

NOTES ON THE CARE AND THE DYNAMICS OF HOUSEHOLDS

Vivianne Ventura-Dias

1. Introduction

The importance of care for the wellbeing of men and women and the pervasive presence of women as care providers placed care at the center of feminist analysis (Power 2004).¹ In particular, feminist economists have underlined the multidimensional, complex and contradictory nature of care provisioning within the household. On the one hand, care creates “structures of constraint” on women agency, but, on the other hand, the “ethic of care” or of social provisioning points to a new way of doing economic analysis (Folbre 1994). Feminist concerns with social provisioning emphasizes the notions of sustenance, cooperation, and support in analyzing the ways and means through which real men and women organize themselves to live, participate in the labour market, interact with other men and women (of all ages), purchase and consume goods and services, and reproduce the conditions for their daily existence (Carrasco 2003a; Nelson 2004). Feminist economics stress solidarity in highly competitive societies while acknowledging power relations, class, race and ethnic differences among women (Power 2004, Picchio 2009).

On a conceptual level, the conjunction of views on care in feminist studies shows a broader endorsement on the differences between men and women. In other words, feminists recognized that striving for equal political, economic and social rights for men and women, while emphasizing intrinsic female qualities, were not incompatible goals, thereby ending an enduring debate.² Conversely, more feminists were persuaded that adequate policies to improve women’s wellbeing depended on the identification of relevant differences between men and women.³ In the 1960s and 1970s, pioneering feminists believed that special measures created either to compensate for ingrained disadvantages or to protect female attributes, such as motherhood, undermined their demands for equality with men. Hence, protective labour laws for women were opposed by most feminist groups as discriminatory pieces of legislation.⁴ At the same time, other activists and scholars maintained that women should be perceived in their multifaceted roles as workers, companions and mothers. Over that period a system of ideas was constructed to bridge the differences encompassing “the seemingly opposed concepts that women are both different from and equal to men” (Jain 2005:21).

Already in the 1950s, the Nobel Prize Alva Myrdal (assisted by Viola Klein) proposed that the discussion on women and work had shifted from questions on women’s capacities to questions on women’s individual wellbeing and social welfare. She alluded to women’s two roles at home and at work. Myrdal claimed that women’s abilities were no longer seriously in doubt.⁵ She perceived, however, that a second stage of the

¹ Saraceno (2008) mentioned that the academic debate about the meaning and content of terms like ‘care’ and ‘caring’ started in the 1970s. See Antonopoulos 2008; Carrasco 2003a and 2003b; Folbre 1994; Folbre 2006; Folbre y Bittman (eds.) 2004; Himmelweit and Land 2010; Himmelweit and Land 2008; Himmelweit 2008.; Picchio 2009, Razavi 2007; *Révue Française de Socio-Économie* 2007; Rodriguez-Enriquez 2005, among many others.

² Jain (2005:18) mentioned that the dispute between “difference” feminism *vis-à-vis* “equality” feminism in the drafting process in United Nations dated from the League of Nations discussions of equal rights treaty in the 1930s.

³ Fraser (1996) referred to as the “politics of recognition” in which the goal is no longer assimilation to dominant cultural norms, and instead there are claims for the recognition of the distinctive perspectives of gender difference (besides different perspectives of ethnic, “racial”, and sexual minorities).

⁴ In the United States, from 1972 to 1982, women activists organized in defense of the ERA (Equal Rights Amendment) that would provide equality of rights to both females and males. The ERA passed in 1972 but at the deadline (June 30, 1982) the ERA had been ratified by 35 states, short of three states of the 38 required for ratification. The movement that started in 1920 after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment that extended voting rights to women, opposed discriminatory labour laws that protected women’s health (see <http://www.equalrightsamendment.org/> and <http://law.irank.org/pages/18544/Equal-Rights-Amendment.html>).

⁵ The book was published in 1956.

revolution had still to unfold to fulfil the desire of a growing number of women to combine family and employment. For that, it would be necessary to make “husbands, and fathers, full partners in the affairs of their families, instead of mere *‘visiteurs du soir’*” (p. 193). To conciliate home and work, she proposed that society would have to be reorganized “in such a way as to give practical scope for both feminine roles” (p. xiii). Rather than recommending proposals to pay for stay-at-home mothers, Alva Myrdal, as early as in the 1930s, argued for new institutions to perform caring activities to allow for rearing children in collective settings (Myrdal 1941/1968).

Similar perceptions of “gender differences” are at the roots of a vast and growing feminist literature on the social meaning of complex tasks in household work that involve emotion and affection referred to as care work, care services, caring activities, and that altogether may constitute a “care economy”.⁶ While unpaid work at home, done primarily by women and girls, has been at the forefront of feminist research and collective action, for more than one century, care is a more recent invention.⁷ Gilligan (1977; 1982), Tronto (1987), and Wærness (1984) are basic references for an “ethic of care” that provided powerful feminist critiques of traditional ethical theories of rights and justice.⁸

The size and the diversification of the literature reflect how complex, multifaceted, and contemporary the realm of care is. There are ambiguities related to the nature of care as well as to the motivations and incentives for a few men and plenty of women to engage in caring activities. Women are primary caregivers either as unpaid providers or as paid care workers. This is to say that the realm of care is feminized, regardless of the nature of the institution that provides care, be it the household, the market or the state (Adams and Nelson 2009). States and markets have relied on female labour force to attend to care needs sustained by a gender order that has no empirical basis in post-industrial world. In service-oriented knowledge-based economies new forms of socio provisioning will have to be found to replace policies and institutions that used to supply social care to the “family-wage male bread-winner model” (Fraser 1994; Lewis 1999).

Economic and demographic factors created new demands for care in post-industrial societies, derived from ageing populations; low fertility rates, two wage-earners in the family, as well as a broad array of household arrangements. Caring for children, the frail elderly and the infirm is deemed a socially necessary work, but employment in care activities is not well-remunerated creating shortages in care supply (Adams and Nelson 2009; Benería 2008). Gaps between increasing demand and decreasing supply for care in industrial countries were further compounded by the financial crisis of 2007-2009. The fiscal bill for a generous bailing out banks and investment funds with public resources is being paid by the working population of OECD economies, and by women in particular. Lower wages and reduced benefits of public workers (including school teachers), higher fees of public schools and universities, and a significant decline in public provision of social services have created a “crisis of care” (Benería 2007, 2008).

The purpose of these notes is to discuss conceptual and methodological issues related to the production and consumption of care services in the household. The nature of the essay is exploratory because as a trade economist, I am not conversant with all the disciplines that contribute to a better understanding of caring activities. These notes will raise questions on three aspects of care without trying to integrate them in a consistent argument. I will firstly explore the historical evolution of time and space for caring, particularly for child caring. Secondly, I will briefly introduce some data on the social demand for informal and institutional care for child, the elderly, and the infirm. Finally, I summarize some formal studies on household production that are inadequate to study the production and the consumption of narrowly-defined care. These notes should be seen as a work in progress that will be used later in empirical studies in Latin America.⁹

⁶ Himmelweit (2000) aptly entitled her book *Inside the Household. From Labour to Care*.

⁷ Gilman 1898 and Veblen 1899/1918 are early references. See among many others Boserup 1970; Kuhn and Wolpe eds., 1978; Oakley 1976; Scott and Tilly 1975; Vanek 1974. Benería (1999) pointed out to the pioneering work of Boserup (1970). See also Benería and Sen 1981.

⁸ See also Tronto 1987/1993.

⁹ This essay is part of a larger LATN research project that is jointly being developed with Soledad Salvador from CIEDUR – Uruguay.

Why did I choose households? The household is the locus of care *par excellence*, where care is delivered both by unpaid and paid labour, although institutions such as schools, churches, hospitals, kindergartens, are also care-providers. Households have been adopted in sociology as mediating institutions between “a broad set of opportunities and restrictions proposed by the historical and structural macro framework and the individual level of choices and actions” (Schmink 1984). The household can be studied as an institution embedded in a social web of relations that mediates the effects of macro policies on gender relations (Elson 1996).¹⁰ The premise in these notes is that more precise gender-analysis of household dynamics is required for more effective public policies aiming at balanced gender equity relations.

These notes are divided into five sections including this Introduction. Section 2 proposes some reflections on the historical development of the household, and the creation of time and space for caring. The objective is to underline that care in the realm of the household is historically and culturally defined. Section 3 presents some statistical data on family patterns in consumption-oriented societies that raise questions on how to address the social demands for caring. The section also discusses the definition of care as an operational concept. Section 4 introduces a brief discussion on the models available in the economic literature on household production. Section 5 advances some final considerations.

