

**Care Work between Defamilialization and
Commodification**

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*Care Work between Defamilialization and Commodification*¹

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Abstract

The article aims to evaluate the practical possibilities of implementing defamilialization policies in the society of crisis without introducing elements of inequality. At a time of profound changes in the welfare system, labour market and households, defamilialization is presented as a policy that is unsustainable. Starting from a critical reading of the thought of Esping-Andersen, this article stands out as there is no certainty that the virtuous circle of rise in defamilialization-female employment-demand for new services is activated independently from the bottom. At the same time, the hypothesis of defamilialization through the growth of private market services at affordable 'prices' to families is based on a reductive conception of care work, seen only as domestic work and social cost, which would still continue to be a burden to women and would turn the market – at an affordable cost! – into what is already done at home free of charge.

Keywords: family, care, defamilialization

1. Defamilialize the Family?

Levels of uncertainty, insecurity and vulnerability have increased in individual lives as a result of profound changes affecting the three cornerstone

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institutions of modern society: the labour market, the welfare state and the family. At the birth of the modern industrial society, work was transformed from a 'biblical' punishment reserved for non-citizens to a right and condition for the practice of individual liberty; the greatest social risks² were socialized by the creation of public social protection systems, while the wide dissemination of the stable married family guaranteed a satisfactory turnover of the population and rising levels of the quality of life of the workforce, who replaced those leaving the labour market through retirement. At the beginning of the 21st century, the three pillars of modernity have completely different profiles: as a result of the globalization of markets and the increase in international competition, work has lost its central role as a producer of wealth and has become a cost that Western economies regularly try to reduce in a systematic way by deregulating the labour market and introducing increasingly high levels of flexibility, whose social costs are mainly offloaded onto the worker (Gallino 2009). Welfare systems find it increasingly difficult to protect citizens against old and new risks because of the financial crisis, the reduction in contributory revenue and changes in the demographic foundation of the population. As a result of population ageing processes, the reduction in fertility and the rise in marital conflict, the family spectrum has changed significantly. There are now more families with elderly people and new family types (cohabitees, single-parent families, blended families), while families with small children are in the minority. The network of interfamily solidarity has narrowed, generating new systems of obligation whose nature and durability cannot be assessed for the time being (Di Nicola 2008). From the perspective of families, aspects such as the reduction in the purchasing power of wages and salaries, the demographic crisis, the drop in the marriage rate, the decrease in average family size, the increase in the poverty risk among families with a single income earner – of which there are many, also with a female head of family – and the fall in self-sufficiency show that the family is now more of a risk factor than a protective factor in the life trajectories of social actors. It is therefore necessary to implement social policies aimed not so much at remedial action as identifying new strategies for re-establishing an adequate trade-off between state, market and family³.

The aim of this article is to assess whether the hypotheses of defamilialization – socializing and transferring the production of goods and services that the family still incorporates outside the family – can constitute a

² The first forms of protection focused on the risks associated with old age, illness and unemployment.

³ For a presentation of the changing trends in welfare models and the labour market at European level, see Hemerijck (2008).

strategy to stem family poverty and the demographic crisis. While aware of the complexity of a radical redefinition of the relationship between state, market and family, attention will be focused on the single aspect of defamilialization, because in addition to its apparent simplicity and linear nature, it touches the very heart of the family: the fact that it is still the centre of reproduction (Di Nicola 2011) and, above all, the subject that dispenses 'care'. Care is meant not only in the physical sense, but also in terms of the attention, consideration and concern that form the basis of the processes of individualization and the formation of self-confidence in modern times.

The article aims to assess to what extent it is possible to defamilialize the family, or how far and under what conditions care work⁴ can be socialized without transforming the family into cohabiting adults who have nothing in common apart from sharing the payment of bills and rent.

In order to achieve this objective, a presentation of the ideas and arguments of Esping-Andersen – who can be considered the theorist of defamilialization – will be followed by in-depth analysis of the concept of care in the light of the broader category of 'recognition'. The necessary and feasible levels of defamilialization and the methods for obtaining them can only be defined by rereading the relationship between productive labour and reproductive labour during its historical development in the capitalist industrial society. Care work has been subjected to a systematic process of social dis-recognition involving the social subjects that were traditionally responsible for it (the family, above all women) and unless this process of dis-recognition is reread with a critical eye, any theory of defamilialization – although it should help women in their paths of emancipation and individualization – will run the risk of turning into a mere process of commodification. This would lead to the total colonization of the family by the market logic.

