

29/2013 Quaderni di Donne & Ricerca ISSN: 1827-5982

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**Women's Unpaid Work:
Measurement and Distributional Issues**

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Prefazione

Erica Albarello presenta una buona analisi critica dello stato dell'arte su un tema di attualità come la misura del lavoro di cura non pagato che si svolge all'interno delle famiglie, sostenendo la tesi che esso dovrebbe valutato come non solo la letteratura in proposito, ma anche diversi organismi internazionali tentano di fare e la stessa autrice documenta. Essa si preoccupa soprattutto del fatto che è proprio il lavoro di cura ad allontanare molte donne dal mercato del lavoro, specie in paesi che, come il nostro, non offrono sufficienti servizi per l'infanzia, ma vale la pena di ricordare quanto esso tocchi oggi la cosiddetta generazione *sandwich*, vale a dire la generazione di ultracinquantenni, in particolare donne, impegnate simultaneamente sul duplice fronte delle responsabilità di cura verso i figli giovani e i genitori anziani, che giocano un ruolo fondamentale nel fornire assistenza informale alle generazioni di anziani più fragili, sostituendosi a servizi che oggi il welfare pubblico non è in grado di offrire.

L'autrice contesta anzitutto chi afferma che il lavoro dei *care givers* non è quantificabile, ricordando che i differenti *time use surveys* sviluppati in diversi paesi da tempo offrono dati in proposito. Vengono accuratamente esaminati pregi e difetti dei data base disponibili come HETUS (Harmonised European Time Use Survey), l'equivalente americano ATUS e infine MTUS (Multinational Time Use Study) che considera ben 60 paesi.

Come è noto, il lavoro di cura è distribuito in maniera sbilanciata fra i due sessi e ciò influisce in maniera sensibile sulla diversa partecipazione di uomini e donne al mercato del lavoro, come mostrano i vari indicatori disponibili nelle statistiche internazionali, fornite dall'ILO e soprattutto dall'ONU nel ben noto UN Human Development Report con il suo Gender Inequality Index (GII).

Particolarmente interessante è la discussione degli argomenti forniti in letteratura per spiegare le ragioni del differente impegno dei due sessi nel lavoro di cura, che contrappongono le attività di riproduzione sociale a quelle di produzione economica.

Si tratta di una decisione meramente privata, derivante dal contratto di genere con cui implicitamente i coniugi si accordano per una divisione di ruoli all'interno della famiglia, in base al quale agli uomini spetta di fornire reddito conquistato sul mercato del lavoro formale e alle donne di occuparsi di tutti gli altri compiti connessi alla riproduzione sociale? Ma allora, obietta la nostra autrice, come si spiegherebbe il fiorente sviluppo del mercato dei lavori domestici che si registra attualmente? O si tratta di una razionale divisione delle risorse relative di cui i coniugi dispongono

in base al ruolo delle differenze biologiche a suo tempo sottolineate da Becker, ma che conducono al circolo vizioso illustrato da una delle più note economiste femministe (Ferber): *Women specialize in the household because they would have low wages on the market and they do have low wages on the market because they are specialized in household labor.*

In teoria uomini e donne ugualmente contribuiscono alla riproduzione sociale, “producendo” esseri umani e così contribuendo alla “riproduzione” della specie umana. Ed entrambi i genitori sono supposti prendersi cura dei figli, per cui non sarebbe il genere, ma la genitorialità a impegnarli in questo ruolo. Ma in realtà sono per lo più le donne pagate o non pagate o ispirate da un altruismo socialmente condizionato (compulsory altruism, dice la Folbre) a svolgere questo ruolo.

Nel par. 2.2 del suo lavoro l'autrice discute – anche troppo dettagliatamente – pregi e difetti dei vari metodi che sono stati suggeriti in letteratura per la valutazione del lavoro di cura. Si va dal volume degli inputs – basandosi cioè sulle ore di lavoro spese nella cura, dato che il tempo è sicuramente l'input più importante degli altri – alla valutazione degli outputs (cioè i beni e servizi prodotti), alla imputazione di salari che la famiglia potrebbe pagare o che sul mercato sono pagati a un lavoratore polivalente impiegato per fornire gli stessi servizi o ancora attribuendo un valore di mercato ai beni e servizi prodotti in famiglia. Si tratta ovviamente di valutazioni necessarie per cogliere l'importanza anche economica di questo welfare domestico che si sostituisce a quello pubblico o di mercato.

L'autrice passa poi a una accurata disamina dei pregi e dei difetti delle linee guida per la misurazione finora suggerite dai vari organismi internazionali, (ONU, OECD e anche UE) che suggeriscono di accompagnare le normali statistiche di contabilità nazionale – che si propongono di fornire una descrizione attendibile dell'economia di mercato – con una contabilità satellite dell'economia familiare, poiché il lavoro domestico rappresenterebbe una nozione alternativa che richiede un differente metodo di valutazione economica, connessa alla contabilità generale, ma da essa distinta per giungere alla nozione di “produzione estesa”. Pochi paesi hanno accolto questi suggerimenti. Tra di essi USA, UK, Finlandia e Svizzera con qualche successo, sia pure con metodi differenti, mentre tentativi sono stati fatti, senza molto successo, in Spagna e in Corea del Sud.

Nel caso italiano, dopo l'interessante ma isolato lavoro di due ricercatrici (Addabbo e Caiumi, 2003) si registra una curiosa situazione: i dati sull'impiego del tempo esistono (tanto che su di essi si fonda la stima fornita dal database europeo HETUS), ma a livello ufficiale non si è ancora deciso né di sostenere la ricerca in questo argomento né di produrre le stime ufficiali che consentano di pervenire a una valutazione del prodotto nazionale lordo comprensiva del lavoro non pagato. Eppure si tratta di un fenomeno di rilevante importanza economica, dato che nei pochi casi nazionali in cui l'esperimento è stato tentato – pur con tutte le differenze di metodo dovute alla

mancanza di comuni linee-guida a livello internazionale – il peso economico del lavoro non pagato raggiunge quando addirittura non supera la metà del PIL.

Non resta che sperare che le conclusioni della autrice – che ritiene il riconoscimento del lavoro non pagato un tema prematuro ed anzi di scarso rilievo per la pubblica opinione, poiché tocca una questione scottante come la divisione del lavoro domestico fra uomini e donne – siano troppo pessimistiche.

Graziella Fornengo, Università di Torino

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Introduction

What is unpaid work? Why is it a gendered issue? And why is it important to make research on its distributional and measurement aspects? Before entering deeper into the substance of the intra-household allocation of tasks, and before analyzing and comparing the different unpaid work evaluation methods, it is fundamental to understand the reasons why such issue should gain more space on the economic, political and academic agenda at international level. It can be noticed that, in the concerned literature, the words “hidden”, “invisible”, “iceberg” frequently appear, together with the verbs “to ignore” and “to marginalize”. These expressions tell us much about the consideration that the issue of non-market labor has received in the public discourse so far.

Unpaid work is a category which could be declined in a number of ways. Chapter 1 is devoted to the description of its under-categories approached in the research.

Working in the house, caregiving, volunteer work, subsistence and so on, though not having an evident market impact, prevent people who perform them from engaging in other activities – paid work included – and are substitutes for equivalent activities offered on the market. They consequently have an influence, though indirect, on the wider economic system. The fact that unpaid workers do not get any remuneration, and cannot benefit from the welfare advantages granted to regular workers, contributes to keep them in a weaker position, both in the family and in society. This happens because, as Himmelweit (1995) points out, society tends to undervalue people performing activities which do not perfectly fit into the category of “work”. Such people are traditionally women.

The intrinsic commitment of the present research is to give visibility both to the economic meaningfulness of the work performed for no pay, and to those who accomplish it, carrying out a fundamental – but still largely neglected – public function, the so-called “social reproduction”. Affirming that even non-market work has a quantifiable value means *translating it into a language governments* – and even common people – *understand: money* (Hoskyns and Rai, 2007, p. 302).

Chapter 2 deals with unpaid work’s specific measurement and evaluation methods. Time use surveys are statistical tools aimed at registering, through detailed questionnaires, the precise activities that people follow along their day. In order to make an evaluation of the measured time spent in unpaid work, however, it is fundamental to determine if it is correct to consider it as productive. Much resistance in recognizing typical female activities as such comes from

institutions. We consider the 2008 UN System of National Accounts (SNA), the guidelines which most of the states follow in drafting their GDP estimates, as the main tool legitimizing the exclusion of household activities from the production boundary. Alternatives to the official standard are presented, the main examples being inspired by Margaret Reid's "third-person criterion". On the basis of alternative production boundaries, many unpaid work measurement methods have been proposed throughout the past century. We analyze such methods and observe that each of them entails both advantages and drawbacks. Our point is that their shortcomings are not reasons sufficient to justify the refusal – or the disinterest – from national and international authorities to engage in unpaid work evaluation efforts.

It must be recognized that concrete efforts towards unpaid work evaluations have actually been carried out, even if they are episodic and their comparability is limited. We are talking about Household Satellite Accounts which calculate the economic width of the household sector in a certain country. Chapter 3 presents some examples of these separate accounts. The growing employment of household satellite accounts rises a double dispute. On the one hand, the implicit message underlying the creation of new accounting tools is that the current definitions of work and productivity have lost some of their legitimacy and need re-discussion. On the other hand, however, keeping these accounts separate from the main GDP calculations contributes to give them a lower and marginal status. We argue that an early SNA revision is needed, in order to recognize the due economic importance to a great amount of work – whose volume is comparable to the formal labor deriving one – which is still unrecognized, but whose benefits advantage (for free) each member of society.

In conclusion, policymaking should play a stronger role in supporting a more even distribution of family responsibilities between the partners. The increasing participation of men in household activities, even reinforced by a more female-friendly legislation especially as regards caregiving, is an essential step in raising the public awareness on the actual social *and* economic value that is embedded in unpaid work.

1. What is unpaid work, how it is distributed and why

1.1. Defining unpaid work

According to the most obvious definition, we can affirm that an unpaid worker is someone who provides a service or who produces a good without obtaining the remuneration that he would get, had that service or good been produced in the market. If we widen our concept of unpaid work, we may say that a government could define as such every activity whose remuneration doesn't appear in any official document or statistics. The clearest example is informal work which could turn into illegal work depending on the type of activity.

The present research focuses on two specific forms of unpaid work which have something in common: they appear to affect more women than men, thus arising a gender issue. They are domestic and care work.

Domestic work, also referred to as housework, includes those chores undertaken in order to take care of the house where a family lives and of family members, when they are in good health conditions¹. Some common examples are cleaning, shopping, repairing, cooking meals. Domestic work has historically been considered as a female prerogative, using the explanation that women are more "suitable" than men in performing it. It is a fact that women spend a disproportionate amount of their time, compared to the time spent by men, in taking care of the household, to the disadvantage of paid jobs. Many women in the world never engage in remunerated activities in order to meet the expectations of their families, husbands, and husbands' families. This means that a great number of the world's female population can't earn money on its own, living consequently in a condition of total dependence, generally from a man. Social pressure seems one of the main causes that perpetuates such a situation even if, after the Second World War, major changes have occurred. From the '50s and '60s on in fact, a lot of women entered the paid labor market², devoting less time to domestic activities. This revolution was due to a great economic expansion, requiring

¹ This remark is useful in differentiating housework from care work.

² See, as an example, the data regarding the increase in women's activity rates in some European countries shown by Solera (2009), p. 54.

an accrued workforce. But from the moment in which women started to work in the paid labor market, did they stop performing housework? Of course not, but still something has changed.

A full-time working day, and sometimes the concern for a career, are few of the reasons why fertility has been constantly decreasing in the last decades in developed countries. As a consequence, fewer children meant less domestic duties³. The engagement in maintaining a paid job position is also a consequence of increased investments in female education. The fact that women had to leave their jobs in order to take up familiar and domestic responsibilities is not given for granted anymore. The female opportunity cost of renouncing a paid activity is becoming more and more similar to the men's.

