

ARENAS OF CARE AT THE INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN GENDER AND SOCIAL CLASS IN BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT

The transition being undergone by women from unpaid domestic work to remunerated employment, since the mid-20th century, due to the restructuring of capitalist economies, and, above all, the growth of the tertiary sector, has accelerated a shift away from family infant/child care, which has been becoming more and more shared with public and private institutions. The aim of this article is to examine how some of the care systems work in Brazil, in particular the family, the labour legislation and child education, with a special focus on gender and social class. It seeks to understand how such arenas of care influence the quantity and quality of mothers' participation in the labour market.

GENDER RELATIONS • LABOUR MARKET • PUBLIC POLICIES • CARE

THE EXTERNALIZATION OF CARE from the domestic ambit to the public sphere, albeit featuring different paces and institutional formats, arises from a process of profound change in the social conceptions and practices involving gender. Since the middle of the last century, under the lead of activism and feminist social criticism, there can be observed, principally in Western societies, a weakening of the traditional vision that confined such care solely to the domestic sphere, particularly to women. A new discourse has emerged and situates care in the political field, that of legitimate citizenship and social welfare demands.

The feminist studies were pioneering in the development of a new vocabulary and reconceptualization of domestic activities, on bases very different from those that had been enshrined by sociology. The activities performed at home were acquiring the conceptual status of labour and attributed new expressions: “unpaid work”, “unremunerated work” “social reproductive work”, “non-mercantile work” etc.

In fact, until a few decades ago, sociology addressed work and the family as themes that should be treated by separate sub-disciplines. The concept of work used to refer only to activity that was remunerated, exercised basically by men. Understanding of its institutional logic was practically limited to the analysis of class relations, work organisation and management processes, the protection systems for labour and representative entities. In turn, the sociology of the family was being developed with inspiration from the Parsonian interpretive model, which, although recognising the relation between the home and work, did so through the notion of the male occupational role (instrumental)

and the female role (expressive), which related in a complementary manner and would be indispensable for the maintenance of the stability of the social system. Although these two sub-disciplines of sociology presented important internal variations, family and work were, in general, regarded as autonomous spheres of activity, governed by different principles.

Such a disciplinary division in academia reflected the so-called “doctrine of separate spheres” (OKIN, 1989), which associated the separation between the home and work to the qualities desired in women and men. Remunerated work, as an arena of competition, rationality and achievement, was associated to the male, given that, practically, only men inhabited this universe. In contraposition, the home, described by means of values like refuge from the market, kingdom of purity, altruism and care for others, was linked to women, considered as those principally responsible for this social space. The notion of separate spheres sought to be, at the same time, an interpretation of society and the moral prescription for the desirable sexual division of work, as it was viewed as functional for reproduction or the equilibrium of the social system.

The feminist thinking in the last few decades has effected real change in the sociological paradigm by submitting this formulation to profound criticism. Succinctly, it argues that work and family are not only intrinsically linked, but the way they relate produces and reproduces hierarchies, differences and gender inequalities (HIRATA; KERGOAT, 2007). They constitute, moreover, spheres of legal regulation, firmly anchored in the gender divide, and fields of conflict and social strife.

The critical conception about how domestic activities and care were theorised and the new formulation that they acquired from the feminist studies are incorporated into a context of disintegration of the traditional order of gender in contemporary societies. During the second half of the 20th century, the restructuring of the capitalist economies in the West, notably the transition from industry to services, promoted the passage of women from unpaid work to remunerated activity (CASTELLS, 1999). The family model constituted of “male breadwinner/female carer”¹ weakened, causing ruptures in the traditional cultural references of femininity and maternity, and challenging the conventions about the position of women in society. The previous order has been substituted by a new unequal division of labour pattern, in which women combine remunerated work with their domestic activities, while men invest their time, as a priority, in paid work (GORNICK; MEYERS, 2003). Simultaneously, there has been acceleration of the process of defamiliarization of the care of the young child, which is increasingly being shared with public and private institutions.

