

Presentation¹

Care is a term used to describe processes, relations and feelings between people who care for each other, and for other living creatures and even objects. It thus encompasses various aspects of social life. As Hirata and Guimarães (2012) affirm, it is a concept that shares with concepts such as “work” and “gender” a simultaneously multidimensional and transversal nature and connotes a broad field of actions involving the state and public policies aimed at the segment of the population considered to be dependent, and extends to a set of practices, attitudes and values related to emotion, love and the compassion involved in intersubjective relations.

The economic crises in various countries, the stagnation of public social services, the prolongation of human life and the increased proportion of the elderly in the population transform dependence into a social risk and the issue of care into a political concern. Problems that until recently were considered specific to the private sphere – the responsibility of women in the family – have become obligations of the state. These obligations take on new configurations in the contemporary world.

How is this type of work redefined? To what degree do the European and North American context respond to the growing needs of dependent aging and care for children? What is the type of emotional control involved in these different activities? How does the ethics of care delineate biopolitics? And above all, how has care challenged feminist theories?

Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto, in the book *Circle of Care – Work and Identity in Women’s Lives* (1990), propose three images that can characterize the main approaches that the growing interest in the issue of care has gained among feminists: selfish carer, androgynous carer and visible care.

¹ Translated by Jeffrey Hoff.

The selfish carer sees care as a burden for women who should try to escape this function and place her own needs first. It can be said that this posture characterizes both liberal and Marxist lines of feminist thinking. Care is part of domestic seclusion, and is seen as the central mark of the oppression of women. The abilities needed to clean, cook, wash and care for children and the ill and for other tasks appear as specific to the feminine nature, with their economic and social values remaining obscure. The entrance into the world of remunerated work would be, from these different points of view, the condition for the liberation of women, for the guarantee of both economic and financial autonomy and a condition for the active participation in unions and political organizations.

In contrast to this vision, there was a trend to present a positive vision of care, as a dimension of life that was devalued by the capitalist and patriarchal order. Gilligan (1982) based her reflection on the ethics of care on longitudinal empiric studies in developmental psychology, which are decisive for demonstrating the differences between ethics of justice and ethics of care. The former are based on rational, abstract and universal principles. The latter are based on the intimate, unique and irreducible experience of feelings and of relationships. Gilligan proposes a moral alternative that is attentive to the well-being of others.

The controversy about Gilligan's essentialism is fueled by her description of the feminine personality as being defined much more in relation to the other than that of men, and the affirmation of the existence of a "moral of proximity" of women. She also affirms that mothers risk love and suffering because they have a different experience of the connection to and a different form of reaction to the other.

The criticisms of Gilligan's work take three main directions: they consider that the author's affirmations about the differences between the sexes reinforce an essentialist posture. They affirm that by working with "the woman" as an encompassing category, Gilligan underestimates social, economic, cultural and other differences that give very distinct meanings to the feminine

experience. At the extreme, the author's concepts would be tributary to what Nietzsche denominates as slave morality, given that the subservience of women can be interpreted as a virtue.

The concept of the androgynous carer is a reaction to the image that care is devalued because it is an activity undertaken by women. It proposes the integration of men to the work of care to give importance to the practices that are stigmatized by being considered exclusively female. This integration would promote the valorization of the tasks conducted, which would come to have the same status as other types of work.

Critics of this view argue that care is deeply integrated in the system of sex/gender and that the social division of labor – which makes care a woman's task – could not be abolished without a deep change in gender constructions. Moreover, the integration of men into this work would result in new standards of domination and hierarchies, and would wind up transferring them into administrators of the work of women.