An external factor that can't be ignored is that technological innovations have been an important help to women, remarkably reducing the time spent working in the house. Moreover they represent tools which can facilitate the male approach to domestic chores. As a matter of fact, there seems to be a slow transition towards the access of men into the "private sphere" of the house, opposite to the access of women laborers into the "public sphere" of the market. Time use surveys (Sayer, 2005) highlight an actual narrowing of the gender differences in paid and unpaid work. The fact that men increase their help in the household does not mean that women are continuously reducing theirs. Data⁴ show that the increase in men's participation in household chores doesn't go much to the detriment of their free time. Men are still enjoying more leisure than their wives who, consequently, spend more time working. Unfortunately we wouldn't come to the same conclusion if we just looked at the respective incomes. The reason why this happens, is that domestic work is left outside from the "production boundary" even if, for example, meals are produced and consumed, competing with the ones offered on the market. Furthermore, nobody denies the opportunity of accounting for the job made by paid housekeepers. The problem in recognizing domestic work as a productive activity doesn't lie in the job itself, but in the identity of those who perform it. If the worker is an employee, housework is productive and must be accounted for, if it is a wife or daughter, it is just ordinary family responsibility.

The second issue that we are considering is care work, an activity which affects almost every human being in the course of its lifetime. Caring for a person means satisfying its basic needs when the cared for is not in the conditions to doing so on its own. The care beneficiary is usually a child, an elderly, disabled or ill person. There are cases in which providing care is a temporary status, while a number of people have to bear that burden for the greatest part of their lives. Considered that most of the carers provide help to relatives or close friends, they are usually motivated by non-monetary

³ The decrease in the number of children has reduced the intensity of many other unpaid activities, discussed later on.

⁴ The ones collected by Sayer regard the USA, but we argue that the same results would emerge in similar countries.

reasons, but it doesn't mean that caring equals leisure. Looking after a person who is not self-sufficient is a wearying task, some of the services required are quasi-medical and the psychological consequences of such a heavy load often lower the quality of the carers' lives. People are usually forced by social norms to personally take up care, instead of looking for a substitute in the market. A disproportionate part of them, again, is made up of women. Let's consider a couple of facts that we have just mentioned. First, women are increasingly entering the labor market, more and more of them are therefore engaged in paid employment for a part of their day. Second, care work is largely performed by women. The easy conclusion is that a lot of mothers and/or daughters have a double occupation. No wonder, then, that the female employment rates remain constantly lower than the male ones. Many women are obliged to give up their jobs, and again their economic independence, to satisfy a stereotype.

The 2008 System of National Accounts doesn't deem it appropriate to count care labor produced and consumed within the household as a component of the GDP. The reasons⁵ given to explain this choice can be summarized as follows. The repercussion of care labor on the rest of the economy are unimportant because care is a service that is produced in order to be fully consumed, the demand perfectly corresponds to the supply. Moreover, since care is usually not produced for the market but for family consumption, it would not be possible to impute an adequate market price.

Of course these assumptions can be easily controverted, since there is a flourishing paid care market, which could be taken as a model to impute prices to unpaid services and even act as a competitor for the "voluntarily" given care. There is one aspect, however, that we have not considered yet. We should ask ourselves the question which opens one of Julie Nelson's most challenging articles about care labor: *is it OK to pay well for care?* (Nelson, 1999, p. 43).

She refers to the emotional and interpersonal side of care, that is the relationship established between the person who benefits from the service and the one who provides it. Attaching a mere monetary value to such a connection could spoil its deeper meaning. Care shouldn't be valued simply because it is invaluable, its essence consists in the motivational drive, not of the physical work actually performed⁶. Such definition, however, carries the concept of care dangerously close to that of leisure.

The marketization of care, as Nelson points out, is not necessarily a mortification of the feelings entailed by such activity. A remuneration can be seen both as a recognition of one's commitment and a stimulus to carrying it on. But who should pay for the service offered by a relative? Of course not the beneficiary because, as already said, the cared for is not usually in the condition of earning

⁵ A deeper analysis of the 2008 SNA will be presented in the following chapters. The references made in this part of the text can be found at pp. 98-99 of the 2008 SNA.

⁶ This distinction is proposed in Himmelweit (1999).

or providing money, or even of making a voluntary choice. The easiest solution should be the institution of a governmental fund issuing a pension not only to the non-self-sufficient person, but also to the carer. It is very likely that this situation would not offend the carer. Instead it would give a concrete economic help, letting him/her provide care with less concerns about daily life material needs. The reason why governments don't usually make steps towards such a possibility is that the absence of a monetary reward to those who provide family care, doesn't stop them from providing it. A paradoxical situation of under-demand for care⁷, combined with an incomprehensible disinterest of an ageing civil society towards the issue, seem the main reasons why people – above all women – continue to care for “altruism”, or better for “love”⁸. The answer could be to start to challenge the dualism between “love” and “money” accepting the fact that real people have real needs, and money is simply a means of satisfying them, not a mere vehicle of selfishness.

Moreover, we have to recognize the role that care plays in building society, the so-called “social reproduction” function which is something hard to define. We will treat the subject more in depth later on, but now let us only say that social reproduction is what lies at the basis of economic production. Politicians, and society in general, should pay more attention to an aspect which is too often wrongfully ignored. Not supporting care-givers with adequate remunerations and helps could be dangerous for the development of society and of the economy itself.

1.2. How do we know women perform more unpaid work than men?

The most faultless way of objectively showing that a real gender gap in performing paid and unpaid work actually exists is quoting official, internationally shared, data. In the present research, however, instead of showing numbers which can be publicly consulted, we will make a reference to the most reliable databases and international organizations which make an effort in collecting and processing such data. The aim is to give a first input to the ones who are interested in verifying the present distribution of time and work – paid and unpaid – between men and women. Examining the mentioned sources suggests that even if, in these last decades, tendencies have been approaching a more egalitarian sharing of family responsibilities, gender still remains the most accurate predictor of the volume of time spent doing housework⁹.

⁷ As Nelson (1999) highlights in the conclusions of the above mentioned article, p. 56.

⁸ The reference is to Folbre and Nelson's “For Love or Money – Or Both?” (2000).

⁹ As pointed out for example by Davis and Greenstein (2004), pp. 1260-1261.

One of the most frequent explanations given to prove that measuring unpaid work is an activity which is not worth engaging in, is that collecting reliable data on how much unpaid work is actually performed by a family member is basically impossible. This statement is controverted by time use surveys, consisting in asking people to report what they are doing in a specific 24-hour period, possibly while they are actually doing it.

Many databases collecting such data have been created in the last decades. At European level, the member states' efforts in producing harmonized time use surveys have started to find support in the 1990s. The resulting database is called HETUS (Harmonised European Time Use Survey)¹⁰, which has been developed by Swedish Statistics with a grant by Eurostat. The American equivalent is the ATUS database¹¹ whose data collecting begun in 2003 by the U.S. Census Bureau and is updated every year. Moreover, many other countries engaged in elaborating time use surveys at national level, thus arising a methodological concern in the cross-national study on time use: comparability. The MTUS (Multinational Time Use Study) exactly addresses such issue by collecting and harmonizing time use data from over 60 countries. Several imperfections are quoted by the detractors of time use surveys. Among them the difficulty in reporting multitasking and in exactly recalling which activity has been performed and how long, in case a telephone survey is conducted instead of a diary. Time use surveys, however, have a great advantage not only in understanding how paid and unpaid work are distributed in the family, but also which are the activities that prevent some people from engaging in a formal job. The classification of daily activities into time use categories is another controversial point which the harmonization effort engaged by MTUS is trying to overcome. In the light of the relative abundance of time use data, and of the international attempt to set up a unique methodology in this field, we claim that a useful tool in measuring the amount and distribution of paid and unpaid work actually exist and should be more and more supported and capitalized.

1.2.1. Men and women in the labor force: databases and indicators

Data on time spent in paid work and household activities displaying a rather unbalanced distribution among the sexes, are further strengthened by official statistics showing some indicators which are more frequently used to depict the labor market in a country. Some examples are the ratio of employed people compared to the total potentially active population, the labor force participation rate, the unemployment rate, the female wage rate compared to the male.

¹⁰ Available online at www.tus.scb.se

¹¹ Available online at <http://www.bls.gov/tus/>

Again, we don't provide figures but suggest instead a number of internationally shares sources of reliable data that confirm, up to the present moment, that the formal labor market is still male dominated, thus creating an imbalance in the income earned by men and women. As we will explain later on, the potential earned income in the market can be regarded as the opportunity cost of performing household or care labor instead of a paid job. That is why statistics on the official labor market are fundamental in understanding the gender distribution of unpaid work.

If we considered data provided by national statistical services, we would obtain a clear overview of the labor market in a specific country. However, since the focus of this study is understanding if and how it would be possible to provide an internationally shared method of accounting for unpaid work, we prefer to refer to international organizations as sources of harmonized and comparable statistics. At European level, the Eurostat database is the main tool to be taken into account¹². On a broader scale, the key institutions providing updated, reliable and exhaustive figures on the labor market are the OECD¹³ and the United Nations, in particular the International Labor Organization¹⁴. From 1995 on, the UN Human Development Report started to include gender related indicators helping us understand if and to what extent women are managing to reach social and economic achievements, as a gender group. The ones used until 2009 are the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). They are relevant for the present research because the female labor force participation and income are taken into account in such indicators' calculations. The GDI is the result of a combination of the following variables calculated for the two sexes: life expectancy at birth, adult literacy rate (people aged 15 and above), gross enrolment in education, and estimated earned income. This kind of measure, though very useful in giving an idea about the general female life conditions in the analyzed countries, could be somewhat distortive for the present research, at least as regards developed countries. Life expectancy at birth, in fact, is usually more favorable to women, as well as the enrolment in education. As a consequence, the earned income component weight is reduced.

In order to have more reliable data about the actual female participation in public life, we should instead consider the Gender Empowerment Measure. This index is calculated on the following variables: percentage of seats in parliament held by women, percentage of female legislators, senior officials and managers, percentage of female professional and technician workers, ratio of estimated female to male income, the year in which women received the right to vote and to stand for election, the year in which a woman became Presiding Officer of parliament or one of its houses for the first time and percentage of women in ministerial positions. Again we don't provide figures, let us just

¹² See <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/eurostat/home/>

¹³ See http://www.oecd.org/topicstatsportal/0,3398,en_2825_495670_1_1_1_1_1,00.html#499783

¹⁴ See <http://laborsta.ilo.org/>

remark that both indices range from a minimum of 0 (perfect inequality) to a maximum of 1 (perfect equality). No country has ever reached the value 1 up to the present day, in the 2009 Human Development Report only one country (Norway) exceeded the value 0.9 in the GEM calculations. In 2010 a new index has been introduced in order to avoid the drawbacks of the previously quoted ones, such as the difficulty in combining absolute achievements (for example income) and relative ones (gender equality). The new index is called Gender Inequality Index (GII) and it includes education, economic and political participation, adolescent fertility and maternal mortality as indicators to assess inequality among the sexes. It is significant for our research because it also includes the female and male labor force participation rate as a component. The range goes from 0 (perfect equality) to 1 (perfect inequality). Only 9 countries out of 146¹⁵ scored under 0.1 in 2011.

1.3 Women as carers: possible explanations

In order to better understand why care activities are considered something different from productive work, thus creating the debated labor division, we have to approach the concept of “social reproduction” and compare it to the one of “economic production”.

An effective way of diverting attention from typically female matters is to ascribe them to the sphere of private life. Hoskyns and Rai (2007) argue that not only men, but even a great deal of women are not ready to recognize their disadvantaged social or family position, or they do not identify such a situation as an anomaly¹⁶. The point is not that, for research purposes, one should have the right to invade the private realm of other people’s lives. It should be clarified what is actually to be considered private. A solution to this issue is admitting that every action entailing public implications, in the end affects the public sphere, even if it is performed in the house.

