Do Modern Welfare States Foster Democratic Family Arrangements? 
Comparative Case Studies of Britain and Spain

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This article examines the extent to which different models of welfare regime support the formation of more or less democratic families. The parameter here adopted for gender equality within the family is the expansion of dual-earner families. Welfare state commitment to gender equality is assessed according to the characteristics of family policy or specific social policies that challenge the traditional gender division of labour; e.g. state support to working mothers. The research is based on a comparative analysis of Britain and Spain. These countries provide very distinct examples of welfare state developments. Despite the maturity of the British welfare state and the longer tradition of female paid employment, the analysis reveals that the proportion of dual-earner families (women aged 26-45 in 1991) is very similar in both countries. This is partly attributed to a continued trend in Britain towards the privatization of domestic responsibilities.

Systems of social protection originating in the post-war period were mostly created on the assumption that societies were organized around traditional families in which men were the main wage earners (family providers) and women were the main caregivers (family dependants). Following this premise, the mainstream literature on comparative studies of welfare state policies has focused on the male as the typical citizen entitled to social rights. In so doing, studies have tended to select those fields of social protection more relevant to male workers, such as the risks acquired from losses in paid-employment, and have neglected those fields mostly concerned with women’s interests such as the burden of family responsibilities. The last view has been predominantly held by feminists scholars, who have pointed out the fundamental role which the voluntary sector, families and, most particularly, women’s unpaid work within families still have as welfare providers in modern societies.
Naturally, families have undergone major transformations during the post-war period. Some of the factors responsible for this transformation are related, on the one hand, to the increasing participation of women in the labour force and, on the other hand, to the emergence of new demographic patterns such as an ageing population, a decline in fertility, an increase in the divorce rate, and lone-parenthood. Altogether, governmental bodies have seen the need to define new social policy strategies which can deal with modern family arrangements and the specific needs of social protection. In this context, it seems timely to examine to what extent there has been any attempt through these systems of social provision to address issues such as gendered family responsibilities and equal access to paid employment during the reformulating of modern welfare states.

This paper adopts a comparative analysis of gender relations and welfare state policies in Britain and Spain. The logic of this comparison is based on two dimensions. The first, the state, examines welfare state commitment to encourage egalitarian partnership arrangements. Stress is placed on family policies (or policies related to families), and on the assumption that gendered family responsibilities are at the basis of the disadvantage of women in participating on equal terms with men in the labour market. This is not to say that other aspects of social policy may be any less important in enhancing women’s interests, such as labour laws. A more detailed analysis, however, would go beyond the scope of this paper. The second dimension of the comparison, regions, stresses the fact that cross-national analyses restricted to the limits of the states are liable to obscure important contrasting geographical realities in gender relations. The comparative analysis focuses on the extension of dual-earner families, used here as a barometer of expanding egalitarian partnerships, as acquired in British and Spanish regions.

At present, many EU states have acute regional differences in relation to the position of women in the labour market, which cannot be explained simply by uneven economic developments. They could instead be ascribed to deeply rooted beliefs about gender roles, and embedded notions of masculinity and femininity, primarily constructed at the local or regional level.

Next, the historical development of the British and Spanish welfare states from which the current models of family policy arise will be considered. It is assumed that, paraphrasing Orloff (1993: 304), the character of public social provisions affects women’s material situations, shapes gender relationships, structures political conflicts and participation, and contributes to the formation and mobilization of identities and interests.
To adapt the postulate of *gendered welfare states* does not necessarily imply that one could clearly delimit a linear causality between some welfare state models and the resulting types of gender relationships. This would oversimplify the complex and varying processes of negotiation which take place within the framework of the market, the state, and the sexual structures of power in all spheres of daily life. Yet, it is an acknowledged fact that certain welfare state regimes are more capable than others of challenging gender inequalities.

**THE FALLACY OF WOMEN’S CHOICE: THE BRITISH WELFARE STATE**

The aim of this section is to describe major changes in social welfare policy approaches. For this purpose it is important to highlight the mainstream view adopted in the post-war period (1940s) and the more recent developments during Thatcherism (after 1979).

The social deal which emerged in the post-war period could be briefly summarized as a combination of Keynesian economic policy and Beveridgian social policy. Sir Henry William Beveridge, the chief architect of the model of the welfare state, was convinced that proper full-time mothering would secure the re-establishment of family stability. His concern did not fully acknowledge the fact that many married women joined the labour force during the war and expected that welfare needs would be satisfied by a *mixed economy* of the family (unpaid caring work), the market and the state.

The main relevance of Beveridge’s social security model resides in the fact that its influence lasted for a long period. It was revised only in the middle of the 1970s, and helped discourage further movements in the shift of gender family responsibilities. It allowed, for instance, the progressive trend towards the reduction of day-care services to working mothers. At the end of the war, there were 62,000 places for pre-school children while in the early 1960s the figure had been reduced to 22,000 places (Lewis 1992).

The premise of full employment which was thought to secure the functioning of the welfare state was based on the prototype of the male family wage earner and female full-time homemaker or, possibly, secondary worker. It was, furthermore, intended that married women would benefit from social security provisions as dependent family members rather than as citizens in their own right (Ginsburg 1992). At the time, however, women’s movements managed to gain some achievements in the field of family assistance such as the provision of ‘family allowances’ (1946), and ‘child benefit’ in the 1970s.

