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Mediterranean Welfare and ‘Superwomen’

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Abstract

In the last two decades, family members in South European countries have been able to preserve high levels of well-being due to the hyperactivity developed by cohorts of ‘superwomen’. These have combined their non-paid household activities with their increasing paid professional activities, a phenomenon that manifests itself in all social groups and classes. The role played by ‘superwomen’ within households has been very important for the ‘catching up’ up aspirations of Mediterranean countries and their success in the process of economic convergence with the rest of EU countries. Sacrifices made by ‘superwomen’ in the 1980s and 1990s have allowed not only South European countries to cope better with welfare retrenchment as compared to Central and Northern Europe. They have also facilitated higher aggregate public and social expenditure with the implementation of governmental programmes other than those directly related to family and personal services. However, the postponement of maternity and the decreasing number of children are the causes that fertility rates in Italy and Spain –Catholic countries par excellence– are among the lowest in the world. ‘Superwomen’ may have well allowed a greater degree of gender equality for future generations, but their gradual disappearance may also bring about new uncertainties on whether the Mediterranean welfare regime can survive, as we have known it until present.

Introduction

The family is a key component of any welfare regime. The latter refers to a combination of legal, material and organizational resources among the main producers of welfare (state, market and family). To the most analysed categories of welfare capitalism (Anglo-Saxon, Continental and Nordic), a fourth Mediterranean category can be added, which includes Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain (Ferrera, 1996; Rhodes, 1997; Sarasa and Moreno, 1995). The role played by the family in the Mediterranean¹ regime constitutes one of its more characteristic traits.

The case of Southern European welfare illustrates the shortcomings produced by state-centred analyses.² These have tended to put the emphasis on the autonomous and compelling action of state institutions, and have failed to assess the diverse outcomes produced by those differential arrangements made between states, markets and families/households. Esping-Andersen’s well-known three-world typology (1990) not only ‘ignores’ women but, most importantly, de-commodification fails to understand the crucial importance of unpaid work (Lewis, 1992). Women play a key role as unpaid carers in families/households, a reality of the foremost importance concerning the Mediterranean welfare regime. Esping-Andersen himself has recognised that in his

pioneering work published in 1990 he did not take into account sufficiently the structuring role that families have in welfare arrangements in Southern Europe, something which he has incorporated in later works.³

Beyond considering its action as mere complementary of those of state and civil society, the family is a vital producer well-being, and, thus, welfare. In Southern Europe the family has remained as a central institution of socialization and as a solid network of micro-solidarity. In recent decades, Mediterranean countries have been able not only to cope better with programmes of welfare retrenchment, but also have increased their public social expenditure at higher levels than those of Central and Northern European welfare regimes. Very significantly, in some of the latter countries public policies have been re-addressed so that families and households could replace state intervention in order to contain welfare expenditure.

Often the term 'familialist' has been used with a cliché pejorative connotation. According to this term, the family has been viewed as a pre-modern patriarchal institution where men exercised a discretionary power over family members. According to the classical functionalist paradigm, kin and extended family were institutions, even labelled as 'amoral', in economically underdeveloped areas.⁴ In general, this school of thought ponders that the processes of modernization, industrialization, urbanization and mass democratization should produce a transition from extended to nuclear family. This latter Parsonian model, formed by couple and children, would be representative of a more advanced stage of human civilization. Such a prescription has proved to be rather simplistic, particularly with reference to the Mediterranean regime (Guillén, 1997; Pérez-Díaz *et al*, 1998). Paradoxically it has been repeatedly formulated in a context (North America) where the nuclear family has become a rarity in recent times (NB. USA households composed by a family of married couple decreased from 45%, at the beginning of the 1970s, to 26% in 1998).

Much welfare research in OECD countries is carried out with the individuals as the central units of observation. Welfare producers and recipients are often regarded as non-contextual beings lacking of affective ties. Their cultural resources (attitudes, expectations, perceptions and values) are simply ignored, something that has hindered the understanding of more complex social phenomena and, in particular, the role of the family in welfare provision in advanced industrial societies.