Women spending a great part of their day taking care of the household, looking after children, disabled people or the elderly, and even after adult members of their family¹⁷ are supposed to act in response to a presumed natural altruistic inclination, it however has profound economic

¹⁵ Even if the Human Development Index was estimated for 187 countries in 2011, complete data for the calculation of the GII were not available in 41 of them.

¹⁶ This is particularly true for the less developed countries and for traditional communities. See for example Sen’s reference to the Indian case, (Sen, 1990, p. 126).

¹⁷ As underlined by Thornton (1991) in her research aimed at demonstrating that even anti-discriminatory legislation is drawn up in order to maintain a certain degree of gender roles separation.

consequences. This is why, according to the present research, a so called intrusion into the private sphere of the household is justified by the collective outcomes of many activities that happen in there.

If we try to establish a link between the public/private dichotomy and the one concerning male and female roles, we can identify their connection in what Arber et al. (2000) call the “gender contract”. This expression is used to address the silent agreement between spouses causing a rational – as probably Gary Becker would define it – division of tasks. The wife is thus compelled to take up all those chores allowing her husband to participate in the formal labor market without any family responsibility, except to provide enough money to ensure a decent standard of living to his relatives and to himself. If men are supposed to give financial support to their family, all the other duties – namely the ones dealing with social reproduction – are left to women. Of course people usually combine different amounts of the two sides, but the relative percentages are usually imbalanced.

The social nature of the division of the spheres of action between men and women is the main obstacle against a possible reversal. Recognizing the value of the work performed in the household as well as the non-exclusively affective nature of caring labor would make women aware of the importance of their social role, constituting an essential condition for the reaction against abuses. The meaning of accounting for unpaid work is not therefore confined to the economic domain, its possible social and psychological benefits are significant as well.

The flourishing domestic workers labor market¹⁸ is a sign that a lot of people have actually understood that the personal and welfare benefits entailed by a paid job are good reasons to allow a separation between the carer and the cared for. According to the main point of this research, that is unpaid work – the one usually performed by women – should be accounted for, the widening of the service sector is a good way to make typical female jobs, and their actual economic significance, come to light. The shift of care and domestic activities from the hidden to the paid labor market is certainly a way to underline their economic importance. The problem is that not only wealthy people need to combine care assistance for their relatives and a paid job. This is why a great part of the above mentioned flourishing service labor market is actually informal.

¹⁸ Anderson (2001) reports that the demand for paid domestic workers is constantly increasing in all of those countries where families are nuclear and societies are ageing. Some quoted examples are the EU countries, Japan, Malaysia and Taiwan. Gornick and Meyers (2006) underline the typical market-based approach to childcare which can be observed in the USA.

1.3.1. Gary Becker's relative resources theory

Gary Backer is considered as the founder and main exponent of the economic approach to the family, or “new home economics”. Such a view is not shared by many scholars – chiefly the feminist ones – who, though recognizing Becker's role in raising academic and governmental attention on the household when it was still considered as an exclusively private domain, strongly reject what Barbara Bergmann calls his “preposterous conclusions”¹⁹.

Gary Becker begins his analysis of the causes of the division of unpaid work within the household stating that basic gender differences have always been observed throughout history. First of all, a biological difference characterizes the two sexes and conditions their life expectations and experiences. Women are actually the ones who materially give birth to children, usually feed them with their own milk, and they are *biologically committed to care for children*²⁰. As a consequence, they are induced to devote a great deal of their time to care labor, in order to make their investments in such an activity worthwhile. Men, on the contrary, have always performed market – or productive – jobs, managing to acquire a certain amount of expertise in that field.

The second cause of the gender disparity in allocation of time, according to Becker, is somewhat connected to the biological explanation. If people have certain natural inclinations, by satisfying their own predisposition, they acquire a certain amount of human capital. The obvious conclusion should be that the choices of a rational family suggest exploiting women's greatest human capital in caring and domestic activities, while men must remain on the market due to the greater success they usually get in paid jobs. It must be recognized, however, that investing time in one's supposed natural preferences further reinforces the so-called “biological” difference among the sexes.

The net advantage should be that, by allocating the single family member's resources to the activities giving the greater profit, the entire household has maximized its utility. Becker actually shares Adam Smith's position recognizing major importance to the division of labor in raising the productivity potential of a country²¹, applying this neoclassical viewpoint to the smaller domain of the household, considered as a productive unit.

A strong feminist opposition to the relative resources perspective, and therefore to the whole of Becker's theory of the family, has grown from its very first enunciation. Feminist scholars maintain that a family cannot be equated to an individual because a member's choices do not benefit each member in the same way. Consequently, it must not be given for granted that the labor market

¹⁹ The reference is to Bergmann (1995), also discussed by Woolley (1996).

²⁰ Becker (1981), p. 21.

²¹ Becker and Murphy (1992) actually quote some passages from Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*.

choices of men and women are made out of perfect specialization rational decisions. People, in fact, are not necessarily better off when the total amount of family resources – or family production – rises. Their well-being is instead conditioned by the actual sharing of those resources²².

In short, it could be said that the feminist critique to Becker's theoretical work is mainly directed to his neoclassical and mainstream point of view. By neoclassical we mean the fact that rationality and optimization are taken as the sole propellers of human actions, while everyday failures demonstrate that the rational evaluations are far from being the only reliable grounds for decisions to be based on. The apparent blindness to the actual difference among people's preferences and among the situations they daily face, is considered to act as a major constraint to scholars committed to the same field of research, as well as to policies in favor of women. By saying that one of Becker's faults is being mainstream, or that he reinforces the status quo – as Ferber (1995) puts it -, feminists denounce his perpetuation of gender imbalances in the division of paid and unpaid work through stating that it is the optimal solution for a family to have men employed in the market and women in the household, without giving a sound resolution to what turns to be a vicious circle: women specialize in the household because they would have low wages on the market and they do have low wages on the market because they are specialized in household labor²³.

One way of *getting the best of Becker*, as suggested by Woolley (1996), should be to openly recognize that the picture that comes out from Becker's analysis gives strong evidence of a female subordination in family and labor market relationships.

1.3.2. Women and social (re-)production

Before starting to properly address social reproduction, let us consider the definition of labor which, according to the classic authors, is a process creating value. The remuneration of the worker is thus a secondary issue, which does not affect the actual value of the supplied product or service.

Folbre²⁴ provides an interesting analogy in order to make the family social reproduction role emerge. We are presenting it in this research for its great explicative strength.

Imagine an economy in which there is no labor market where workers are hired, because the entire economic production is provided by means of androids. Capitalists just have to buy androids – whose price must at least correspond to the price of producing them – and the batteries that let them work. The cost of the batteries can be made equal to the wage that a worker would get. The

²² As pointed out by Cigno (1991), p. 21.

²³ The paradox is highlighted by Ferber (1995), p. 359.

²⁴ See the Levy Economic Institute of Bard College (2005) conference proceedings, reporting Nancy Folbre's intervention on social reproduction.

category of human capital thus disappears. Now imagine that someone, in our ideal society, decides to produce androids for free. The costs that capitalist have to bear are consequently reduced to buying batteries for their “machineries”. They receive a “gift” from those who supply them with androids and increase their profit accordingly.

The parallel with our society easily emerges. It can be actually argued that families grow children and provide for their nutrition and education for free, or out of profit purposes, at least in developed countries. Parents can be said to endow the new members of society – and of the labor market – with capabilities that it would not probably have been possible to acquire elsewhere²⁵. It has been in fact stressed that social reproduction has important positive spillover effects on human development and capabilities both for children and adult people²⁶. Once they enter the labor market, capitalists can employ perfectly operational “androids” whose only requirement are wages (or batteries).

The connection between what now is a clearer concept of social reproduction and the economic market production thus emerges. It must be recognized, however, that also the state has a social reproduction function. Compulsory primary education, family transfers, free health service – where they exist – are fundamental investments in raising the economic potential of the beneficiaries.

In consideration of the positive effects on the labor market, and even the ones in terms of personal well-being, it is advisable to start recognizing that social reproduction – or care labor – does not exclusively represent time and resources inputs, it produces outputs as well. Without addressing the issue of savings in welfare expenses when care is provided by non-paid relatives or friends, the 1999 Human Development Report refers to the benefits that care generates in terms of life expectancy, child health and survival. Major savings thus arise for the national health service.

1.3.3. Is social reproduction a gendered issue?

Time use surveys demonstrate that women spend much more time than men performing household and care activities. This tendency can be affected by the personal characteristics of the members of a household, but it is still the main standard in all developed societies. Care labor – which is one of the main ways in which social reproduction is declined – is in fact usually associated with activities that women specialize in, even if men cannot be excluded *a priori* from such domain²⁷. According

²⁵ The special emotional relationship between the carer and the cared for which is often stressed in the caregiving literature (see as examples Folbre and Nelson 2000, Himmelweit 1999, Nelson 1999), is one of the characteristics increasing the human capital value of children.

²⁶ See for instance UNDP (1999), Elson and Cagatary (2000).

²⁷ Folbre (1995), pp. 75-76.

to Folbre²⁸, a distinction in the provision of social reproduction should be made between men and women, as well as between parents and non-parents.

The main solutions that people may find to prevent the economically disadvantageous consequences of parenting are two. The most evident one is not having children – or reducing the number of children per household –, which has obvious demographic consequences, affecting the future availability of labor force for the market. Such a situation is already a reality for the majority of the developed countries whose fertility rates registered a decline after the industrialization process²⁹. The other possible answer is outsourcing the provision of care, which means charging paid workers with a great part of the responsibility and attention that being parents requires. This happens in particular when the state is unwilling to spend public money for policies aimed at supporting parental care or public care services.

Is social reproduction work performed by strangers as valuable as the one performed by the natural carers? Are the economic and social outputs of these two types of caregiving comparable? At this point, what Nancy Folbre (1995) calls “the paradox of caring labor”, arises. The cared for, in presence of a “payment” for the carer, would thus become a “commodity”. If we talk about “compensation”, the cared for would even turn out to be a “burden”³⁰.

At the same time, however, in absence of any economic return for the carer, will s/he continue to provide her/his services? In case the carer can get a remunerated market job, will s/he accept it and decide to pay someone performing care in the household? According to Anderson (2001) the answer to this last question is yes. She actually points out that in countries where the family is becoming a nuclear unit and care continues to be needed especially by the elderly, the solution that has increasingly been undertaken by women – entering more and more into the paid labor market –, is employing a paid worker to perform care and housework³¹. As a consequence, many migratory waves have taken place, both from rural to urban areas and from less developed to industrialized countries, in order to cover the demand for domestic workers. Such flows regard mostly women³². This gender trend, of course, does not show up by chance. Underlying stereotypes can be recognized as the main causes shaping preferences in families to choose their paid carer/housekeeper.

²⁸ See her already quoted address at the Levy Institute 2005 conference.

²⁹ See reference for example in Folbre and Nelson (2000), p. 124, Benerìa (2007) p. 1 and Solera (2009).

³⁰ Julie Nelson’s opinion reported by Folbre (1995), p. 87.

³¹ One of the most interesting points of Anderson’s analysis, concerns the conflict arising from the domination/dominated roles that women employers and women employees often face in paid housework job relationships. On the same subject see for example Rollins (1985) and Ambrosini (2005).

³² Anderson (2001), pp. 26-27.

Is then social reproduction a gendered issue? In theory both man and women are required to “produce” human beings. Both parents are supposed to educate their children, so that parenting should be the real feature connecting people to such role, not gender. In practice, however, the main carer is usually a woman, whether (regularly or irregularly) paid or doing the bulk of care out of a socially driven altruism³³.

³³ Though the already quoted “compulsory altruism” is the most frequent explanation that can be found in the feminist literature to expound the typically female helping behavior, Folbre (1995) argues that other reasons may be found. Long-run expectations and reciprocity are just some examples, pointing out that caring for no remuneration does not mean acting in absence of self-interest.

