

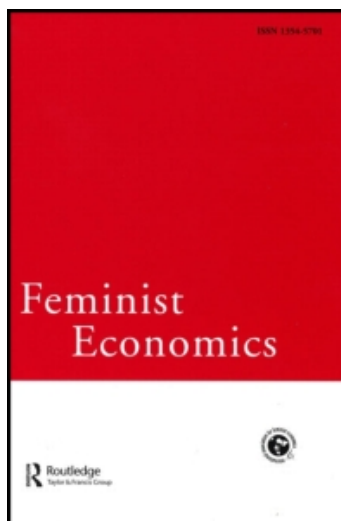
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The crisis of care, international migration, and public policy

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THE CRISIS OF CARE, INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION, AND PUBLIC POLICY

Lourdes Benería

ABSTRACT

Focusing on Europe's reconciliation policies, aimed to balance family and labor market work, this paper explores whether some of the legislative efforts introduced in Europe during the past decade could be applied to Latin American countries with important migrant populations, such as Bolivia and Ecuador. This paper argues that there are differences between Northern and Southern countries that would influence the effectiveness of these kinds of policies in the South. Three differences in particular – the availability of domestic service, the extent of the informal economy, and international migration – are taken into consideration. Using the capabilities approach framework, this paper outlines other lines of public policy action that can be useful in designing reconciliation policies for the South. Finally, the paper argues that there is an urgent need for re-thinking gender equity within the emerging gender order across countries.

KEYWORDS

Gender equality, social reproduction, globalization, international migration, capability approach, social policy

JEL Codes: B54 F22

We feel that we are at a moment . . . that requires a deepening of the agenda on gender equality. As the demographic transition and women's incorporation in the labor market have proceeded, the organization of social and reproductive work has remained intact.

— *Marisela Padrón, Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)*¹

INTRODUCTION

Much has happened since the 1970s, when feminist theory pointed out the importance of distinguishing between productive and reproductive work and between production and the different meanings of reproduction. The main objective of this effort was to underline the invisibility of women's work in the reproductive sphere and to emphasize its importance for

welfare provision and the functioning of the economic system. A second objective was to understand the connections between women's concentration in reproductive work, their participation in the paid labor force, and the conditions under which this participation takes place. Finally, feminist analyses were important in efforts to estimate the totality of women's work and the contribution of unpaid work to GNP (Susan Himmelweit and Simon Mohun 1977; Lourdes Benería 1979). Over the years, and as women's labor force participation has increased very substantially across countries, these distinctions remain important, but the boundaries around which productive and reproductive activities are located have changed, particularly with women's shift from performing mainly household work to participating in the paid labor market. A growing proportion of care work has been marketized, even though much is still performed within the household, either as unpaid work by family members or as paid activities performed by hired domestic help.

These transformations have intensified the problems, for women in particular, of balancing family and labor market work. At the same time, globalization and the neoliberal policies of the last quarter century have weakened the foundations that contributed to the construction of welfare states in many countries, particularly the notion that the state had a strong role to play in the provision of welfare and social protection. In high-income countries, where the welfare state had been the most developed, privatization and the new emphasis on free-market policies represented an important shift away from Keynesian economics and government interventions. In developing countries, the neoliberal order has tended to de-emphasize and de-universalize social protection; the pressures related to social reproduction led to new directions in the privatization of survival, such as the feminization of international migration. To be sure, there are substantial differences across countries and the pressures to reverse some of these trends are growing.

The main focus of this paper has to do with legislative efforts to balance or reconcile household activities and market work. This issue has become a matter of intense public debate in many countries in the North, such as in the European Union, since the late 1990s. This is because "the crisis of care" has intensified as women have progressively moved into the paid labor force and as demographic trends have resulted in very low fertility rates and high life expectancy in many countries, with corresponding aging populations and increased pressure on social security systems. Thus, the provision of daycare and other social services facilitating women's incorporation in paid labor has become more important; the same can be said for legislation regulating parental and other care-related leaves from paid work.

In the South, these legislative efforts have appeared less urgent, mostly because the middle and upper classes have the demands of their household responsibilities cushioned by their access to paid domestic service: the still-abundant supply in many countries of workers – mostly women – willing

to perform domestic work, in spite of the prevalence of very low wages and informal working conditions, mediates the need to balance household and paid market work. However, at least in Latin America, the debates regarding reconciliation issues have begun. To the extent that developing countries will generate new sources of employment for women, increasing female participation in the paid labor market is likely to intensify the pressures felt by families to deal with care work. Women's roles have been changing, often quite drastically, and in the process, men's roles have also been transformed. Even though many questions remain about the extent and importance of these transformations from a gender perspective, they provide the background for rethinking social policies with regard to what in Europe are called "reconciliation issues" and legislation efforts aimed at balancing family and labor market work.