More recent trends in welfare development from the era of the
Thatcher government did not find a good environment for the enhancement of a committed social policy towards gender equality. The government sustained that there were work disincentives (i.e. unemployment benefits, social assistance for the unemployed lone mothers, and so on) which cause state dependency. This line of arguments was used from 1988 to justify the systematic introduction of ‘market reforms’, which focused on the so-called ‘disincentiving dependency’ and targeting benefits to the most needy as a way of reducing overall state budget expenditure. In short, it meant assuming a further shift towards governmental liberal principles of social protection (Ginsburg 1992).

It is not our purpose here to assess the overall consequences of welfare reforms arising from the political changes since 1980s. Yet, it should be stressed that as far as families were concerned, the general trend supported the privatization of domestic responsibilities or, in other words, the transfer of public services to the private realm of the families which eventually resulted in a further burden for married women performing work in and out of the home.

British state policy during the Conservative government has been regarded as a package of welfare provisions rather than a welfare state policy in its own right (Clarke and Langan 1993b). There has not been any interest in developing an integral family policy, but just certain provisions directed towards targeted groups. Demographic transformations affecting families did not raise any concern to encourage state intervention, which, after all, would go against the government’s liberal principles. However, it was unrealistic to count on families continuing to perform the function of caregiving and kinship solidarity in view of the emerging trends towards further social individualization. This individualization is exemplified, for instance, by the increase in non-family households (i.e. household of friends or unrelated people), people living alone, cohabiting couples and lone mothers.

Gauthier (1993) explicitly argues that welfare needs have been raised through the poverty lobby. Government intervention has been supposed to act to correct ‘dysfunctional’ versions of the ideal nuclear family. The underlying assumption was that a real threat existed when families lost their capacity to remain as a self-sufficient unit and required state support.

This fear explains the governmental approach towards issues such as the increase in lone mothers, who are mainly viewed as a burden on the state rather than as a new women’s family option and, if supported, as encouraging non-family forms of parenting and welfare dependency (Millar 1994; Gauthier 1993; Edwards and Duncan 1996). In this line
of argument some New Right politicians have suggested that income support for lone mothers' produced a 'perverse effect' whereby the state assistance generates a deviation from the ideal family type (Clarke and Langan 1993a).

As far as publicly-funded child care services are concerned, Table 1 shows the current situation for a selected group of European states. Britain and Spain have, when compared to France and Denmark, a low provision of child care granted for children under 3, while Britain scores even more poorly than Spain with regard to services for pre-school children aged 3–6. Publicly-funded services in the welfare system are only targeted on children who are defined by the local welfare authorities as being ‘in need’ (children with learning difficulties, economically disadvantaged families, etc.) instead of recognizing the specific needs of working parents or other educational aspects of child care.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1</th>
<th>PUBLICLY FUNDED CHILD CARE SERVICES (% PROVISION FOR CHILDREN BY AGE GROUPS) IN SELECTED EUROPEAN STATES, 1993</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children under 3 (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark*</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*data for 1994.


The shortage of public care is the result of explicit policy guidelines whereby the choice for care is perceived as a private matter. There are only child allowances (1994) for low income parents to subsidize part of their costs if they have to rely on private services. However, costs are relatively high and informal caring arrangements have been reported as being an important facility. Among these arrangements are the atypical hours worked by mothers in order to fit in with school children, as well as parents, relatives or friends taking care of small children (European Commission Network on Child Care, 1996).

Thus, the state does not support women workers (e.g. through public child-care) but neither does it provide explicit support for homemaking.
Rather it leaves women to make a ‘free’ choice between paid work and childbearing. Thus, by assuming traditional motherhood and not supporting it the disadvantaged position of women is intensified (Duncan, 1995).

Table 2 shows also the existing maternity leave schemes. Although major improvements have been made in this field since the 1960s and 1970s, Britain shows relatively low support compared with Spain. Maternity pay covers only a small fraction of women because of the restricted criteria for eligibility. Women need to have worked with the same employer for five years according to the legislation in 1990 in order to qualify for the higher cash benefits (Gauthier, 1996).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>TABLE 2</th>
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<tr>
<td>STATUTORY LEAVE FOR WORKERS WITH CHILDREN IN BRITAIN AND SPAIN</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Britain</th>
<th>Spain</th>
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<tr>
<td>Length of maternity leave/parental leave available per family after the birth of each child</td>
<td>7 months</td>
<td>36 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternity leave (after birth)</td>
<td>29 weeks</td>
<td>16 weeks (can be partly taken by fathers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paternity leave</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental leave</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Until children is 36 months, family entitlements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave for family reasons</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2 days per parent per illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Most maternity leave paid at low flat-rate or unpaid; short period paid at high earnings-related level</td>
<td>Payment at full earnings except parental leave which is unpaid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: European Commission, 1996.

Jane Lewis (1992) has produced a typology according to states’ commitment to move away from the male-breadwinner family constructed around the criterion of state’s assistance for caregiving. In her typology, the British state is regarded as a strong male bread-winner state, because public policies are regarded as embodying a strong dividing line between public (employment involving male and female workers) and private responsibilities (involving only women).
The gendered division of caring responsibilities is blamed for the current nature of women’s participation in the labour market, where part-time working is a common practice among married women to fit reproductive work (Lewis, 1992: 164). Part-time employment currently embraces 44.3 per cent of employed women aged 16 and over (Eurostat, 1994). Other authors have claimed that specific family benefits (i.e. family allowance/child benefit, family income support) have been introduced with the purpose of containing wages and improving work incentives for ‘single-earner low income families with several children’ (Bieback 1992).