2. Measuring unpaid work: methods and related problems

The discussion carried out so far has revealed that, although not always visibly, unpaid work engages a great number of people for long hours during an ordinary day. In order to satisfy social and relational expectations, they renounce to perform other activities – such as paid work or leisure-related ones – and devote their time to something which, in the greatest part of the cases, is taken for granted by the beneficiaries. The fact that there is not a formal recognition as productive of the time spent this way, opens a debate on the existence of a widely shared connection between absence of remuneration and unproductivity. The UNSNAs fail to consider as worth being included in the GDP all those activities related to social reproduction which are indeed indispensable in guaranteeing an appropriate functioning of the economic and social system. Satellite household accounts, up to the present moment, are just occasional and small-scale efforts to try and find out what the real proportions of the domestic sector are (Hoskyns and Rai, 2007).

Among the most recurrent objections to the need of accounting for unpaid work, politicians, statisticians and economists frequently claim that there are two main difficulties. The first regards data collecting and detecting, since unpaid work is at times difficult to recognize from leisure.

The fact that even those who are engaged in unpaid work for free do not usually express interest in its economic recognition, lets us understand that the absence of possible electoral benefits feeds the hesitations from politicians to address the issue.

A more methodologically grounded concern in evaluating unpaid work regards finding a commonly shared system of accounting. The various possibilities elaborated during the last century have been collected and generalized by Luisella Goldschmidt-Clermont (1982). The categorization of the possible evaluation methods presented in the current chapter are principally based on her contribution. From the analysis of the characteristics of such methodologies, it emerges that each of them inevitably presents pros and cons. No measure does perfectly mirror the actual value of unpaid work, nonetheless it seems that nobody, at least among the policymakers, wants to commit in discussing a shared evaluation compromise.

A further concern regards the concept of comparable worth. Such notion is generally applied to the paid labor performed on the formal market and, in brief, concerns the attribution of the same wage to men and women for the same amount and quality of work performed, or for the same benefit given to the employer. The issues to be addressed about this matter are chiefly two. Is the concept

of comparable worth applicable to unpaid work? And isn't it biased by those theories, such as Becker's "biological differences", stating that specialization happens exactly because men performing female activities do not provide the same outcomes as women performing them, and vice versa?

The issue of the suitability of accounting for unpaid work seems indeed to be the main obstacle in proceeding to proper evaluations, whose appropriate methodologies arise as a subsequent problem.

2.1. What is productive? Official and feminist views

2.1.1. The third-person criterion³⁴

The best method which has been found so far in order to draw a clear distinction between what can be considered as leisure and what is actually work, is the so called "third-person criterion"³⁵.

According to Reid's view of the third-person criterion, an unpaid activity should be considered as work if it can be also performed by a paid person, that is to say not by the family member that usually executes it³⁶.

When the outcome is the same in quality and quantity terms, paid workers can be entrusted with household and caring chores. This definition suggests that activities such as food preparation, laundry, ironing, gardening, do-it-yourself, taking children to school, feeding a non-self-sufficient person, and so on are perfectly marketable tasks, so that a monetary value should be imputed to them even when they are performed by a family member obtaining no remuneration.

On the contrary eating, sleeping, reading, playing sports, watching TV and the like, benefit the person who is directly engaged in them. No third person can be involved to undertake these activities since the performer and the beneficiary coincide.

Another fundamental characteristic which Reid outlines as a benchmark in defining an activity as non-marketable, and thus not includible in the production boundary, is the relationship between the performer and the beneficiary. Wood (1997) unveils a contradiction between this theory and the

³⁴ Ironmonger (1996), p. 61 note 4, wonders why this principle has not instead simply been called "other" or "second" person criterion.

³⁵ Ironmonger (1996), pp. 39-40 quoting Margaret Reid's *Economics of Household Production* as the first work suggesting such criterion.

³⁶ Reid rejects the utility criterion to define productivity because she maintains that each rational act is expected is meant to increase somebody's utility (quoted in Brennan 2006, p. 417).

third-person criterion main definition. Much of the work that a mother carries out in order to care for her children, for example, has payable market-substitutes. The decision not to recur to them is actually due to personal or social constraints, inducing people to neglect an economic significance to caregiving.

The third-person criterion, despite its imperfections, is however fated to remain a theoretical possibility, at least as long as the System of National Accounts will not overtake the “production boundary” according to its current definition. Considering that the most recent update of the UN guidelines has been drafted in 2008³⁷ with no relevant progress on the matter, we can predict that the division among SNA and non-SNA activities (Goldschmidt-Clermont and Pagnossin-Aligisakis, 1995) will still remain largely untouched by the economic weight of several unpaid activities for quite a long time.

2.1.2. The production boundary: the SNA perspective

At present, the 2008 SNA is the source of the main accounting methods that governments use in order to draw up their GDP accounts. According to the UN guidelines, the production boundary, that is what represents production³⁸ within the SNA, should include all the goods and services which are destined to the market. Moreover it also comprises goods and services provided for free to the families by governments and/or by non-profit institutions serving households (NPISHs). It should omit, however, the services which are produced in the household by its members for one’s own final consumption. The official reason why unpaid household activities are not accounted for, according to the 2008 SNA, is that considering all household activities as productive, would make unemployment disappear. Is then just statistical and economic conservatism that leaves the greatest part of ordinary women’s days out of the economic meaningfulness of a productive system? Wouldn’t it be worthwhile to re-discuss the real essence of unemployment³⁹, considering that people who are out of the labor force or labor market often contribute in a different way to the productivity of the country? The 2008 SNA actually affirms that the exclusion of unpaid services and goods produced in the household from the GDP calculations, is not a denial of their important role in welfare raising however, by accounting for them, SNA would become a less useful tool for economic analysis and policymaking. Such point sounds quite disputable to us, in fact we maintain

³⁷ The first version of the SNA dates back to 1953. Updates have been released in 1968, 1993 and 2008. It thus emerges that we can presumably expect a quite long time to pass before modifications to the latest version will be made.

³⁸ For a precise definition of the characteristics of “production” see the 2008 SNA, par. 6.10 p. 96 and par. 6.24, pp. 97-98.

³⁹ Marilyn Waring (2003) argues that *the current definition of unemployment is inappropriate*, p. 36.

that the proper economic recognition of unpaid activities in the household would represent a sort of “discovery” for most policymakers and thus influence the decisions and policies that they would be encouraged to promote.

Let us now consider the three main concrete reasons given for not including household activities into the SNA production boundary⁴⁰. First of all, it is affirmed that the services within the household are produced precisely because the decision to consume them has been made even before the production started. As a consequence their repercussions on the market are limited. It could be objected that household own-produced services do not *actively* influence the market, but the fact that such services are not bought on the market has concrete consequences for the economic system. Secondly, it is difficult to impute appropriate values to unpaid services, since they are produced for the household and not for the market. As we will see later on, however, many accounting methods have been proposed to address unpaid labor. The real obstacle consists in finding a shared evaluation compromise. Such issue should be handled both by experts and policymakers.

Thirdly, the decision to produce services in the household does not affect the monetary flow of the wider economy. No effects, for example, can be registered for the tax income of a country nor for the level of the exchange rate. In reality, the absence of taxes, expenditures, consumption, etc., deriving from potentially hired workers actually affects the economy.

It seems to us that these explanations reveal a certain narrow-mindedness and lack of foresight, or maybe are just ways to disguise the disinterest towards the issue of unpaid work.

But, doesn't the meaning of production change across space and time? Does it make sense to establish a single production boundary for all the UN countries? Do first-world and third-world countries treat the issue in the same way?

Many economists have criticized the opportunity to establish, in a top-down manner, a single production boundary to be applied to each country committed to GDP calculations. Among them we mention Cynthia Wood (1997), who affirms that the production boundary endorsed by the SNA⁴¹, as well as Reid's third-person criterion, are biased by a masculinist first world vision of the market and of the marketable services and goods. David Brennan (2006), on the other hand, questions the pertinence of applying the same concept of production across time⁴².

The problem of outlining boundaries lies, by definition, in the limited nature of what remains within the boundary and in the width of what is left outside. The production boundary is perceived as a

⁴⁰ They are explained in the 2008 SNA parr. 6.29a, 6.29b, 6.29c, pp. 98-99.

⁴¹ She refers to the 1993 version of the SNA, but we argue that her point still holds for the revised 2008 SNA.

⁴² For an historical analysis of the evolution of the meaning of “productivity” referred to housework see also Folbre (1991).

compromise, enabling economic assessments and comparisons. It, however, does not mean that such compromise is fully satisfying or cannot be challenged.

Brennan (2006, p. 420) recognizes the existence of a tension between what he calls the *desire for stable and consistent economic categories* and the need for *culturally relevant* ones. At the same time he feels the necessity to explain why economists have to turn to culture to provide economic definitions. Income, wealth, labor, productivity are concepts which cannot be based on scientific classifications, valid everywhere and in every historical period. It is culture that actually tells us if certain activities are to be deemed productive or not. More precisely, the presence of a market for a given good or service should be the method in order to establish whether to include it or not in the production boundary, and consequently in the GDP. Differences emerge, for example, when considering first world and third world countries (Wood, 1997).

What actually constitutes market labor is largely a matter of culture, and economic categories change across societies and time. Their definitions, and the justifications that theorists have given to support them, usually refer to un-scientific sources of legitimization such as “common sense” or “common understanding”⁴³. The access of domestic work – more or less widely considered – into the production boundary can be dated back to the 1960s⁴⁴. That was the period in which a massive entrance of female workers into the paid labor market revealed the need to hire domestic staff in the household in order to keep unchanged one’s living standards.

Despite such widening of the production boundary, it can be maintained that the third-person criterion shortcomings are still present. The absence of a wide female participation to the formal labor market in developing countries reveals that a different production boundary would be more suitable. Moreover, the exclusion of the bulk of caring from it, is still considered as a major drawback by feminists scholars (Himmelweit, 1995 and Wood, 1997). Brennan (2006) defines such phenomenon as a lack of *synchronization* between cultural norms and economic assessments.

The partial solution which has been endorsed to mend such inconsistency lies in satellite accounts, deeply investigated in the following chapter. Here we just recall that they are aimed at providing *ad hoc* evaluations of non-SNA activities, housework is an example. Their drafting has a double meaning in reference to the culture problem affecting the production boundary. Satellite accounts are separate from the official calculations of the national product, as a consequence they do not directly challenge the current economic categorizations. On the other hand their existence demonstrates that official definitions are becoming less culturally relevant and require re-discussion⁴⁵. The drafting of satellite accounts, or the more optimistic prospect to include unpaid

⁴³ See Brennan (2006), p. 418 referring to Reid, Smith, Malthus, Senior and Marshall.

⁴⁴ Such precise moment is identified by Himmelweit (1995).

⁴⁵ Such observations are carried out by Brennan (2006), p. 421.

non-market activities into the official GDP rises a further theoretical dispute. It regards the establishment of appropriate accounting methods gathering wide international consensus. The following section is devoted to the analysis of such techniques, as well as of their pros and cons.

2.2. Measuring unpaid work: possible evaluation methods

2.2.1. Volume of inputs and outputs

Household production and market production, at least as regards the activities which fully satisfy the third-person criterion, do not differ much in their substance. When market activities take place, the value of the job performed can be measured by means of the remuneration earned, while the price of the product represents the sum of input costs and value added by the transformation process. In household chores, on the contrary, workers do not get wages and outputs are not sold. What method shall we use, then, to evaluate the work performed in the house? Goldschmidt-Clermont (1982) suggests four possible measurements categories, regarding volume of inputs, volume of outputs, value of inputs and value of outputs.

What do we mean by volume of inputs when referred to household production? Exactly as in market production, inputs can be expressed in terms of number of workers engaged in the household sector, hours devoted to it and goods employed in the production process⁴⁶. The first two concern the volume of inputs related to work, the latter refers to inputs other than work.