Focusing mostly on high-income countries, Nancy Fraser has emphasized the need to rethink our notions of gender equity as "the crumbling of the old gender order," which is centered on the weakening of the family wage model, continues (1997: 41). At the root of this transformation, there is the insufficiency of the male wage for family survival and the parallel increase in women's employment in most countries but also changing family structures and new household arrangements. With the purpose of thinking through the new policies that can help build gender equity under these circumstances, Fraser distinguishes between two visions/models for postindustrial societies. Her "universal-breadwinner model" aims at achieving equity through women's employment and parity with men (Fraser 1997: 51). In contrast, her "caregiver-parity model" relies on the support of informal care work and on forms of employment for women that do not necessarily imply parity with men, such as part-time employment; in this case, the objective is "to make difference costless" (Fraser 1997: 55). The first model shifts care and reproductive work to the market and the state, whereas the second keeps care work within the household with support from public funds. To some extent, both models are in fact at work in many countries, although they have been implemented to various degrees and with results that are far from approaching what Fraser calls a "universal caregiver welfare state," which would promote share of care work between women and men (1997: 61).

Although neither model is likely to be fully realized in a world dominated by neoliberal policies, the time has come to press the discussion on how to achieve gender equity within the emerging gender order. This discussion is, of course, well under way in many circles, even if the final objectives might not necessarily be identical. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has been promoting a social policy discourse that has clearly shifted from a neoliberal agenda to a more interventionist model, as a result of an "inclusive liberalism" that is aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of capitalist development under uncontrolled markets (Rianne Mahon forthcoming). Mahon argues that

“inclusive liberalism” has gradually developed since the 1990s to emphasize the need to support “the development and use of human and social capital” (forthcoming). The OECD objective is not to reintroduce a Keynesian state but to emphasize the central role of employment and the need to “remove barriers to work and reinforce the work ethic” (Mahon forthcoming). In this sense, public support for childcare and other policies to reconcile family and labor market work can promote employment and increase productivity. We might argue that this is a very functionalist proposition that has little to do with the pursuit of gender equity, but this would not be totally accurate: as Mahon also points out, one of the arguments also used is that “staying in the labor force is one way that mothers can protect themselves and their children against the vicissitudes of relationships and work” (quoted in Mahon forthcoming). Thus, although this discourse falls short of approaching the objectives of Fraser’s models, it opens some doors for feminist agendas on gender equity.

This paper argues that the policies needed at present in many Southern countries for balancing different types of work may be, to some extent at least, different from those being designed in the North. In particular, this paper analyzes two main differences: First, in the South the informal economy absorbs a much higher proportion of the working population. This has many implications for the provision of the needs of Southern households and the ways that family and market work can be reconciled. The second difference relates to the feminization of international migration, which especially since the 1990s, has contributed to the globalization of care and social reproduction. Women’s migration from the South to the North in large numbers, including mothers leaving their families behind, has been meeting the demand for care labor in Northern countries. This process has affected the ways in which migrants and their households in the South organize themselves, including the formation of transnational families that then have to solve their own care needs. This paper analyzes these two differences between the North and the South and provides a theoretical framework for developing reconciliation policies relevant to the labor market in the South; for this purpose, it uses the human development or capabilities approach to identify policies that can expand individual capabilities, particularly women’s, through balancing family and market work. The empirical background of this analysis refers mostly to Latin American countries with an important emigrant population, and more specifically, to the cases of Bolivia and Ecuador.

RECONCILING FAMILY AND LABOR MARKET WORK: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE NORTH AND SOUTH

A good deal of the legislative efforts to balance household and market work in the North has tended to focus on employers as the channels through

which these measures are implemented. To illustrate, Spain's 1999 "Law to Promote the Reconciliation Between Family and Working Life" regulates maternity and paternity leave as well as work leave and reductions in work hours to facilitate the care of biological and adopted children and the care (and attending to the death) of family members. For this purpose, the law mandates paid or unpaid leave with the assumption that workers will be allowed to return to their jobs within a given period. The firm or employer negotiates the different forms of temporary leave to facilitate care work. In return, the law regulates reductions in social security payments for the employers granting leave to both men and women workers.

The objective behind this type of legislation is twofold: first, it is designed to facilitate women's incorporation in the paid labor force, and, second, it is an effort to promote equality of treatment between men and women workers. Women are often perceived as more likely than men to ask for maternity or other care-related leave from work, which has a negative effect on female employment. Therefore, by legislating parental permits on an equal basis between men and women, the policy aims to end the discriminatory practices that hurt women as the primary care-providers. It also responds to calls for promoting gender equality, not only from women in general and women's groups in particular, but also from a variety of international institutions. The Spanish law, for example, mentions specifically the recommendations from the 1995 Beijing Platform of Action agreed upon at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women; and it refers to the directives given by the Council of Europe and the recommendations from UNICEF and other international organizations regarding the need to grant parental leave. In addition to this type of legislation, the debates on reconciliation measures have centered on other basic policies facilitating women's incorporation into the paid labor force. These include the provision of daycare and other public services addressing family needs as well as the flexibilization of working hours and commercial schedules in order to help women to combine employment and domestic responsibilities.