2. The three Pillars of Welfare Capitalism: State, Market and Family

The welfare state regimes theorized by Esping-Andersen (1990) were responsible for opening a heated debate about the theoretical and empirical

⁴ As we will see, care work refers in general to domestic work (washing, ironing, doing the shopping, tidying and cleaning the house) and physical assistance given to weak or younger members of the family, as well as relational and emotional care in the strict sense of the term. The distinction between care work and domestic work is only feasible from a theoretical perspective, but not always from an empirical point of view. For example, is a parent who prepares milk and gives it to a newborn child doing domestic work or care work? When considered together, domestic work and care work can be seen as a synonym of reproductive work.

issue of identifying distinctive elements in the different national welfare systems in order to highlight, in terms of the cost-effectiveness of cognitive categories, common political, cultural, social and economic systems and account for the forms assumed by welfare capitalism, albeit within the different individual national contexts. Esping-Andersen's aim was to develop a complex theory about the birth, development and change in policies fostered to safeguard citizenship rights. His starting point was the fact that protecting citizenship rights only became a major undertaking in European parliamentary democracies (and, by extension, in countries with ideal, cultural and historical links to Old Europe) implemented with increasing intensity after the Second World War – in the wake of Marshall's thinking (1955) – and that the question of encouraging citizens to participate in all aspects of associated life by adopting social policies of increasing inclusion and broadening the range of social risk assumption only arises in these contexts. Esping-Andersen (1990) maintained that the creation of welfare capitalism – that is to say a development model within which certain risks are socialized with costs distributed collectively with a view to redistribution – was made possible by varying attributions for covering the social costs of risks to the state, market and families. The three types of welfare regime identified by Esping-Andersen – liberal⁵, corporate-conservative⁶ and social-democratic⁷ – can be linked to

⁵ “In one cluster we find the 'liberal' welfare state, in which means-tested assistance, modest universal transfers, or modest social insurance plans predominate. Benefits cater mainly to a clientele of low-income, usually working-class, state dependents. In this model, the progress of social reform has been severely circumscribed by traditional, liberal work-ethic norms: it is one where the limits of welfare equal the marginal propensity to opt for welfare instead of work. Entitlement rules are therefore strict and often associated with stigma; benefits are typically modest. (...) The archetypical examples on this model are United States, Canada and Australia” (Esping-Andersen 1990, p.26).

⁶ “A second regime-type clusters nations such as Austria, France, Germany, and Italy. Here, the historical corporatist-statist legacy was upgraded to cater to the new 'post-industrial' class structure. In these conservative and strongly 'corporatist' welfare states, the liberal obsession with market efficiency and commodification was never preeminent and, as such, the granting of social rights was hardly ever seriously contested issue. What predominated was the preservation of status differentials; rights, therefore, were attached to class and status. This corporatism was subsumed under a state edifice perfectly ready to displace the market as a provider of welfare; hence, private insurance and occupational fringe benefits play a truly marginal role. (...) But the corporatist regimes are also typically shaped by Church, and hence strongly committed to the preservation of traditional family-hood. Social insurance typically excludes non-working wives, and family benefits encourage motherhood. Day care, and similar family services, are conspicuously underdeveloped; the principle

three different trade-offs between the responsibilities of the state, market and family for purposes of safeguarding citizenship rights. Each of these regimes models the triangulation of the three institutions in a different way. The liberal model essentially starts from the assumption that if the market functions well and if social actors offer good 'functioning' in the field of productive activity, the state will only need to look after the poor and the emarginated (those who have not succeeded in the wider social competition), while families will have the opportunity to manage care work as they prefer, helped by the presence of a system of private goods and services at a range of costs that are therefore 'accessible' to all budgets. The social-democratic regime, which starts from the assumption that the task of democracy is to guarantee greater equality among citizens, activates a wide range of public services and carries out checks on remuneration levels: the state makes it almost worthless to produce private goods and services and even if there is a charge for some public services, the significant presence of dual-income families makes it possible to access expensive but good quality services. Finally, the corporate-conservative regime is based on the principle that workers are the best citizens and that the protection of citizenship rights is therefore connected to participation in the strictly regulated labour market. Married women are excluded from this protection and are encouraged not to work, as they are given almost exclusive responsibility for reproductive work. This is also a result of the strong presence and ideological influence of the Church. In this regime, the market of private services is extremely restricted (only accessible to elite families), while public care services are underdeveloped (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