Analyses of this new scenario of interaction between work and family have given rise to the term, care, which has begun to refer to the

¹ Such a model, though not always verified in practice, notably in Brazil, where many women have, for a very long time, been involved in activities generating economic resources, has served as an idealised moralising reference to the family. The notion of a woman dependent on her husband's income has also been inscribed in civil, labour and social security law, both here and in many other parts of the world.

activities performed to assist dependent persons, and, on the other hand, to the work involving domestic tasks that are provided to persons who could, by themselves, perform them adequately. Despite the difficulties of a rigorous separation between these dimensions, it was care that mobilised social solidarity and began to be considered worthy of public intervention.²

Brazil shares with several developed countries many social processes that engender reduced family involvement in care. One of them is the outstanding action of women's and feminist movements, which, since their resurgence at the end of the 70s, made the claim for creches one of its priority themes for mobilisation. Today, this theme is presented as one of the main claims mothers address to the public authorities (Data Popular/SOS Corpo, 2012). Others refer to demographic and structural changes that have occurred in the last few decades, which have brought Brazil closer to the family model constituted of two providers, besides having increased the historical presence of families with only one female provider.

However, in contraposition to those countries, care, to a great extent, in the private sphere of families and, when not provided by the family, is very consistent with the pattern of socio-economic inequality in the country.

The aim of this article is to analyse some of the care mechanisms in Brazil, in particular, the family, the labour legislation and child education, with a special focus on gender and social class. There is examination of how such arenas of care influence the quantity and quality of the participation of mothers in the labour market. The text is divided into four parts: the first deals with change in the family composition of providers and its effects on mothers' work; the second analyses the gender division of work in the family, based on the crossing of data between gender and income groups; the third covers the gender presuppositions contained in the legal provisions for care established in the labour legislation; and the fourth explores the relation between access to child education and the employment of mothers.

FAMILIES WITH TWO PROVIDERS AND THE FALL OF WOMEN'S CARE RESERVE

In the last few decades, there has been a considerable shift in the profile of the Brazilian population, which has strongly influenced women's reserve of care. One of the principal marks of this process has been the fall in the number of children per mother, which has reached levels below population replacement. This means that mothers are having less children to take care of, which also means that they will have less possibility of being cared for by their children. The process of transition from a young age structure to an adult one indicates, for the near future, a growing trend towards an ageing population.

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In this article, the term, "care" is used to refer, without distinction, to these two dimensions, particularly because the Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios - PNAD [National Research by Household Sample], fundamental to the analyses, does not allow for separation of care activities from domestic tasks.

However, the matter of care is not explained by demographic processes in themselves. They acquire a more precise sociological meaning when interpreted in the light of what has changed in gender relations (the transition of women into remunerated work) and what has remained unchanged (the low male participation in domestic activities).

The growing productive engagement of women, which has occurred over the last few decades, has been marked by the presence of female spouses and mothers with young children (BRUSCHINI, 2007). This configuration shows, in sharp relief, the emergence of new tendencies in female identities. The integration into remunerated work already forms, for these women, a space for social experience and a horizon of important expectations, even when the demands for care are very intense. Studies show that, irrespective of recessive or expansive economic conjunctures, the participation of women in the labour force is growing, such that it is no longer possible to attribute the economic difficulties of families exclusively to orientation towards remunerated work. Other factors, such as the increase in women's schooling to higher levels than those of men, and cultural changes related to the gender roles – which place more value on the independence and autonomy of women, are crucial to understanding the transition of women into paid work.

Today, it can be said that, in the majority of family arrangements of couples with children, there are two providers. According to the 2009 PNAD, in 55% of these couples, the woman is considered to be a working spouse, and when considered to be the head of the household, this percentage rises to 59% (GOMES, 2011).

