in the sphere of education.

The statistical data show that at the end of the XIX century women teachers in Bulgaria are hardly 1081 in comparison to 8026 men teachers. During the first thirty years of the XX century their number becomes about equal – 13 489 men and 13 339 women. Women dominate in the teaching profession

in the years – 2017–2018. The relative number of women teachers in the schools is 85,3%, and in the professional schools – respectively 72,8% from the common number of teachers (NSI 2018, p. 33).

Concerning university education, the lecturers men – 11 056 are slightly more than the lecturers women – 10 858. Yet, it should be noted that among the academics, women are mainly assistant professors, whereas men dominate among the associate professors and professors (NSI 2018, p. 34).

The educational level of the employed women is higher in comparison to that of men. The share of women who work and have university education is 40,9%, while among men this percentage is lower – 23,9% (NSI, 2018, p. 35).

The gender segregation on the labour market continues, in spite of the policies against discrimination. The highly qualified women receive jobs, but often they have to make compromises, e.g. to work in positions, or in economic activities for which a lower educational degree is required. The employment of women increases in the sphere of the customer service, and mainly trade, tourism, etc.

Today, the majority of women work in branches and hierarchical positions in which the level of salaries is traditionally lower, even for highly qualified labour. According to *Eurostat* for 2019 the gender pay gap in Bulgaria is around 13,6 % whereas the average for the European Union is respectively 16% (NSI, 2018, p. 37).

The share of women increases in leadership positions such as the legislative, executive and law power in the European Union members during the last several decades. It should be noted, however, that in 2019 for the first time after the establishment of *The European Union*, a woman was chosen as the president of *The European Commission* – Ursula von der Leyen. She has managed to achieve gender balance in the team of the commission – 14 men and 12 women.

The concept that leadership is a male model of success is disrupted. At the same time the participation of women in the management of the corporate business lags behind. The number of women in the board of directors of the biggest companies is almost symbolic – hardly one tenth. The domination of men in the corporate business is due to the conservative attitude of modern society to the role of women in both family and labour.

The European institutions develop a number of programmes including *Strategy 2020* with the aim of improvement of the gender balance in the management of the listed companies. The national governments of the European member states accept legislative and administrative measures for the gender quota principle.

The corporations in some European countries apply policies of self-regulation together with the national, administrative and legislative regulations. The German company *Allianz SE* accepts a social programme in 2011 with the aim of improvement of the business environment for the women at work. According to it, it is predicted that by the year 2015, the number of women in the management structures was about to increase by 30%. An initiative project *Frauen* was drafted with this aim. After the analysis and the identification of the problems and the spheres of activity, the following strategic measures have been defined:

1. The departments *Human resources* are obliged to: accept motivation activity for women with the necessary qualifications to apply for and be employed at management positions, to make structural changes in the choice of applicants – minimum one woman applicant with the suitable qualification for the position, to make a four monthly account of the employed new applicants in leadership positions.

2. To balance both family and professional obligations, to engage the management council with the topics: *Management and part time work day*, *Managers in leadership positions*, increase of the number of kindergartens, flexible patterns of working time, part time work, patterns for the exchange of information during pregnancy and bringing up of young children.

3. A selection of programmes for the qualification of potential applicants: mentor's programmes for women in leadership positions – *Career Lounge*, a series of seminars on the topic *Allianz Women in Dialogue*, a database for talented and highly qualified women *High Performer with Potential*, systematic planning of the career models for potential applicants.

4. Measures and initiatives for the change of the management culture, carrying out of seminars for the management of skills, practical knowledge on the method of administration of differences, an information portal for the monitoring of differences (MLSP 2015, p. 33–35).

The digitalization and robotization of the economy and the global connectedness make necessary a change in the culture of management of the corporate business, with a focus on the working capacity of the employees. For this purpose long-term social programmes for the balance between both personal and professional life are accepted, for the improvement of the collaboration in the team, e.g., the so called "team building", etc.

The dynamics of the digitalization of the economy gradually solves the problem with the gender segregation and the gender pay gap of modern European women. Today, both women and men choose the specialties with mathematics, information and communication technologies and technical sciences, instead of an academic education in the humanities.

Therefore, the tendency is that the technological revolution is going to solve the women's social cause for an equal participation in the economy, and a just payment of their labour.

In conclusion, it should be underlined, that the application of different scientific methods is a paradigm for the achievement of the basic aim of the study. The comparison of women's social problems in the context of remote historical ages has a different significance for the taking of strategic decisions.

The comparative angle has a topical connotation, too. The modern business lady, who is empathetic to the described personal stories in the novels, accepts the literary images as close to herself. The formulated theses in the research affect and inspire the women who aim at their own businesses or leadership positions to head forward in a brave and confident manner.

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