The classification met with much approval, but also criticism, especially of a methodological, theoretical and empirical nature. In methodological terms, Esping-Andersen was accused of having used the types as ends

of 'subsidiarity' serves to emphasize that the state will only interfere when the family's capacity to service its members is exhausted" (Esping-Andersen 1990, p.27).

⁷ "The third, and clearly smallest, regime-cluster is composed of those countries in which the principles of universalism and de-commodification of social rights were extended also to the new middle classes. We may call it the 'social-democratic' regime-type since, in these nations [Scandinavian countries: *nda*], social democracy was clearly the dominant force behind social reform. Rather than tolerate a dualism between state and market, between working class and middle class, the social democrats pursued a welfare state that would promote an equality of the highest standards, not an equality of minimal needs as was pursued elsewhere. This implied, first that services and benefits be upgraded to levels commensurate with the most discriminating tastes of the new middle classes; and, second, that equality be furnished by guaranteeing workers full participation in the quality of rights enjoyed by the better off" (Esping-Andersen 1990, pp.27).

(cognitive objectives) rather than ideals (instruments) for measuring to what extent individual national situations were similar or different, as Max Weber taught. Theoretical criticism focused on the indicators chosen to construct the classification (which are in general indicators of decommodification⁸ and defamilialization⁹). In empirical terms, many critics highlighted that the three regimes are not stable, in the sense that some countries move from one regime to another when certain indicators are modified, and that there are more than three regimes (in particular, some suggested removing Mediterranean countries – Italy, Spain and Greece – from the corporate-conservative regime, as they are strongly based on family work and so do not involve major transfers or significant services)¹⁰. Finally, others accused Esping-Andersen of underestimating the role of women and the domestic and care work they regularly carry out as important factors in the creation of welfare capitalism. It is true that Esping-Andersen only dedicated special attention to two of the three pillars of welfare capitalism – state and market – in his 1990 study, leaving the subject of the family as a general formulation that in principle enters into the theoretical definition of the three regimes, but is never actually operationalized – the family is taken on as a cultural variable that plays a role depending on the social and cultural contexts in which it acts and according to the different dominant religious traditions in the countries in question.

Further analysis of the extensive debate on the types of welfare regime triggered by Esping-Andersen's book is outside the scope of this study (see Arts and Gelissen 2002); reference will only be made to aspects regarding the family and defamilialization.

⁸ Esping-Andersen uses old age pensions, health insurance cover and unemployment as indicators of decommodification, that is to say, indicators of the satisfaction of individual needs without the mediation of the market (Esping-Andersen 1990, p.50).

⁹ As indicators of defamilialization, Esping-Andersen uses public expenditure on services for families (as a % of the GDP), the coverage of nursery schools (% of children under 3 years old enrolled) and home help (% of elderly people receiving assistance) (Esping-Andersen, 1999). For Esping-Andersen, the type of social regime that assigns the family as many welfare duties as possible can be defined as family-oriented. However, He will use the term 'defamilialization', which is also somewhat cumbersome, to indicate the policies that reduce the dependency of individuals on the family and maximize the number of resources available to an individual regardless of familial and conjugal reciprocity (Esping-Andersen, 1999).

¹⁰ Ferrera (1996) and Trifiletti (1999) affirmed the distinctive nature of the Mediterranean model.