The visible carer insists on the interest of the valorization of the work of care, considering, however, that it does not involve sharing care with men, but giving the proper value to these practices related to emotional bonds, such as dedication, affection, love, compassion and donation to the assisted other and in this sense, involves a very specific type of work. From this perspective, the quality of our lives would be lost with the imposition of the forms of commercial rationality, converting care into mere work. Moreover, this perspective, criticizes movements and struggles considered to be emancipatory, but wind up reproducing the practices of domination against which they struggle, to the degree that by questioning the organization of gender in capitalist society, they reproduce its fundamental values. Demands for inclusion through employment and wage labor tend to commodify care, incorporating women into a system of competitive values, thus annulling values specific to the feminine ethic of care.² From this

² Other feminists affirm that reproductive work is productive and that the depreciation of domestic work and of child care was what led to the

perspective, the concept prevails that Zelizer (2012) characterized as “hostile worlds” – the world of love and the world of money – a vision that she strives to challenge in name of a “a new economy of care”, which is capable of creating equitable combinations.

The challenge raised by Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto (1990) is to politicize *care*. The authors show, correctly, that the liberal philosophical tradition concentrates on a world view in which rational and autonomous man conducts his life projects in the public domain, people are found isolated and the self is anterior to the activities and connections with others. The supposition of this liberal tradition is that there is a division of functions between the male sphere, including public affairs and legal rights. Women are considered to be dependent beings responsible for caring for others, for family obligations and for non-remunerated work. For this reason, care work is invisible, mythified and oppressive. Although some feminists attempt to liberate the concept of caring from the assumptions in which it is embedded, their perspective tends to be rooted in the world of rational, and autonomous men. As Tronto (2013) synthetically proposes, it is necessary to bring care to democracy, and at the same time, democratize care.

The vision that we inherit of care is related to the “cult of domesticity” – an ideal developed in the 19th century, with the entrance of middle class men into the capitalist labor market and with the exclusion of their wives from paid work. The cult of domesticity emphasizes the moral and emotional sensibility of middle class women (versus the physical work of caring that could be done by servants) and emphasized the duty of caring (versus the right to compete and express individual interests that was exercised by men) and the intense private nature of caring (versus the public business of politics and profit making).

subordination of women. The very idea of a dual work shift was considered as an unsuitable classification – because it is degrading – for the caring activities, as opposed to paid work.

Saskia Sassen's (2002) analysis of global cities goes in another direction. For Sassen, caring is something specific to these cities, which trigger the demand for highly skilled professionals and women are incorporated in this extremely competitive labor market. These cities have a growing number of what are ironically called "professional households without wife", in which adult couples – composed of a man and a woman or of two men or of two women – allocate the domestic tasks of caring to the market. In these global cities, the caregiver hired is most often an immigrant, and above all women immigrants.

The work of Pascale Molinier (2014) shows the inseparability of the ethical and political dimensions in caring as work. The question of love and affection as unavoidable aspects of care is central to her work; first, as confrontation and dissent between classes and socioprofessional categories, in which are opposed supervisors and caregivers points of view about this "work of love". Molinier also sees that affection by the part of the caregivers is an inevitable consequence of their work, which, however, is fundamentally marked by ambivalence. This is a subversive conclusion from the perspective of the current policies of work and employment: a criticism of the dogma of professional specialization.

Molinier criticizes the repartition of "dirty work" as it is conducted today in the framework of the "professionalization of care"; attentive to the "ethic of the subalterns", the effort that motivates the wage workers in the realization of their work, which is particularly demanding at the physical and psychological level. She shows that "care is by definition a region of dissent and of disagreement" (2014:24). This conflict is simultaneously the result of the specialization and hierarchization of the care work, which makes the work of the caregivers increasingly less visible and valued. Molinier shows that the rigid hierarchies and the new forms of specialization contribute to a segmentation of the process of care in the commodified space.

The dossier that we present is based on the idea that the reflection about care requires detailed study that is capable of

considering the various manifestations of care. For this reason, we seek to combine studies that consider the relationship between the caregiver and the individuals cared for – and their family members – with what could be called community care, and the new meanings that it takes on in the contemporary world, particularly in the context of the crisis of the welfare state.