It should be pointed out that most European countries have developed their own responses to the need of balancing family and market work. A report published by the European Commission comparing policies across thirty countries found that they differ considerably, "with every country having its unique constellation of childcare services, leave facilities, flexible working-time arrangements, and financial allowances" (Expert Group on Gender, Social Inclusion, and Employment [EGGSIE] 2005: 5). Returning to the case of Spain, a more comprehensive and pioneering piece of legislation than the 1999 law regarding care needs was passed in 2006 to begin implementation in January 2007.² This later law is intended to provide state support for different types of care by funding a portion of the expenses individual households spend on care, with the portion determined by income. This type of legislation responds to a vision of universal

access to public funds for the provision of care, and represents a positive step toward the promotion of collective efforts leading to Fraser's *universal caregiver state*.

To be sure, it is too early to evaluate the extent to which these types of legislation will be successfully implemented in the European context, especially given the many differences among the EU countries. However, my question here is whether these efforts are appropriate for the developing world, and more specifically, for countries characterized by economies such as those in Latin America. Although in general this legislation might be appropriate, I discuss three main differences between Latin American and Northern countries that should be taken into consideration when answering this question. First, the availability of inexpensive domestic service in many Latin American countries functions as a cushion that diminishes family tensions around unpaid work. Although this privilege is available only to the middle and upper classes, they are precisely those most likely to contribute to the debates and to press for the appropriate legislation. Perhaps for this reason, debates around reconciliation policies had not surfaced in Latin America with the same intensity as in Europe; however, they have clearly surfaced during the past few years.³ The second difference has to do with the extent and nature of the informal economy in Southern countries, and the third relates to the phenomenon of South–North migration, and particularly to the feminization of migration. As mentioned above, here I focus on the last two differences in more detail while assuming that the availability of domestic work is likely to decrease if employment opportunities continue to increase for Latin American women.

The informal economy

Much has been written about the ways in which the globalization and neoliberal policies of nearly three decades have contributed to labor market informalization in both high- and low-income countries (Alejandro Portes, Manuel Castells, and Laura A. Benton 1989; Hernando De Soto 2000; World Bank 2000–1, 2007; Benería 2003; International Labor Organization [ILO] 2004; Juan Pablo Pérez-Sáinz 2006; Mercedes González de la Rocha 2006), but there are differences among the experiences of these countries. In many Southern countries, the tremendous growth of the informal economy during this period has resulted in a continuous weakening of the links that the largest proportion of the labor force has with formal firms and institutions. The shift of employment to more informal jobs was intensified by a variety of policies introduced through structural adjustment programs – from budget cuts to privatization policies aimed at reducing the scope of the state and from the deregulation of markets to the opening of national economies to global competition and

foreign investment. At the same time, increasing global competition has resulted in a deterioration of the relative bargaining power of unskilled labor. Transnational production has provided multiple channels to shift investment towards more informal, precarious, exploitative, and unprotected forms of employment. As a result, references to the informal “sector” that prevailed in its initial 1970s formulation have been replaced by an analysis of the informal “economy,” given the magnitude of the affected population. In Latin America, about half of the working population on average is engaged in informal activities, with higher proportions for the Andean and Central American countries. In Bolivia, for example, over 65 percent of the working population participates in the informal economy, which is the highest proportion in the Andean countries (Unidad de Análisis de Políticas Sociales y Económicas [UDAPE] 2003). A growing body of scholarship has shown how the informal economy and its accompanying processes of unemployment, underemployment, and social exclusion can be linked to the persistence of poverty in many Southern countries (Portes, Castells, and Benton 1989; De Soto 2000; World Bank 2000–1, 2007; Lourdes Benería 2003; International Labor Organization [ILO] 2004; Juan Pablo Pérez-Sáinz 2006).

Extensive literature also exists on the extent and nature of informal activities, which are characterized by precarious and unstable working conditions, a lack of regulation, and little or no protection for laborers. A good proportion of informal labor is engaged in marginal subsistence activities, such as street vending, that allow individuals and households to manage their survival strategies. However, the informal economy also includes multiple forms of labor engaged in wage labor and self-employment, which are often linked to more formal levels of activity. The various processes of informalization have resulted in a continuous blurring of the formal–informal divide, as in the examples of sub-contracting and outsourcing. The degree of fluidity among these activities and among different types of work can be very high; for many workers, it often includes temporary migration within and between countries, symbolized by what Álvaro García-Linera has referred to as the contemporary “nomad worker” (1999). Additionally, the informal economy in many countries is characterized not only by a high degree of fluidity between formal and informal activities but also by a high level of heterogeneity that generates different degrees of precariousness, income levels, instability, insecurity, and vulnerability. To illustrate, in a study of poor urban households in Bolivia and Ecuador, Lourdes Benería and Maria S. Floro distinguished between three “degrees of informality” in order to better understand these variations between formal and informal activities, including the many types of labor market insertions and labor conditions (2006). For women in particular, the shifts between different jobs and tasks are highly associated with their involvement in domestic work and care responsibilities. They

often do not separate the care of children from other activities, and this practice has important consequences for balancing family and market work.