Nevertheless, women enter the labour market in very disadvantageous conditions in relation to men. Although the salary differential has declined, average female remuneration is still approximately 70% of that of males. And women continue occupying the more precarious positions available in the market. Their greatest employer is remunerated domestic service. In 2009, of the around 7.2 million workers in this occupation (equivalent to 7.8% of the total occupied population in the country), 6.7 million were women. This figure corresponds to 17% of the occupied women (against 0.95% in the case of men). The formalisation index was extremely low: only 26.3% of these workers had their employment booklet signed by the employer, a percentage very much lower than the average formalisation in other sectors, which was 69.9%, according to a study conducted by the Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada – Ipea (BRASIL, 2011).

The condition of being a mother weakens her employment position, which appears with great clarity when one observes the main indicators of the labour market for female spouses or female heads of monoparental families with one child. Sorj, Fontes and Machado (2007) show that these two segments are integrated into the labour market

through participation in occupations of inferior quality when compared to the working conditions of men, in any position in the family, and also to women without children. A significant percentage of women are in informal occupations without the protection of the labour laws, with low earnings and part-time work regimes. A working day shorter than the standard established by the labour legislation is a common means by which mothers conciliate paid and unpaid work.

The analysis of mothers' remunerated work compared to that of fathers and other women leads us to conclude that the private solutions of the conflict between work and family reflect and reproduce the gender differences and inequalities in the labour market. Private solutions mean that mothers are not available to be integrated into the labour market under better conditions, which would guarantee them more autonomy and independence.

UNPAID DOMESTIC WORK: GENDER AND SOCIAL CLASS DIVISIONS

The gender division of home activities is so unfavourable to women that many analyses consider that the category gender is sufficient to explain the organisation of such work. However, when the income dimension is introduced into the analysis, important distinctions emerge within and between the sexes, suggesting that domestic activity spans diverse social experiences.

TABLE 1
TIME SPENT ON HOUSEHOLD TASKS IN FAMILIES WITH ONE CHILD UP TO 6 YEARS OLD IN RELATION TO INCOME RANGE, GENDER AND POSITION IN THE FAMILY

INCOME RANGE	AVERAGE NUMBER OF HOURS SPENT PER WEEK										
	AMONG ALL FAMILY MEMBERS			HEAD			SPOUSE			CHILDREN	OTHERS
	Total	Man	Woman	Total	Man	Woman	Total	Man	Woman		
1st quintile	10.4	2.8	19.5	13.1	4.9	28.6	32.4	4.9	35.9	2.4	4.6
2nd quintile	10.6	3.0	19.9	12.3	5.2	26.1	28.7	4.7	32.6	2.4	5.8
3rd quintile	10.2	3.5	18.8	11.1	5.7	23.5	26.5	5.1	29.8	2.0	6.1
4th quintile	10.1	3.8	18.4	10.5	6.0	23.4	25.6	5.5	28.6	1.7	6.9
5th quintile	8.8	3.7	16.1	9.1	5.8	19.2	21.1	4.1	24.3	1.0	7.2
Average	10.2	3.2	18.9	11.7	5.4	25.6	27.9	4.9	31.4	2.1	5.8

Source: IBGE/PNAD 2009 (Estimates).

As can be observed in Table 1, women dedicate, on average, six times more hours to domestic tasks than men. This difference decreases in proportion to increases in the income bracket. In the first quintile (the poorest 20%), the time spent by women is almost 7 times that of men, while in the fifth quintile (the richest 20%), it falls to 4.3 times. In the comparison among women, it is verified that the richest work 3 to

4 hours less than the poorest. This is probably due to the smaller sized families in the fifth quintile, access to modern domestic technology and domestic employees. Among men, the difference in time invested in the home between the poorest and the richest is much less, just one hour. The difference between the male and female behaviour patterns with regard to domestic work, throughout the income distribution, reveals that men are much less conditioned by income level than women.