The dependent elderly and their caregivers are practically invisible in the cultural production circuits and in the opening article of this dossier Kathleen Woodward asks how can we bring what is a scandalous public secret into visibility. Dependence and care of the elderly increasingly becomes a matter of the global market involving populations denied citizenship rights. Considering that one of the most effective modes of advocating for changes in public policy is engaging people's understanding through stories and images, this article masterfully explores the representations of the elderly and their caregivers in photographs, news, documentaries and biographies.

Nadya Araujo Guimarães presents how the word “care” arose in the Brazilian context by surveying the frequency of the words care and caregiver in a Brazilian periodical over time, thus feeding the debate about the polysemy involved in the term care and the consequent difficulties in its use. The author situates the commodification of the work of caregiving in the broadest process of consolidation of commodification of work in Brazil, notably female work. She circulates analytically through various forms of care, from home care and care in institutions to forms of “social care”. She locates the commodification of the work of care at the interior of broad controversies in the social sciences today, in particular that about the emotional and moral dimensions involved in care work and the problematic of the dissociation/association between emotional investment and economic behavior.

Antónia Pedroso de Lima discusses different dimensions of care, focusing particularly on the Portuguese case and the transformations caused by a situation of economic and social crisis that have promoted deep changes in the public policies and in the ways of life of the population. Considering that interpersonal care

is decisive for facing situations of crisis – economic, social, personal or political – the author proposes that care be considered as a factor of sustainability. Seeing care as a moral value in opposition to care as paid work allows an incisive analysis of the question of voluntary work and of the position of the state as provider (or non-provider) of care. It also allows to think the opposition between welfare state and welfare society.

Bila Sorj examines the meanings that community care acquires in the context of changes in the model of social policies that have attributed to the community the active role of being co-responsible for local development and social well-being.

Based on the Women of Peace program (Mulheres da Paz) implanted in favelas of Rio de Janeiro as an alternative form of confronting urban violence, the author explores in a very sensitive way the disputes between managers, operators and the target public, pointing to the deprofessionalization of women's work, undertaken for the care of young people in "situations of risk", and showing the complex and ambivalent character of these new modes of governing.

Guita Grin Debert *addresses* the question of care simultaneously at the macro level of the public and social policies, discussing the solutions presented for aging and the dependence on the social level, and at the micro level of the experiences and perceptions of the different actors in this process, based on an anthropological focus. The author presents her research about the international migration of caregivers from Eastern Europe and Latin America to Europe (in the case of Italy) and the interest and need for this migration, both for the European beneficiaries and for the migrants themselves. This article enriches theories of care and of migrations, conceptualized today in terms of "global chain: of affect and assistance".

Helena Hirata addresses the work of care and the dimension of sexuality. She begins with results from the study by P. Molinier that emphasizes the invisibility of care which is realized through discrete *savoir-faire*, showing that this work cannot be considered independently from sexual work. If it is less disturbing to separate

sexual desire and aging, on one hand, and sexuality and professional skills on the other, it is not possible to escape this dimension that is constitutive of the relations of care both in institutions and homes. In the same line as P. Molinier, Helena Hirata shows, through her research results, to what point the possible responses to the demands of the beneficiary of care in this terrain are part of the work and of the professional competence.

The articles presented in this dossier were initially presented and discussed at the International Seminar “Rethinking Gender and Feminisms”, in commemoration of the 20 years of the Pagu – Center for Gender Studies, held at UNICAMP in September 2014, at the round table “Gender and Care”, coordinated by Sabrina Finamori.

The organizers of the dossier would like to thank Pagu for the opportunity that was offered to them to reflect on the studies that have been conducted on the subject and to develop the version that is presented here. We would like to take the opportunity to announce the publication in the next edition of *cadernos pagu* of other enriching debates based on reflections and discussions from the international seminar “Rethinking Gender and Feminisms.”

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