



**HOME RENAISSANCE FOUNDATION**  
RENEWING THE CULTURE OF THE HOME

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The Work of the Home as a Field of  
Research in Sociology

By Maria Sophia Aguirre

# The Work of the Home as a Field of Research in Sociology

Directed by Maria Sophia Aguirre, Ph.D.<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The work of the home has been a paradigm worthy of academic analysis since long before the 1960s shift of women to the labour market. In fact, in the late eighteenth century and nineteenth century we find important intellectual antecedents in Home Economics as a field interested in the work of the home as a necessary social good. This precursor to the current paradigm of thought serves to demystify the pre and post-shift dyad, and understand current efforts within the field of sociology to analyse the work of the home as a form of production of social and human capital. This literature review aims to analyse sociological research focused on the work of the home and its value, examining how views on this work have widened in scope, first considering mechanical tasks such as cleaning and cooking to be relevant to the economy, and later, focusing on the work of the home as a more complex phenomenon, composed of relational and distributive activities which evidence its centrality to the humanization of society and the economy. In sum, the work of the home is an evolving paradigm that has proven to be a necessary central index to studies of society, though this fact has historically been ignored by market-oriented analyses that continue to view housework as secondary.

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## Introduction

The historical, economic and social change that propelled women’s entry to the labour market set a new paradigm into motion for social scientists interested in women’s social role and housework as a phenomenon worth analysing in order to address gender equality,

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<sup>1</sup> Home Renaissance Foundation and Integral Economic Development and Economics Programs, The Busch School of Business and Economics, The Catholic University of America.

economic and public policy issues.<sup>2</sup> Up until that point, research on the subject of housework had focused on understanding how the housework itself had changed over time due to technological advances, changes in standards of cleanliness, etc., with little attention as to who actually performed the household tasks. Another contemporary line of research, perhaps broader in scope, focused on the division of labour within the home, but did not address the women that performed the labour. Nevertheless, this paradigmatic change and the focus on feminism and public policy have overshadowed studies of the work of the home that started before this change and continue to develop today. These studies dealt with the work of the home as a paradigm that has to be analysed in its role of production of human and social capital, shedding light over inquiries, in sociology and other social science, regarding the motivations and the quality of the work of the home as a source of social change. With this agenda in mind, numerous authors have sought to dignify the work of the home and recognize its actual impact in the construction of society.

The early antecedent to this literature is found in Domestic Economics research in the early nineteenth century. This work focused largely on the motivations for housework and how to make this labour more efficient and profitable (Brodeur, 2012). This approach sheds light over the complex transformation that the work of the home has undergone, starting with the late eighteenth century establishment of factories at the time of industrial revolution, which drove men away from the household, transforming housework into 'women's work'. This important shift took place before the shift of women from the home to labour market.

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<sup>2</sup> The definition of housework now generally includes childcare, in addition to cooking, cleaning and other home maintenance tasks. Some point out that shifting demographics argue for the inclusion of eldercare in the definition of housework. Eichler and Albanese (2007).

The beginning of the twentieth century brought with it a new era, where the work of home became politicised in its relation to women. The efforts to make sense of the “double shift bind”, as Arlie Hoshchild termed it, and to explain the unequal division of housework in couples, diverted attention from the importance of the work of the home to women’s rights and other agendas.<sup>3</sup> The politicisation of the home and its concerns reflects a “suspicion model of heterosexual marriages”, based on the assumption that men are not likely to comply with their necessary role in heterosexual relationships, thus enhancing women’s oppression (Alvare, 2009, p. 169). Many feminist understandings at the core of the discussion in the sixties, veered the analysis of housework toward the discussion of gender equality and public policy agendas. The change of course by feminist movements, however, did not overshadow the relevance of the work of the home to the lives of persons and families. Indeed, some of these very sixties thinkers, some decades later, in facing the reality of their own lives, came to highlight the relevance of care, the service rendered by the work of the home, and its manifestation in the work of the home, within the context of the family, which is the place where most individuals learn to love..<sup>4</sup> What is it about this work that is often taken for granted, but that we all yearn for when is missing? A growing body of literature has wrestled with this question by focusing on work of the home as the core subject of analysis, yet it has been ignored. The present literature review aims to shed light on studies that engages in a more complex analysis of the work of the home as the nucleus of social and human capital production that has important effects that spill over into broader economic and social life.