Family and social change in South European countries

Traditionally in Southern Europe social structures and public policies have favoured intra-family relations in which the male breadwinner exercised authority as *pater familias*, while women's functions related to reproduction and caring responsibilities. At the turn of the millennium, family structures in Southern Europe are seemingly traditional, but this is misleading.⁴ Instead, they show that old models are not viable any more, despite that new models have yet to consolidate.

Given its crucial importance in Mediterranean welfare development, the family has constituted an independent variable of analysis although it has usually been neglected for two main reasons: (a) The difficulty of obtaining systematic and reliable data on family matters; and (b) The inability to transfer affective categories into

quantitative information for statistical purposes. Furthermore, practices of intra-familial transfers and 'pooling' of resources and 'soft budgeting' (Petmesidou, 1996), as well as patterns of home ownership and the fragmented heterogeneity of social reproduction in Southern Europe configures the family as a kind of methodological 'black box' for statistical research purposes.

As in other countries of welfare capitalism, the family in Southern Europe has undergone significant changes. Undoubtedly, new family forms reflect the 'waning role of the father' (Flaquer, 1999) a phenomenon that goes hand in hand with a depatriarchalization of family life. But this latter process has not necessarily translated, as in other welfare regimes, into a generalization of new family forms. Although the increase of single-parent households in Southern Europe has been considerable, figures are far more limited than those in other welfare regimes are (less than 1 in 10 as compared to 1 in 4 in Anglo-Saxon and Nordic countries). Cohabitation is also very low in Southern Europe with less than 3 per cent for all age groups between 20 to 34 years, both for men and women (Kiernan, 1999).

Marriage continues to be the preferred way for Mediterranean men and women to create a family. Note that, in 1997, only 14 per cent of the Spanish population considered 'living together without being married' as the preferred option (CIS, 1997). Likewise, nine out of ten married women in Spain are mothers whereas only 5 per cent of unmarried women have children.

Rather than a convergence with the kind of family changes experienced in Central and Northern Europe, some of the demographic transitions in the Southern Europe have reinforced the role of the family as a main welfare provider and source of socialization. Mediterranean youngsters continue to regard the family as the most important institution in their lives, despite the fact they have adopted life-styles of an individualistic and self-centred nature.⁶

Differences in residential independence trends are very telling in terms of the rites of passage and social reproduction in Southern Europe. In 1986 more than two thirds of young people aged 20-29 were still living with their family of origin in Greece, Italy and Spain (72 per cent in the latter). In 1994, the gap had widened: 71 in Greece, 78.5 per cent in Italy and 79 per cent in Spain. These figures compared to 44 per cent in Germany, 41 per cent in France and 36 per cent in the United Kingdom (Fernández Cordon, 1997).

With the aim of achieving a greater degree of gender equality within households, it has been argued that women had to previously be 'commodified' as a first step to 'de-familisation' (Orloff, 1996). These processes should be mainly accomplished by state intervention. Some alternative views distrust a model exemplified by the situation in some Scandinavian countries, where there is persistent gender stratification in the occupational structure and a high degree of sexual segregation in labour markets (Lewis and Astrom, 1992). Particularly in Southern Europe there is an ambivalent and uneasy relationship with top-down statistic policy-making. In Spain, for instance, state intervention in family matters brings back memories of authoritarian policies during Franco's dictatorship (Valiente, 1995).

There is no consensus from a feminist perspective as what should be the optimal course of action in order to favour gender equality within households. In Southern Europe, the progressive generalization of the 'dual-earner' model is having a profound effect in welfare provision. A 'win-win' –or 'positive sum'-- strategy to secure the 'individualization' of the family would be the development of national 'sheltered sectors' of personal social services (Esping-Andersen, 1999).⁷ Beyond the desirability of an external 'de-familisation' of women's unpaid caring work, there remains the question on whether such proposals do little more than disguising the unequal relations of power within households. So, can gender equality be accomplished by the externalisation of domestic work without making effective an equal sharing of household responsibilities by family members? This is a big question which cannot be constraint to a mere debate on what kind of governmental policy-making is most appropriate for the conciliation of paid and unpaid work for women. The pressing need in Southern Europe to build, for instance, day care centres cannot disguise the structural problem of gender inequality 'behind-doors-closed'. Gender equality in the households must account, first and foremost , for a change in the cultural division of labour within households.