Under these circumstances, reconciliation policies can hardly be implemented through the workplace since formal and secure work involves only a small proportion of the population. For many workers, there is no fixed workplace, and the most stable working reference is the household. In addition, policies aimed at increasing labor market flexibilization are not very relevant under these conditions, given that the informal economy is already highly flexible. This suggests that policies to balance different types of work should be designed around the household as the center of people's life and work, such as increasing the availability of neighborhood daycare (as opposed to daycare at the firm or other institutional levels), giving all children access to local schools, and implementing measures to save time in domestic activities. This household-level strategy is, of course, particularly relevant for women, and it can include a variety of measures such as increasing access to neighborhood health centers, improving the availability of community services such as sports facilities and centers for the aged, making improvements in public transportation and paved streets that make it easier for people to move about, and providing greater access to telephones. Most importantly, these measures should aim at saving time for household members, especially women who tend to have the greatest need to reconcile different types of work. I will return to this subject below.

The globalization of care and social reproduction

A different trend in Latin America has been the increasing feminization of international migration, particularly since the 1990s. In recent years, the official statistics in Southern European countries have been showing that the proportion of women in the total migrant population from Latin America exceeds 50 percent in many cases. As Table 1 shows for the case of Spain in 2006, official statistics report levels above 60 percent for some Latin American countries. However, this tends to underestimate the actual figures given that the official data do not include undocumented migrants. These increasingly female migrant populations differ from earlier migration flows from Latin America because they have shifted their major destination to Western European countries, and Spain in particular. Similar to the case of the Philippines since at least the mid-1990s, this shift has resulted from a combination of well-known factors. First, the crisis of care in Europe has been felt strongly in countries with a substantial increase in women's labor force participation since the 1990s. Households find it difficult to combine domestic and labor market work, resulting in time and cost pressures to deal with domestic activities. Second, the crisis is due not only to the increase in women's labor force participation but also to the

Table 1 Latin American women immigrants to Spain from selected countries, 2006

	Total migrating population (n)	Women (n)	Percent female
Argentina	24,191	11,979	49.52
Bolivia	77,755	43,170	55.52
Brazil	32,586	18,212	55.89
Colombia	35,621	19,040	53.45
Cuba	8,875	4,873	54.91
Chile	9,884	4,979	50.37
Ecuador	21,387	10,264	47.99
El Salvador	1,127	672	59.63
Honduras	6,454	4,307	66.73
Mexico	5,533	3,078	55.63
Nicaragua	2,297	1,610	70.09
Paraguay	21,617	14,089	65.18
Peru	21,691	10,746	49.54
Dominican Republic	14,652	8,212	56.05
Uruguay	8,581	4,281	49.89
Venezuela	11,699	6,575	56.20
Latin America	306,100	16,7208	54.62

Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Spain (INE) 2007.

aging of the population that has resulted from the fall in fertility rates and the increase in life expectancy. The result has been a further “nuclearization” of the family, which reduces the extended family to turn to for help. Individual households have addressed the deficiencies in public services care provision that are more prevalent in southern Europe than in other EU countries by hiring migrant labor. For middle- and upper-class households, migrant women provide the help needed to deal with the crisis and to carry out the tasks of social reproduction, such as caring for children and the elderly, domestic work, and other family-related chores.⁴ For these reasons, migrant women find jobs more easily than migrant men, and though they earn relatively low wages for the receiving country, the wages are high enough to provide an incentive to migrate.

On the supply side, growing inequalities between high- and low-income countries provide an economic incentive to migrate. Other incentives have to do with the sense of insecurity, vulnerability, and instability resulting from economic crises, poverty, and unemployment that affects a proportion of the population in many developing countries. For women, there are also gender-related factors behind their decision to migrate, such as the wish to leave abusive relationships, family conflicts, and different forms of gender discrimination (Gioconda Herrera 2005; Rhacel Salazar Parreñas 2005a). To be sure, migration also takes place within the Latin American region, as in the case of Bolivian, Ecuadorian, Paraguayan, and Peruvian women in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. A variety of studies have shown that many

migrant women have children and leave their families behind, either assuming that the family will follow them eventually or that they will engage in some form of “international mothering.” As argued by Parreñas for the case of the Philippines, the export of women’s labor generates a “depletion of care resources” that affects their ability to provide care for their own families left behind (2005a: 15); households have to negotiate who will be responsible for domestic chores and for the children and other family members once women migrants leave. This continuous negotiation includes the extent of men’s involvement in the process and the extent of transnational mothering. In any case, it is obvious that there are hidden costs of migration that economic estimates do not easily capture; they include not only those involved with the dislocation of families and communities but also psychological costs that are very difficult to measure.