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<sup>3</sup> Arlie Hoshchild is a professor emerita of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley. Two of the most important books that set her discourse on the subject at hand include *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*, and *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*.

<sup>4</sup> It is not the purpose of this literature review to analyse what it has come to be known as the feminism of care or ethics of care. A helpful reference to this literature includes Clemont (1996).

Concurrent to the concern with the work of the home as a source of social and human capital, there has been a wealth of recent studies on “domestic work”, the name given to the work of the home that is outsourced, and done for pay by someone who does not belong to that household. Since the seventies, sociologists have focused, on an analysis of domestic work that dignifies it as real work and reclaims its status as part of the paid market labour, even though it is performed at the privacy of a household. A lingering concern in this research is the persistence of prejudice which undervalues housework and frames it as non-professional largely because of its relation to the innate abilities of women. This situation has facilitated, in some cases, forms of labour relations that conceal abuses, discrimination and highly problematic situations at the expense of a vulnerable community.

*Because of its close association with women’s unpaid work in the home, domestic work is devalued and underappreciated. Regarded as women’s work, domestic work suffers from the perception that its successful performance depends not on skill but on a woman’s innate ability (Smith, 2012, p. 3).*

This statement links the value of the work of the home to the value of domestic work as paid labour. Both institutions are dynamically interlinked and shape each other’s fate.

One of the central themes that connects work of the home and domestic work is the necessary professionalization of this work and debate over the boundaries of public and private realms.

*Thus, the private sphere is frequently considered to be off limits to the imposition of regulation and officials are often reluctant to enforce labour regulations when it comes to domestic work. Yet when homeowners allow outsiders to work in their homes, they*

*necessarily forgo some measure of privacy and the government has a legitimate interest in protecting the welfare of all workers, including those that work in the private sphere of individual homes (Smith, 2012, p. 9).*

Datiles has highlighted that a direct relation exists between dignifying the unpaid work of the home and raising standards for paid domestic work.

*While our focus is on paid housework, necessarily we will take into account unpaid housework because it has a critical impact on how we view its paid counterpart... seeing domestic work, this care for the home, not only as real work but humanly essential work (Datiles, 2009, p. 3)*

Consequently, in order to solve the perceived lack of relevance of the work of the home as essential work, Datiles proposes to work towards the professionalization of this type of work, which, a process which has historically involved the establishment of specialized tasks, especially through the contributions of home economics as a professional field. She concludes that by shifting the focus from remuneration to being acknowledged as socially useful, thus laying the basis for its formal recognition, we give the work of the home grater status within the world of work. "Recognizing that work is also a means of participation in social integration and as such deserves to be supported in the name of social solidarity" (Le Guidec, "1996, p. 645.)

Other researchers have focused on explaining the work of the home as a paradigm to understand and solve social issues. Through this analysis; they have proven the relevance of the work of the home as a source of human and social capital. In new research that values the work of the home as producer of humanity, good nutritional habits, health, cleaning standards, family dinners (Aguirre, 2006),

and care are linked to development (Aguirre, 2014), economic growth and lower crime rates. All of these activities take place in the household and this research has contributed furthering understanding of the nature of the work of the home and its impact.