The British social security system is also seen as providing for the individual who is in the labour market, but offers very little protection for those whose ties to the market are weak or who undertake unpaid work in the family. Hence, public income maintenance policies can also be said to secure the breadwinner family (Meyer 1994). Women currently working part-time are primarily affected, as they are only entitled to a very restricted range of state benefits. For many women, part-time work is only possible when receiving other supplementary income at the household level, such as the husband’s contributions normally based on a full-time job. However, since women working part-time are only eligible for the means tested benefit system, the presence of a partner is again a reason for not profiting from the full range of state benefits (Meyer 1994).

In short, Britain has not supported any explicit policy for the encouragement of equal share of family responsibilities or the enhancement of a more equal sexual division of work for those who engage in partnerships and childbearing. In the empirical analysis (below) the current organization of couple’s paid work, which may be partly the result of this policy environment, is examined for the British and Spanish cases.

THE PERNICIOUS ‘SELF-CONFIDENCE’ OF FAMILIES’ INTERGENERATIONAL SUPPORT: THE SPANISH WELFARE STATE

In the previous analysis of the British state, I began with the model of welfare social policies originating in the post-war period. For the Spanish case it is relevant to start with the role of the dictatorship (1939-1975) in enforcing the functioning and obligations of family members, and then proceeding with the recent developments promoted during the mandate of the Socialist Party since 1982.

First, it should be noted that the authoritarian regime overthrew numerous expectations entertained by women during the Second
Republic (1931–36) and truncated the reform of social assistance schemes arranged in line with other modern European states such as Germany (Moreno and Sarasa 1993). The Francoist despotic corporatism adopted extremist conservative policies, particularly in the first years of the dictatorship – the so-called autarchic period (1939–59), which was mainly characterized by its closed economy. In this period the family wage to male workers was instituted under state guidance in the form of wage complements (i.e. family allowances in 1938, family bonuses in 1945) to alleviate the burden of family dependants.

In other countries the family wage was the result of the struggle of working-class men to exclude occupied women competitors from the workplace while reproducing the middle-class housewife model (Fox-Harding, 1996). In Spain, male privileges over married women were imposed by the state, although it did not have the originally desired impact given that this scheme only targeted industrial workers. Non-salaried workers remained excluded despite representing around 40 per cent of the population in 1960s (Meil 1995).

In Spain the family wage was justified to preserve the cohesion of the family through the male breadwinner as postulated by the Catholic social doctrine. This scheme, however, eventually turned out to be an irrational system of wage control (not liberated until 1956) to guarantee capitalist accumulation in a system of low wages rather than serving pro-natalist purposes as was originally meant (Meil 1995). The system’s fiscal policy directly discouraged married women from working in paid employment because this meant a loss of income supplements given to husbands for having dependent wives or children (Nash 1991). It has been estimated that a male worker could receive the equivalent subsidy (wage-complement) of four dependent children for having an economically dependent wife (Meil 1995).

Thus, the authoritarian regime had a vast impact in suppressing women’s freedom to enter the formal labour market but did not really succeed in promoting an increase in fertility (Nash 1991). Franco was resolved to regulate female sexuality, work and education according to his patriarchal notion of motherhood whereby women were conceived ‘...as potential breeders ... halting national degeneration through an expanded birth-rate and maximum development of their reproductive capacities’ (Nash 1991: 160).

In 1959 the economic isolation came to an end with the implementation of the Stabilization Plan. The new economic policy brought about the so-called economic miracle of the 1960s and supported the reform of the irrational family policy (1963–73) inherited from the previous phase in which workers were rewarded according to
their family burden rather than by their professional qualifications. The economic growth coincided with the decline of agricultural work and the shift of many women from rural areas (who quite possibly were not recognized as employed in official statistics) to the paid employment available in industrial cities.

The significant incorporation of women to the labour force, however, did not come about until some years after the end of the authoritarian regime in the middle 1980s. The new elected democratic regime inaugurated profound social-democratic reforms in core issues for women’s emancipation. The most relevant were the abolition of the reactionary ban on wives’ occupation outside the household without the husband’s permission in 1975, the legalization of the use of contraceptives and the decriminalization of non-marital unions in 1978, and the legalization of divorce and the full legal recognition of children born outside wedlock in 1981.

Yet, the authoritarian system of social provision provided the foundations of constraints from which future developments came forth without completely abandoning the assumptions of the familiaristic welfare system. That is, social benefits based on a male family headship and female caregiving. The state was not fully engaged in enhancing women’s individual capacities of independence as much as presupposing individual’s (women and youth) dependence on families. Indeed, it has been argued that the social functions accomplished by the cohesive family ties discourage the state from providing higher levels of public provision (Naldini 1996).