Counting the number of workers who are employed in the household sector and comparing it to the official labor force should shed light on the way most of the people resulting unemployed or out of the labor force use their time. Such method, besides the well-known technical difficulties in managing to properly count all the homemakers, has two main faults. The first one is to confirm the SNA concern about the disappearance of unemployment. If housekeeping were considered proper work and the household sector were fully included in the economic system, such hypothesis would be in fact fulfilled. The second and more serious problem, however, is that even people performing a market job spend a considerable part of their time minding for non-market activities. This is why the proposal to evaluate the work time inputs is more likely to find wider consensus. The number of

⁴⁶ The following analysis, for clarity reasons, presents the explanatory scheme used by Goldschmidt-Clermont (1982), p. 9 and subsequent. In her work, she also quotes examples of previous studies who have applied the analyzed methods in accounting for unpaid work. Such references, however, are not reported in the present research.

hours that paid workers and non-paid workers devote to the household sector can be measured in a more or less approximate way⁴⁷ through time use surveys, though Goldschmidt-Clermont⁴⁸ recognizes a major concern about the personal decision to allocate a certain number of hours to housework. She cites the so-called Parkinson's law affirming that *work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion*⁴⁹. According to such theory, women whose only occupation is housework, feel socially compelled to work at least eight hours performing domestic activities. Women are therefore supposed to spend long hours in housework simply because they want to be on a parity-level with their spouses as regards time spent working. If we put it in another way, they want to provide a *self-justification* for remaining at home. Such interpretation, however, requires women themselves recognizing domestic chores on the same level as paid work, which is a not always occurring circumstance. Moreover, it does not hold for households where both partners are employed. The most reliable proxies of time devoted to domestic activities can rather be recognized in the size of the household (number of children and of aged people), age of the younger child, educational and occupational level of the wife, social status of the family and so on.

On the basis of the previous analysis, it can be argued that evaluating the volume of work-related inputs creates both data-collecting and interpretation concerns.

An alternative method which has been developed, consists in evaluating the volume of inputs other than work. It means comparing rough materials employed for market production to those used in homemaking. The result is an assessment of the share of goods produced, and consumed, within the household in relation to goods produced and sold on the market. The theoretical questions arising on this point are many: do families produce goods and services in the household because they cannot reach the market goods and services, for instance because they live in rural areas? Or instead, low income compels families to renounce market goods, because they would be too expensive? Or again, is the higher quality of home production compensative of the time spent working for no direct pay? Personal preferences and contingent circumstances certainly influence the amount of material inputs employed in household production. Many household activities such as care, moreover, are labor - not capital - intensive. They just require time inputs, so that if we

⁴⁷ For a deeper focus on the reliability and biases affecting time use surveys see for example Abraham et al. (2005) and Goldschmidt-Clermont (1982), p.17.

⁴⁸ In Goldschmidt-Clermont and Pagnossin-Aligisakis (1999), however, it is recognized that time use diaries are quite objective tools in accounting for daily time allocation. A critique is nonetheless made, that is saying that an hour is spent in a certain activity does not tell us anything about the effort and conditions in which it is actually carried out.

⁴⁹ The Parkinson's law first appeared on *The Economist* in 1955, when Cyril Northcote Parkinson published an essay precisely entitled *Parkinson's Law*. The quotation appears in Goldschmidt-Clermont (1982), p. 10.

want to count unpaid work by means of volumes of inputs, neither the work inputs evaluations nor material inputs accounts can be fully satisfying.

The estimates which can be obtained, if matched with formal statistics on employment, hours spent in paid work or capital inputs, give only a partial picture of the economic importance of unrecognized work. Monetary evaluations, which are examined in the following section, better achieve the goal.

The other possibility in accounting for volumes regards outputs. The amount of goods and services provided within the household can be compared to those delivered on the market. The same critiques moved to the evaluation of volumes of non-work inputs, however, could be repeated here. The volume of outputs is in fact strongly connected to the inputs employed, and the reasons inducing people to produce in the household are the same, whatever side we look at the question.

Let us now concentrate on the monetary evaluation of unpaid work, which is certainly more useful for GDP inclusion and for attracting the attention of policymakers.

2.2.2. Accounting for values: wage imputation issues

When a family member works in the household no remuneration is granted by any institution. In the past century, frequent debates were addressing the possibility to attribute a basic wage to the housewives, in order to give them a minimum economic independence. Feminist scholars, however, have usually replied that such eventuality would keep women in the household, discouraging their access into the formal labor force⁵⁰. We agree that attributing a pay for the work women perform in the household would neither contribute to solve the problem of its lack of recognition, nor give the attention needed to all the unpaid work performed by family members belonging to other categories (i.e. employees and minors). We believe, however, that an economic assessment is vital in attracting public and political attention on such an important – but still unrecorded – side of the economy.

The most widespread evaluation method, among those presented by Goldschmidt-Clermont (1982), consists in attributing a market wage to each of the hours worked in the household. Choosing the most realistic wage value is the hard part. The possibilities are many and can be summarized in the following list⁵¹: wage of a substitute household worker (polyvalent or specialized), wage of workers performing in market enterprises the same activities performed by a homemaker, wages of market workers whose qualifications are the same as those required by household tasks, opportunity cost of time, average wage of market workers or minimum legal wage and market value of a wage in kind.

⁵⁰ On the issue of basic income for non-market workers see for example Robeyns (2001) and Swiebel (1999) p. 10.

⁵¹ The terminology is compliant to the one used by Goldschmidt-Clermont (1982), p. 13 and subsequent.

The easiest method in attributing a potential remuneration to unpaid family workers is imputing them the salary that the family would pay had the same tasks been performed by employed staff. Corrado Gini (1948) is the author of the well-known statement affirming that if a man married his housekeeper, the national GDP would decrease, even if the wife continued to accomplish the same activities she did before. The underlying assumption is that domestic work is worth the salary that the housekeeper received before marrying her employer. The imaginary housekeeper mentioned by Gini is what Goldschmidt-Clermont would call *polyvalent* worker. His/her characteristics are exactly the same as the housewife's ones and no *particular specialization* connected to his/her work can be observed. In our opinion, it can be argued that perfect correspondence between the two subjects can be assumed only when the housewife does not perform any paid activity. Only in case she works at least eight hours a day in the household, she could reach the same *general specialization* of a paid domestic worker⁵². Otherwise her productivity usually remains at a lower level. To be precise, however, we must make it clear that two types of polyvalent substitutes can be detected. Such employees may have low productivities when domestic work is their first employment, or in case they occasionally engage in it, that is when no better opportunities are available for them on the labor market. Most of the paid housekeepers⁵³, however, remain in the domestic sector along their whole working life, performing a wide range of tasks (e.g. cooking, ironing, cleaning, changing diapers, etc.), so that they develop a certain degree of specialization. The attribution of a polyvalent homemaker wage to unpaid work, however, raises many doubts. Polyvalent means performing a great number of different tasks which, however, do not require the same degree of ability. For example, making an injection to an ill relative is not the same as washing the dishes. Moreover, the perfect substitutability between the caring of a mother and that given by a paid carer has very often been questioned. It may be argued that the polyvalent housekeeper's wage is an average calculated on difficult, easy and non-perfectly substitutable tasks. As a consequence, unpaid household work is attributed an imprecise value.

The desire to perfectly account for each task performed in the household has led to evaluate housework according to the wages of workers specialized in each single activity. Such method suggests, for example, counting the number of hours spent cooking in the household and multiplying them by the hourly wage rate earned by a professional cook, counting the number of

⁵² Goldschmidt-Clermont (1982), p. 14, endorses the opposite argument. She maintains that work performed by a polyvalent substitute is poorer in quality and quantity terms compared to the housewife's. We instead argue that being employed in a particular job gives at least a minimum level of *general specialization* which increases the more the hours devoted to such activities are, whether paid or unpaid.

⁵³ For simplicity reasons, in this study we understand the "housekeeper" as a person performing both domestic and care work.

hours spent in caring activities and multiplying them by the hourly wage rate of a professional nurse⁵⁴ and so on. The result would certainly be an overestimation of the value of housework. It is actually self-evident that homemakers cannot embody all the characteristics of professionals, moreover the possibility to hire specialized workers for each domestic chore is quite unrealistic. Such method, though making it clear that people in the house are often required to perform activities without having a specific training, largely ignores the personal features of unpaid workers who, usually, are not as productive as experts.

We believe that the same analysis can be applied to the option to attribute to unpaid workers the same wage that people performing similar activities for market enterprises earn. Market workers' specialization increases together with their job tenure, but this happens for the single task they are paid for. Enterprise workers and specialized substitutes can thus be compared. We maintain that their market wages are inappropriate values to be attributed to unpaid household workers, even if it should be recognized that, by spending a great part of the day performing domestic activities, a certain degree of specialization is also achieved by housewives.

A second group of possible evaluation methods could be named as the "opportunity cost" section. A more indirect way to talk about opportunity cost, is potentially ascribing to household workers the wage that paid workers get on the market for the performance of jobs requiring the same qualifications that the former have. Goldschmidt-Clermont (1982) still classifies this system among the ones concerning production functions, in contrast with the time use based approach that will be presented hereinafter. Her point is that if such workers entered the market, their qualifications would not be the only characteristics determining their wages. The dynamics of the formal labor market, influenced by supply and demand, trade unions, state laws and so on, thus do not allow a perfect comparison among people sharing the same qualification within or outside the labor market. The methodological risk of comparing people employed in two different sectors – the formal and the informal one – is avoided by making suppositions regarding a single worker and his/her opportunity cost. Such theory points out that, if a person is a full-time housekeeper s/he is renouncing to earn a wage on the market⁵⁵.

If we looked at it from Gary Becker's point of view, the possible market monetary benefits are not enough to compensate the non-monetary benefits created by performing domestic and care unpaid activities. If we endorsed such opinion, we would admit that the opportunity cost would give a

⁵⁴ On the different possible methods in evaluating informal care see van den Berg et al. (2004).

⁵⁵ Himmelweit (1995) quotes the opportunity cost as one of the characteristics turning housework into proper work. She maintains that spending one's time and energy in housework, actually prevents people from employing them in any other activity, that is in any other type of paid work.

lower estimate of the actual value of unpaid work. Becker would probably prefer a value of outputs methodology than the opportunity cost of time one.

More practical concerns about the validity of the opportunity cost method can also be mentioned⁵⁶. Despite its formal soundness, it does not seem to fit well neither the situation of housework performed by people who are also employed on the market, nor the unpaid activities carried out by people who are not part of the labor force.

If a person spends eight hours of his/her day in paid employment, the extra-hours worked at home for no remuneration should be counted as overtime, consequently a higher wage might be imputed. On the contrary, when people are out of the labor force⁵⁷, the wage they would get on the market does not appropriately reflect their productivity at home, because of their specialization in domestic work. Overestimation and underestimation issues are usually solved by means of average values, giving acceptable estimates of the potential market earnings which have not been realized by the economic system due to household needs to be satisfied.

Some further critiques to the opportunity cost method can be mentioned. It actually seems to ignore that potential market earnings do not tell us anything about the concrete household productivity. The ironing performed by a graduate or by a low educated person do not differ in their outcome. What differs, however, are the reasons why people decide to do housework despite better benefits in market labor, or to work on the market despite low wages. Contingent circumstances such as custom or the possibility to get a pension after retirement are just examples.

The last perplexity that we would like to quote here is the total disregard towards secondary activities⁵⁸ when it comes to housework evaluation. The difficulty in properly accounting for all the tasks that especially women perform at the same time in the household is, in fact, probably one of the main biases affecting the opportunity cost method. Time use diaries, as the ones used to create the HETUS database, record both the main activities that people perform and the secondary activities which happen in the meanwhile. Multitasking is thus formally recognized, but the value of a single hour spent both cooking and looking after children is difficult to evaluate, especially if no pay is given for either of them. A value of output approach would be more advisable if we do not want to ignore secondary activities.

⁵⁶ A wider investigation is carried out by Goldschmidt-Clermont (1982), pp. 23-26.

⁵⁷ Such concern is pointed out in van den Berg (2004), p. 39 in relation to informal caregivers.