We sought to verify whether, besides class position, position in the family had consequences for the unpaid work day of men and women, and we found that the situation was unaltered. Whether as family heads (person of reference, considered responsible for the other family members), or as spouses (the person who has a conjugal relationship with the person of reference, whether or not they have a matrimonial link), the women perform the major part of the domestic functions rather than the men. In other words, the attribution of the greater portion of the domestic tasks is not conditional upon the position occupied in the family. An interesting aspect that emerges from these data is that female spouses perform more domestic work than female heads, which suggests that the presence of a partner implies an even greater work overload.

For men, the opposite occurs: the male heads spend more time on domestic tasks than male spouses, although both significantly less than women. A possible explanation for this is that the position of male spouse, depreciatively valued in relation to the patterns of hegemonic masculinity, given that, probably, he is not the main provider in the household, is compensated by even greater distancing from domestic tasks.

From the point of view of income differences, the female spouses of the fifth quintile work 11.6 hours less per week than those in the first quintile, whereas the family heads present little variation between one income bracket and another – just an hour and a half. In other words, men present great consistency in their low participation in domestic tasks. There are indications that gender distance with regard to hours spent on domestic work in the highest quintile of income distribution is decreasing. However, as shown in Table 1, such convergence is due more to the reduction in time dedicated by female spouses than the increase in time dedicated by the male heads.

We can say that, although gender determines the division of domestic work, income produces important differences in the domestic experience of women. For men, position in the income distribution is almost irrelevant, whereas the overwhelming aspect is the almost absolute influence of gender identity as males, strongly constructed by the distance they maintain and preserve in relation to the domestic sphere.

WORK, LEAVE AND MATERNITY

In order to understand how a society deals with the dual role of its workers, as providers and carers, one of the paths is to examine the rights established in the labour legislation for carers of dependents. We will focus on these rights as devices that organise gender identities and social hierarchies in the spheres of paid work vis-à-vis unpaid domestic work.

The main benefit provided in this legislation is related to the reproductive order and expressed in the granting of maternity leave, which guarantees the female worker leave of absence for 120 days on full salary, with job security as of confirmation of the pregnancy until 5 months after the birth, plus the right to a creche in the baby's first 6 months. However, its scope is reduced, given that it contemplates only the mothers who contribute to social security. With this limitation, a hierarchy of value is attributed to maternity, which varies according to the status of the female worker as a contributor or a non-contributor. The contribution rule makes a distinction between maternity that is socially protected and that which is not.

It is thus a benefit that excludes many female workers, as a major portion of them are engaged in informal work activities. Although the number of men and women who contribute to social security has increased recently, informality is still very significant among women. According to the latest IBGE census (2010), the section of activity that had the worst results in terms of contributions to the official social security was "Domestic Services" (38.3%). Given that these services are over 90% occupied by women, one can grasp the level of exclusion that maternity leave based on the contribution regime may cause.

Another important indicator of exclusion of women from this benefit becomes evident when it is observed that younger women, those 16 to 24, the age group in which the highest birth rates are concentrated, are the most severely affected as they are largely engaged in informal activities. This means that a great portion of female workers have babies without any support or economic security.

Even for those in formalised activities, their rights to the care, guaranteed by the labour legislation, are extremely limited, being concentrated, above all, on the protection of women in the reproductive phase and on the care of infants in the first six months of life. The legislation does not make provision for facilities so that the workers can conciliate work and family throughout the whole family life cycle. With the exception of leave for two consecutive days in the case of the death of a close relative, the legislation does not recognise the citizen's double role as carer and worker.

Concerning the approach to gender, the labour legislation has changed very little over time: reproduction and child care continue to be considered an almost exclusive female attribution. Maternity leave for

three months was introduced in the *Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho* – CLT [Consolidation of the Labour Laws], in 1943. For the father, it created leave of absence for one day during the first week after the baby's birth. With the 1988 Constitution, maternity leave was extended to 120 days, and paternity leave was established at five days. The shorter time attributed to the father suggests that such a right has little chance of altering the rigid gender division in infant/child care. The recent broadening of care rights has been promoting a new differentiation among female workers. The latest extension of maternity leave indicates a change in conception of this benefit. It represents a transition between leave as a worker right and leave as an employer prerogative.