2. Care and households: time and space for caring

In this section, I want to illustrate the argument that the nature of care needs and care provision has changed throughout the history of family, houses, and households. Changes in the spatial organisation of the house and in time dedicated to physical homework were required before care became a major component of unpaid household work. Moreover, additional historical development should be in place before concepts, values, and living standards that were prerogatives of the bourgeois class were generalised to large masses of the population in Europe and the United States. For the rest of the world the access to 20th century home technology is not yet finished. The argument that housework activities have a history of their own is not new. It was made by several feminists in the 1970s. Since the *Annales School*, but particularly after Georges Duby and Philippe Ariès launched the five-volume *Histoire de la Vie Privée*, historians and philosophers have profusely explored the social history of cultural practices such as childhood, family, love, death, health, sexuality, among others. More recently, feminist historians have filled the gap on the history of women’s private life.¹¹

Men and women live in households, in which the material, intellectual and emotional conditions of human existence are produced and reproduced (Engels 1884/ 1902). It is the space in which life is sustained and nourished (Carrasco, 2003a, 2003b; Picchio 2009).¹² Living alone, in couples (bisexual or same sex), with related or unrelated persons, men and women need a shelter to accomplish routine functions such as cleaning, preparing meals, eating and sleeping, and other biological needs, as much as a home in which they can daily interact with other human beings, and be in touch with themselves. The concept of household encompasses at least two notions: that of a dwelling or a physical space, and that of a social arrangement that binds together two or more persons that live under the same roof. The sexual division of labour is one part of such social arrangements. Social arrangements vary across time and across social groups. Voluntary contractual relations between household members are modern practice observed mostly in industrialised countries. In many countries, arranged marriages, kinship ties, customary rights and duties

¹⁰ The vast literature on trade and gender has shown the frustration of researchers when trying to establish empirical evidences of the impact of macro variables on women’s well-being See Ventura-Dias 2010a and 2010b for a review of the literature.

¹¹ The reference is Oakley 1974/1976. Ann Oakley is also credited with the creation of the term “gender” in her 1972 book: *Sex, Gender and Society*.

¹² Although, the notions of households and families are used interchangeably households are not always equal to families. For instance, the United States Census Bureau defines a family as a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together; all such people (including related subfamily members) are considered as members of one family. A household consists of all the people who occupy a housing unit.. A household includes the related family members and all the unrelated people, if any, such as lodgers, foster children, wards, or employees who share the housing unit. A person living alone in a housing unit, or a group of unrelated people sharing a housing unit such as partners or roomers, is also counted as a household. There are two major categories of households, “family” and “nonfamily”.

according to sex and age still organise relations and spaces within the household.¹³ Likewise, the notion of household implies a physical location of day-to-day activities in which power relations are exercised across sexes, across age groups, and across social groups in the household.

Households are embedded in social structures and are affected by external economic forces in a two-way road, since households are neither passive recipients of social norms and traditions nor passive actors in macroeconomic change. Socially constructed norms and power relations of higher order impinge upon the spatial organization of domestic activities inside the household, the intra-allocation of resources and the access to physical and human capital. The dynamics of these interactions, however, are not yet well understood by sociologists and anthropologists the two groups that have dealt more extensively and deeply with urban and rural families and households. The lack of consensus on a single definition of household among researchers stands for the complexities of the object of study (Rogers and Schlossman 1990, Wik 1991).¹⁴

The intra-household distribution of resources and activities is based upon persistent gender inequality. Social norms define the limits of what can be negotiated between men and women; they determine the level of bargaining power of each one, and affect the manner in which the negotiating process can take place (the rules and modalities of the negotiation) (Agarwal 1997). Within the household women do not have a clear perception of their interests, of their contribution to the family collective welfare, and the claims that derive from that contribution because those perceptions are filtered through the lens of social norms. Social norms and social arrangements are not immutable. They are also subject to negotiations and to change, although historical experience has taught that transformation is a complex process. Market factors, technological innovations, collective action and public policies can affect ownership patterns, the household production process, and the access of men and women to education, health, and other services.

Throughout history, the household has moved from a situation of relative autarky in the production of goods and services required for the survival of its members to one in which most, but not all, of households' needs are provided by external institutions (market and non-market institutions).¹⁵ The word *hou(s)hold* appeared only in the late 14th century, when it referred to a group of people who lived and worked under the same roof (Riddy et alia 2007 as quoted in Goldberg and Kowaleski 2008: 2). In the middle ages, while a house is a functional structure, home is the locus of domesticity.¹⁶ Home is at the heart of domestic life, but it did not always designate clearly separated spheres for men and women in terms of home and work.¹⁷ Setting apart domestic activities and the world of work is of a much later convention, with the European bourgeois household of the middle 1800s as the ideal representation. Up to the end of the middle ages, individual life was rooted in collective solidarity although a bourgeois mode of living could also be identified in the pre-modern period (Riddy 2005).

¹³ See Agarwal 1997 and Sen 1990.

¹⁴ "The anthropological literature has emphasized the difficulties with reaching a consensus on a single definition of the household because the way human beings organize themselves is culturally bound. A variety of functions are associated with the household: co-residence; joint production; shared consumption; kinship links. Nevertheless, there are communities in which co-residence may not always be associated with shared production or shared consumption. It makes sense to define the household unit according to the particular dimension of research interest." (Rogers 1990:x).

¹⁵ In ancient times, the home was the center of the family economy and where work was located. Economics started with the management of the *oikos* out of which the term "economics" originated. The household is a community (*koinonia*), and as such, it is an association to some common end. According to Aristotle, the *oikos* is composed of two principal relationships, that between man and woman (procreation) and that between master and slave. The union of men and women in the household aims at the foundation of an enduring community that will seek the greatest possible independence from external forces (autarky). The art of household management (*oiko nomike*; *oikos nomos*) is, among other things the art of supplying the things needed by the *oikos* (Booth 1993). The natural economy of the Greek household reflects relations of domination and subordination between men and women and between free, slave and servile members of the household.

¹⁶ Goldberg and Kowaleski (2008) mentioned the phrase of the poet Chaucer's host that a home was "there where a man might be master". In his home, a man was a master of his family and his servants.

¹⁷ Domesticity included a variety of meanings in the middle ages, from private family and household life. Historical research has shown that in the 14th and 15th century England, wealthy merchants and sell-off artisans combined working and trading with everyday routines of domestic family life (Goldberg and Kowaleski, eds. 2008).

Georges Duby, one of the coordinators of the ambitious project on the history of private life, reminded us that the distinction between male and female is ingrained in the construction of the insides and outsides, in the creation of public and private domains (Duby, 1987).¹⁸ The collective work of the historians of private life, and with more emphasis, the work of feminist historians revealed the social construction of the concept of privacy, and the physical separation of private and public domains expressed in the evolution of housing and working buildings. Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby proposed that private life in Europe was derived from the historically progressive fragmentation of the social, with the increasing compartmentalisation of activities related to work, leisure and home life.¹⁹ The point I want to raise here is that the characteristics of care provided by female members of the household are historically related to the construction of private spaces where care could be exercised. It is important to learn how these spaces of intimacy were conceived in the house and in the household, what factors allowed some people to enjoy the pleasure of privacy, who were those able to have “a room of his or her own”, and know how the very concept of caring for children and for other adults in the household evolved. The effort to uncover women’s “anthropological history” is quite recent having developed over the past two decades, in parallel to the evolution of women’s and gender history, as well as that of feminist economics.²⁰

While I am not qualified to undertake an intellectual history of care, I want to emphasize that caring provision by women in the household has a history of its own, which is also linked to the history of family, as we know it, and to the history of home technology.²¹ The assertion is almost trivial: in the same way that gender roles are socially constructed, care and care work are also social and historical constructs. Oakley (1974/1976: 24-25) made this point almost four decades ago, when she used a much quoted phrase by Montaigne: “I have lost two or three children in their infancy, not without regret, but without great sorrow.”²², to show that the attachment to children and feelings toward children care are not immanent in women. Until recently, the average expectation of life was short and infant mortality was very high. While this is not anymore true for industrialised countries and for the most advanced developing countries, these facts remain a cruel reality in many developing regions. Women bore a large number of children because the general feeling was, and for a long time persisted, that one had several children in order to keep just a few. The observation by Montaigne, which could shock our present-day sensibility, expressed the fact that as late as the seventeenth century, people could not allow themselves to become too attached to something that was regarded as a probable loss (Ariès (1960/1973: 29).