The resulting model of welfare state system has been categorized as a *late-corporatist welfare state with a mixed system of social assistance* which introduces the decentralization of many social services (devolution to regional autonomous communities and municipalities) and enjoys relatively weak independent social initiatives from civil society (Ferrera 1995; Moreno and Sarasa 1993). Estivill also refers to ‘*a mixed system, midway between the Bismarck and the Beveridge models, which is far from the development of the so-called “welfare state” of most important European countries*’ (1993: 255).

Carrasco et al. (1997) argue that the welfare system of social provision maintains an indirect gender discrimination, which derives from the *dual system* of contributory and non-contributory social protection. In the former, women are over-represented because of their main responsibility within the family work. Homemaker married women are only entitled to derived benefits as wives. Female workers in irregular working conditions (i.e. temporary work where many women are involved) also have to rely on non-contributory benefits that deprive
them of full citizenship rights. Temporary or atypical female workers, for instance, are rarely entitled to maternity rights. The condition for eligibility is the payment of social security contributions for a minimum of 180 days during the previous five years.

In Spain, unlike Britain, there is no important tradition of part-time work, which could have equally absorbed working mothers. This has been justified by the fact that trade unions had never been interested in an occupational practice that could jeopardize male-household-head privileges from well-paid family wage (Durán 1996). The result is that in 1980 there were only 6.8 per cent of women working part-time (i.e. less than 40 hours a week) and in 1996 the proportion was only 15.9 per cent.\(^5\)

Carrasco et al. (1997) also argue that there has been no profound commitment to gender equal opportunities in the sphere of social services. The typical evidence supporting this is the shortage of publicly funded day care centres, and the nature and extent of school time-tables and children’s holidays, which hardly accommodate parents’ regular working hours. As Table 1 shows, the shortage is particularly evident for children younger than three years, while for pre-school children aged three to six years the coverage is extensive. The same applies for elderly care since almost 90 per cent of home-based assistance is currently provided privately by families (Ditch et al 1996).

Despite the existence of subsidies (tax relief on the cost) for acquiring child care services, when both parents are employed outside the home or receive low income, many people rely on informal networks for child care. In 1990 as many as 24.6 per cent of children whose mothers worked were looked after by their grandparents (Instituto de la Mujer 1990, see also Table 1). Grandmother/father may look after the children if the mother decides to continue in employment (Solsona et al 1992), but this arrangement generally implies lack of geographical mobility for mothers or couples.

The availability of informal networks for child care and the rigidity of female employment in Spain (i.e. few part-time jobs together with huge female unemployment) may account for the low level of women giving up full-time jobs after the birth of the first child in comparison to Britain (Vaiou 1995; see Solsona and Treviño 1995 for Spain). Thus, although full-time working mothers are not very numerous they tend to reproduce continuous labour force careers.

The shortages in child care would not outrageously disadvantage married women in the context of a parallel trend towards equal sharing of family responsibilities or further flexibility in gender roles. Nonetheless, routine domestic work is still nowadays mainly carried out
by women both in Britain and in Spain as shown in Figure 1 where France and Denmark have also been included. It is not surprising that a social-democratic welfare state like Denmark has the lowest proportion of male partners never doing domestic work. This state has a women-friendly approach (generous parental leaves and child care services) which has resulted in the encouragement of dual breadwinner families and further awareness of gender equality (Lewis, 1997).

**FIGURE 1**
GENDERED RESPONSIBILITIES IN PARTNERSHIPS: PROPORTION OF MALE PARTNERS NEVER DOING DOMESTIC WORK ACCORDING TO HER AND HIS OPINION, 1991

[Graph showing gendered responsibilities in partnerships with data for Spain, Great Britain, France, and Denmark.


In spite of the improved legal framework promoted by recent governments in terms of services for young children and new labour laws to promote more equal sharing of parents' responsibilities, further developments have been curtailed by countries' severe economic recession. In general, reforms in social policy have been shadowed by other matters which have been more at stake since the beginning of the 1980s such as an enormous unemployment rate (22.2 per cent in 1996), the process of industrial restructuring or the achievement of international competitiveness.6

The very high unemployment rates recorded in the last years are undoubtedly unbearable for any society. Yet, this issue has not been perceived as a real social problem not only because of the availability of
unemployment subsidies, but because of the crucial social role played by families. Furthermore, unemployment has not been perceived as so problematic given that it mainly affects young people and women rather than male household heads (Torns et al., 1995; Carrasco et al 1997).

As far as the social welfare services currently available through the Social Security System are concerned, where reception depends on previous contributions, women can enjoy fairly good maternity benefits (in the past incorrectly called incapacity leave) which are made up of 100 per cent of the last salary. The criterion to qualify is that women have paid social security contributions for a minimum of 180 days during the five years preceding birth.

There are also family allowances for children with low income parents (the income threshold is adjusted upward every year since 1994). This allowance is part of the small array of family benefits administered by the Ministry of Social Affairs (created in 1987) aimed at combating poverty rather than pursuing either demographic or distributive aims (Cabré et al 1989, Estivill 1993). In the same line of action, there is also a social minimum income (renta mínima de inserción social) granted to very low income households, which has been the first attempt to universalize social coverage during the democratic period. Currently, lone-parents and old people living alone are the main recipients of this income (Meil 1994).

At present, state family contributions per se are mainly directed at offsetting the costs of children in large families, and they especially target citizens in disadvantageous circumstances (Valiente 1995). Despite the restricted reforms in the field of family policy, other areas of social protection have experienced an extraordinary expansion. This is the case of the universalization of health care (achieved in 1989 by the State Budget Law) and the establishment of non-contributory (means-tested) retirement pensions in 1990.