In our discussion, de-familisation is to be regarded not as a mere process of welfare individualization with the aim of getting women into the paid labour market, but in how family members engage in the sharing of household domestic work. The promotion of choice in either to do or not unpaid work, or to engage in paid or unpaid work continues to be a paramount concern. As Jane Lewis has put it:

“The problem is that women’s complicated relationship to paid work, unpaid work, and welfare means that we have to consider their right not to engage in paid work (de-commodification) and by extension their right to do unpaid work, and also their right to do paid work and by extension their right to not engage in unpaid work” (1997:73-4).

‘Superwomen’ and the household-employment dichotomy

By 'superwomen' we refer to a type of Mediterranean woman who has been able to reconcile unpaid caring work in the household and her increasing professional activities in the paid labour market. Cohorts of women in the age group 40-59 are, *grosso modo*, representatives of this type of 'superwoman'. The hyperactivity deployed by Mediterranean superwomen has proved to be a very effective social 'buffer' in Southern Europe during the 'neo-liberal' offensive of the 1980s and 1990s. Policies of retrenchment and cost-containment have had a lesser impact in a welfare regime less exposed to public expenditure cuts. A simple explanation for this is that unpaid women's work has continued to perform as an effective cushion against reduction in social benefits and care.⁸ There was not much to be cut down in social expenditure concerning family policies. Sacrifices made by 'superwomen' have allowed not only sustained economic growth, but have also facilitated higher public and social expenditure in areas of governmental action falling outside household concerns. Thus, in Southern Europe the extra activities carried out by superwomen have been crucial not only for social cohesion but also for comparatively higher economic growth.⁹

As for the allegations of 'social dumping' in Southern Europe, the evidence lends no support to such hypothesis (Guillén and Matsaganis, 2000). In fact, the role played by 'superwomen' within households has been very important for the 'catching up' aspirations of South European countries. It should be pointed out that democratic consolidation and an overriding aspiration not to be 'left behind' account for the success in the process of economic convergence of Southern Europe with the rest of EU countries

As unpaid carers superwomen have greatly contributed to the well-being of families while pursuing professional careers. Although such a display of hyperactivity has been labelled as an 'impossible situation' (Nicole-Drancourt, 1989), superwomen have too often managed to accomplish two-working days in one throughout a good deal of their lives. The absence of shared domestic work by other family members has meant sacrifices and long hours of commitments both inside and outside the home. There is no question that, due to the peculiarities of the family-welfare nexus, the position of Mediterranean women worsened with an increasing burden of responsibilities *tout court* (Trifiletti, 1999).

At present, new patterns concerning the relationship employment-household for Mediterranean women reflect, nevertheless, attitudes of 'ambivalent familialism' (Saraceno, 1995). Such an expression describes the uneasy adjustment between professional and affective dimensions in women's priorities. In Southern Europe, it is precisely this dichotomic vision of the world that is in need of further analyses considering their far-reaching implications for welfare development. Let us concentrate in some aspects of what appears to be an inevitable and eventual disappearance of the superwomen as a generalized phenomenon. Although references to other Mediterranean countries will be made, our main analytical focus will concentrate on the case of Spain.

There is a direct correlation between a higher level of women's formal education, a growing prioritisation for professional careers, and a greater female participation in the labour market (Alberdi, 1999). A sharp reduction in the number of children per woman has taken place, but it would be an overstatement to attribute this dramatic fall in fertility rates to one single variable. The low fertility rates in Southern Europe --with Spain's 1.07 children per woman in 1998¹⁰ as the lowest in the world-- is also the result of a change in people's values, lifestyles and cultural resources, as well as the consequence of the combination of increasing women's commodification and unchanged public policies. These low fertility rates should not be understood as an exponent of a lesser commitment by Mediterranean women towards maternity. Remember that in Spain, for instance, younger generations of women continue to express a great desire to become mothers (9 out of 10, in the age group of 15-24 years, and 8 out of 10 in the 25-29). In the aggregate of the potential childbearing female population, and with the exception of those with physical impediments, half of all surveyed women responded that they wished to have children (INE, 1999).