The change was brought about by Federal Law no. 11.770, issued in 2008, which created the *Programa Empresa Cidadã* [the Company and the Female Citizen Program], aimed at extending maternity leave by another 60 days, the new total being 180 days, through the granting of fiscal incentives to companies that adhere to the program. Besides private enterprises, the federal public sector adhered, and, little by little, the other administrative levels, state and municipal, started to introduce the longer leave period.

Historically, the public sector is one of those that grants more benefits associated to maternity, which probably explains the significant participation of women in this labour space. Leave to accompany an ill family member is an example of this: it is granted for 30 days, extendable for a further 30, and, in excess of 60, another 90, but without remuneration.

The situation of female workers in the private sector is significantly weaker, given that the benefits provided by the labour legislation do not have automatic application throughout the universe of companies. On the one hand, above all the small firms, do not grant the benefits, counting on deficient public control. Only the larger ones with active unions grant the benefits associated to creches.

Thus, the effectiveness and type of application of such leave varies depending on working mothers' engagement conditions: formalised or non-formalised, public or private sector, and within the latter, company size. Thus, care leave expresses the gender divisions and segmentation of the employment market, imposing different maternity experiences on women (SORJ, 2004).

CHILD EDUCATION AND MOTHERS' PARTICIAPTION IN THE LABOUR MARKET

The perspective of child care as a social responsibility, which should count on the participation of extra-family institutions, has arisen in the country due to social conflicts and pressures that have mounted since the mid-1970s. The general public itself, at the same time as exerting pressure on

the public authorities without much success, has begun to organise and assume responsibility for the creation of local community creches.

Thus, at the beginning of the 1980s, there was a strong popular movement for the creation and maintenance of community creches in peripheral districts of the major cities. In a short time, supra-local organisations were created, becoming interlocutors with the public authorities. Filgueiras (1994), analysing the history of this movement in Belo Horizonte, attributed the striving for creches to the experiences of communities and groups of women in the period 1978-1979. She situated the genesis of the movement in the first initiatives for child care, supported by mothers, neighbours and parishes, the aim being to facilitate mothers' access to remunerated work.

As of the 1990s, the discourse about extra-family child care mobilised other social sectors, and acquired a new formulation that emphasised child education as one of the child's rights. In 1996, upon approval of the new *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional* (Law no. 9.394) [Law of National Educational Guidelines and Bases], the creches and pre-school institutions began to be integrated into the basic education system, and conceived access to child education institutions as the right of the child and a right of the family to share the education of their children in social facilities. Child education has become considered as crucial for the cognitive and emotional development of children, with a positive impact on future living conditions and socio-professional prospects.

The first decade of this century has seen important growth in access to child education. The creche attendance rate rose from 8.7% to 18.1%, between 1998 and 2009, and that of pre-schools, in the same period, from 57.9% to 81.3%, as revealed in the Ipea study (BRASIL, 2010). Besides low coverage, above all of the creches, serious social inequalities are verified in their distribution. In 2009, only 11.8% of children in the lowest income quintile (the poorest 20%) were in the care of creches, against 34.9% in the fifth quintile (the wealthiest 20%).

Although the discourse about child education has shifted from the field of working parents' rights to the individual right of the child, various studies have shown the virtuous effect of this device on mothers' paid work.

Sorj, Fontes and Machado (2007) sought to assess the effectiveness of creches and pre-school establishments in promoting the employment of mothers considered poor, relating this to the attendance levels of their children up to age 6. Analysis of the data from the 2005 PNAD shows that, although income did not make a significant difference, the indicators of women's engagement in the job market were very diverse. Mothers of children under care in creches and pre-schools displayed a higher participation rate in the working population (60.7% in the north-east and 59.1% in the south-east) than mothers whose the children had no access

to child care/education (57.8% in the north-east and 55.6% in the south-east). The former managed to work more in comparison to those whose children stayed at home, mainly in the south-east, besides earning higher salaries. Formal employment also became more probable when children were catered for in creches and pre-schools. Thus, it was proven that child education is an effective mechanism of articulation between the family and work, as, besides enabling mothers to work, and to work more, it also allowed them enhanced access to the world of work.