⁵⁸ The performance of secondary activities represents a main difference between market and non-market work. It can actually be argued that market work represents a single productive activity while, paradoxically, unpaid work may entail many potentially productive tasks (for example cooking and looking after children at the same time). For a specific study on the importance of including both main and secondary activities in time use surveys and of accounting for both of them see Floro and Miles (2005).

In order to complete our value of input methodologies analysis, we still have to mention two remaining possibilities. A solution to the trouble in attributing a proper wage to homeworkers who remain out of the labor force, could be to attribute to such people the average market wage (sometimes the average female wage is used, sometimes the general average one). An alternative, certainly giving underestimates, suggests using the minimum legal wage⁵⁹ in unpaid work evaluations. Such methodologies represent simplified versions of the opportunity cost one, thus giving approximations which are not necessarily reliable.

A rather different value imputation approach consists in attributing a monetary value to the non-cash benefits obtained by working in the household, such as board and lodging, clothing, vacations and so on⁶⁰. Such view strongly highlights a gender approach, since it is women who usually benefit from goods and services purchased by their husbands' money. The implicit mechanism is reciprocity between freely-provided household services and a sort of in-kind payment by the family formal earner. It is however not scientifically proved that the main breadwinner has the capacity to evaluate the amount of work done by his wife, thus rewarding her accordingly, or to earn enough to give her the right compensation. Moreover, the in-kind benefits that family members enjoy largely depend on the household total income⁶¹. If it is high enough, one of the advantages could be a paid housekeeper, so that we cannot talk of reciprocity anymore, but instead of sharing of benefits.

As emerged from the above analysis, none of the examined unpaid work evaluation methods is free from theoretical ambiguities and practical difficulties. The main problem lies in choosing the most appropriate market wage to impute to unpaid – out of the market – workers. The market, however, is affected by mechanisms which do not happen in the household, so that their comparability is limited. A different approach that could be undertaken to overcome some of the previously quoted obstacles, consists in considering the market value of household outputs.

2.2.3. Accounting for values: price imputation issues

Goldschmidt-Clermont (1982), in her review of the unpaid evaluation methods which had been developed up to the moment she published her work, recognized that giving a market value to

⁵⁹ Actually such methodology has been applied only to the housework performed by teenagers. We however are compelled to argue that major output differences usually do not occur whether, for example, dishes are washed by adults or by teenagers.

⁶⁰ Goldschmidt-Clermont (1982) quotes Barbara Bergmann as the first scholar to apply this method.

⁶¹ It must be noticed that the household total income does not necessarily depend exclusively on the husband's market wage. Many other factors are at stake, even depending on women. Dowries and inheritances are just few examples.

household production is a not very used technique⁶². In brief, it shall consist in attributing to goods and services produced at home by unpaid – and largely unskilled – workers, the market price of equivalent products which are formally sold.

A distinction can be made between *global* and *specific* replacement. When we talk about care provided to children, aged or ill people in institutions, we are referring to global replacement services because even the household is replaced by a market substitute satisfying each vital need of the cared for. According to such evaluation method, care services in the household are worth the charge that would be paid to an institution in order to full-time keeping non-self-sufficient people. Of course some technical differences can be detected at once. Institutions can benefit from economies of scale which, in the household emerge at a smaller degree. Household, on the other hand, do not face administration costs which are typical of institutions. These, however, are minor concerns if compared to the broad debate existing on accounting for care work⁶³. In short, it is often argued that care services cannot be compared to commodities because a special relationship usually develops between the carer and the cared for. If such activities were performed in return for a wage, the “emotional” quality of the service would decay. On the other hand, feminist authors replay that *the fear of “market values”* is largely due to our *romanticization of altruistic behavior* (Nelson 1999, p. 44). As a matter of fact, the widespread performance of care at home, affecting countries with a weak welfare state, is a concrete saving for governmental funds, so that a proper evaluation shouldn't be avoided. But how can we get a “proper evaluation”? It is actually often observed that the female performance of the bulk of care – whether for pay or not – has devaluating effects on the entire sector⁶⁴. We will discuss the issue of comparable worth among work performed by men and women in the following section. As for now, we just notice that the evaluation of care services on the basis of market global substitutes suffers from a well-rooted gender bias.

The other type of value of output measurement refers to specific replacement. This method suggests accounting separately for single goods or services such as restaurant meals, laundry washing, professional ironing and the like. Such products and services are also defined – we believe inappropriately - *equivalents*. Has an homemade cake the same quality of a bakery one? Is it convenient to sew clothes at home when industries offer low-price ones?

The fact that home production actually occurs means that people find it convenient, or that they have no access to the market. It however does not imply that the outputs are fully comparable.

⁶² This is also recognized by Ironmonger (1996), p. 48.

⁶³ See, among the others, Folbre (1995, 2001), Folbre and Nelson (2000), Himmelweit (1998, 1999, 2005), Ironmonger (1996), Nelson (1999), van den Berg et al. (2004).

⁶⁴ Folbre (1995), p. 78.

As the previously quoted methods, the value of output one presents both advantages and weaknesses. It may be argued that they are useful in estimating the actual wealth of a household, irrespective of their labor market deriving monetary income⁶⁵. Data collection on household production is nonetheless very challenging and price imputations, as we said, is not always immediate. The market and the household are separate sectors and their differences affect even the goods and services they provide.

After the analysis of the unpaid work evaluation methods which are more often addressed by the economic literature, it can be concluded that none of them is completely satisfactory. The reason might be that, attributing artificial values (wages or prices) to activities which formally have none, leads to a certain – unavoidable – degree of inaccuracy. The absence of an international commitment in raising the issue of unpaid work as economically meaningful both puts aside the necessity to find a methodological compromise in accounting systems⁶⁶, and delays the creation of comparable estimates among countries.

2.2.4. The concept of comparable worth

Unpaid work evaluation methods suggesting to impute a market value, namely a wage, to housework do not usually discuss the opportunity to consider the female or male market wage for the analyzed activity. The underlying assumption should be that it would make no difference, so it does not need specification, since an hour worked by a man or a woman in the same job position should deserve equal remuneration. This is the principle of the concept of “comparable worth”. It is well-documented, however, that gender discrimination on the labor market actually occurs both at vertical and horizontal level⁶⁷. It means that a larger percentage of women are employed in certain sectors (usually the less profitable ones), and cover the lower job positions within a sector, thus constantly earning smaller salaries than men.

In the light of such evidences of gender discrimination on the labor market, we believe that the question should be taken into account when trying to give a realistic value to unpaid household work. As far as our bibliographical research has revealed, however, no specific study has been

⁶⁵ As suggested by Goldschmidt-Clermont and Pagnossin-Aligisakis (1999), p. 528.

⁶⁶ Goldschmidt-Clermont (1982) recognizes that many of the investigated evaluation methods are complementary, so that an effort in aggregating them would be worthwhile.

⁶⁷ See for example Melkas and Anker (2001) presenting data on occupational segregation in Nordic Countries up to the 1990s. We argue that, if such issue is topical in gender equality concerned countries, it is likely to affect even strongly states implementing weaker gender policies, or ignoring the issue. Such assumption is confirmed by data presented in the studies investigating the doctrine of comparable worth, which are quoted hereinafter.

carried out – up to the present moment – openly applying the concept of comparable worth to the evaluation of unpaid work.

It can be argued that horizontal segregation is due to well-rooted discriminatory factors. Female preferences for certain types of education and employment sectors are socially and historically biased, and require long-term processes in order to be modified. We thus maintain that many social and political factors prevent the comparable worth principle from being fully applied. Among the most evident, we mention the persistence of gender stereotypes, supporting the idea that women are more suitable for certain activities and thus have some *skills* but lack some others.

As already pointed out, the doctrine of comparable worth gives a few technical indications in estimating the value of a paid job. This method is commonly used by employers in order to determine the wages to be paid to their employees. It is widely recognized that the idea of attributing an intrinsic value to a certain job, irrespective of who is performing it, is a challenge to the sexual division of labor and the gender hierarchy underlying the economic system.

We believe that the *reevaluation of women's work* (Feldberg, 1984) is precisely the reason why the concept of comparable worth should be applied to the largest female-dominated working sector, which is the household, covering both domestic work and caregiving.

The work input approach described by Goldschmidt-Clermont (1982) can be applied but it must be recognized that, as long as sex segregation on the formal labor market will not be permanently removed, it is likely that the intrinsic worth of jobs which have been usually seen as typically-female ones will suffer from biased evaluations.

As we were previously pointing out, many of the accounting techniques comparing market and non-market inputs and outputs, try to find relations between inherently different sectors. However, if a monetary value is given to the work performed in the household, and if the evaluation method takes care of the real intrinsic value of the unpaid activities performed, people can gain awareness on their own economic significance.

The recognition of an actual value to unpaid work, whatever its characteristics, is the main step forward to be pursued. Sex segregation on the formal labor market is still the main obstacle in using each of the work input evaluation methods previously described, in applying the comparable worth concept to unpaid work.

3. Accounting experiences: lights and shadows of household satellite accounts

Up to the present moment, the only practical efforts⁶⁸ which have been carried out in order to impute a monetary value to unpaid work – housework and caregiving in particular – are the so-called household satellite accounts (HHSAs). The drafting of such evaluation tools has been recently encouraged by international institutions, such as the UN, the OECD and the European Union.

The UNSNAs, from their 1993 version on, have introduced a reference to satellite accounts aimed at making the official production boundary look less strict. In the current chapter, we particularly address the 2008 SNA approach to such issue, since we consider it as the main current source of accounting guidelines at international level.

Both the OECD and the EU have dealt with the issue of household satellite accounts, recognizing that a methodological shared framework is necessary in collecting data on time use, as well as in calculating reliable unpaid work evaluations. In their documents, both of them refer to a project funded by Eurostat which Statistics Finland officially delivered in 1999. In the present research we refer to the 2003 revision of such study⁶⁹ so as to better understand if concrete guidance and motivation in drafting satellite accounts are actually given to governments. At present, sovereign states are the proper actors who must decide whether to make time use surveys and provide internationally comparable data and statistics. The actual implementation of household satellite accounts, relying on existing time use questionnaires, is however a demanding task, both from a scientific and from a financial point of view. As a consequence, it is easy to understand that the experiences of HHSAs drafting are very scarce, and limited to a small group of first world countries.

In the following sections we try to understand to what extent such evaluation efforts have been successful. We maintain that the most problematic characteristic affecting the household satellite

⁶⁸ We refer to institutions-supported evaluations. Many theoretical studies, as those presented in Goldschmidt-Clermont (1982), have however been carried out by several scholars for research purposes.

⁶⁹ See Eurostat (2003).

accounts lies precisely in being *separate*⁷⁰ from the main GDP calculations. Such partition contributes to keep HHSAs in a marginal and episodic position, deprived from the legitimization that should arise from the economic results that they reveal.

A SNA update including into the official GDP the economic value generated by household unpaid activities is, from our point of view, strongly recommended for two main reasons. The first, and more gender-related one, claims that the recognition of a great deal of women's work at public level would provide them – and society in general – with an increased awareness of their economic and social power. The second reason concerns the unreliability of growth statistics provided by developing countries when they witness a massive female access into the formal labor market. The great number of countries that nowadays are registering high development rates and a fast industrialization demonstrates that accounting for unpaid work is not – and cannot remain – a marginal issue.

3.1. Institutionalizing household satellite accounts?

If we analyze the previously quoted international institutions' documents, namely the 2008 SNA and the 2003 Eurostat paper, we realize that the leading approach to household unpaid work is to consider it on a separate level from those productive activities recognized as part of the national economic system.

The post-war industrial expansion has contributed to raise growing awareness on the economic significance of housework. More and more women entering into the paid labor market have unveiled the previously hidden vital necessity⁷¹ to carry out – whether for pay or not – certain tasks in the house, which, up to that moment, had been considered as “natural” female responsibilities, thus not comparable to paid work. Susan Himmelweit (1995) points out that such revolution revealed the need to find a third-way, other than “work” and “non-work”, to account for every non-monetized chore entailing both productive and self-fulfilling elements, such as caregiving. The philosophy that nowadays shapes household satellite accounting partly endorses such “third way”

⁷⁰ Waring (2003) p. 36, critically explains the separateness issue, stating that satellite accounts “*have to be separate so as not to disturb what the experts call the ‘internal integrity and international comparability of the current accounting framework’*”.