The reform of the pension system meant a fundamental change in the scheme of social protection. It aimed at covering not only stable workers but people with weak attachment in the labour force or interrupted occupational careers. This is the case of many married women of the older generation (the requirement for full pension payment is 15 years of contributions to social security). Women are also entitled to a widow’s pension but, again, this is not an extension of full citizenship rights but a derived right from their status as spouses. Moreover, non-contributory pensions tend to be lower, thus, in 1994 they were only 55 per cent of an average contributory pension (Mota 1996).

It is also worth mentioning the recent reform of fiscal policy which has facilitated a new system of income tax (Law 20/1989 effective in
1991). The new system allows the choice between joint taxation of the spouses' income and individual taxation (in Britain there is only individual). Joint taxation can be more advantageous in the case that only one of them is on paid employment or the household income distribution is very unequal. This reform represents an important advance for gender equality since it aims at the equal treatment of men and women as well as married and single women. Cohabiting couples (heterosexuals or homosexuals), however, are not considered as family units entitled to joint taxation or any other benefits derived from an official marriage contracted by civil or religious union (i.e. social security, inheritance in case of death, etc.).

In sum, there seems to be a renewed interest in family matters but family policy as such is still a neglected area within the welfare state, in spite of (or possibly due to) the crucial role played by inter-generational solidarity in families. Families, as in other southern European states, have emerged as being the basic institutions for the alleviation of social exclusion (i.e. youth unemployment) and the reconciliation of the difficult relationship between women's paid employment and family responsibilities (Flaquer 1995; Ferrera 1995; Meil 1994; Viaou 1995)

There are different interpretations for the lack of a specific family policy. It has been argued that social policies originating after the authoritarian regime had intentionally avoided the memories, still quite vivid, of strong pronatalist state intervention enforced during the dictatorship (Gauthier 1993; Valiente 1995). Another argument states that Spain has never experienced labour shortages, which may have pulled women into paid employment thereby forcing further developments in the field of services to families. In Britain, for instance, the labour force shortages of the 1960s used immigrant female and male manual workers from the ex-colonies to fill up vacant jobs, while permitting the continuance of the hegemony of the white male breadwinner and the middle class families (Williams 1995).

Whatever the reason, the fact is that the situation of most families still does not present a harmonious relationship between employment and caring responsibilities. Large families play a crucial role in women's intergenerational solidarity networks in the absence of extended child or elderly care provision.

Familialism or Defamilization?

By the term familiarization I refer to the ambiguous liberal ideology of assuming family privacy and freedom and at the same time failing to support other forms of welfare that do not rely on women's responsibility for care within families. Both the British and the Spanish
welfare state models tend to produce strong familiaristic ideologies in their social assistance programs, but this is far more evident in the case of Spain. The result is that caring and reproduction tasks are mostly located in the private sphere of the household and the boundaries between private and public spheres are very strongly delineated.

Neither the British nor Spanish welfare states have greatly modified the organization of social reproduction or gender inequality during the last decades. In both states existing policies on ‘the family’ are aimed at families in special underprivileged circumstances. However, British women have gained more space in the labour market (a higher total employment rate) so that one may conclude that British women have been slightly more defamilialized – by the market – than their Spanish counterparts.

It is also worth noting that ideological discourses around the social role of families strongly differs in both states. Britain, using recent demographic trends in households, has created a discourse around certain family forms as ‘social failure’ (e.g. the typical approach to lone mothers), whereas mainstream Spanish politicians have exalted the social cohesion of families as a primary source of welfare supply without considering the urgency for relief (by policy making) for the gendered burden of this family system.

The next section focuses on households and the economic participation of women in Britain and Spain. When this comparison was originally planned, the first hypothesis was that women in Britain would have achieved a more solid position in the labour market than Spanish women (let us say women in the same age cohorts) and, therefore, would present a higher presence of dual earner families in spite of the lack of support from the liberal welfare state. Suffice to say that during forty years of a repressive totalitarian state the employment of mothers in the formal economy was penalized and directly discouraged (Nash 1991). Nonetheless, as will be shown, the original assumption can be questioned.

WORK ARRANGEMENTS OF BRITISH AND SPANISH SPOUSES: WOMEN AGED 26–45

This section deals with the empirical analysis of households economic organization. The goal is to analyze the relationship between family forms and the economic specialization of the spouses. In order to do that different set of household types have been constructed as follows:
Household Types According to Gender Economic Roles

a. Woman living with a man in full-time work:

1. Traditional household (breadwinner man working full-time and the homemaker an economically inactive woman); 
2. Modified traditional household (breadwinner man working full-time and woman in part-time work); 
3. Dual-earner household (both partners working full-time); and 
4. Other households (men working full-time and women unemployed or seeking a job).

b. Woman living with a man who is not working full-time (unemployed, inactive, etc.):

The distribution by household types reveals that from the overall group of women aged 26–45 living together with male partners in each country, 26 per cent in Britain and only 12 per cent in Spain are living with men not working on a full-time basis (households type a. in Figure 2). From the group of women aged 26–45 living with a full-time working man (household type b.) only 5 per cent in Britain and 22 per cent in Spain do not belong to household types 1, 2 and 3. These households consist of women who are unemployed or studying. The analysis is limited to household types 1, 2 and 3 in order to facilitate the interpretation and comparison between states.