The geographical dispersal and fragmentation of families implies not only an important shift in gender relations; it is part of the new gender order associated with globalization through which women’s roles experience contradictory changes. On the one hand, there are role reversals, symbolized by women’s decision to migrate and find employment abroad before men; likewise, their new role in family maintenance takes place through the remittances sent. Both represent an increase in women’s individual and financial autonomy, which can contribute to a process of “undoing gender” (Lourdes Benería 2008, forthcoming). On the other hand, the prevalence and intensity of transnational mothering also implies a *continuity* of women’s traditional roles; although subject to changes in time and space, there is evidence that migrant women’s care of their children does not stop when they physically leave them (Sarah Fenstermaker and Candace West 2002; Rhacel Salazar Parreñas 2005a, 2005b). In her study of children of migrant mothers in the Philippines, Parreñas illustrates the extent to which the experience of children is different in households in which the mother is away versus those in which the father is away. In the first case, children do not just feel deprived of their mother’s presence and love; her absence is socially more difficult to accept for them than that of the father because it goes against conventional social norms and traditional gender roles. Likewise, Herrera (2005) makes reference to an Ecuadorian mother who is saddened by the fact that her children are resentful of her absence and have not understood her decision to leave. My own observations in Bolivia also show that the effect of mothers’ migration on children is expressed in contradictory terms, often depending on the availability of an extended family. These examples speak of tensions between role reversals and continuities and between the ideology of women’s domesticity and the de facto transformation of gender relations.

Arlie Hochschild has referred to the extraction of care resources from the South by the North as “emotional imperialism,” and she has compared

it to nineteenth-century imperialism's extraction of material resources (2002: 13). This extraction, she argues, is not done by force or through colonial structures; it is the result of choices that result from economic pressures, which constitute a different form of coercion. To be sure, growing North–South inequalities and the problems of development in the South are at the root of these decisions. However, the problem is more complex and though the comparison with nineteenth-century imperialism is interesting, it is not quite warranted; rather than being linked to an institutionalized form of Northern colonialism, the extraction of care resources results from the decisions taken by individual households in response to their perception of conditions in their home and host countries, including the perception that they will benefit from migration. The solution is to be sought not only in the reversal of North–South inequalities and the systematic improvement of economic conditions in the South; it also depends on the shift of policies in host countries, particularly in the case of southern Europe, towards the provision of social services that can meet the care needs of individual households. As with Fraser's *universal caregiver state*, it implies a new turn in policy towards more collective approaches to social provisioning and a shift from the dictates of neoliberal regimes. In addition, part of the solution depends on achieving a higher degree of equality in the gender division of labor within households. In this sense, charges of emotional imperialism might tend to intensify North–South tensions rather than illuminate the fact that they share the need to counter the consequences of neoliberal policies.

Female migration can also have implications for reconciliation policies in both the home and host countries. In the receiving countries, the employment of migrant women represents an individual household's solution to the needs of balancing family and labor market work. To the extent that many households resort to similar solutions, female migrant labor contributes to the privatization of social reproduction in the sense of not relying on social policy. This solution is open to families who can afford the corresponding costs but leaves lower-income households without a solution to the problems of dealing with their time pressures. In fact, the employment of migrant women from the South might contribute to a vicious circle in the host country, in which private solutions delay collective efforts to search for appropriate public policies. In home countries, the need to balance family and labor market work shifts from the women who migrate to the individuals who assume their roles in the family. In the case of mothers leaving their children behind, studies show that it's mostly women who assume the roles vacated by migrant women, even in cases when fathers assume responsibility, and this includes especially close relatives or female extended kin (Herrera 2005; Parreñas 2005a). Yet, in the absence of a clear pattern regarding who takes up the tasks of the absent mother or daughter, it is difficult to identify those who can benefit

from any type of reconciliation policy. However, policies that save time for household members, as mentioned above, are likely to help those who take up the tasks of those who migrate.

THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH AND RECONCILIATION POLICIES

To provide a theoretical framework to think through policies to balance family and labor market work, this section turns to the capabilities approach as defined initially by Amartya Sen (1985a and 1985b) and elaborated by Martha Nussbaum (2000), Ingrid Robeyns (2003, 2005), and others. Linked to the concept of human development, capabilities represent ways to expand the multidimensional potential and functionings of individuals, affecting each and everyone's potential *to be* and *to do*. Sen distinguishes between "capabilities" and "functionings" in the sense that the former represents what is possible and desired, while the latter corresponds to what is actually realized (1985a). For Sen, the "primary feature of a person's well-being is the functioning vector that he or she achieves" (1985a: 198). While a capability is the ability to do, a functioning is the actual achievement. Thus, capabilities can be linked to the removal of obstacles in people's lives, so they can enjoy a higher degree of freedom to live the kind of life they chose for themselves. In this sense, human development represents the expansion of people's capabilities.