⁷¹ When an activity is seen as a “natural” prerogative of a household member, it can be assumed that such effort is given for granted both by families and by society. In the moment household workers (housewives) begin to engage in paid employment, therefore when household services start to obtain less attention, their “labor” nature emerges.

perspective, recognizing the unpaid work's hybrid essence. In the SNA language, housework would be defined as an *alternative economic concept*⁷², thus requiring *alternative* economic evaluations. There is however widespread resistance to the strong demand (coming not only from feminist environments) for a change in the SNA guidelines regarding the production boundary. The chief objection regards the lack of comparability that would result from statistics calculated according to diverging accounting systems. Swiebel (1999) suggests, as a viable solution, to produce both the traditional GDP accounts and the new ones comprising such activities as housework. This choice would enable inter-temporal comparisons, providing, at the same time, a broadened database for future research. Such proposal, however, seems to lie ignored within the corpus of scientific discussion on unpaid work.

3.1.1. The 2008 SNA perspective on household satellite accounts⁷³

The official SNA definition for satellite accounts affirms that they are *linked to, but distinct from, the central system* (2008 SNA, par. 29.4, p. 523). They should also be *consistent with* the main framework, though not necessarily with each other. Household satellite accounts are considered – from the UN perspective – as a particular case of economic evaluation precisely because they challenge the current version of the production boundary, being their *separateness* what actually justifies the episodic assessment of officially non-SNA activities as productive.

The HHSAs proposal advanced by the 2008 SNA makes a direct reference to the third-person criterion⁷⁴. Such theory thus excludes all of those tasks whose beneficiary is the performer himself. The SNA quoted examples refer to eating, sleeping and exercising, even though no mention at all is made to the problematic issue of activities entailing a particular relationship between the performer and the beneficiary. The whole discussion about the subtle border dividing leisure and personal responsibility remains thus ignored. The question of personal preferences is however addressed, affirming that the concepts of “work” and “leisure” can be attached to very different activities by people having dissimilar inclinations. It must be noticed that no methodological solution is suggested by the SNA to avoid such obstacle⁷⁵.

⁷² See for example the reference in 2008 SNA, par. 2.166, p. 37.

⁷³ The present section largely draws from chapter 29 in the 2008 SNA, which deeply examines the issue of satellite accounts.

⁷⁴ 2008 SNA, par. 29.146, p. 542.

⁷⁵ In the analysis of the SNA it is quite common to run into the description of methodological or practical problems. This research has chiefly revised the sections dealing with unpaid work (non-SNA activities), observing that no actual

To sum up, the substance of HHSAs should consist of *household services for own consumption* (2008 SNA, par. 29.147, p. 542). If we aggregate the traditional SNA activities and the ones included in satellite accounts, we obtain what is usually referred to as the “extended production”⁷⁶.

After circumscribing the HHSAs covered area, the SNA handles the issue of the most appropriate measurement method. Referring to Goldschmidt-Clermont’s categories, we can affirm that the procedure suggested by the UN falls into the “volume of work inputs” classification. It is pointed out that the measurement technique which is finding greater practical application consists in accounting for the time devoted to the concerned activities. Such tendency is confirmed by the increasing governmental, as well as international⁷⁷, interest towards the conduction of time use surveys. In spite of this growing trend, even the SNA recognizes that methodological improvements in shaping time use questionnaires are needed, especially in reference to multitasking.

The SNA actually draws a distinction between measurement and evaluation of household services. If time use surveys are the suggested and prevalent measurement instrument, different possibilities are available in attributing a monetary value to the work performed in the household. Continuing to use Goldschmidt-Clermont’s terminology, the value of non-work inputs, such as the food purchased for meals preparation, is one of the discussed approaches⁷⁸. It is however rejected as an evaluation method because of the interpretational ambiguity of the obtained values. The system that the SNA seems to favor consists in attributing a potential salary to each hour worked in the household. The discussion carried out in the UN document presents two distinct possibilities recognized as the “opportunity cost” and the “comparator cost” methods, whose shortcomings are openly addressed. None of them seems completely realistic, because in real life their economic rules are not necessarily respected. If a person could get a high salary on the labor market (opportunity cost), it is however not given for granted that s/he will decide to transfer his/her domestic responsibilities to a paid substitute. Personal convictions and social norms play a fundamental role in influencing people’s choices, often causing anti-economic behaviors. On the other hand, the comparator cost – that is the specialized substitute’s wage – does not provide a faithful picture of the quality of tasks performed in the household, compared to a professional service, nor of the difference of time spent by household members or professionals in achieving the same result.

solution is usually suggested to the mentioned concerns. This could be due to the marginality which unpaid work covers in the SNA.

⁷⁶ United Nations Statistics Division (2000) p. 8, defines “extended production” as a concept whose definition is based on the third party criterion.

⁷⁷ The HETUS database is just an example.

⁷⁸ It is mentioned in the 2008 SNA, par. 29.149, p. 542.

The UNSNA does not give any further hint in shaping household satellite accounts. The theoretical and methodological issues are broached, without adding any guidance on sharable solutions, or operational compromises.

Many references to satellite accounting can be found in UN supported researches⁷⁹, nevertheless we maintain that whenever official GDP guidelines are provided by the UN Statistics Division, parallel satellite accounts guidelines should be published too. From our point of view, as long as no incentive and guidance in accounting for unpaid work will come from an institutional and legitimized source, the (scarce) governmental efforts to achieve results in such field are fated to remain largely occasional and fruitless. Only a universal institution as the United Nations has the power to raise universal awareness and shape a universal methodology⁸⁰, which indeed represent the largest deficiencies affecting the issue of unpaid work.

3.1.2. A regional perspective: the EU approach

It could be argued that for a regional organization, such as the European Union, the establishment of commonly shared consensus and methodologies in drafting satellite accounts should be an easier task, compared to the difficulties caused by the membership heterogeneity in the UN. The 2003 Eurostat document on this topic demonstrates that a growing interest in household labor evaluations is spreading throughout Europe, and related researches gather financial support from the Union.

First of all, it is interesting to observe the EU methodology in making research on unpaid work. Both the 2003 *Proposal for a Methodology of Household Satellite Accounts* and the HETUS database are the results of projects funded by the European statistical service (Eurostat). Two Scandinavian governmental organizations⁸¹ have been awarded with a grant, consequently constituting task forces charged of accomplishing the related objectives. We argue that this approach has the advantage to take into account the proper difficulties that governments face when approaching new economic concepts. The Eurostat work on HHSAs is basically consistent with the SNA guidelines as well as with its economic concepts and definitions, such as the production

⁷⁹ Leading examples are Swiebel (1999) and United Nations Statistics Division (2000). A fundamental role has also been played by the UN's Fourth Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 (official proceeding available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/official.htm> accessed on 23 June 2012).

⁸⁰ The "universality" argument is particularly emphasized in Brinton (2008).

⁸¹ Statistics Sweden was responsible for shaping the HETUS database. Statistics Finland carried out the satellite accounts related research. It is arguable that such institutions have not been awarded by chance. The well-known preeminence of Nordic countries in gender equality policies has probably played a central role in the EU choice to fund their proposals.

boundary. It is however recognized that the SNA⁸² does not give a univocal advice in producing satellite accounts. Governments may thus choose what type of measurement system to adopt, depending on the purposes they want to achieve through HHSAs. Three main categories of separate household accounts can be compiled, depending on the complexity of data to be taken into account. The first, easiest and still more commonly applied option regards the evaluation of unpaid labor only. The utility of such method is limited, according to Eurostat (2003), to labor market issues, especially from a gender perspective. The wage imputation issues still remain the recognized point of divergence in establishing a shared accounting methodology. The considered approaches include the opportunity cost, which is deemed useful as long as the research interest lies in studying the micro-level of personal decisions to enter into the paid labor market, but lacks consistency when it comes to appropriate value assessments. The second methodology is the replacement cost which can be declined as follows: wage of a specialized substitute whether working in market enterprises or employed in the household, or wage of a generalist worker.

It must be recognized that, compared to the 2008 SNA, Eurostat (2003)⁸³ gives wider guidance both on the advantages and shortcomings of each possibility, as well as richer references on previous implementation experiences. Eurostat (2003) acknowledges that no consensus has currently been reached on the appropriate evaluation method to apply in HHSAs. Some suggestions, however, are given on the most widespread and reliable trends. It is argued that *the opportunity cost method has widely been rejected by researchers* (Eurostat, 2003, par. 5.1.1, p. 26), though greater validity is recognized to the use of average or prevalent market wages. It is finally suggested that, despite the well-known drawbacks, the most consistent wage imputation method should refer to the salary earned by a polyvalent (generalist) substitute working in the household.

In reference to the SNA guidelines, we maintain that clearer instructions regarding the best evaluation method in drafting HHSAs would be appreciated. We believe that Eurostat has partly reached this goal by suggesting at least which approach to avoid and which one provides more reliable figures. On the other hand, legislative acts giving governments more precise guidance and requiring actual enforcement, such as European directives, would be needed in order to start a coherent policy aimed at counting unpaid work in the EU.

For analytical completeness, we make some references to the other household production evaluation options which are presented in Eurostat (2003) even though, according to our investigation, the attribution of a monetary value to household labor in terms of forgone wages, should be the first evaluation achievement to be accomplished.

⁸² Eurostat (2003) par. 4.2, p. 10. This document refers to the 1993 version of the System of National Accounts. We however observe that no major differences among the 1993 SNA and the 2008 revision occurs with regards to HHSAs.

⁸³ See in particular par. 5.1, p. 24 and subsequent.

It is suggested⁸⁴ that *production and generation of income accounts for households* can be calculated, both using input and output approaches. They however require information, at household level, on output, intermediate consumption, gross value added, capital consumption and taxes/subsidies on production.

The last type of HHSAs which is described in Eurostat (2003), is defined *sequence of accounts*⁸⁵. Their purpose should be to highlight the household extended disposable income and its extended consumption, thus aggregating both market and non-market data. Some practical guidance is provided, both from input and output perspectives. Such option, however, suffers from the same complexity biases affecting the previously addressed approach.

The Eurostat paper admits that, especially for these last two methods, much research is still needed and major divergences affect the current debate. It is recognized that the experiences developed by single countries are fundamental in determining which method results as the more appropriate.

The HETUS database harmonizing figures collected through national time use questionnaires, from our point of view, is a useful premise for an advancement in HHSAs drafting at European level. We believe, however, that two more steps are essential. The European guidelines on the production of time use surveys⁸⁶ should be enforced by each EU member and candidate states, so that the obtained time use data could be interpreted and compared unambiguously⁸⁷. Secondly, by taking advantage from national experiences, an international (European) task force could be constituted in order to overcome divergences and finally establish a univocal household satellite account drafting system.

3.2. Household production vs GDP: relative magnitude and possible connections

3.2.1. The share of unpaid work compared to the GDP: some estimates

Unpaid work monetary evaluations represent experimental attempts which have been carried out by a limited number of countries and scholars. The use of different methodologies restricts their

⁸⁴ Eurostat (2003), par. 4.2.3.2, p. 14 and par. 5, p. 24 and subsequent.

⁸⁵ Eurostat (2003), par. 4.2.3.3, p. 15 and par. 7.4.2, p. 44.

⁸⁶ Eurostat (2004).

⁸⁷ The national data used for the HETUS database are affected by the differences in data collection and aggregation observed in different countries. This is why data harmonization is required, though its accuracy is not necessarily guaranteed.

comparability and the absence of international consensus both on the convenience and on the most appropriate theoretical framework does not favor their enforcement. In spite of this discouraging foreword, whenever household satellite accounts or unpaid work evaluations are carried out, striking figures emerge. The share of unpaid work, compared to market labor, is remarkable both in terms of time and of monetary value, so that its economic significance is hard to deny.