Each of these household types (1, 2 and 3) may be interpreted as indicating different degrees of female subordination in family relationships. Results from other research shows that a woman’s contribution to family income (or women’s labour market position) is highly correlated to her ability to exercise decision-making within the family (Ferber and Nelson 1993; Orloff 1993). That is to say, a woman’s position in the labour market partly determines her capacity to change patriarchal relations of power within the household. These typologies may arouse opposition due to the use of a quantitative approach to address the question of gender inequalities within the households which may be seen as subjective. However this approach allows us to obtain a general cross-national comparative picture. It should undoubtedly be complemented by other kinds of qualitative studies in follow-up research.

As far as data sources are concerned, British data have been drawn from the Samples of Anonymized Records (SARs) derived from the 1991 Census of Population, while the Spanish data have been drawn from the 1991 Socio-demographic Survey (Encuesta Sociodemográfica).
FIGURE 2
FAMILY TYPES ACCORDING TO SPOUSES' GENDER ROLES, 1991
WOMEN AGED 26–45 LIVING IN PARTNERSHIPS


Notes:
a: women living with a male partner working full time.
b: women living with a male partner not working full-time (i.e. unemployed, inactive, part-time, etc.).

In Britain 74 per cent of women aged 26–45 are living with a full-time working man, of which 29 per cent are in dual earner households, 28 per cent in modified-traditional households and 13 per cent in traditional households. This means that of ten full-time working men four of their female partners are full-time, four are part-time and two are full-time homemakers.

In Spain there is a slightly higher proportion of women aged 26–45 living with a full-time working man (88 per cent) and they are distributed in the following way: 25 per cent in dual earner households, 7 per cent in modified-traditional households and 34 per cent in traditional households. This means that of ten full-time working men four of their female partners are full-time, one is part-time and five are full-time homemakers.

These figures suggest that women living together with full-time working men in Britain have, in general terms, greater attachment to the labour market when the dual earner households and the modified-
traditional households are considered together.

It is worth noting, however, the salient fact that dual earner households represent a similar proportion in both states, in spite of the historical differences discussed earlier. Therefore, the crucial difference between both states is the behaviour of married or cohabiting women in the way they allocate time for household chores. It seems one is talking about different strategies to accomplish the same purposes around family duties and, at first glance, it is difficult to say which one represents the best, or least bad, scenario.

According to Hakim (1996) traditional households and modified ones have many things in common in Britain. In her research, the female workforce in Britain is divided between: family-centred women, working part-time for whom paid work is a subsidiary task that does not take any priority over domestic responsibilities; and women committed on a full-time basis to paid employment, associated with status attainment, who tend to take up continuous, year-round employment.

However, this description of the British female labour force has been strongly contested by many feminist sociologists and economists (see Ginn et al., 1996, Breugel, 1996). Their main criticism is that she has considered neither the cultural conditions (the breadwinner ideology of the family and labour force discrimination) nor the material constraints (employer policies, access to child care facilities, etc.) by which female employment is mainly determined. In addition, other research supports the idea that part-time employment is significant in terms of women’s control of their earnings, their sense of identity and the distribution of poverty (Lister 1992; Brannen et al. 1994 as cited by Ginn et al 1996).

The simple fact of entering the formal labour market means from the outset a disruption of women’s traditional role as homemakers, so that it sets the conditions for enlarging the culture of female paid employment, even when the precarious conditions associated with part-time work are taken into account. Therefore, I may speculate that British women, married or cohabiting, have extended their presence in formal paid employment, but that a large proportion of them have done so by adapting their household responsibilities to part-time jobs.

Spanish women living in traditional households have not had many options for jobs on a part-time basis. Instead, strategies to earn money are more likely to be organized around an informal economy not captured in official statistics (family help, occupations in small feminized workshops, home-based work, etc.). Trade unions estimate that 42 per cent of working women in Spain are concentrated in the underground economy, although the same sector only accounts for 19 per cent of men’s activity (data from 1991; Comisiones Obreras 1993; see also De
Miguel 1988; Bagnasco 1983). It is very difficult to know where these informal activities are concentrated, but home-based work is normally carried out in the older and less productive industries. The city of Valencia, for instance, is well known for the large number of women carrying out home-based work in textiles and toy making (European Commission, 1996d).

As far as women who work full-time are concerned, it is important to note that the structure of the Spanish female labour market is extremely rigid, so that once women leave their jobs it is very difficult to re-enter the labour market. This explains the small proportion of women in full-time jobs who avoid, as far as possible, leaving their job even in the event of a child or family formation. This factor may account as well for the high proportion of women in continuous careers (Solsona and Treviño 1995). Spain presents a bipolar pattern between continuous careers of full-time women workers – covering child care mostly by extended family networks or private centres – and entirely disrupted careers of full-time homemakers. In contrast, British women may shift from full-time to part-time work or return to work at later stages in the family life cycle (probably as part-time workers again).