As pointed out by other authors, the capabilities approach is particularly relevant for women since, depending on the extent of gender discrimination and patriarchal norms, conventional measures of development can be very inappropriate to evaluate their well-being. Economic growth and family income, for example, may not benefit women to the same extent as male family members. Hence, a focus on capabilities rather than income can more specifically reveal the different dimensions that can contribute to women's well-being. As Nussbaum (2000) argues, a further advantage of this approach is that it can address gender inequalities in resources and opportunities within the family.

It has been pointed out that in many ways, the notion of capabilities is similar to that of human rights in the sense that "the language of capabilities gives important precision and supplementation to the language of rights" (Martha Nussbaum 2003: 37). Thus, desired capabilities might differ according to specific circumstances related to socioeconomic conditions and cultural factors. Unlike rights, which have been criticized for having a Western bias, the notion of what people are able to be and do might call for very specific goals, and it can differ across the social spectrum and across countries and regions. Along these lines, some authors have developed a list of capabilities beyond Sen's more general approach. In fact, Sen does not endorse the notion of elaborating specific lists since he

assumes this is the task of public debates within a democratic system. The lists can be used to design indicators of well-being or quality of life for setting social goals and design policy. Nussbaum for instance has developed a list of ten capabilities that she sees as “central” and that affect “life” (“being able to live to end of human life of normal length”), “bodily health” (“being able to have a good health”), “bodily integrity” (“being able to move freely from place to place . . . and to be secure against violent assault”), and others such as “control over one’s environment,” which includes political participation as well as control over material aspects of people’s lives such as being able to hold property (2003: 41–2). She views this list as being universally valid despite her claim that capabilities are more specific, and hence more locally adaptable and culturally specific than human rights.

My concern for this paper, then, becomes how to move from a list of capabilities to the realm of policy and practical action in such a way that capabilities can become functionings for each and every individual. This requires some evaluation of what is most urgent for a good life. Nussbaum’s list of capabilities is a useful attempt to identify these urgent needs, but it is still too general to specify some policies such as those helping reconcile paid and unpaid work. For this purpose, I have used a list compiled by Robeyns (2003) for her evaluation of gender inequality in Western societies.⁵ One of the differences between Nussbaum’s and Robeyns’s lists is that the latter includes capabilities having to do with inequalities in time allocation, leisure time, and time-related stress. Five among them seem particularly relevant for the ability to reconcile different types of work and are listed in Table 2; (1) being able to raise children and to take care of others; (2) being able to work in the labor market or to undertake other projects; (3) being able to be mobile; (4) being able to engage in leisure activities; and (5) being able to exercise autonomy in allocating one’s time.

Robeyns arrived at her list following several steps that included brainstorming sessions, the testing of a draft list by engaging with existing literature on the topic and comparing it with other lists, and debating the list with groups from different spheres in life representing academics, policy-makers, activists, and workers, among others. Thus, her methodology incorporated the expressed needs and local views of people specific to Western societies; however, it is by no means universal: some of these capabilities seem relevant to all societies, whereas others apply more specifically to some contexts than others. For example, capabilities 1 and 2 can be considered universally relevant, whereas capability 3 applies to different societies in various degrees. Even though women’s mobility tends to be lower than men’s across countries,⁶ this capability can be especially important in areas with restrictive social norms limiting women’s mobility, such as in cases of seclusion and various forms of gender segregation. Likewise, capabilities 4 and 5 apply to women worldwide: even though there

Table 2 Capabilities and public policies

Capabilities	Increased availability of neighborhood daycare centers	Greater access to schools	Greater access to health centers	More available community services	Improved public and private transportation	Greater access to telephone	Family subsidies	More paved and secure streets, etc.	Greater access to water, laundry, etc.
1. Being able to raise children and take care of others	++	+	+++	+	+	+	++	+	++
2. Being able to work in the labor market and other projects	+++	+++	++	+	+	++	++	+	+
3. Being able to be mobile	+	++	+	+	++	+	Depending on use	++	+
4. Being able to engage in leisure activities	++	++	++	+++	++	+	+	+	++
5. Being able to exercise autonomy in allocating one's time	+++	+++	++	++	+	+	+	+	++
6. Being able to articulate individual and collective needs and to organize around them	++	++	+	++	+	+	Depending on use	+	++

Note: The number of positive signs suggests the assumed strength of the correlations between policy actions and basic capabilities – to be tested empirically.