Cultural and axiological changes in peoples' value systems are to be regarded as crucial elements conditioning the family-labour relationship and as main explanatory variables to understand the latest demographic transition in Mediterranean countries. Indeed, a generalized refusal by young men and women to commit themselves to

family formation in the 20-29 age groups can be identified as a major reason for both maternity postponement and declining fertility.¹¹

Emerging life patterns of an individualistic and self-centred nature have a direct implication in the gradual disappearance of committed superwomen to both family and profession. For younger generations, love and affection do not mechanically translate into lifetime commitments for marriage and family as used to be the case with respect to the 'male breadwinner' model of welfare capitalism. This is evident in the case of Southern Europe where the reluctance to abandon cosy households by men and women in their 20s is to be highlighted. In Spain only seven in ten people at the age of 29 are economically independent. Note that in 1984 two out of three of those aged 25 were standing in their own two feet, but the proportion has dropped to one-third in ten years (Tobío, 2001a). Approaches towards life styles increasingly reinforce an Epicurean and self-interested understanding of collective life, while family sacrifices are assessed in a negative manner.

Alternatively, it has been argued that this trend will be reversed in the future and 'old habits' of family formation may return in the years to come. In the case of Spain the fact that the most numerous generations are still within reproduction age could lend support to this view. According to the Spanish *Instituto Nacional de Estadística*, a small increase in the fertility rate could take place in the not too distant future. Such an estimate is in line with those made by UN and EU projections for the period 1997-2015: a mere annual negative rate of -0,2 per cent. Anna Cabré (1993) challenges such 'self-fulfilling' prophecies basing her argument on analyses of demographic cycles and on the demands and needs of the 'marital market'. She is of the opinion that a growth in the fertility rates might be around the corner.¹²

Mediterranean women seem to have opted more for the 'quality' than the 'quantity' of the family. Note, for instance, that in Spain around half of all births are first children. Women with higher levels of formal education who can have access to better jobs --but also more competitive and demanding-- in many cases simply choose not to have a second child.¹³ However, some qualifications should be made concerning the diverse family types and superwomen in Southern Europe. In the particular case of Italy, where there is a profound North-South division, various models and family cultures are evident although strong differences might be disappearing. A sharp decline in the birth rates of the Italian South has been noticeable in recent years and has found expression in a generalization of the two-child family as a contrast to the one-child family characteristic of the North (Naldini, 2002).

With regard to other superwomen, a reference to class and levels of education needs further qualification. Not all superwomen can ascribe themselves to middle class and university categories. Lower income superwomen decided to keep both household and professional commitments but not for the same kind of reason of their mothers, who restricted themselves to unpaid household activities. They wanted to maintain their more 'expensive' lifestyles and, after getting married, a 'second salary' in the household was most welcomed. As a consequence, 'dual earner' families have proliferated throughout the social ladder although not always for the same kind of reasons. It can be argued that the necessity for commodification of this kind of superwomen is somewhat 'fictitious' because if they had accepted similar consumption needs as their mothers, they would not have faced a situation that compels them to remain in the labour market

in order to secure a 'second salary'. Thus, it can be observed that working class superwomen have changed social patterns beyond restrictions imposed by their household's economies. It has somewhat been the result of changes affecting patterns of consumption, although they have not altered the solid micro-solidarity within Mediterranean families. In this respect superwomen can be regarded as a general epiphenomenon that manifests itself in all social groups and classes.¹⁴

Indeed, the most analysed variable in explaining variations for family formation has been the labour market. Due to a great diversity of factors (cultural, economic, international, judicial, juridical, technological) predictions and explanations are often misleading and difficult to formalise. However, changes in the labour market are among the most influential in the recent family transition in Southern Europe.