It is almost a truism too say that the notion of family, as we know it, is linked to the notion of individuality, itself a product of the Enlightenment. When the notion of individuality overcomes that of community, the family seeks privacy to become the harbour of emotions and sentiments along gender lines. In his seminal work on childhood and on the social history of family, Philippe Ariès (1960/1973) suggested that the roots of the European family are to be found in the “discovery” of childhood, as a stage of life with its specific needs, that started in the 15th century but it was accomplished in the 17th century²³. Looking at any of the numerous child portraits painted at the beginning of the 17th century, we can see that only then children ceased to be dressed like the adults. In medieval pictures nothing except the size distinguished the child from the grown-ups. Children were treated as diminutive adults. In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist, even though people could have affection for children. Nevertheless, there was not an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from

¹⁸ Duby was criticised by gender historians from the United States for proposing that women had no voice of their own in the middle ages.

¹⁹ The opposition between public sphere and private life has been criticized by other historians. See Goodman 1992.

²⁰ Perrot 1995; Thébaut and Zancarini-Fournel 2002. Feminist historians have been trying to give voice to women of the past. Women have being seen through men’s eyes because until the diffusion of writing at the end of the middle ages, there are no documents written by women themselves.

²¹ Care is also related to the history of sentiments and feelings, although this is a very complex topic to be dealt with in this paper.

²² Montaigne, *Essays*, Book II, Chapter 8 «Of the Affection of Fathers to their Children», to Mame D’Estissac (in Projeto Gutemberg <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3600/3600-h/3600-h.htm#2HCH0065>). “L’opinion commune devait, comme Montaigne, ‘ne leur reconnaître ni mouvement en l’âme, ni forme reconnaissable au corps’. Mme de Sévigné rapporte sans surprise un mot semblable de Mme de Coetquen, quand celle-ci s’évanouit à la nouvelle de la mort de la petite fille : ‘Elle est très affligée et dit que jamais elle n’en aura une si jolie. » (Ariès 1960/1973: 29).

²³ “L’intérêt porté à l’enfance,..., n’est qu’une forme, une expression particulière de ce sentiment plus général, le sentiment de la famille.” (Ariès 1960/1983: 393).

the adult, even from the young adult. That is why, as soon as the children could live without the assistance of their mothers, or nannies, around the age of seven or eight, they belonged to adult society. From that moment on they were included in the adult community; they shared adult friends, adult work and adult games. At the age of seven or eight, it was common for children to leave home to become servants or apprentices to other families. (Ariès 1960/1973: 462; Oakley 1974/ 1976: 25).

It is fair to say that there is a broad consensus about the role of Philippe Ariès in making childhood a subject of history research. Since the 1960s research accumulated in the new field of Child, Childhood and Family raised questions on the generalisation of his findings to other countries, and also on his methodology. Pollock (1983) adopted a sociobiological theory to show the continuity of a parent-offspring bond regardless of economic restrictions. She claimed that “there is no reason to assume that parental care must vary according to development and changes in society as a whole.” (p. viii). In particular, Pollock criticised the sources used for the history of childhood by historians that supported Ariès’ conclusions secondary sources such as moral and medical tracts, religious sermons and views of contemporary experts, evidence from paintings, travellers’ accounts, and pieces of legislations. Only occasionally primary sources as diaries, memoirs and letters are used but the difficulties of generalising from scanty evidence are even more severe.²⁴

As numerous studies reminded us, the concept and the experience of childhood remained for a long time confined to children of the upper and middle classes.²⁵ Up to the beginning of the 19th century, for a large part of workers there was not a feeling of having a home, although gradually the idea and values linked to family were extended to the whole population (“...up to the point that the aristocratic and bourgeois origins of the family fell into oblivion.” (Ariès 1960/1973: 458)). It can be easily forgotten, that even in industrialized countries, it was only in the second half of the 20th century that bourgeois family values became values shared across social classes and across countries. In other words, it was only after the Second World War, merely fifty years ago, that bourgeois values and standards of living were extended to working class families of Europe. As a result of this complex socio-historical process new demands for caring for young children were created, which fell on women’s shoulders from all social classes, although at different levels, and with enormous different in resources to meet these needs.

In the middle ages, the movement of collective life did not leave much space to solitude and privacy. Conversely, the modern family required spaces for intimacy that reinforced the family identity. It is only in the 16th and 17th centuries that private life and families become a constant part of pictorial representations. Finally, in the 18th century, the family began to create its own space, increasing the zones of privacy in the houses.²⁶ Moreover, the development of industrial and urban economy accomplished a physical separation between housing and work areas thereby rendering more difficult for women to combine child care with working as many women of the peasant and working classes of industrialized countries had done in the past, and that peasant women in many developing regions still do.²⁷

George Duby made clear that, after reaching a certain level of complexity, every society generates its own private spaces that are distinguished from one society to another by factors related to culture, power, religion, housing configurations, and family patterns.²⁸ Similarly to the development of family values in

²⁴ See De Mause 1974; Heywood 2001; Montgomery 2009; Shorter 1995.

²⁵ « Cette évolution de la famille médiévale à la famille du XVII^e siècle e à la famille moderne, fut longtemps limitée aux nobles, aux bourgeois, aux riches artisans, aux riches laboureurs. » (Ariès 1960/1973:457). See Humphries 1977; Oakley (1974/1976; Scott and Tilly 1975.

²⁶ “Dès le XVIII^e siècle, la famille commence à prendre ses distance à l’égard de la société, à la refouler au-delà d’une zone de vie privée toujours plus étendue.” (Ariès 1960/1973: 451).

²⁷ Scott and Tille (1975/1980 : 101 fn26) raised the hypothesis that in pre-industrial rural communities, separation of spheres of activities and of roles did not imply discrimination or hierarchy. Men worked outside the home and women presided over the interior of the household and over the private affairs of the family.

²⁸ « Toutes les sociétés du monde et de l’histoire, dès qu’elles ont la moindre complexité, renferment un champ du privé. Mais ce dernier est d’une part délimité et structuré différemment de l’une à l’autre par les variables du pouvoir, de la religion, de l’espace habité et de la famille, et il est défini d’autre part au premier chef par le discours de la culture.» (Ariès and Duby 1985/ 1992, vol 1 as quoted by Langelier 2003: 1). The Greek civilization distinguished between the private (oikos) and the public (agora) domains (Booth 1993).

European history, for a long time physical privacy was the privilege of property-owners and middle-class professions. The usual dwelling for working-class families before, throughout, and for some time after the period of industrialisation consisted of only one- or at most two-room houses that offered virtually no individual privacy.²⁹ It is important to note that this remains the standard housing situation for the masses in developing regions.

In France, the Revolution will accentuate the definition of public and private spheres, attaching high importance to family while segregating sexual roles in the opposition of political men and domestic women (Perrot 2009: 68).³⁰ After the Napoleonic period, the French bourgeoisie will adopt the English model of home including the English term itself. Detailed historical studies of the evolution of the spatial organization of modes of living of French bourgeois families showed how precisely they mirrored social changes in female roles. During the first half of the 19th century, the houses of textile manufacturers were constructed near the textile mill, and sometimes were part of the plant building itself. The wives of textile manufacturers used to have some managerial duties in the family enterprise and helped with the firm accounting. After the conversion of family enterprises into capitalist societies, in the 1860s, textile entrepreneurs and directors left the sites of the factories to build villas and mansions in other parts of the city, making the space of production distinct from the domestic space. Women became full time housewives (Perrot 2009:66).

The separation of private and public spaces in the house was even more rigid in other cultures with continuities and discontinuities in the ordering of space both inside and outside the house. Social patterns and family values were crucial factors determining the spatial configurations of Arab houses in diverse periods and in different countries. For instance, in Egypt, before the Second World War, women were physically confined in the private areas of the house and could only glance at the outside (public) areas concealed by *mashrabiya*s, screens created from pieces of turned wood that allowed women of the household to enjoy the view without being seen.³¹ In many Islamic regions, women are still considered a property of the male members of the household and have to hide themselves from other male eyes.³²

In predominantly rural economies, as are many African countries, households are still vital units for the production of goods and services both for internal consumption and for the market. Female labour is intensively used in peasant households for food production and food processing, besides the routine activities of care, home maintenance, fetching water and firewood.³³ In many communities, shaped by polygyny, however, age hierarchy adds to gender hierarchy to create an array of rights according to gender lines and senior privileges. Although the structure and composition of African families vary across countries and societies, it has been observed that in African families, consanguineous ties can be stronger than conjugal (McDaniel and Zulu 1996). The nature of obligations that women have in caring for family members, for boys and girls, in these societies can be remarkably different when compared to broadly-defined Western patterns.