It can thus be affirmed that access to institutional child care/education has brought potential for the promotion of better remunerated work for mothers and placing them in better quality occupations.

Gama (2011) confirmed these findings about child care/education, using data from the 2006 PNAD, and the work characteristics of mothers. This research allowed delineation of a clearer picture of the conflicts engendered by the relation between women engaged in remunerated work and child care in Brazilian families. Access to creche services presented a positive association with the remunerated condition of mothers, measured by indicators, such as the formalisation of employment, the increase in hours worked, greater income from work and less hours dedicated to domestic activities across the entire income range. Especially among mothers without spouses, the greatest proportions of access to these child care/educational services has meant greater benefits in terms of productive engagement. The authoress showed that the increased coverage of these child care/educational services has also had an impact on the decreased time spent by women on household tasks, which is reduced even further when children frequent full-time care/educational institutions.

The transfer of child care from families to child care/educational institutions is far from being a universal practice, even among wealthier families. However, the differences in access depend, to a great extent, on private funds and the availability of educational institutions. Whereas among poorer families, or part of them, child care is directed to the public educational facilities, the richest are oriented towards the private sector (SORJ; FONTES, 2012). The educational institutions for children express the social inequalities of the country, but, at the same time, strengthen them, as the public institutions are, in general, of inferior quality, which adversely affects their role as equalisers of life opportunities for children.

CONCLUSIONS

The macro-sociological developments occurring over the last few decades, such as the expansion of women's education, access to means of communication, multiplication of discourses on human rights, and

broad dissemination of feminist ideology, have altered the traditional gender norms and expectations. The significant transition of women into remunerated work is an expression of this process, and it encourages changes in the gender identities. However, this transition is taking place without adequate public support that could effectively socialise care services and enable greater integration of women into employment, as well as into the public sphere in general. It is still left up to women to solve the incompatibilities between the labour market and family responsibilities, whether assuming the burden of overwork alone or distributing the care among other women.

The way in which care appears in the social spheres analysed here – family, labour legislation and child education – shows that it operates at the crossroads of two systems of inequalities, gender and social class, and that it configures distinct social experiences of care. Although gender is a fundamental category of analysis to explain the logic that permeates domestic work relations, it has also been possible to demonstrate that income is a powerful conditioning factor for the way unpaid work is expressed.

The distribution of domestic work in the ambit of the family shows that it is concentrated on women, and this characteristic is transversal across the income range. However, when we introduce income into the care scenario, it is possible to perceive differences among women in this social practice. Here, the gender category does not account for the existence of the same collective experience of women, given that the variations are not at all negligible. In contraposition, when we introduce the category income class into the analysis of the practice of domestic care performed by men, the picture remains unchanged; the male experience overlaps class inequalities. Thus, when we relate gender and income class, the aggregate effect for men and women is the opposite: women differ among themselves and men acquire a uniform identity.

In the analysis of the labour legislation, we verified that it introduces inequalities in the experiences of maternity as an event in the lives of working mothers. In defining as female workers only those who contribute to social security, maternity has distinct consequences for women's careers, probably further exacerbating the inequalities between women in formalised occupations and those in the non-formalised. Thus, the association between maternity benefits and the labour status (formalised or non-formalised), which, in turn, has a close relation with income, introduces and strengthens differences in the maternity experience as an event in the lives of working mothers.

Finally, it is possible to conclude that access to creches and pre-schools is a way of socialising care, which bears a positive relation with the work of mothers and has the potential to stimulate development of the economic independence and autonomy of women.

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