In Spain, the single most significant feature in the composition of the labour force has been the increasing participation of women since late Francoism and the transition to democracy. In the last two periods of general growth of employment in Spain (1964-74 and 1985-1990), women's participation in the labour market increased *vis-à-vis* male workers. In 1969 there were 32 female workers for every 100 male employees. This ratio increased to 39/100 in 1974, to 41/100 in 1985, and to 56/100 in 1994.¹⁵

In relative terms, women's participation is greater in the public sector than the private. In 1975 there were nearly 1 million public employees in Spain. At the beginning of 1996 the corresponding figure was nearly 1,800,000. Note that in 1964 there were 17 women for every 100 male public employees. This ratio jumped to 70/100 in 1991. In the period 1971-1991, the creation of public jobs almost doubled (NB. Those corresponding to female public employees increased by 271 per cent). Practically half of female workers entering the labour market between 1977-1998 corresponded to the public sector. Note that the proportion of female public employees within the 25-29 age group was 105 for every 100 male workers in 1990 (Salido, 2000). Job security and stability appear to be paramount for women in this age group.

Other than the massive entrance of younger generations of women into the labour market, the underlying feature is that they do not leave their jobs when they become mothers. In contrast with the situation in Germany and the United Kingdom, employment interruptions in Spain --and Southern Europe, as a whole-- are motivated more by professional reasons and less by maternity concerns. This pattern translates into high continuity rates and fewer part-time jobs (Jurado and Naldini 1996). In Spain, for instance, only 14% of female workers were part-timers, which compared to 29% in the whole European Union (Eurostat, 1995).

Unquestionably the household-employment dichotomy has become increasingly stressed for women in Southern European countries in recent years. Inevitably, Mediterranean women have had to use a more flexible approach based on expedient agency. Solving problems caused by the uneasy household-employment relationship has found expression in the proliferation of a variety of the so-called 'family strategies', which are briefly analysed in the following section.

Family strategies, granny-mothers and puzzled fathers

The concept of 'family strategy' has become a catchy expression in reference to the greater or lesser ability to organize family activities. There is an emphasis on the 'rational choice' capability of family members (primarily the couple) in order to maximize material resources and to cover family needs. Accordingly, to a greater 'intentionality' on childbearing decision-making a limitation of unwanted effects is expected. Among these the mismatch between the number of family members and the sufficiency of material resources has been a major cause of situations of poverty and social exclusion.

In Southern European countries, severe poverty rates are lower due to the role of the family as a clearing house in the distribution of material resources. For instance, in Spain severe poor (having less than a quarter of the mean equivalent household income per head) are 36 per cent if they are considered individually (all citizens excluding those under 16 years of age), but they amount to only 5 per cent of the aggregate population living in households (Carabaña and Salido, 1999). The latter figure illustrates the importance of family and households in peoples' attitudes, expectations and decisions in Mediterranean everyday life. However, dangers associated to disaffiliation and social exclusion are now more likely to have an impact due to the extension of values of welfare individualization as it has happened in other welfare regimes, mainly in liberal Anglo-Saxon countries.

A greater degree of secularization in couples' relationships has also contributed to a relaxing of religious codes of conduct regarding the family, particularly in countries where the religious element has been so important in welfare arrangements. All things considered, and despite the emphasis on human rational agency, family strategies do not necessarily imply a degree of rational 'intentionality' and are highly conditioned by structural factors (Garrido Medina and Gil Calvo, 1993).

In Southern Europe the analysis of informal strategies to combine both the paid labour market job and unpaid domestic activities are crucial for the understanding of the dynamics of welfare arrangements between state, families and markets. Large numbers of Mediterranean mothers with small children are now in the paid labour market (NB. In Spain, the current generation of working-age mothers is the first one in which a majority of its members is in paid work). They cannot simply reproduce past behaviour and, therefore, they display innovative ways and means to deal with the 'reconciliation' between households and jobs. At this point the concept of strategy can be explained as practices that have to do with action to change the position of the agent and to give an answer to new emerging problems (Tobío, 2001b).