²⁹ « Under these circumstances, housework was not the isolated activity it now is. The absence of modern labour-saving devices may have added to household work, but the absence of the kitchen, for the mass of the population, ensured that housework remained integrated with the main work of the family. The making of clothes, and the preparation of food – items in the ordinary housewife's role – were part of a communal work-activity" (Oakley 1974/1976: 24).

³⁰ The French Revolution denied women the right to vote, to have a voice and to write: "Condorcet excepté, qui revendique avec éclat le droit de vote et la qualité de citoyennes à part entière au moins pour les femmes "éclairées", les hommes de la Révolution, jacobins ou enragés, refusent aux femmes le droit de vote, voire le droit à la parole (les clubs de femmes sont fermés en novembre 1793) et à l'écriture. Le plans d'éducation sont très généralement sexistes, lient les filles au fuseau et au rouet en limitant leur scolarisation au strict nécessaire.» (Perrot 2009: 68).

³¹ In the beautiful Cairo Trilogy, the Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfouz describes the saga of the Muslim family of the patriarch Ahmad Abad al-Jawad, during Great Britain's occupation. Mahfouz created an unforgettable character, the oppressed wife Amina, who is cloistered together with her two daughters behind the *mashrabiya*s. The daughters leave the paternal house after marriage. The gentle Amina lived the first fifty years of her life within closed walls, at first, in her parents' house and later in her master's (her husband) home, she would get glimpses of street life through the *mashrabiya*.

³² REFS.

³³ See Ventura-Dias, 1985, and Date-Bah, Stevens and Ventura-Dias for an early attempt to study the labour process in a household unit of production in Ghana, Kenya and Sierra Leone. See Ventura-Dias 1985 for bibliographical references.

This historical *aperçu* suggests that the nature of care to children, to husbands, to relatives, to sick and the frail elderly in the household is highly dependent on the way the society is organised; the ways family patterns are structured; the ways childcare is socially defined; as well as the responsibilities of mothers and fathers towards household members, their progenies and ancestors, and the community. While a sexual division of labour is present in most human civilizations, care is a somewhat more fluid concept.³⁴ The spatial transformations in the house and in the territory that occurred in European societies allowed for individual and family privacy, as prerequisites for care to be deployed. But besides the construction of dedicated spaces in the home for caring, it is dedicated time that is also required for the unfolding of caring activities. In the 19th century, few women had time to care for their own families since most of them were renting their caring labour for upper classes women who did not have to care for their own children.³⁵ Up to the end of the 19th century, urban working class women in England did not have houses to clean, furniture to keep, and few clothes to wash and iron.³⁶

Household activities can be separated between those labelled as home-work (cleaning the house, washing and ironing, preparing meals, etc.), and those designated as care work (childcare, attending to the needs of dependent adults, frail elderly, etc.).³⁷ The invention, development and diffusion of technological innovations, following the electrification of houses, which brought light and power to the home, in the turn of the 20th-century, led to the industrialisation of homework chores that were time-consuming and extenuating³⁸. For those women who had to do the homework themselves, there was very little time left for caring for household members. Without modern conveniences, working men and women had to do everything by hand, and homework tasks were physically demanding.³⁹ Electric appliances allowed for middle classes, first and for working classes, later, escaping from the drudgery of those activities, resulting in more time for child caring. Labour-saving appliances extended to middle-income women the benefits of time-saving that was available previously only to wealthy households able to employ three to five servants. Along the same lines, Folbre (1991: 467) indicated that by the end of the 19th century, in the United States, with the increased availability of domestic servants, middle and upper-class families “redefined the role of wives, emphasizing their qualities of personal nurturance and their civilizing influence on husbands and

³⁴ The division of tasks between men and women is commonly associated with difference in prestige and power. "Manual labour, industry, whatever has to do directly with the everyday work of getting a livelihood, is the exclusive occupation of the inferior class. This inferior class includes slaves and other dependents, and ordinarily also all the women." (Veblen, 1899 p. 2). "There is in all barbarian communities a profound sense of the disparity between man's and woman's work. His work may conduce to the maintenance of the group, but it is felt that it does so through an excellence and an efficacy of a kind that cannot without derogation be compared with the uneventful diligence of the women." (p. 5).

³⁵ In the nineteenth century England, most women held jobs in domestic service, garment making or the textile industry. In 1841 and still in 1911 most working women were engaged in domestic or other personal services occupations. In 1911, 35 per cent were servants (including laundresses), 19.5 per cent were textile workers and 15.6 per cent were engaged in the dressmaking trades (Scott and Tilly 1975/ 1980: 84)

³⁶ In 1883, Lord Salisbury denounced that “..thousands of families have only a single room to dwell in, where they sleep and eat, multiply, and die... It is difficult to exaggerate the misery which such conditions of life must cause, or the impulse they must give to vice. The depression of body and mind which they create is an almost insuperable obstacle to the action of any elevating or refining agencies.”(see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Housing_of_the_Working_Classes_Act_1885).

³⁷ There are definitional problems in establishing the boundaries between housework (homemaking) and caring activities are not so precise, as for instance in the in the case of elderly and sick persons living by themselves. Should they be separated? How are they related? What are the linkages between the household, the informal and the formal economy?

³⁸ From 1912 to 1929, the percentage of dwellings in the United States with electric service jumped from 16 to 68 per cent (Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957, series P203). No aspect of housework stood in greater need of motor power than washing clothes, a job so slow and gruelling when performed manually that laundresses were by far the most sought-after domestic help. In the pre-electric era, Mondays were traditionally devoted to doing the laundry. First, the clothes were rubbed against a washboard in soapy water to remove most of the dirt; next they were wrung out, perhaps by running them through a pair of hand-cranked rollers; they were then boiled briefly in a vat on top of the stove; then, after removal with a stick, they were soaped, rinsed, and wrung out again; finally they were hung on a line to dry—unless it was raining. The arrival of electricity prompted many efforts to mechanize parts of this ordeal. Some early electric washing machines worked by rocking a tub back and forth; others pounded the clothes in a tub with a plunger; still others rubbed them against a washboard. A big improvement came in 1922 when Howard Snyder of the Maytag Company designed a tub with an underwater agitator whose blade forced water through the clothes to get the dirt out (<http://www.greatachievements.org/>).

³⁹ In practically all households in the United States by the beginning of the 20th century, cooking was done on cast iron stoves that burned wood or coal. The fire had to be started anew each morning and fed regular helpings of fuel. A waxy black polish had to be applied from time to time to prevent rusting resulting in an hour or more a day that was spent simply tending the stove (<http://www.greatachievements.org/>).

children”.⁴⁰ As economic opportunities for poor women increased in factories, stores, and offices in the United States, the ratio of domestic servants to the general population fell by half between 1890 and 1920 (REF).

With the advancement of the industrialisation and the urbanization processes, more, better and cheaper products were offered in the market thereby turning home production of goods into unnecessary and unattractive activities.⁴¹ The availability of cheaper consumer goods raised the opportunity cost of male labour, first, and female labour, later, used into the home production of similar goods. It became more gainful for male labour, first and to female labour, later, to move to the labour market and use monetary income to purchase the goods previously produced at home. It took longer for markets and the state to replace caring services produced in the household.

It is important to recall that the generalisation of labour-saving appliances was a gradual movement that was only fully accomplished in the late 1970s in Europe. In 1951, only 3.3 per cent of French households had a refrigerator, 8.5 per cent had a washing machine and 6.3 per cent had a vacuum cleaner. The census of 1954 showed that only 54 per cent of French dwellings had running water; almost 27 per cent had an outside toilet and only 10.4 per cent had access to a shower or a bathing tub (Langelier 2003:49-50). It is easily forgotten that “the democratisation of private life” in a heterogeneous global mass society is still a recent phenomenon.

Nevertheless, in one classic article published in 1974, Joann Vanek disputed that United States women were spending less time in housework than their mothers and grandmothers had done in the 1920s. After investigating the time budgets of United States housewives over a 50 year period, starting in the 1920s, Vanek (1974/ 1980: 82) came to the counter-intuitive conclusion: “Non-employed women, meaning women who are not in the labor force, in fact devote as much time to housework as their forebears did.” Similar number of hours, however, did not imply that the nature of the tasks remained the same. The time spent in the tasks classified as shopping and managerial increased. “So has time devoted to family care...Time spent on child care has also increased” (opus cit.:84/85). New research on wider data bases has also come to the same conclusions (REFS).