Esping-Andersen drew up his classification in 1990, working with data referring to a period from the 1950s to the 1980s, the golden years for the development of welfare systems and capitalism in Europe¹¹. It captures a social and cultural situation which, as he also underlines, was already changing as a result of the increasingly fast and pervasive processes of globalization and changes in the production and labour systems. No data about defamilialization is used, even though it appears evident from the definition given to the three regimes that Esping-Andersen thinks that the public production of goods and services, including care (defamilialization), creates jobs and allows married women to participate more extensively and consistently in the labour market. The countries that follow this path are those that obtain the highest levels of decommodification, solidarity among citizens, equality and individualization. These countries are different from those in the corporate-conservative regime – above all the Mediterranean countries such as Italy, Spain and Greece – which feature low levels of female employment, the strong presence of the family network as the support network for employed mothers (Leira et al 2005) and a fairly undynamic labour market aimed more at maintaining existing jobs and protecting insiders in employment than creating new job opportunities. The problem of whether defamilialization is enough to create new employment for women is a constant background presence, namely whether a rise in employment levels is a condition for the socialization of care work to become part of the political agenda of a country. Posing this problem is not a purely theoretical and speculative question; in addition to the ideological valorization of care work and the acknowledgement of its contribution to the construction of welfare capitalism, the compatibility between care work and work for the market is not only related to the problem of increasing jobs, but also the concrete protection of fundamental freedoms (moving from the abstract level of formal *de jure* rights to the substantial level of *de facto* rights) that allow men and women to exert control over their lives and strategies (Nussbaum 2011). Different new approaches are needed that cannot be tackled with the linear logic of new zero-sum trade-offs between state, market and family.

¹¹ Powell and Barrientos (2004) highlight that Esping-Andersen only considers passive income support policies and not active ones aimed at helping people enter the labour market. The European Union is also moving in the direction of such active policies.

3. Family and social reproduction in the post-industrial labour saving society. Beyond linear logic.

Almost ten years after the publication of *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990), Esping-Andersen returned to the theme of the three regimes. While taking the opportunity to defend his first classification by insisting that no regime is pure and that it is important to choose variables seen as distinctive and justify them methodologically, he also opened up a new perspective (Esping-Andersen 1999). He started in the introduction by explaining that the welfare system crisis is a result of the poor functioning of the market and the family, which deprive the state of two resources: jobs and children (future workers). All over Europe, the number of jobs has fallen and will continue to drop with significant losses in terms of tax revenue, while the demographic crisis shows that families are no longer able to replace the population and the workforce, thereby activating a process that leads to even less contributory revenue. In this framework, the welfare regime is faced with a political and cultural problem rather than an economic one, namely how to reconcile an increase in jobs with redistribution – how can everyone be guaranteed certain service standards when there is a trend of a shrinking contribution base and an increase in the demand for care (more pensioners, who live longer, with more who are non-self-sufficient)? According to Esping-Andersen, this is a dramatic problem for corporate-conservative regimes, including the sub-group of Mediterranean Europe, which have lower rates of total employment, female employment and fertility. A low fertility balance has been established in these countries as a result of the rising expense of maintaining a dependent family (especially the cost of children), with little support from social policies (Esping-Andersen 1999).

The situation is illustrated in Table 1, which shows the weakness of the labour market in a number of European countries; a weakness produced by a low employment rate among women and the population aged 55-64. In the three years considered, the employment growth rate was extremely slow (even decreasing in some countries), while there were few workers aged over 55, above all in countries where the labour-saving strategy was applied (by encouraging early retirement). In other words, there are more 'young' pensioners in these countries who must be paid for out of the state coffers after relatively few years of paying contributions. The situation of Italy in Table 1 is emblematic of countries with a corporate-conservative regime in the 'Mediterranean area' sub-group.

Therefore, for the sustainability of the welfare state it is important to increase the number of jobs and reduce the cost of labour by creating a rise in general employment, especially among women and young people, even at the

cost of renouncing certain safeguards and guarantees. The sustainability of welfare systems is a problem in all three regimes (Esping-Andersen 1999). In social-democratic regimes, the development of public services has come to a standstill, because the costs involved turned out to be unsustainable. In liberal countries, the growth in low occupational jobs led to the creation of the category of poor workers, with a consequent rise in the number of people requiring assistance and the cost of this assistance. In corporate-conservative regimes, the family has moved from being a protective factor to a poverty risk factor, while young people find it impossible to access the labour market, with the further aggravating factor of the burden assumed by families¹².