In this context of social change it is necessary to refer to both women's and men's individual strategies, which can be coincident with family strategies but which can also conflict with each other. As a matter of fact, in this combination of such individual strategies lies a great deal of the claim for gender equality. For men family strategies have traditionally been articulated in their career interests. Superwomen have represented a transitional and exceptional compromise which has put them on the edge of an 'impossible situation' due to the disproportionate amount of personal sacrifices. Mediterranean women have now taken initiatives in a more possibilistic although *ad hoc* manner.

For 'puzzled fathers' the preservation of their professional careers is no longer the one and paramount objective around which family used to be mobilised. Considering their pivotal role as mothers and carers in family arrangements, women's strategies are becoming as important, if not more decisive, as men's strategies. The two main objective constraints for advancing gender equality within the family remain the same: (a) The unequal sharing of domestic responsibilities within the household;¹⁶ (b) The lack of external support (personal social services and parental leaves).

For young Mediterranean mothers their main strategy is to count on 'substitute mothers',¹⁷ usually a family or kin member living nearby. In Spain, three quarters of the working mothers have a close relative living in the same town; in more than half of the cases it is their own mother. Help provided by grandmothers has become crucial in many cases and can be seen as the main resource for working mothers in Southern Europe. 'Granny-mothers' continue to perform an indispensable support for young mothers, who can rely on them without reservations. Moreover, 'granny-mothers', as surrogate mothers, eliminate any feeling of guilt by working mothers concerning their engagement in paid employment.

The transfer of caring responsibilities from young parents to grandparents or relatives greatly reinforces the cultural bases of the model of 'family and kin solidarity' in Southern Europe (Naldini, 1999). However, a long-standing perverse effect of the Mediterranean family micro-solidarity could remain the same in the years to come, i.e. the limited state intervention, usually passive and in many cases 'unfriendly', towards working mothers. An alternative view to this scenario is that political parties will gradually realise how important an electoral issue the household-employment dichotomy is becoming in so many domains (education, employment, fiscal, health, housing or social services). In the not too distant future it is more than plausible to forecast a growing interest by South European political parties in debating welfare arrangements as highly contested electoral matters. However, such an eventuality would very much depend on claims and mobilization carried out by younger working mothers, who have up until now shown their reluctance to adopt superwomen burdened strategies. The non-participation of women as relevant actors in policy making explains to a high degree why policy inputs have usually been discriminatory for women in terms of outcomes (León, 2001)

The changing and unstable role of 'puzzled fathers' within households will make them realise that domestic responsibility also concerns them.¹⁸ Working fathers would eventually become 'objective' allies of working mothers in struggling to set a new model based on both a greater gender equality within households and on a more committed public support for personal services; one which would help them to 'find' women in the more competitive 'marital market' and would give them a sense of purpose within households (Cabré, 1993).

A big question for the future development of Mediterranean welfare is whether daughters and grandchildren of superwomen would be willing to carry out the same amount of caring activities for their own children and grandchildren. It does not seem plausible to expect superwoman's daughters to reproduce strategies as 'granny-mothers' in the same way as their mothers have done. If this is the case, future arrangements will have profound implications for the Mediterranean welfare regime

as it now stands. The transition to a new model should concern actively to the society as a whole. In so doing, what was considered to be a 'women's issue' would no longer be coped with behind closed doors. The sacrifices made by Mediterranean 'superwomen' in the last decades may have well allowed a greater degree of gender equality for future generations, but they have also brought about new uncertainties on how the Mediterranean regime would evolve in the years to come.

Conclusion

Social protection in the Mediterranean welfare regime continues to rely heavily on the role of the family as producer and distributor of welfare. The involvement of women in unpaid care, mainly for both older people and children, has been crucial for social cohesion in Southern Europe. Family production of well-being has been traditionally considered as a 'given fact' by governments. The unequal sharing of domestic activities has been often coupled with legal inequalities and disparities between sexes.