Perhaps, the introduction of the vacuum-cleaner, which became available in 1905 in the United States, illustrates the contradictory effects of home technology on unpaid female work. Previously, dust and dirt were removed from rugs with whisks and rug beaters. Rugs were hung on a clothesline where they are beaten with whisks or rug beaters. However, that heavy labour was usually done by the husband or a male servant, and was done once or twice a year. The availability of the vacuum cleaner increased the frequency of cleaning that was now done by women. Similarly, part of the heavy tasks of laundry, such as hauling and heating the water, was done by men. Doing the laundry was very labour- and time-consuming task. After the full diffusion of electric washing machines, women began to do the family laundry on their own. Nevertheless, by 1960, in the United States, only about 75 per cent of homes had this piece of equipment (Coleman, Ganong and Warzinik 2007: 51).

More recently, Moky (2000) discussed what he termed the “Cowan conundrum” raised by Ruth Schwartz Cowan (1983) in her book *More Work for Mother*, who as Vanek, ten years earlier, concluded that in the century after 1870, despite the growing mechanization of household activities, homemakers had not reduced the hours they spent in housework. The result was more striking since the new appliances had an enormous impact in the productivity of labour: Cowan (1983 as quoted by Moky 2000: 2) acknowledged that in 1950, in the United States, a homemaker “produced single-handedly what her counterpart in 1850 needed a staff of three or four to produce: a middle class standard of cleanliness, health, and comfort for herself and her family.” Hence, two divergent trends had strong impact on female household activities. On the one hand, technological progress allowed a growing proportion of the female population to living standards that were privileges of a few in the 19th century. On the other hand, labour-saving machines had to be employed by upper middle class women that could not rent domestic servants’ labour that was no

⁴⁰ By 1860, there were more than 15 domestic servants per 100 families in many major cities in the United States (Folbre 1991: 467).

⁴¹ In the United States, until the 1930s, rural families were producing 70 per cent of their food (REF).

more available to be bought in the market. More comfortable houses implied more rooms to clean: indoor kitchens, bathrooms, and toilets required cleaning. More clothing meant more washing and ironing. To maintain the quality of food and clothing and the level of cleanliness and nutrition that middle-class standards demanded, women, especially those with large families, had to work as hard as their mothers and grandmothers did.

In addition, as Mokyr (2000) showed, in the United States and in England, there was a broader educational movement that changed the perception of homeworking tasks. Cleaner homes and more labour intensive foods became inputs for other objectives such as health, because of the sanitary and hygienic movement of the late 19th century.⁴² The creation of the domestic science of home economics is related to the need to diffuse notions of cleanliness and to teach women to control a microbial environment.⁴³ Health became an output domestically produced with women as their guardians. With the discovery of antibiotics and their introduction after World War II, the responsibility for health was partially removed from the household and transferred to experts. The understanding of “the direct correlation between dirt, nutrition, child care, and other variables controlled by homework on the one hand and the health of members of the household on the other” placed the health responsibility on women’s shoulders.⁴⁴ Hence, a higher value attributed to housework by society in England and in the United States may have prevented a higher number of married women to work outside the home.

Joel Mokyr opened a new line of research on cultural history by stressing that research on the economic history of the household and the family has to include the role played by knowledge and perceptions on the allocation of resources and time within the household and between the household and the market economy.

Finally, as more than 35 years ago, the pioneering work by Ann Oakley argued extensively, the *housewife* as model of feminine role fully occupied with housework and house-care took a long time to be accomplished in the United States, in England, and to be translated to the majority of European countries, to spread later to other countries. The housewife was part of a gender order that included a money-provider husband, and a money-dependent wife caring for a nuclear family that could be kept with just one wage.⁴⁵ Employers could expect total dedication by men to work because full-time housewives took care of home and family. The basic determinant of the family’s standard of living was the husband’s incomes. Families were supposed to invest in the human capital of their children who were not in the house anymore to help housewives with housework. The concept of a *living wage* that should cover the needs of the working-class family became a common objective of trade union in collective bargaining in many industries. As a result of a higher bargaining power of workers, there was an increase in real wages from 1950 to 1970, when mean hourly earnings (in 1977 constant dollars) increased from \$3.36 to \$5.04. This trend reversed in the 1970s and thereafter, when two wages in the family could not support the standard of living of the past one income-earner model (Ferber and O’Farrell eds. (1991: 30)).

⁴² In the United States, proponents of the Progressive movement (which covered the early decades of the 20th-century) believed that science could be used to improve the well-being of individuals and society.

⁴³ Mokyr (2000) relies on historical research that shows that one of the long-run implications of the new scientific discoveries on epidemiology and bacteriology, was that “the responsibility for the health of household members was shifted from Providence or ‘fate’ to the homemaker” (Mokyr 2000: 17). See also Mokyr and Stein 1996. For a document on the perception of 19th century educated women on homework see Gilman (1898) for concrete proposals on how to scientifically organize homework activities.

⁴⁴ Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1898) was one of the first persons to write about the labour process in the household, and to question on the natural division of labour between men and women.⁴⁴ Gilman wrote that women had been taught to be “non-productive consumers” but the importance of the tasks that were assigned to them required a better training. She discriminated all the activities that were part of household production: food selection, price negotiations, food preparation, etc. Influenced by utopian socialism, she proposed that all tasks that a normal housewife was supposed to accomplish could be performed by professionals such as cooks, managers, cleaners, etc. thereby freeing time for women to get into waged activities.⁴⁴

⁴⁵ That the one-wage earner model did not correspond to an empirical description of the reality of most families was demonstrated by many studies. For instance, Brennan (1955) indicated that the 1951 Great Britain Census showed an occupied population of 21.3 million while the number of private households was 14.48 million. Hence there were roughly 1,5 earners per household. Moreover, of the 14.48 households, only 6.78 million (49 per cent) had only one earner; of these, 3.3 had no children under 16. After calculations, the result was that at most only about 3.2 million or 22 per cent of all households were composed of two adults and young children with one adult earning. In Great Britain, still recovering of the destructions of the war, the model covered less than one household in four.

Looking retrospectively it is amazing how ephemeral the full housewife model was. It started to fade in social and economic importance just when it was reaching maturity and the Golden Age of United States capitalism was in its twilight, at the end of the *glorious* 1960s.

3. Care services in self-centred societies

Households remain the locus of production and consumption of care services that are required for the sustenance and well-being of household members in our societies, albeit with highly unequal distribution of resources, across countries, and across social classes in individual countries. Sociological and anthropological studies revealed that the household is a dynamic entity highly adaptive to internal and external changes. Households have to adapt themselves to internal changes across the life cycle of families that reduces the dependency ratio of the unit, as well as to external changes that affects the survival of families and the way households are internally organized.⁴⁶ At a macro level, new patterns of economic production, employment conditions, housing styles and social life created new domestic artifacts, new service products, that affect the quality of household work and the conditions under which they are executed.⁴⁷ At a micro level, changes in the cycle of life and in other circumstance of life require constant adjustments in the households and in the domestic activities (Eichler and Albanese 2007). Demographic and technological changes affect the structure of households whereas economic changes impinge on household strategies for survival (Benería 2003; Wheelock and Mariussen eds. 1997; Wallerstein and Smith 1996).

As households were being transformed, a comparable structural transformation has shifted resources from good-producing into service-producing industries gradually converting industrial societies into service-oriented and knowledge-based economies (Mokyr 2002; Reed, Mrinska and Coelho 2008). At the root of these transformations, it is the intensification and deepening of the social division of labour, the increasing specialization in the use of factors of production, and labour-saving innovations that have accompanied modern economic growth, which fascinated classical economists, from Adam Smith to Karl Marx, and classical sociologists as Max Weber and Émile Durkheim.⁴⁸ Historically, social processes leading to increasing demand for goods and services by households, associated with large-scale technologies, drove the production of these goods and services out of the home into large-scale production provided by markets and the public sector (Buera and Kaboski 2008).

Care services have been outsourced from the market, either through hiring persons to do the service at home, by buying the service from an enterprise (kindergarten, hospitals, nursing homes), or from a public agency. A major characteristic of care services is that regardless of the institution that provides them, be it the household, the market or the state, care services are highly feminized. In brief, women are major care providers, regardless of where the production of care services is located.⁴⁹ To illustrate this assertion, we find that in France, women account for 99% of jobs in maternal assistance; 98 per cent of jobs in domiciliary help and 93 per cent of housework assistance (Rousseau 2007: 3). Adams and Nelson (2009: 5) indicated that, in 2005, women accounted for an estimated 92 per cent of registered nurses in the United States; 91 per cent of registered nurses in hospitals in Australia, and 94.8 per cent of registered nurses in residential aged care facilities.⁵⁰ The over-representation of women in all form of caring work can be interpreted as a consequence of gender skewed power structures (Saraceno 2008:x).