can be differences across countries and social groups, available information on time distribution shows that men enjoy longer hours of leisure than women do; in fact, many studies indicate that poor women in particular have no leisure time at all (Cristina Carrasco, Maribel Mayordomo, Màrius Domínguez, and Anna Alabart 2004; Elizabeth Andia Falgade 2006).⁷ In addition, prevailing gender norms and work roles in most societies assign women many responsibilities, such as domestic work and family care, in such a way that the degree of autonomy in allocating their time is very low, particularly time dedicated to leisure activities. Finally, Table 2 includes a sixth capability: “being able to articulate and organize around individual and collective needs.” This capability summarizes what emerged in discussions during my work in Bolivia (see below). It was added to reflect the identification of specific local needs in order to act upon them.⁸

Expanding upon these six capabilities would help ease the problems of balancing different types of work. Table 2 also includes a list of public policies that could be instrumental to expanding the set of capabilities open to men and women and their households but with special relevance for women. As with Robeyns’s methodology, I discussed the list of capabilities and policies included in Table 2 with different groups and individuals while doing fieldwork in Bolivia. These discussions took place in various social settings such as university seminars and meetings with groups representing different constituencies and ranging from academics and researchers to activists and policy-makers. Some of the researchers were very familiar with the needs of poorer households, and of poor women in particular. Although there were no basic disagreements regarding the capabilities and policies listed in Table 2, interesting comments and suggestions were made. For example, the columns “access to water, laundry, etc.” and “private transport” (in addition to “public transport”) were added after these discussions.

For each cell in Table 2, the positive signs and their numbers indicate the type of correlations assumed, except in the case of family subsidies whose effects are likely to depend on how the subsidies are used.⁹ Although they seem intuitively correct, the signs and their weight need to be tested empirically. As for the set of policies, their importance is likely to change at the local level, depending on factors influencing household needs and women’s capabilities. The type of community services needed, for example, might change according to climate and the structure of urban spaces, and they may range from providing warm shelters for the aging population in need of care to increasing children’s access to sports facilities. Thus, in cases such as the Andean countries, there are likely to be important differences between the local needs in the highlands and lowlands. This implies that, although these policies can be designed at the national, regional, or municipal level, many of them might be more appropriate for

intervention at the local level, and not just those related to the provision of community services but other services also, such as access to water and laundries.

Finally, it should be emphasized that this list of policies is compatible with the assumption, as argued above, that the household is the most stable place for those engaged in informal activities.¹⁰ Each policy is likely to save time for household members but particularly for women in order to help ease the pressure of balancing different types of work. Since they do not need to be implemented through a site of formal employment, these policies are appropriate for meeting the needs of households associated predominantly with the informal economy.

To be sure, the design and implementation of these policies raises the question of funding and public budgets. Given current trends in Latin America, the demographic transition and the increasing incorporation of women in the paid labor force are likely to continue. To the extent that countries will succeed in raising living standards and creating more jobs, domestic service as it exists now is likely to be less accessible to many households. This implies that balancing different types of work will become a matter of greater urgency than at present, and this will require a political environment conducive to taking up this challenge and allocating resources to appropriate policies. Under neoliberal regimes, the assumption with regard to care needs has been that families and households could rely on social networks and find private solutions to their care needs. However, economic restructuring and marketization of life have gradually deepened the processes of social fragmentation and the disintegration of these networks. As Mercedes González de la Rocha (2006) has argued, particularly for the case of poor households in Mexico, the capacity to build these networks has a limit, and it breaks down with the individualization of life and the further fragmentation of traditional social networks. Based on many years of direct observation of the efforts made by the poor to adjust to precarious labor market conditions, unemployment, and poverty, González de la Rocha's work typifies the frequent call to recognize the limits of household survival strategies. Hence the new gender order for Latin America requires a rethinking of reconciliation policies for the region and a redesign of the policies now in place in many countries. At the same time, the new agenda of gender equity needs to emphasize men's equal share in the reproductive activities taking place within households. Given that political change in Latin America in recent years has resulted in a shift to the left, this could be an appropriate moment to deepen the "agenda of gender equality" mentioned in the quote at the beginning of this paper, thus responding to the need to find collective solutions to care provisioning.

Based on the analysis in this paper, we might ask whether remittances from transnational migrants could be a source of funding for care services.