Cohorts of superwomen in the age-group 40-59 have proved to be a very effective resource for maintaining high levels of families' well-being. They have also contributed to maintain economic progress in Southern Europe, precisely at a time of welfare retrenchment and public cost-containment in other EU countries. At present, the increasing participation of female workers in the labour force, coupled with new burdens on family formation and expansion, raise major questions for women's reconciliation of working and mothering.

Emerging life patterns of an individualistic and self-centred nature imported from a 'neo-liberal' conception of social life are a main cause for the gradual disappearance of committed superwomen to both family and profession. For younger generations, love and affection do not mechanically translate into lifetime commitments for marriage and family as used to be the case with the 'male breadwinner' model of welfare capitalism. An individualization of lifestyles and a prioritisation of professional concerns by women have resulted, among other causes, in a sharp decline in fertility rates and in worrying demographic prospects for Southern European countries.

Among the various reforms for offsetting the impact of the gradual disappearance of superwomen in Mediterranean welfare, a quantum-leap achievement in family reorganization would be the carrying out by men of their equal share of household responsibilities. This would also bring about an objective alliance between working mothers and fathers for a more committed support from state intervention.

The household-employment dichotomy is regarded to provoke political debate and would eventually become a central electoral issue in future party competition. Besides the sharing of domestic activities, other measures for greater gender equality could be implemented also for those women unable to enter the labour market or willing to devote themselves entirely to family life. Caring credits or credit allowances, together with a panoply of fiscal measures, would effectively --and legally-- recognize the material nature of unpaid (principally, caring) activities within households (Luckhaus, 2000).

As a desirable scenario the implementation of a scheme of basic income would solve major problems of gender equality and choice (Van Parijs, 1992). This type of universal guaranteed income would provide women with a wider range of possibilities in sorting out their dual choice between paid and unpaid work (Gough, 2000). Such a scheme could be worked out along the lines of the 'negative income tax' and would *de facto* expand the practices of solidarity from the micro level characteristic of the Mediterranean households to include the citizenship at large, in a context of cosmopolitan democracy (Montagut, 2001).

Sacrifices made by the Mediterranean superwomen have undergone somewhat unnoticed for both academics and the general public. Such a low-profile behaviour should not hide the decisive contribution made by them to the performance of the Southern European welfare regime. Undoubtedly their descendants will be more equal inside and outside the households than they were.

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Notes

1. Or Southern European. Although Portugal does not have a Mediterranean coast, and its formidable overseas expansion was historically carried out with an Atlantic mentality, its axiological resources belong to a high degree to the *Mare Nostrum* cultural world.

2. Likewise, and from a certain gender perspective, policy regimes are preferentially linked to an understanding of the centralized power and the state (O'Connor *et al*, 1999).

3. Indeed, he has incorporated some of the many feminist critiques in his book published 1999. In this respect, he has put forward his ideas about 'de-familisation' and the externalisation of household services.

4. In-group practices in the Italian *Mezzogiorno* have been labelled as being the product of a 'amoral familialism' (Banfield, 1967). This rather mystifying proposition has lacked empirical and historical bases. For a useful discussion of this, see Gribaudi (1997).

5. In Spain the 'male breadwinner' model on which the Golden Age of welfare capitalism flourished (1960-75) is now found unacceptable by two of every three Spanish women (CIS 1995, Estudio 2194).

6. In Spain, 76% of youngsters corresponding to the age group 15-29 years were of the opinion that family was 'very important'; 23% considered it as 'quite important', and only 1% regarded it as 'of little or no importance' (CIS, 1996).

7. According to Esping-Andersen, policies that advocate more male participation within the household may appear egalitarian from a gender point of view, but they do not appear to be a 'win-win' strategy. In the case of the USA, where there is a large pool of low-wage workers, market promotion of personal services is the preferred mechanism for policies of de-familisation (1999).