The Human Development Report has extensively dealt with the reasons why unpaid work, which is mostly performed by women, should be economically valued only in its 1995 version⁸⁸. What is interesting to observe in the UNDP report is the actual amount of unpaid work, compared to the total GDP, which is calculated for a selection of countries (Australia, Germany and Finland are mentioned hereinafter). The obtained figures are striking. The method used in providing estimates is an input-based one. It consists in attributing a market remuneration to the hours of unpaid work performed in the household by using a housekeeper's wage. It is recognized that such method, however, could produce underestimates since housekeepers are usually women working for a low pay, so that the extra gross wage⁸⁹ is used, in order to obtain more realistic evaluations.

The estimate of total non-SNA production in Australia for the year 1992 represents 86% of GDP; if we considered just the non-SNA output attributable to labor, the figure would be 72%. In Germany the same calculations give estimates scoring 55% and 53% of GDP. The country registering lower figures is Finland, whose total non-SNA output is 46% of total GDP, while the labor valued at extra gross wage represents 45%. It is further noted that non-SNA production in industrialized countries in the early 1990s, on average, contributed to 60% of the extended private consumption.

If we consider more recent statistics, we understand that the situation is substantially unchanged. Finnish data relative to the year 2001 (Varjonen and Aalto, 2006, pp. 30-31) highlight that household production is still 46% of total GDP. Such figure is made up by a 6% of housework which is included in the GDP, while the remaining 40% is left uncounted.

We can argue that similar percentages could be obtained in many other countries. Calculations for South and South-Eastern Asia, for example, have revealed that unpaid work represents between 43 and 48% of GDP, depending on the applied evaluation method (Hoskyns and Rai, 2007, p. 309).

Goldschmidt-Clermont and Pagnossin-Aligisakis (1995) observe that, among the countries they review in their paper, when estimates of the share of non-SNA labor compared to total GDP are

⁸⁸ We refer to chapter 4 of the 1995 Human Development Report, available at http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr_1995_en_chap4.pdf (accessed on 10 June 2012).

⁸⁹ The extra gross wage comprehends both taxes and employer's social security contributions. Such solution is used to overcome the comparable worth-related difficulties previously addressed. The fact that some jobs are mostly performed by women (horizontal sex segregation) means that the attributable wage in unpaid work evaluations is gender biased.

provided, the obtained results are newer lower than one third of GDP. The estimates, in fact, vary between 33 and 72%⁹⁰.

Such figures should not be surprising considering that the amount of hours devoted to unpaid activities (leisure excluded) is usually similar to the time spent in market work⁹¹. The current GDPs, however, seem to assume that people spend just one third of their day being productive and the remaining two thirds are left in the non-SNA side. If we consider that, on average, 70% of such presumed unproductive activities are carried out by women, the persistence of gender inequalities in society and in the economic system begins to find an explanation.

3.2.2. Should household accounts remain “satellite”?

The above question wonders if it is appropriate to exclude unpaid activities from the main GDP calculations, not if it would be an easy task to aggregate the two. We have already stressed that the persistence of some economic concepts, such as the current production boundary considering non-marketed goods and services as unproductive, excludes the possibility of expanding the bases of national economic systems. Nonetheless, such enlargement is exactly what ideally happens when satellite accounts are carried out, and the obtained figures reveal that the dimensions of such hidden side of the economy are massive. Keeping household accounts as separate evaluation systems actually contributes to feed the dichotomy between the productive man and the unproductive (or marginally productive) housewife, thus perpetuating the absence of the recognition of the economic role that women play even when they do not “make money”.

It must be recognized that the concept of “third way”, other than work and non-work, remains the most common approach in the economic literature used to account for unpaid labor, also being supported by the UNSNAs directives. What is interesting to notice, however, is that the 2008 SNA suggests to draft separate household satellite accounts exactly after having underlined that the exclusion of the household sector from the main GDP causes misleading figures on a country’s growth rate⁹². When a developing country engages in an industrialization process, in fact, one of the main effects is that the paid labor market expands. As a consequence, a great number of people moves their household activities on a secondary plan, in order to enter into paid employment. What

⁹⁰ Goldschmidt-Clermont and Pagnossin-Aligisakis (1995), p. 24. The countries registering the quoted figures are not specified. The countries reviewed by the paper are Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and the United States.

⁹¹ Addabbo and Caiumi (2003) p. 59, express such concept by saying that “*neglecting the non-monetary sector means leaving out of account about half of human labor*”.

⁹² We refer to the 2008 SNA, parr. 29.145 and 29.146, p. 542.

actually happens is neither that previously unproductive people are now turning into economically active subjects, nor that household work is left undone. The real process is more similar to a change of employment sector within the same economic system, so that the great increase of growth rates that developing countries register is not completely justified. A moderate growth rate would depend on the fact that people work more (paid employment plus housework)⁹³, but the current system and figures seem to suggest that previously idle people are now productive workers. This is not realistic. The core question about unpaid work does not concern how to make people more productive or how to move women from the household to the market in order to favor the economic development of a country. Through household satellite accounts, the actual value of non-market labor and household production is made visible, and time use surveys reveal the imbalanced gender division of market and non-market tasks. The real unsolved problem lies in the reluctance in shifting the issue on the public discourse level.

In the light of the results acquired through the present research, we observe that no clear international attitude towards the measurement of unpaid work has been reached yet, since no institution has so far engaged in providing precise guidelines aimed at applying a single method in the evaluation of unpaid work. What is more, such measurement efforts are left to the governments' discretion. In absence of supranational obligations to account for unpaid work, it is unlikely that most countries, especially the less developed ones, will commit to measurement endeavors.

It must be added that the intra-household distribution of non-market labor, which could also be expressed as the gender problem affecting the issue, has never reached the main stage of the public debate. Without such pressure, it is unlikely that any kind of serious political commitment will be displayed soon. The previously quoted observations reveal that our proposal to revolutionize the current economic concepts, aiming at the recognition of a higher status to unpaid work is probably premature. Prior essential steps have been mentioned, such as a shared consensus on the most appropriate methodology in creating satellite accounts or international obligations to carry out regular time use surveys.

Some of the main characteristics of the discipline of feminist economics, which – among the corpus of economic literature – has so far devoted the greatest share of attention to the issue, can be recognized in its audacity and far-sightedness. We believe that more audacity in dealing with the issue of unpaid work and on its real gender consequences should be used. Giving a monetary value to something that has been long considered a natural inclination is certainly something provocative but also necessary since money is the language that current politics and economics better understand.

⁹³ This, of course, would happen only if housework were counted as a productive activity.

Concluding remarks

The present research has extensively dealt with the issue of unpaid work. Though such concept can be declined in a number of ways, we have especially focused on housework and caregiving, since they are the most pervasive forms of non-market labor for people living in first world countries. The aspects which have been privileged concern the intra-household distribution of unremunerated tasks, in particular how they are shared by the members of a couple, and their measurement and evaluation methods. In these last decades, a growing interest and recognition of the importance of the question has emerged, especially thanks to the development of feminist networks⁹⁴, which have tried to move the issue from the private sphere of the household to the public floor. Major improvements have been recently achieved both at national and international level in collecting data on time use and in organizing them – though only in a limited number of cases – in household satellite accounts. Much academic debate and research have moreover contributed to support methodological enhancements in drafting reliable time use questionnaires and consistent evaluation systems.

In spite of these progresses, however, it must be admitted that unpaid work is still a marginal issue in the economic field and most of the labor performed especially by women remains largely unrecognized and unvalued⁹⁵. One of the main reasons why this happens lies in the current definition of “production” which settles a tight bond between economic value and market price. Such view is endorsed by the SNA concept of “production boundary” which excludes, with few exceptions, each non-marketed service or good from the national GDP.

Housework and care are usually performed by the members of a household for their own consumption, so that no market transaction occurs and workers are not subject to the pressures that economic competitiveness entails. This is why it has long been maintained that what happens in the household cannot be equated to market dynamics, exactly because the two fields are ruled by different mechanisms and are thus not comparable. The expansion of the formal labor market registered by developed countries from the 1960s on, has moved an impressive number of women

⁹⁴ The importance of feminist scholars, organizations and lobbies is particularly highlighted by Hoskyns and Rai (2007), p. 303-304.

⁹⁵ This is the starting point of chapter 4 in the 1995 HDR.

from the household into paid employment revealing what, up to that moment, was invisible because embedded in social custom. The work performed in the house, which can be summed up in the expression “social reproduction”, is made up of essential tasks for social well-being and for the improvement of the overall economic system. When such activities stop to be the full-time engagement of women, substitutes have to be found, so that it becomes self-evident that the market and the household are less independent than expected.

If we look at data on time use, we realize that unpaid work actually affects women more than men and, when paid and unpaid work are aggregated, women result as having less free time than their partners. On the other hand, it has been proved that the share of extended family income due to female work is inferior to the one deriving from the work performed by men⁹⁶. This anomaly still seems to be ignored by mainstream economists as well as by policymakers.

We have particularly stressed the lack of international commitment in finding a commonly accepted and applied method in producing estimates of the value of unpaid work. What, however, in our opinion looks more troublesome is the absence of a widespread and open demand⁹⁷ for policies in favor of people bearing both market and non-market responsibilities, as well as the under-demand for market provision of domestic and care work⁹⁸. The persistence of unequal market remunerations for the sexes causes major difficulties in unpaid work evaluations. The commonly adopted method, in fact, suggests attributing a potential wage to the hours worked in the household. The applied market salary, however, is usually affected by the sex of the majority of people performing a certain job, which usually belongs to female-dominated sectors. One viable solution to such drawback is to apply an output-based approach in evaluating household production, but the absence of extensive and reliable data on household production is still a major impediment.

We strongly affirm that the primary role in approaching the issue of unpaid work, consequently in finding solutions to its unequal distribution and in establishing the most appropriate evaluation method, should be played by national governments, with the support of international institutions as coordinating organizations. Providing even tentative estimates of the economic value represented by unpaid work could be the best way to attract political and public attention on the issue. The impressive figures on the actual amount of unpaid work claim a radical re-definition of the concepts of “market”, “value” and “production”. The “monetary language” is probably the best communication tool to reach this goal.

⁹⁶ See Addabbo and Caiumi (2003), p. 76.

⁹⁷ The absence of public demand for accounting for unpaid work is stressed by Hoskins and Rai (2007) p. 304.

⁹⁸ As stressed in Nelson (1999).

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Abstract

Many activities of every person's daily life can be recorded under the category of "unpaid work", meaning that they are performed without receiving a monetary reward. The present research deals with two of the most pervasive forms of unpaid work: housework and caregiving. In these last decades, the existence of such hidden side of the economy has been partially brought to light by time use questionnaires led by several first world countries, and by indexes on gender development and empowerment worked out by the United Nations. Such tools reveal that, both in developed and developing countries, the greatest amount of unpaid work is carried out by women who spend long hours in performing what can be defined as social reproduction. Moreover, it is striking to observe that, when such time is converted into money, by attributing a monetary value to the time spent in housework or to the activities which have been performed, the economic relevance of unpaid work emerges, proving to be equivalent to a considerable share of the official GDP.

Many different evaluation methods are presented, and the effort to apply them through the so-called Household Satellite Accounts, that some countries have been drafting, is remarked.

The point made by the present research is that despite the existing successful efforts to give an economic value to the work performed within the household – especially by women –, no actual concrete guidance is given by international organizations to governments in choosing an harmonized evaluation method. Moreover, the inclusion of unpaid work in the calculations of the GDP is discouraged, since it doesn't seem to match with the current economic concepts.

We maintain that, considering the economic relevance of the work performed for no pay, it would be advisable to redefine what production means. Giving a monetary value to such activities, though not being a definitive solution, could be a good way in letting economists and policymakers realize the role of unpaid work, and of those who perform it, in the economic system and in society.

Keywords: women, unpaid work, housework, caregiving, evaluation.