Using Walby’s conceptualization of women’s access to employment (1994), I could claim that British women have gained high levels of participation, although they suffer from discrimination in a highly gendered labour market (a high degree of public patriarchy) whereas the proportion of women apparently fully economically dependent on a male breadwinner is still much more significant in the Spanish context (a high degree of private patriarchy). This is shown by the fact that 34 per cent of Spanish women married or cohabiting aged 26–45 have the primary role as a homemaker (only 13 per cent of British).

In conclusion, gendered aspects of domestic arrangements as related to paid employment among heterosexual couples are far from equal in either Britain or Spain. The supposedly more democratic arrangement of the dual earner families reaches similar proportions in both but, generally speaking, British women have more options to access precarious, but formal and officially recognized, paid employment. In relative terms, the similar proportions of dual earner families found in both states is striking. The similarity suggest that the improvement of women’s labour force position is not only a matter of time and the social processes of modernization but also a matter of changing ideologies around equality, and of implementing policies for individual social rights and caring responsibilities.
Work Arrangements of Young Spouses: Women Aged 26–35

The previous section was concerned with women aged 26–45. This is a very heterogeneous group from which to identify incipient tendencies in household formation, and in gender relationships within households. Moreover, in countries like Spain the most significant changes in female employment patterns are basically found among young women. Therefore, this section focuses on a younger women aged 26–35.

I would also like to test, as authors such as Andersen (1991) claims, whether increasing access of women to the labour force has resulted in a higher proportion of dual-earner households overall and whether, as has been suggested above (see Bowlby et al. 1986; Duncan 1991; McDowell and Massey 1984), local regional cultures play a great part in defining geographical inequalities in household formation.

It is problematic to explain the underlying reasons for the existence of a higher or lower proportion of dual earner couples (DECs) in a given region without going deeply into the characteristics of local labour markets, traditions of female employment or even the prevalence of particular gender cultures with regard to the main role expected of women. Nonetheless, it is worth analyzing to what extent regional spatial differences affect the interpretation of family arrangements.

First of all, in both countries (see Maps 1 and 2) DECs basically appear in the regions where women have traditionally maintained high activity rates. Their distribution roughly coincides with the map of the regional geography of female work. In the case of Britain it defines the economically dynamic regions of the South East (including Greater London) and the West Midlands and in addition, the old industrial region in the North West. In Spain DECs appear in the more industrialized and urbanized regional autonomous communities of the north-east coast (Cantabria and Basque Country), also in Navarra and Aragon, Catalonia in the north-east and Madrid (the latter being highly feminized due partly to the concentration of women working as civil servants in the bureaucratic apparatus of the central Spanish state).

An examination of the distribution of DECs among younger women (aged 26–35) allows us to observe that cross-regional differences are more acute in Spain than in Britain. For instance, Catalonia has the highest proportion (40 per cent) of dual earner couples, while Andalusia and Castilla la Mancha have the lowest (18 per cent). In Britain there is more homogeneity in the regional distribution of dual earner couples. The highest proportion is found in the South East (33 per cent) and the lowest in East Anglia and the South West (around 25 per cent).

In response to the question at the beginning of this section, an
MAP 1
WOMEN IN DUAL-EARNER COUPLES AGED 26–35, BRITAIN 1991
(% IN RELATION TO ALL WOMEN IN PARTNERSHIPS)

Source: GB 1991 1% Household SAR.

MAP 2
WOMEN IN DUAL-EARNER COUPLES AGED 26–35, SPAIN 1991
(% IN RELATION TO ALL WOMEN IN PARTNERSHIPS)

Note: Canary Islands are in the range 21.50–32.50%.
increase in women’s access to the labour force may not necessarily result in a higher proportion of full time dual-earner households. In particular regions or localities women’s employment may be organized according to both their opportunities for paid work and the social expectations associated with each gender when married or cohabiting. Women do not appear to automatically take on full-time work. This is particularly true of British women (aged 26–35) who, in spite of having an older tradition of paid employment than Spanish women, have much the same proportions of dual-earner households. It is possible that the feminized social construction of part-time work and the liberal ideology surrounding family matters may be partly responsible for the long-lasting stagnation of British female full-time employment.

This section highlights the importance of the geography of gender divisions of labour in defining different models of couples’ gendered economic arrangements. In view of the results, it calls to attention the need for comparative studies of family systems applied to homogeneous regions, instead of international comparisons between countries with complex cross-regional realities. The artificially formed boundaries of nation states do not provide the correct framework to study gender relationships and family constructions.

CONCLUSION

The cases of Britain and Spain represent a good illustration of how different welfare states are approaching the issue of gendered family responsibilities. Neither of them, for different reasons, has either provided extended child care provision, in comparison with other European states, or reconciled motherhood and employment.

The basic difference is that British women can opt for the alternative of part-time employment. This is seldom available in Spain. Therefore, there is a greater proportion of women in a full-time homemaking role in Spain. However, the figure of Spanish homemakers may be overestimated as the number of women who are engaged in productive (but not officially recognized) work carried out at home (as a non-registered self-employed or family help) or in small non-regulated firms, appears to be high.

Even so, it is surprising that a cross-national comparison between Britain and Spain reveals a similar proportion of dual earner households among women aged 26–45. If we take into account the fact that female formal employment has a much longer tradition in Britain than in Spain, it could be expected that dual earner families would be more numerous in the former, so indicating a further modernized state or family
arrangements. Despite the fact that women in Britain have higher rates of total female activity, female employment is growing due largely to the expansion of part-time employment, which in Britain means fairly marginal jobs usually arranged around domestic work. It could be hypothesized that the long-lasting stagnation in the proportion of married or cohabiting women in full-time employment may be somehow related to the liberal model assumed by the British welfare state.