This approach could be coupled with a relational sociology (Donati and Archi, 2015), in which economic value, traditionally related to the utilitarian individual, is realistically assessed and confronted with the importance of economic well-being. Rushworth and Schluter (2011) write:

*This means learning to see life from the perspective of relationships, as opposed to seeing it from the viewpoint of materialism or individualism. Instead of assuming that income or profit should generally be the ultimate goal for personal, corporate or government decisions, we argue for relational wellbeing instead – since ultimately our relationships are what matter most in life. Learning to think relationally calls for a Copernican revolution: instead of placing material wealth, or individual rights and freedom, at the centre of our metaphysical solar system, with all other things – including relationships – revolving around them, we place relationships at the centre, to reflect better what we ultimately value. As an example, take the decision to buy a microwave oven: we may consider the decision financially (can I afford it?), or spatially (is there room in the kitchen?), or environmentally (how does this affect my carbon footprint?) – but what about relationally? Having a microwave could either enhance or lower relational wellbeing in the household. Reducing the time spent on preparing food could either permit more time for talking together over the meal, or else lead to family members eating at different times and not talking together at all. Looking at the decision through a relational lens will bring this dimension*

*into perspective (2011, p. 2-3).*

Today, this literature that has contributed to the understanding of the work of the home and a comprehensive view of its social functions, is still overshadowed by neo-liberal research that focuses on the market value of work, and the work of the home is seen as an peripheral sphere that does not demand much focus. Belardinelli rightly highlights that the home is still seen as a work of secondary importance. Yet, the home is a place where the social ethos and the fundamental values that essential for ensuring an ordered civic life are generated (Belardinelli, 2011). The “critical gap about society and law not giving domestic work a financial value, is the failure to appreciate the work of the home as true work benefiting humanity, irrespective of the monetary” (Datiles, 2009, p. 12). This explains why family friendly policies have failed to benefit most families and why the family as a nucleus of social production is in danger.

Already, Vassar professor Lucy Maynard Salmon, over 100 years ago, in her (1901) *Domestic Service* book, captured the socioeconomic relevance of the work of the home as well as its complexity, clearly and succinctly. In addition to a thorough analysis of the nature of this work, Salmon takes note of the changes –both social and technological– generated by the industrial revolution. These changes, despite being largely ignored, affected the whole of society. Specifically, she states “household service and household employment do not occupy an isolated position; ... while they might be indifferent to the political, industrial and social changes constantly occurring, they cannot by the virtue of this indifference remain unaffected by them.” (p.263) Furthermore, in analysing its link to the economic realm, Salmon holds that this type of work, while subject to the same economic laws as other types of employment, has additional peculiar laws because of its relational nature. (p.263-264) She highlights the failure to recognize the work

of the home as part of the great industrial question of the day and provides two reasons for such oversight. The first one is the fact that “economic writers have not as yet discussed the subject, and [the second one is] because those who come in daily contact with it overlook its economic side” (p. 265.) Her analysis appears to remain relevant today.

This review aims to highlight the development of the literature that contributes to the understanding of the work of the home as a source of human and social capital, and its central role in the humanization of the economic activity. It does so, with a particular emphasis on the sociology literature. A quick overview of the treatment of the work of the home, pertaining specifically to the sociology and socioeconomic literature, can be summarized as follows. The work of the home was historically integral to productive activities. However as the industrial revolution generated a major shift, there was a need to facilitate the work of women in the home. Technological advances as well as the professionalization efforts were developed to assist with this end. From this followed the first wave of the feminist discourse on women and work and the negative connotation that it conveyed in regard to the work of the home. Literature focused on the various tensions suffered by women in attempting to balance work inside and outside the home then followed. Different proposed solutions were put forward. However, among them, a strong understanding emerged that the work of the home matters to women and that the need to care and to be cared for at home is crucial for human development. These findings captured the attention of researchers across disciplines, many of whom have begun to unveil the reasons for the necessity of the work of the home both for those carrying it out and benefiting from it and, thus, its lasting importance despite socioeconomic change. The service the work of the home provides is not value neutral for human flourishing. The literature outlined attempts to

trace a full circle and highlight the unity of the corporal and relational dimension of the human person.