I am restricting myself to care services as a group of tasks directly related to the physical and emotional well-being of dependent creatures, leaving aside emotional support to independent persons or the

⁴⁶ The dependency ratio measures the ratio of producing members to consuming members in the household.

⁴⁷ Households are affected by structural transformations (what Kuznets (1971) called “societal innovations”), by demographic changes, and by macroeconomic policies.

⁴⁸ See Cloud and Garrett 1996 for an attempt to relate structural changes and gender analysis.

⁴⁹ Valeria Esquivel proposed that care work is defined by its labour process rather than by where it is located, be it a household or the market (GEM-LAC Lecture, Buenos Aires, July 2010).

⁵⁰ The category includes homemaker services (maid and cleaners) as well as care to children, to the elderly, handicapped and to infirms.

reciprocal affection between lovers.⁵¹ Kari Wærness (1987) distinguished between caring and supporting, the last one meaning the relationship between two able-bodied adults, and the former the help we can provide to a young child, a frail elderly, or an invalid person (quoted in Saraceno 2008:x).

In this sense, care is both a concept and a descriptive category. As a concept, care can be defined as encompassing the activities aiming at fulfilling the emotional and physical needs of children and dependent adult persons as well as the social norms and institutions that shape them and the costs associated to their accomplishment (Lewis, 1999). Care is interdependent. It implies relations between more two or more persons. Persons living by themselves will receive care from persons external to the household. As a descriptive category, care refers to the daily care provision to children, daily and contingent care provided to dependent and independent adults.⁵²

I agree with Saraceno (2008) on the importance of the analytic distinction between caring for dependent persons who are not able to care for themselves and caring for those who are physically independent (although they may be emotionally dependent).⁵³ As Saraceno (2008:x) pointed out: "In redistributive terms, only the former is an issue for policy intervention. Only the care for very dependent persons raises the issue of renegotiating the boundaries between the state and family with respect to responsibilities for the provision and costs of care." (2008:x).

In industrial and post-industrial countries, households have been critically transformed by the destruction of the old gender order that, as it was summarised above, relied on male provider earnings for having access to goods and services in the market (Fraser 1994).⁵⁴ But the old gender order was not replaced by a new one. Entitlement to receive care is still framed basically as entitlement to be cared for by a female family member (Saraceno 2008: 2). As Wheelock (*et alia* 2003) proposed, not only the state and the market but caring activities within the household must be considered when welfare policies are analysed.

The transformation of households is creating new demand for care. Low fertility rates, a high mobility of husbands and wives due to high rates of divorce, ageing population, and ageing workforce resulted in family patterns in which bi-parental families with children account for a reduced proportion of households. In addition, very few families have an elderly adult living in the house. It is more likely that old adults will be living alone or in nursing homes.⁵⁵ There is increasing concern about the supply of care workers to meet current demand and future needs. The contrast between the high social value of care services and their low monetary reward is creating high imbalances in the supply and the demand for social care.

The complexities of care extend to its providers, organisational settings, location and funding. According to EuroFound (2006:5) care services are provided by a diverse range of organisations, encompassing both governmental and non-governmental agencies. Care services can be categorised according to where they are provided. They can be delivered to the service users' homes, in day centres of various types, in residential homes and in institutions. Most care is still provided by family, friends, neighbours, colleagues,

⁵¹ See Folbre 1995; Folbre and Nelson 2000. "From a purely conceptual point of view, care is both particular and universal. What is construed to be adequate care may vary between cultures over time and between different groups in society. Despite these variations, care is a universal aspect in human existence. All people need care, even if the need requirement varies, not just based on cultural differences, but also on biological differences. A baby cannot survive without care, and for adults disease, disability and ageing mean that the need is greater than it would otherwise be. Therefore care is not universal with respect to the specific needs in question, but everyone needs some kind of care." (Wærness 2004:111).

⁵² "Social services' is a common term used for all sorts of services designed to meet an individual user's needs. In most countries, service users include elderly people, children and families, people with disabilities – both physical and mental – and people with mental health problems. They may also include drug users, young offenders, refugees and asylum seekers." (EuroFound 2006: 5).

⁵³ As Folbre (1995:74) argued, "any kind of labour can be defined as "caring" in the sense that it results in activities that help meet the needs of others. All economic activities are rooted in the provisioning of human existence."

⁵⁴ In the United States, in 2010, there were 60,384 married couples out of which, more than half (32,731) had both husband and wife in the labour force, and more than 7 per cent had only the wife in the labour force. Conversely, couples in which only the husband was in the labour force accounted for a little over 21 per cent (13,074). Subtracting the impressive number of couples in which both husband and wife were not in labour force (10,053), more than 65 per cent of the couples had the two spouses in gainful work (U.S. Census Bureau).

⁵⁵ Over the past three decades, the size and composition of households have changed not only in advanced countries but also in most developing regions.

and unpaid volunteers. However, these individuals have no clear moral obligation to care. The reality is that time became one of the most scarce resource for individual men and women. Time is the relevant measure of value. As a result, time to care for others and care giving remain marginal to the lives of men and women who can really choose how to allocate their scarce resource. The use of time is subordinated to financial and consumption considerations.

Households by Size 1960 and 2010								
	ALL	ONE	TWO	THREE	FOUR	FIVE	SIX	SEVEN
1960	52,799	13.1	27.8	18.9	17.6	11.5	5.7	5.4
2010	117,538	26.7	33.6	15.9	13.7	6.3	2.4	1.5

Source: United States Census Bureau (<http://www.census.gov>).

In the United States, between 2000 and 2010, the number of households headed by a married couple who had children under 18 living with them declined from 24 to 21 per cent of all married couples, while the percentage of children under 18 living with two married parents declined from 69 to 66 per cent of children under 18 years old. Between 1994 and 2010, the number of married couples with children under 18 did not increase, remaining stable around 25 million couples, while the number of married couples increased from 53 to 60 million. Similar trend can be observed in the number of married couples with children under 6 that remained constant around a little less than 12 million (data from the U. S. Census Bureau).

Looking from the other side, the mirrored dominant characteristic of household patterns in the United States, as in other rich countries, is the reduced number of persons per household, 2.59 in 2010. After separating the data in family and nonfamily households, the average increase for families (3,24); nonfamily households, that include groups of unrelated persons living in the same house, showed an average of 1,26 persons per household. In the same year, more than 60 per cent of all households contained two and fewer people (see table). A proportion of these households is composed by old persons living by themselves: 46 per cent of all persons aged 65 and over lived alone in 2010.⁵⁶ In Europe, the proportion of single occupancy of houses is greater than in the United States, although with wide variations across countries. In 2009, the average of dwellings with just one person was nearly 30 per cent, with the highest proportion in Denmark (46 per cent) and the lowest in Portugal (17 per cent) and Cyprus (16 per cent). The average share of households with two persons in Europe for the same year was 31 per cent, with the highest rate for Switzerland (36 per cent) and the lowest, Poland and Slovakia (23 per cent). These household patterns should be combined with the analysis of social care policies from individual countries.

Among the rich countries, the United States stands out alone as the country that most heavily relies on private market forms of care with the lowest investment in early care and education (Warner 2009). In Europe, care became an important topic of public policy.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Nevertheless, 82 per cent of older people living in families lived in households of two persons. This data correlates with the number of grandparents that are taking care of grandchildren. Between 2001 and 2010, the percentage of children under 18 who lived in a household that included a grandparent increased from 8 to 10 per cent. Of the 7,5 million children who lived with a grandparent in 2010, 22 per cent did not have a parent present in the household (United States Census Bureau).

⁵⁷ See EuroFound 2006; *Revue Française de Socio-économie*, 2008/2; Warner 2009; Williams 2010. See also Folbre 2003.

4. Household economics and household production of care services

In a modern context, Ellickson (2008: 1-2) proposed that households can be perceived as a set of formal or informal institutional arrangements that rule the interactions between owners and users of a particular housing space, that do not need to be linked by family ties. "Households are well-defined physical spaces in which household members normally sleep, share meals, and together manage an enterprise that uses inputs from land (agricultural households), capital, and labour as to supply shelter, meals, and other services to themselves." Through repetitive interactions household members create a set of norms to oversee their behaviour, including, in some cases, their obligations to supply inputs to the household as well as their rights to share the household products.