Comparisons at the regional level reveal important internal inequalities in the distribution of dual career families. These inequalities suggest that more studies need to be done to identify the elements shaping particular regional gender cultures, which at the same time influence the formation of particular family systems. From this exercise comes a question as to what extent cross-national comparisons are obscuring regional diversities in each particular country. It is rather suggested that a more suitable approach for comparing family systems at the international level would be to cluster similar regions.

New doubts emerge in the light of the future transformation of the modern machinery of welfare states which are continually threatened by liberal policy interests in favour of a more residual and targeted systems of social provision. It is certainly right that the premises of full male employment and family stability on which the social deal of the 1950s gave way to the birth of contemporary welfare states do not seem to hold any more. Hence, it is obvious that debates on welfare state reforms are at stake now.

From the feminist perspective, it is imperative that equal citizenship rights and political participation are guaranteed insofar as reproductive responsibilities are not regarded as private matters but as social demands delivered by the state. Social security programmes have a great deal of potential emancipatory power for women, regardless of their position in the occupational structure and their position within the family. In the British model, only those segments of the working population who hold full-time, fairly well paid jobs can gain access to child care services, whereas part-time working mothers have to resort to informal care (friends or relatives) and atypical hours of work to fit family obligations. Market forces have proved to be insufficient to overcome women’s dual roles owing to the lack of recognition of their gendered burden. In Spain many women are not commodified partly due to the gendered burden of family responsibilities and those women in paid employment can hardly count on any social backup.
NOTES

1. New demographic patterns have had different impact in Britain than Spain. Lone mothers (aged 20-39 living alone with their child or children), for instance, are an outstanding phenomenon in Britain with 10.1 per cent of all family-households compared with 2.9 per cent in Spain (Eurostat, 1991). There are also important differences in both countries with regard to family formation. Young adults, for instance, leave the parental home much earlier in Britain than in Spain, which also coincides with the fact that the British state provides more support for individuals for access to housing (housing benefits) while in Spain there is a real shortage of social housing and allowances for the unemployed are non-existent (McCrone & Stephens, 1995).

2. In 1992 there was a Child Care Recommendation of the European Community for the introduction of special leave for employed parents and the provision of child-care services for working parents which could not turn into a Directive due to its blocking by the British government.


4. There was not an exceptional change in the traditional views about women and gender relationships held during the Second Republic; however, the legislative efforts in the family field were very promising (Nash, 1983). For instance, the Second Republic approved the right to civil marriage, the recognition of equal rights for illegitimate children, the right for women to have a declaration of paternity on the part of the father (in the constitution in 1931), approved a divorce law (1932), implemented a compulsory maternity insurance within the workers status (1929) and inaugurated women’s suffrage (1931). The introduction of a comprehensive set of social insurance schemes was aborted by the outbreak of the civil war.

5. Data from 1980 taken from Alcobendas (1984); other recent labour force statistics are from Anuario de Estadísticas Laborales y de Asuntos Sociales (AELAS).

6. Unemployment refers to the total average annual rate for 1996 (AELAS, 1996).

7. Replacement rate for the first month of unemployment for a couple with two children at the average level of earnings is higher in Spain than the average for OECD countries (as quoted in Fernández-Cordón 1996).

8. The initial income threshold was 1,000,000 Ptas and 1,157,414 Pts in 1997 which is below the maximum income levels providing exemption from income tax declaration (as quoted in Fernández-Cordón 1996).

9. In the current legislation, large families consist of three children (two if one of them is disabled) aged 21 or 25 if they are still engaged in the educational system.

10. Pensions make up the main bulk of social spending at the present time representing almost 43 per cent of the public budget in 1993 (Mota, 1996). According to the same author, the value of a contributory pension for a typical median industrial manual worker in 1992 was 97 per cent (after taxes) of their past average wage (44 per cent in UK) which represents the highest replacement tax in the European Union. In contrast, a non-contributory pension for the same type of worker was only 30 per cent of their past average wage in line with the proportion received in the UK.

11. The concept of familism was originally used in the 1970s to indicate the degree of commitment to the idea or centrality of the family (Hantrais and Letablier, 1996).

12. The idea of full-time homemakers refers to those mainly responsible for domestic and reproductive tasks, such as women who declare themselves as ‘inactive’ (not actively looking for employment) and, therefore, assuming no economic attachment with the labour market.

13. The SARs consist of two non-overlapping files: a 2 per cent sample of individuals and a 1 per cent sample of households and all persons enumerated in those households. The household SAR contain records for approximately 200,000 households and the 540,000 individuals enumerated in those households. This section uses data from the
1 per cent Household file. The Spanish Socio-Demographic Survey consists of a sample of 159,154 individuals, representative of the Spanish population resident in private households and aged ten years and over.

14. The author supports the idea of high degree of public patriarchy by arguing that British women suffer the highest gender wage gap within the EU. Taking a definition of low pay as earning less than 66 per cent of the median wage, the study carried out by Rubery and Fagan (1994) shows that 41% of women full-timers in 1991 were low paid in the UK, which is certainly the highest incidence in the Community.

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