Aware of the fact that every country tends to retrace well-trodden paths even during times of crisis, Esping-Andersen (1999) provides some corrective measures that ‘soften’ the constituent principles underlying the three regimes. He advises liberal regimes to introduce regulations into the labour market and recommends that social-democratic regimes accept a drop in the minimum wage and more flexible regulation of the labour market (to reduce the cost of services, whether public or private). He suggests that corporate-conservative regimes accept that the family can abandon its state of self-sufficiency (due above all to female domestic work) and acquire goods and services on the market, freeing the wife-mother from her family burden and making her available for work outside the home, thereby creating an additional financial contribution that is significant for her (she is less dependent on her husband), her children, who can be guaranteed better opportunities (such as in the event of divorce), and the family, who will benefit from a higher level of financial security (with an increase in dual-income families, who are stronger in reacting to the problem of adult unemployment).

However, Esping-Andersen (1999) focuses above all on the processes of defamilialization, which becomes one of the main categories of the book. Defamilializing means activating a network outside the family for the production of goods and services that are classed as reproductive labour (the sum total of domestic work and care work), which gives the woman more time for the market and creates jobs: employed women and dual-income families create jobs in services, as they buy the ‘time’ that they need by purchasing them (Esping-Andersen 1999).

How can defamilialization work at times of crisis, when the socialization of risks and needs has reached the limit of economic sustainability, when new risks are not covered and when welfare systems have started to externalize the production of many social and healthcare services?

¹² For a presentation of the different welfare models for families implemented in Europe, see Prandini (2012).

In many respects, the solution provided by Esping-Andersen is simple and linear: if a service network is created outside the family, women with children have the opportunity to work for the market and therefore have money to buy services. Creating a service network outside the family means creating jobs. This creates a network of intra-gender solidarity: women who work for other women, thereby increasing opportunities for all of them, including having more children. As Esping-Andersen explicitly states, housewives – women with a heavy burden of care – simply have to ‘commodify’ their work by taking what they do free of charge in the home and selling it on the market (Esping-Andersen, 1999). The creation of this network can no longer be the responsibility of the state for three reasons: because the costs are increasingly unsustainable for public finances, because domestic work requires ‘low quality’, so highly qualified workers are not needed, and because the market must be able to offer services that are accessible to all budgets and differentiated according to price and quality. When Esping-Andersen addresses the subject of the service market, (Esping-Andersen, 1999), he mentions personal services (doing the shopping, cooking, washing, ironing, cleaning the house: services which were once managed by a ‘butler’) and social services (assistance for the sick and the elderly, childcare). All services in the former category involve high intensity work, while many of those in the latter grouping are at a low occupational level. These services cannot be provided by the state, as they would cost the collectivity too much, given the high quality standards required by the public sector and the minimum wage guaranteed to workers. It is no coincidence that families in most European countries employ immigrant women to perform such tasks; they are asked to provide repetitive manual services that are not related to the qualifications that they actually have. It is like saying: all you need to be a housekeeper is to be a woman!

Therefore, the intra-gender solidarity network is not very ‘fair’ and features downward mobility; after years of struggling for gender equality in access to the labour market, wage and salary dynamics and career advancement, and after years of reflecting over reconciliation policies, the suggestion is to widen the market of low-cost and low-level services with the widespread presence of working women who are naturally low-paid¹³. It is unlikely that these women will be able to buy the services that they provide for other women on the market.

¹³ Considering the average level of integration of women with a low level of schooling and the difficulties that women with medium or even medium-high qualifications have in entering the market, the market of personal care and care services will be the almost exclusive prerogative of foreign and indigenous women.

The hypothesis of defamilialization put forward by Esping-Andersen is linear in its simplicity. The contributory deficit that all redistributive systems are experiencing could be recovered by creating jobs for a largely underemployed share of the population (women and unqualified workers), who would replenish the state coffers with their contributions. If other women are given the opportunity to work, they can contribute to the costs of social policies. Similarly, if families are given the chance to have more children, the number of active cohorts can potentially be increased. This contributes to GDP growth. It is precisely the simplicity of the logic that makes it effective. Ichino and Alesina (2009) attribute the non-development or delayed development of the phenomenon in Italy to persistent familialism – the characteristic tendency of Italians, above all Italian women, to want to do everything ‘in the home’. They suggest the same solution: defamilialization to increase the number of jobs and therefore also prospectively the economic development of the country.