8. Note that in the period 1975-1995, all Southern European more than doubled the percentage growth of public expenditure for the EU-12. Increases in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain reached 15.1 percentage points, 11.3, 10.2 and 13.1 respectively. These rates compare to the mean 5.3 percentage points for all EU countries (Moreno, 2000). In the case of Spain, as a highly illustrative figure, let us remember that the weight of pensions in the Spanish economy multiplied by six since 1970 and the number of pensioners by two, whereas the population over 65 years increased only by around 60%.

9. Although partially, this helps to explain why Mediterranean economies have performed much better than others in Europe. The syndrome 'to catch up with the most advanced European economies is particularly relevant in the case of Spain. In 1959 the Spanish GDP per head was 58.3% of the EC mean; in 1985 it increased to 70.6%, and in 1998 it grew to 81.5%. Spain would reach the EU mean level of 100% by the year 2025 if the annual 'catching-up' percentage of 0.8 is maintained (Moreno, 2001).

10. This was a provisional figure provided by a macro survey carried out by the Spanish *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* (National Institute for Statistics) and which referred to an ill-defined 'structural fertility rate'. Subsequently, the fixed ratio corresponding to the 1999 brought up the figure to 1.2 children per fertile woman, still the lowest in the whole of the European Union.

11. In Spain the mean age for getting married (preferred formula for family formation) was 26.9 for women in 1995, a figure that compares with 23.4 in 1980 (Castro Martín, 1999).

12. Her prediction based on a 'younger sister' approach of the Easterlin theory, was made for the second half of the 1990s, just when fertility rates plunged in Spain. However, expectations for an increase remain possible in the years to come.

13. Note that the *per capita* number of children in the illiterate group of women is 3.9 while the mean figure for those within the higher education group is 0.72 children per woman. At current, in the most fertile 25-34 age group the mean figure for illiterate women is 3.13 children per head, although the equivalent figure for those university-title holders is 0.33 per women. This latter figure translates into

one child for every three potential mothers, precisely in the same age group in which eight out of ten women had declared their desire to have children (INE, 1999).

14. More refined analyses should concentrate on explaining whether or not this is the result of ideological changes in peoples' expectations related to the neo-liberal predicament of welfare individualization and self-interest consumption habits in times of the so-called 'new economy'. I am indebted to Olga Salido for her insightful comments on this issue.

15. Female activity rates are still low in Spain, although it is mostly explained by the fact that Spanish women over 40 years have a disproportionate low activity rate. According to Eurostat Labour Force surveys, female activity rate in 1997 was 36.7% as compared to the mean figure of 45.6% in the EU. Note, however, that in 1986 there was a difference of 12.8 points, which has been reduced to 8.9 points. Further to this, it should be pointed out that although in 1981 female activity rate for the 30-34 age group was only 30.8% in 1989, it jumped to 68.1% in 1999. If projections are accomplished women's participation in the labour market for the year 2005 in the age group 35-39 years would reach 85% (Tobío, 2001a).

16. Reproduction of roles within households in Spain has traditionally placed women in a position of 'subordination' towards men's professional priorities. Beyond the patriarchal understanding for this conduct, it has to be said that often mothers have taught their daughters domestic activities in the belief that household management would effectively provide them with power so that they would become real 'bosses' within families (Guillén, 1997). Indeed women would like men to share responsibilities, but in some instances it is not quite clear up to which extent they want also to share decision-making in organizational matters.

17. Constanza Tobío (2001b) distinguishes among: (a) main strategies (e.g. women substituting women, either grandmothers or paid domestic help), organization, planning and control, men as resource and strategy; (b) complimentary strategies (e.g. childcare centres and schools, spatial strategies, time strategies, and simplifying and reducing domestic work); (c) undesirable strategies (e.g. leaving children alone); and (d) indirect strategies (e.g. reducing the number of children).

18. Even for the simplest of reasons as that for maximizing material resources within households, and the saving on domestic paid help. A reference to the increasing role that female immigrants are playing in Southern European households is to be underlined. In Italy, for instance, the expression 'mia filippina' (my Philippine) has generalized to describe such kind of paid assistance in households, which can also extend to child-caring activities. Immigration is very important to take into account for future developments, including 'marital market' supply.

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