The tremendous increase in their importance as an inflow of foreign currency has generated an international debate about their use. According to the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) estimates, remittances to Latin America reached the astonishing amount of US\$61.3 billion in 2006 (IADB n.d.).¹¹ Most studies and anecdotal evidence show that the bulk of remittances is used to pay for family expenses related to consumption as well as for education, health, improved nutrition, loan payments, and travel. There is also evidence showing that they are used for land investments and for building or reconstructing homes (Cerstin Sander 2003; German A. Zarate-Hoyos, 2004; Multilateral Investment Fund (MIF) 2004; Séverine Deneulin 2006). In the Andean countries, this evidence also suggests that there are cases tending towards conspicuous consumption and expenditures associated with an increase in social status, such as ostentatious spending. This is why arguments emphasizing the use of remittances for more productive purposes have emerged in the literature. Similarly, they could be used to help fund programs, either at the national, regional, or local level, that respond to the care needs of households, such as the creation of day care centers or the promotion of after school programs for children of families with working parents. A tax on remittances used for the provision of these care services and another on the significant profits that financial institutions draw from handling remittances could be considered. Finally, immigrant countries could complement these funds by explicitly including such purpose in their foreign aid programs.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In an attempt to provide a conceptual framework for policies aimed at balancing family and labor market work, this paper makes explicit the connection between the capabilities approach and reconciliation policies, arguing that these policies can contribute to the building of capabilities, especially for women. There are, of course, critiques and disagreements regarding the capabilities approach. In particular, I want to focus on two of them: (a) the approach is too individualistic and (b) it does not pay sufficient attention to social structures (Robeyns 2005). A corresponding critique is that the approach remains located at the theoretical level without enough reference to the collective processes of social policy and to the political limitations and constraints that the appropriate policies can encounter. However, despite these questions, it provides a very useful framework that can shed light on social policy.

Replying to the critique that the capabilities approach is too individualistic, Robeyns has made use of the distinction between “ethical individualism,” which postulates that individuals are the only units of

moral concern, and “ontological individualism,” which claims that “only individuals and their properties exist, and that all social entities and properties can be identified by reducing them to individuals and their properties” (2005: 13). She then argues that “the capabilities approach embraces ethical individualism, but does *not* rely on ontological individualism,” adding that “it takes into account the influence of societal structures and constraints on...choices” (Robeyns 2005: 14). By distinguishing between capabilities and functionings, she argues, the approach recognizes the social and environmental factors that make it possible to actually convert one into the other. In addition, she points out that the shift from capabilities to achieved functionings requires an act of choice, and this choice is influenced by social structures and constraints (Robeyns 2005: 22).

Although Robeyns’s arguments are well taken, they do not make explicit the variables that affect the “act of choice” (Robeyns 2005: 22), and they miss the more political aspects that define social structures and shape the economic regime under which potential capabilities can be generated and converted into functionings. Addressing these variables that affect choice and the political aspects of social structures requires a more critical analysis of the factors shaping this conversion from capabilities to functionings. The neoliberal regime has represented an ideological shift away from the state’s responsibility in providing social services and social protection. Public spending has been handicapped by the enormous decrease in the relative amount of taxes paid by the business sector. Globalization has facilitated this process, and taxation policies have been designed to provide incentives to capital; the result has been the increase in the relative share of labor-related or consumption-related taxes (Howard Wachtel 2003). To sum, shifting from capabilities to achieved functionings requires an effort to rethink fiscal reforms and redefine the social structures that have shaped policies during this period. In the specific case of reconciling different types of work discussed in this paper, it requires a willingness to move in the direction of a “universal caregiver state” in order to build gender equality and ease the time pressures faced by households, including those engaged in informal activities.

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NOTES

- ¹ From the prologue to Luis Mora and María Moreno Ruiz, eds. (2006).
- ² I am referring to the “Ley de Dependencia Universal” (law of “universal dependency”) introduced on March 5, 2006 by the Socialist government and approved on November 30, 2006.
- ³ The 2005 UNFPA meeting, which was attended by participants from a variety of countries, was a pioneering effort to discuss reconciliation policies in Latin America (see Mora and Moreno-Ruiz, eds. [2006]). Since then, this issue has been incorporated in other regional conferences.
- ⁴ Based on her study of Ecuadorian women in Spain, Gioconda Herrera (2005) reports that nine out of ten immigrant women were engaged in domestic work, the proportion being higher among those without legal papers.
- ⁵ More specifically, Robeyns’s work centers on Western Europe.
- ⁶ For example, studies of mobility and the use of transportation show that women tend to move within distances closer to the household whereas men tend to travel longer distances (Eduardo Alcántara de Vasconcellos 2003).
- ⁷ At a seminar I gave in La Paz, Bolivia in which this set of capabilities was discussed, a participant who had conducted research among poor, mostly indigenous women in the Bolivian city of El Alto pointed out that most poor women did not have any leisure time. In fact, when asked what they would do if they had an hour of leisure a day, some of her respondents said that they would use it to do more paid work in order to raise their household income.
- ⁸ For example, some participants in the discussions suggested “being able to bargain at different levels” (for example, in the household, community, the state, etc.) and “being able to develop self-esteem” as important capabilities helping them negotiate with policy makers and local authorities.
- ⁹ For example, subsidies targeted at increasing food availability for family consumption are not likely to increase women’s mobility, whereas the effect is more likely to be positive if it is used to increase children’s school attendance.
- ¹⁰ Note that the table does not include a column for parental and care leave. This is because these policies tend to be linked to formal jobs while those in Table 2 are meant to benefit informal workers, yet when mentioned, there was much agreement about the primary importance of this type of leave for working women.
- ¹¹ If the Caribbean countries are not included, the value for 2006 is US\$54.9 billion (IADB n.d.).

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