There are still two unresolved background problems: where and who the process of defamilialization must start from, along with the insufficient thematization of the individual and social cost (vs value?) of care work. While the state played an important role in reacting to the high rate of employment by providing care services outside the family during the initial development of redistributive systems, above all in countries with a social-democratic regime, this strategy would not be feasible nowadays, especially in countries with low employment rates. Therefore, the state can no longer create employment in the service sector, which often features a predominance of women. As the crisis has cut jobs, especially among women, it becomes complicated to understand how the rising number of unemployed or non-working women can create jobs, even in the services, by activating self-entrepreneurship, without being able to refer to a broader framework of social policies. It must also be considered that many young employed women are ‘atypical’, as they have lost the protective benefits of maternity, including a secure job. They are women who will probably not need or be able to defamilialize. With regard to the second care work problem, the main factor is the relevant costs involved: the cost of children for women and families, the cost of the lack of female employment in production, the cost borne by active members (who have to finance transfers: family and pre and post-natal maternity benefits, parental leave, etc.), the market (cost of labour) and welfare systems (the cost of services to individuals). In one way or another, this cost must be reduced and limited in the light of the radical changes that have affected the labour market and welfare capitalism. There is essentially no specific assessment of the ‘value’ that this work produces for society, the ‘place’ that individual social

actors attribute to it in their life trajectories or its importance in supporting the basic 'abilities' (freedoms) needed to define a life as 'dignified'.

4. Reproductive labour and productive labour: new dynamics of recognition

In order to analyse the relationship between the cost and value of care services in more detail, we need to make some premises in order to reconstruct the path that led to the widespread dis-recognition of care work.

All human societies are characterized by three interrelated types of production: the production of means of production, the production of means of livelihood and the production of the labour force. Marxist studies on the concept of the mode of production only address the first two "branches", while the continuous production of the labour force – its daily rejuvenation and generational replacement – is completely absent (Di Nicola 2011, 2012). Yet this is exactly what families primarily do: they repopulate society, restore the energy of their members and replace worn-out workers with the "fresh blood" of youth. The exclusion of the daily and generational reproduction of the labour force from the development of the modes of production has made it practically impossible to see the family as an entity whose function is to introduce new labour force into economic systems (Di Nicola 2012). As a result, the reproductive labour of the family (which includes domestic work and care work) has become invisible at a social level: it falls into the area of domestic privacy, in which everything follows different logics and dynamics that are 'separate' from the wider reference society in many respects.

The life stories of men and women alike have always been marked by the presence, contiguity and, in many respects, overlapping of productive labour and reproductive labour, albeit within a functional gender-based distinction. However, this functional distinction – especially if the political and religious elite are removed from the equation, along with the ruling classes, who never actually physically carried out any productive work – was created in a social space in which productive labour and reproductive labour were intertwined, combined, interlocked and copresent (Di Nicola 2012).

With the accounting separation between household and business, which for Max Weber marked the birth of modern business, the increase in the social division of labour and the beginning of the "great transformation", there was a change in the relationship between production and reproduction in the family, also because a "labour market" was created. For Polanyi (1944), the great transformation – the birth of capitalism – was made possible by three connected commodification processes: the commodification of the earth

(it starts to be sold and bought just like any other goods and is no longer considered heritage, often unproductive, inalienable), money (financial and banking activities) and labour.

During the "great transformation", while the productive function was gradually transferred to a market (of production, transformation, sale and exchange of services and goods, including labour) that started to be organized according to special rules, the family preserved its reproductive function, namely the production and replacement of the labour force in the quantity and quality required by the emerging labour market. Nevertheless, it was a function that started to become latent and invisible, a function that started to be labelled as private, something within the category of the unproductive and socially useless (because it did not produce material or tangible wealth) and was therefore socially irrelevant. After centuries of showing its full ability and planning strength in using the "tap" of fertility to optimize the relationship between resources and needs, the family has entered the shadow of privacy, affections and emotions, dragging behind it female knowledge and skills that played a leading role in the reproductive function and continue to do so. The picture that has slowly emerged is that of a woman who is only such if she is a wife and mother and a man that can only aspire to honour and social recognition if he is honest and a tireless worker, capable of providing for his family's needs. The close link between reproductive labour and matrimonial status means that women are largely dependent on men (Di Nicola 2012).