Households have been extensively studied by all fields of social sciences although in economics they remain a "black box" out of which individuals supply their labour services to the market and demand goods and services from the market. Households have constituted the basic unit of analysis in economics but it took a long time for mainstream economists to dare to peek into the black box and to recognize that the internal dynamics of households mattered for the welfare of individual members (Stiglitz 1998).

For the economic theory goods and services are exchanged for labour time (and services). Individual members of households purchase goods and services (or exchange property rights) with the income derived from the sale of their labour power. The "new" household economics that emerged in the end of the 1950s, associated to the work done by Jacob Mincer and Gary Becker, introduced the cost of time into decisions about non-work activities. (Becker 1965/ 1980: 53). These authors gave academic respectability to economic studies of family relations, household production and time allocation in the context of the consumer theory; although crucial gendered aspects of intra-household decision-making process for distribution of internal resources were neglected or distorted (Willis, 1987; Bergman 1995). The neoclassical theory of household production integrated the theory of the consumer with that of the firm. In spite of his gender biases, Becker (1965) had the merit of criticizing the separation of production and consumption in economic theory, "production occurring in firms and consumption in households". Instead he proposed that a household could be conceived as a "truly 'small factory' which "combines capital goods, raw materials and labour to clean, feed, procreate and otherwise produce useful commodities" (p. 55). The leading question is the efficiency of intra-household decisions on time and resource allocation. The model considers a simplified production function for each household that has no internal contradictions.

Intra-household relations include cooperation as well as conflict components that can be analysed as bargaining problems within the logic of the strategy of conflict or of cooperative conflicts (Schelling 1960). Borrowing concepts and methodology from game theory, bargaining problems within the household can be analysed as a class of cooperative conflicts. The position of each person *vis-à-vis* the breakdown situation that results from a failure to cooperate (separation or divorce) indicates his or her vulnerability (strength) and serves to estimate his or her bargaining power.⁵⁸ In particular, it is the quantity and quality of these bargaining tools that may help him or her to expand or reduce his or her external options, and determine the dependence level of each member in face of a cooperative solution. Access to productive assets (land, capital, animals, credit, technology) as well as attributes that improve labour efficiency (schooling years, training, and experience) and increase individual possibilities of gainful work shape individual capacity to define his or her preference set, to construct life alternatives, in the absence of a cooperative solution in the household, and to exercise his or her choices (agency).⁵⁹

The unitary model adopted by Becker has been criticised also from the perspective of the theory of the firm based on the critique from Coase (1937) that a firm cannot be subsumed by a production function. Based on the transaction costs approach, Pollak (1985) attempted to analyse the relative advantages of the family as a governance structure for organizing particular productive activities but he did not succeed in building up a workable model. The advantages of family governance were grouped into four categories: incentives, monitoring, altruism, and loyalty. The disadvantages of the family "governance" were grouped

⁵⁸ See Agarwal 1997; Folbre 1994 y 2004; Sen 1990 for bibliographical references.

⁵⁹ See Folbre 1994, Folbre y Bittman eds.,2004; y Katz 1997.

as conflicts, inefficient behaviour or slack performance that may be tolerated. In addition, the capacities, aptitudes, and talents of family members may fail to mesh with the needs of the family's economic activities. Hence, size limitations implied by family governance may prevent the realization of technologically achievable economies of scale.

As expected, Pollak concluded that some types of activities are more efficiently organized through markets while others are more efficiently carried out by families. Accordingly, he argued that the household production approach could be better applied to the study of household production of goods for its own consumption. But "other activities - such as the provision of education, health care, and insurance" –would be better analysed from a transaction cost approach.⁶⁰ The purpose of the argument is the relative efficiency in the production of goods and services by different "governances", and not gender equity. As a matter of fact, the gender of who performs what is not defined.

In parallel to mainstream "new" home or household economics, another stream of literature on household economics has attempted to describe and measure household activities in the tradition of Margaret Reid. Much of the work has been done in the University of Melbourne, at the Household Research Unit, inspired and directed by Duncan Ironmonger.⁶¹ There is some interesting research on estimating unpaid work at households, on transfers of income within households, and diffusion of new household technology.⁶² In addition, numerous countries are in the process of measuring unpaid work at the household through the establishment of household satellite accounts.⁶³

Margaret Reid defined household production as the set of all unpaid activities undertaken by and for household members. These activities could be replaced by goods and services purchased in the market "if circumstances such as income, market conditions and personal inclinations allowed that such service can be delegated to somebody outside the household group" (Reid, 1934, p. 11 quoted by Goldschmidt-Clermont 2000 p. 1). Reid also created the "third person criterion", which is now part of the economic household literature, to distinguish services that are produced for household consumption (productive activities) from those that are for self-consumption (non-productive activities) (Reid 1934, p. 11, quoted in Ironmonger 2000, p. 6). Her test consisted in verify the nature of each activity and to probe whether it could be "outsourced". For instance: biological activities (sleeping, eating, etc.) cannot be delegated to third persons and therefore could be classified as non-productive activities.⁶⁴ As Forget (1996: 4) mentioned, Margaret Reid divided household into two categories: management and performance. The first included planning and supervision whereas the second referred to plain housework.

Clearly, even in modern industrial societies a pure market economy, in which all goods and services are supplied by the market, does not exist in the same way that a pure household economy no longer exists in

⁶⁰ "Protection against the adverse economic consequences of old age, separation and divorce, unemployment, or the illness of death of an earner can be provided in many ways. In many societies the family, the market, and the state provide varying degrees of protection against these and other adversities" (Pollak 1985: x).

⁶¹ Ironmonger (1993) defined as household industries the "productive activities conducted by households using household capital and the unpaid labour of their own members to process goods and provide services for their own use. Collectively these industries can be called the production (non-market production) sector of the household economy as distinct from the allocation sector."

⁶² See other information at (<http://www.economics.unimelb.edu.au/household/hholdunit.shtml#recentp>).

⁶³ See the work done by OECD (<http://www.oecd.org>); United Nations (<http://www.un.org/diesa>); the European Commission (<http://www.uni-mannheim.de/edz/pdf/eurostat/03/KS-CC-03-003-EN-N-EN.pdf>). See also Goldschmidt-Clermont 2000. One should not forget the forensic literature that attempts to evaluate material and non-material work done by women at the household. Elson (2005) referred to the work done by forensic economics: "I amused myself on Google this morning, looking to see who else besides the Forum thinks that unpaid work is important, should be recognized and is a creator of social wealth. Two things that I came up with were insurance companies and Christian groups. Insurance companies now want to sell life insurance to households so that non-earning adults, usually women in the household, will be covered by life insurance just as much as their earning spouses. These companies do the kind of calculation that tells you how much you will have to pay out for a nanny, for a gardener, for a cook, and for a cleaner if your wife is not available to carry out these tasks. It adds up to a large amount, so the message from the companies is that you had better buy some life insurance for your wife, otherwise you may find yourself out of pocket if she gets injured or dies. So the insurance sector is interested in unpaid work and social wealth, but from the point of view of increasing their profits." Nevertheless, the forensic economics literature also aims at defining the cost of the lost household services in wrongful injury, death or domestic relation litigations.

⁶⁴ However, in bourgeois houses of the "leisure class", servants could be used for bathing and dressing the bodies of lords and ladies of the house.

all countries that made their transition to industrial and post-industrial economies. Although the focus of economic theory is the consumer behaviour of households that are treated as places of consumption and leisure with production of goods and services occurring only in business or public enterprises, generally, economic textbooks fail to mention that not only consumption goods ready to use are purchased by families, but that some of the goods purchased are capital equipment, and inputs to a production process. Household production can be complementary or substitute to goods and services supplied by the market economy. Consequently, modern market economy could be described as mixed household and mixed market economy (Ironmonger 2000).⁶⁵

Within this mixed market economy in which unpaid work has to be supplied for the basic needs of the household, the burden of caring for family needs falls mostly over women's shoulders. The care sphere comprises those activities providing physical and emotional attention to others, including those undertaken within the household but also community work and caring for the sick and elderly. Part of the care economy consists of remunerated activities where female labour predominates. In complex mixed market economies, household needs for goods and services are supplied by several types of work: waged work in the household, waged work from public and private services and social voluntary work. Nevertheless, the harmonisation of these several forms of work is the central responsibility of non-remunerated female work that eventually will have to make up for eventual insufficiencies of remunerated workers (Picchio 1999, p. 203 cited in Rodriguez Enriquez 2005 p. 3).