Contrary to a series of clichés, the industrial revolution and the rise of the factories – which led to the first major spatial and social break between the spheres of production and reproduction – not only caused a reduction in the rate of female employment, but also increased the level of women's dependency on men. This made the "home" the exclusive environment of a social subject – the woman – whose life destiny was strongly dependent on the life destiny of her husband, rather than men in general (Di Nicola 2008). The care sector – the female domain – starts to be characterized as a privation, a lack, a void, like everything that is not socially productive.

With modernity, care work left the hierarchy of status and was subjected to a process of dis-recognition, by virtue of which the only form of socially acceptable self-realization and source of esteem, social solidarity and recognition is self-realization in the field of labour and production (Frazer and Honneth 2003; Honneth 2010). This form of dis-recognition affects the figure of the woman, who only benefits from social esteem to the extent to which she closely adheres to her role of exemplary mother and wife. Female emancipation movements have been fighting to release women from financial as well as social dependency on men by encouraging them to participate in the labour market and promoting equal opportunities between men and women

within it. The marked weakness of women in the labour market compared to men shows that this struggle is far from over. During this phase, care work starts to be characterized as a cost: an opportunity cost for the woman, for whom the house and family are a form of handicap that prevent her from participating fully in the labour market, and a social cost, as in order to allow a woman to work, her 'inevitable' absences (for maternity and children) need to be covered in terms of contributions and a guaranteed income threshold. As these costs are borne by the whole collectivity, not everybody agrees that they should be supported; children are now seen as a free choice, so those who cannot afford them should refrain from having them. This message has been fully adopted by many women, above all in Italy and Mediterranean regimes, who have chosen to adopt the low fertility regime, which is perhaps more of a need than a choice.

Therefore, domestic work and care work are still not a source of social esteem or a basic element of a citizenship.

The logic of defamilialization remains part of this labour-based model of citizenship, which is becoming stronger as a result of changes in the labour market, helping to end the short period in which workers – above all women – asked for recognition of the 'right to care and caring' as a fundamental right that should be guaranteed for a dignified life, according to the slogan: work to live, don't live to work.

In many respects, the logic of defamilialization does not reverse this perspective; it aims to lower individual and social costs rather than increase the value of care work and, above all, it leaves families alone to struggle with the labour and service markets.

The logic of defamilialization empties the family of all meaning, turning it into a unit of cohabiting adults that have nothing in common except achieving an economy of scale that makes cohabitation financially advantageous.

The logic of defamilialization commodifies everything that previously – for better or worse – made the family a coupling point for adult identities and a point of reference for the new generation.

Reversing the perspective means 'recognizing' that care work – for the purposes of maintaining our model of development and perhaps even improving it – is socially beneficial labour, not because families have more children (a final and instrumental 'because')¹⁴, but because it is fundamental

¹⁴ There is a wide range of literature on the changing trends in fertility rates in Europe during the last century, confirming the complexity of the phenomenon that apparently cannot be reduced to the issue of the opportunity 'cost' of children for women. For a critical presentation of the literature, see Santangelo (2011).

for the growth of the human and social capital of a collectivity (a causal 'because').

Reversing the perspective means supporting the family in its care work through precise, well-considered and integrated policies so that an act of support – whose effects were not assessed sufficiently, although it was done in good faith – does not end up damaging rather than helping the beneficiary¹⁵.

Reversing the perspective means that defamilialization must become part of a much wider cultural and political project that also includes the other two cornerstone institutions of welfare capitalism – the state and the market. It means that defamilialization must be one of the many instruments implemented to slow down the process of cultural, civil and civic decline in our country. The different forms of care cannot be the sole task and responsibility of women, but must be divided among the different (male and female) social and institutional actors. The social actor should not consider it a burden, but one of the 'abilities' (fundamental freedoms) that allow men and women to exert greater control over their respective lives, already largely de-institutionalized and 'flexibilized'. As M. Nussbaum (2011) says, guaranteeing dignified living conditions to all citizens must be one of the basic tasks of a democracy, because only people whose dignity has been recognized can nurture the political and cultural fabric of a democratic society.

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¹⁵ The important laws that safeguard maternity in Italy – implemented without any major cultural change in the socially welcome attribution of care work to women and the importance of care work to the whole collectivity – have actually helped to strengthen the stereotype that care is an issue that only affects female workers and that female labour therefore comes at a higher cost to companies and the collectivity.

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Tab.1 – Male and female employment rates and employment rates for the population aged 55-64 at European level. Source: Eurostat

	Male			Female			Older workers (55-64)		
	2001	2006	2011	2001	2006	2011	2001	2006	2011
EU-27	70.9	71.6	70.1	54.3	57.2	58.5	37.7	43.5	47.4
Euro area	71.8	72.5	70.3	52.4	56.6	58.2	35.0	41.6	47.1
Belgium	68.8	67.9	67.1	51.0	54.0	56.7	25.1	32.0	38.7
Bulgaria	52.7	62.8	60.9	46.8	54.6	56.2	24.0	39.6	43.9
Czech Republic	73.2	73.7	74.0	56.9	56.8	57.2	37.1	45.2	47.6
Denmark	80.2	81.2	75.9	72.0	73.4	70.4	58.0	60.7	59.5
Germany (1)	72.8	72.8	77.3	58.7	61.5	67.7	37.9	48.1	59.9
Estonia	65.0	71.0	67.7	57.4	65.3	62.8	48.5	58.5	57.2
Ireland	76.6	77.9	63.1	54.9	59.3	55.4	46.8	53.1	50.0
Greece	71.4	74.6	65.9	41.5	47.4	45.1	38.2	42.3	39.4
Spain (1)	72.5	76.1	63.2	43.1	53.2	52.0	39.2	44.1	44.5
France	69.7	68.9	68.1	56.0	58.6	59.7	31.9	38.1	41.4
Italy (1)	68.5	70.5	67.5	41.1	46.3	46.5	28.0	32.5	37.9
Cyprus	79.3	79.4	74.7	57.2	60.3	61.6	49.1	53.6	55.2
Latvia	61.9	70.4	62.9	55.7	62.4	60.8	36.9	53.3	51.1
Lithuania	58.9	66.3	60.9	56.2	61.0	60.5	38.9	49.6	50.5
Luxembourg	75.0	72.6	72.1	50.9	54.6	56.9	25.6	33.2	39.3
Hungary	62.9	63.8	61.2	49.8	51.1	50.6	23.5	33.6	35.8
Malta	76.2	73.3	73.6	32.1	33.4	41.0	29.4	29.8	31.7
Netherlands (2)	82.8	80.9	79.8	65.2	67.7	69.9	39.6	47.7	56.1
Austria (1)	76.4	76.9	77.8	60.7	63.5	66.5	28.9	35.5	41.5
Poland	59.2	60.9	66.3	47.7	48.2	53.1	27.4	28.1	36.9
Portugal (2)	77.0	73.9	68.1	61.3	62.0	60.4	50.2	50.1	47.9
Romania (1)	67.8	64.6	65.0	57.1	53.0	52.0	48.2	41.7	40.0
Slovenia	68.6	71.1	67.7	58.8	61.8	60.9	25.5	32.6	31.2
Slovakia	62.0	67.0	66.3	51.8	51.9	52.7	22.4	33.1	41.4
Finland	70.8	71.4	70.6	65.4	67.3	67.4	45.7	54.5	57.0
Sweden (1)	75.7	75.5	76.3	72.3	70.7	71.8	66.7	69.6	72.3
United Kingdom	78.0	77.5	74.5	65.0	65.8	64.5	52.2	57.3	56.7
Iceland	:	88.1	80.3	:	80.8	76.6	:	84.3	79.2
Norway	80.7	78.4	77.1	73.6	72.2	73.4	65.9	67.4	69.6
Switzerland (2)	87.6	84.7	85.3	70.6	71.1	73.2	67.1	65.7	69.5
Croatia	:	62.0	57.9	:	49.4	47.0	:	34.3	37.1
FYR of Macedonia	:	48.3	52.3	:	30.7	35.3	:	27.9	35.4
Turkey	:	66.9	69.2	:	22.7	27.8	:	27.7	31.4
Japan	80.5	81.0	80.2	57.0	58.8	60.3	62.0	64.7	65.1
United States	79.4	78.1	71.4	67.1	66.1	62.0	58.6	61.8	60.0

(1) Break in series between 2001 and 2006.

(2) Break in series between 2006 and 2011.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: lfsi_emp_a)