In general, due to the limitation of data, research on unpaid work at the household describes the internal productive process as a stable set of activities which, as I mentioned before, is far remote from reality (and Albanese 2007). New appliances (laundry-machines) sometimes replaces home services (hand washing cloth) and changes the nature of the labour process; but commercial services (professional laundry) can also replaces home services (washing cloth). Similarly, hired labour can be used to provide the same service (Gershuny 1983).

Households were transformed from complex units of production and consumption into passive consumption units by the neoclassical economic theory. For parsimony and intimidated by the lack of data, mainstream economists preferred to reify households, and ignore labour and decision-making processes internal to the household. The reification of the household implied the exclusion of the process of social reproduction from the analytical framework of economics. As Picchio (2002a:2) indicated, while classical economists dealt with "subsistence as a sustainable state of the conditions of individual and collective life", neoclassical economics became narrowly focused on the production of the means of subsistence (2009: 28-29). Carrasco (2003a) proposed instead that the real "invisible hand," that Adam Smith assigned to the competitive forces of the market, should be assigned to caring activities at the household which sustain human life, and are performed predominantly by women but hidden from statistics.⁶⁶

A premise in many studies on household behaviour is that the motivations and incentives within households are different from those that rule the market place, although as mentioned there are tensions between competition and cooperation schemes. Altruism and reciprocity factors co-exist with self-interest incentives

The question is how to reintroduce the complexities of life production in one workable analytical framework? Most of the models are heuristic, but they do not address to the same questions. In the economic literature of households, the normal practice is to emulate households to firms, while it is recognized that households do not compete with each other in the way firms do and that the motivations

⁶⁵ Unpaid labour has always to be provided for the consumption of goods purchased in the market. At the least, prepared meals have to be heated; furniture has to be unpacked and assembled, etc. Self-service gas stations, automatic bank tellers, internet shopping, etc are all technological devices to transfer paid labour costs from the market to the unpaid labour costs of the households (Ironmonger 2000).

⁶⁶ It is important to underline the role of homogenous preferences as opposed to hierarchical preferences (wants and needs) (Drako and Kara 2009). In Classical theory, there are differences between wants of body and wants of mind. Wage and luxury goods. Hierarchical structure of different goods (needs) in Adam Smith Primary, secondary and tertiary sectors named after a hierarchy of tastes (preferences) and needs.

and incentives in the household are not equivalent to profits. There are hopes that the analytical categories and reasoning proposed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum could be made more helpful to evaluate women's quality of life than the framework provided by mainstream models.⁶⁷

5. Final considerations

Over the past four decades sound feminist research has established several important points. Firstly, that the unequal participation of men and women in the private (household) and public (market and non-market) spheres is at the roots of unequal gender relations. Secondly, that increasing participation of women in the labour market and in paid occupations has not been matched by a similar increasing participation of men in unpaid activities at home, thereby creating a "double shift" for women. Thirdly, that unpaid caring and domestic services undertaken inside the household predominantly with unpaid female labour are vital for the reproduction of human societies, and for the welfare of human beings. The insistence for a more uniform distribution of caring and domestic activities between men and women should not overlook their importance as the basis for more cooperative relations in society. Finally, that studies aiming at assessing gender equality relations must look at how changes are unfolding in the two spheres of human activities.⁶⁸

Much remains to be done in the realm of care services to make care a workable concept, better identifying the boundaries between different activities at home, primarily done by women and girls. Is care inherent to all unpaid work that women perform at the household, or should care be confined to care for dependent persons (children and adult) while leaving aside emotional relations between adult women and independent adult men? What about all the "male" tasks of home maintenance, mending and repairing appliances and furniture, managing bills, banks and assets, when they are carried out by men, are they also supposed to involve care? In other words, is care an attribute of household tasks, regardless of who does what, or is it part of the "female approach to morality" as the feminist psychologist Carol Gilligan proposed almost thirty years ago?⁶⁹

I adopted the more restricted definition of care as tasks related to the assistance to dependent creatures, including children, frail elderly, persons with disabilities, among others, because, as stated, I believe that this narrow definition is helpful to identify public policies, to discuss social responsibilities, and the study of the working conditions in care provision (including trade in care services through immigration).⁷⁰

While doing the bibliographical research for these note I came across a rich and complex literature to which, as a trade economist, I was (and I am) quite unfamiliar with. I realized that care is a concept that permeates the feminist thought in all disciplines of social sciences, including philosophy, psychology, and literature. The contribution of economics to the development of a "care theory", or conversely, the contribution of care to economics, will certainly merit further research efforts from my side.

Historians have documented that housings, home and households are social constructs. Conversely, care needs to be socially, culturally and historically deconstructed to be better understood. As it was briefly mentioned above, there are aspects of childcare that are part of certain sentimentality that began to be constructed in the Renaissance, as Ariès proposed, around concepts of childhood, private and public spheres to which family organization and female roles were integrated. On the one hand, the material content of homework tasks (and associated abilities required to perform them) changed with changes in

⁶⁷ See Addabbo 2008; Addabbo and Picchio 2006; Addabbo, Badalassi, Corrado and Picchio 2008. (I had no time to review this literature).

⁶⁸ Benería 2003; Carrasco 1999; Folbre 1986, 1994; Himmelwet 1995; Picchio 2009; Power 2004; Robeyns 2000, 2005; Rodrigue-Enriquez 2007; Vanek 1974, among many others.

⁶⁹ "Women's construction of the moral problem as a problem of care and responsibility in relationships rather than as one of rights and rules ties the development of their moral thinking to changes in their understanding of responsibility and relationships, just as the conception of morality as justice ties development to the logic of equality and reciprocity. Thus the logic underlying an ethic of care is a psychological logic of relationships, which contrasts with the formal logic of fairness that informs the justice approach." (Gilligan 1982/1993: 73).

⁷⁰ See also Folbre 2006.

the organization of the households, both in terms of the social arrangements that presided over the same tasks (a family pattern and a gender order), and the physical structure (housing) that enclosed them. Changes occurred also in who were cared for? Did they include the immediate family or inner circle, or members of a broad community? On the other hand, the immaterial content, the practice of and the obligations to care changed with changes in the material basis for care. This is to say that childhood, motherhood, old age, are concepts with a historically given content. As other feminists suggested, caring is rooted in social values, expectations and institutions that should be examined.⁷¹

At the stage of current knowledge on care and households it is very difficult to establish empirically verifiable propositions. There are several theoretical and methodological difficulties involved that only further collective research will be able to solve. The multidimensional and complex nature of care may preclude large quantitative results. The purpose of these notes is to problematize the production and consumption of care services in the household as well as to clarify concepts and propositions in the literature of care and the household.

In a more pragmatic, policy-oriented research, there is already a considerable literature on the relative effectiveness and gender biases of policies and instruments, private and public provision of care services. It is well documented that while the need for caring is socially deemed necessary, we assist to the dismantlement of social policies in OECD countries, the de-skilling and downgrading of care workers.

Certain progress was observed in the definition and measurement of unpaid economic activities undertaken at home, in spite of all methodological problems that remain unsolved. Some authors warn, however, that the solution to the problems derived from care is not to quantify and commodify care activities (Picchio 2009). Care subsumes many activities that are necessary for the wellbeing of men and women, boys and girls, and the discussion of care involves issues of ethics and politics.

There are also inherent ambiguities concerning the politics surrounding care as well as the political demands derived from feminist research. During a recent Forum promoted by the Boston Review, Nancy Hirschmann asked: "What feminists got wrong about family, work, and equality". She reported that from 2003 to 2010, in her course of "Introduction to Feminist Political Thought" she had been shocked by a high number of female students (three-quarters) claiming that they were expecting to be "stay-at-home mothers".⁷² She showed her mixed feelings: "...lately I have grown worried that feminists such as me have exaggerated the importance of care, ignored the inadequate ways in which is often performed. We failed to acknowledge that the louder we applaud it, the more we enable its perversion." She also discussed the claims for replacing the inadequacies of male care at home by greater presence of government in care provision and regulations "When care feminism ignores fathers, traditionalists fill the vacuum by stressing gendered roles."⁷³

⁷¹ See Harding 1995; Tronto 1987/ 1993.

⁷² In 2010, according to the United States Census Bureau, 23 per cent of married-couple family groups with children under 15 had a stay-at-home mother, up from 21 per cent in 2000. In 2007, before the recession, stay-at-home mothers were found in 24 per cent of married-couple family groups with children under 15.

⁷³ See the discussion at http://bostonreview.net/BR35.4/ndf_mothers.php.

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