## **1. Home Economics as a an antecedent**

Up until the first half of the nineteenth century, both husband and wife, performed the work of the home, with the help of children and other members of the household. This was a reality in a pre/industrial context where the household was considered an economic unit. People had animals, cultivated their own goods and sewed their clothes at the home. Anne Brodeur (2012), in her historical account of housework, highlights that it was common that manuals regarding housework tasks be directed to both women and men. This is visible, for instance, in “The Domestic Manual: Or Family Directory” and “The Househusband and Housewife: A Collection of Valuable Receipts and Directions Relating to Agriculture and Domestic Economy”. Nevertheless, with the advent of factory work in the second half of the nineteenth century, men were taken away from the household, and the home became primarily a female sphere of action.

The field of Home Economics emerged in large part through the work of three main leaders: Catherine Beecher, Ellen Richards and Charlotte Gilman Perkins. These women had concerns regarding how households were managed and the standards maintained within them, bearing in mind that the nineteenth century household differs significantly from those of today in terms of machinery, technology and standards of cleanliness. Yet, despite technological tools and innovation in home infrastructure, the production of social capital and values remains at the core of the home even today. These women explained how the work of the home was made up of specialized tasks that, if absent, would negative affect the economy and social life. Consequently, they argued for the professionalization of the home. Their advocacy for the professionalization of the home

took place in the specific context of an urbanizing, industrializing United States, in which ideas about the public and private spheres were shifting.<sup>5</sup>

The specific tasks that characterized housework at the time were thought of as technical and professional skills that should be enhanced and supported, linking housework to the production of goods that the market did not offer. Advocacy for the professionalization of the home was not primarily concerned with the technical aspects of household tasks, although Beecher did publish housework manuals. Their focus was not primary how the work of the home was carried out, but rather, the question of why women did this work. In "A Treatise on Domestic Economy", Beecher addresses women's concerns as mothers and as managers of domestic economy. "She encouraged them to see their work as serving a critical social task: forming the next generation morally and intellectually. To this end, the quality of the home mattered, and on the home depended the health and democracy" (Brodeur, 2012, p. 5).

This focus on quality and not quantity was the axis that simultaneously differentiated and promoted the work of the home as relevant in relation to market work in the industrialized world. They indicated they were trying to set the work of the home on a higher, more dignified plane. With this aim in mind the quality of the work of the home was inevitably linked to the motivations behind it. If women recognized the special status of their work as a school of social, civil and spiritual life, their commitment and self-fulfillment would increase.

Other women, from different areas of expertise, contributed to advocacy for greater professionalization in the work of the home. On

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<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the contributions of these authors see Sklar, (1976), Stage and Vincent (1997) and Gilman Perkin (1915).

the one hand, we find Ellen Richards, who referred to the need for professionalized work of the home from a scientific perspective. Richards contributed specifically to understanding value of housework in terms of its direct impacts on sanitation and nutrition standards. She also viewed the work of the home as a political arena where women could gain participation and recognition to create change in public and political life.

With the advent of electricity, urban homes were supplied with home appliances aimed at lightening the burden of housework. In this context, Ellen Richards pioneered work on water quality, domestic sanitation and household bacteriology. She used science as a tool to address problems related to the home and housekeeping, as a means of better the condition of mankind. The introduction of health standards in the home was seen as a way of inducing social change, not only within the walls of the home but also in broader society.

Both Beecher and Richards were part of the Home Economics Movement, which sought to promote professionalization in the work of the home as a center of social change and as a basic pillar to better health, education and social standards. The professionalization of this work was linked to the transformation of the public sphere, bringing issues of the home to the public domain.

*In many ways, the early home economics movement influences, and was influenced by, the Progressive movement. Richards and others were keen to see women have a greater role in public affairs, and they did this by using the work of the home as their fulcrum (Brodeur, 2012, p. 9.)*

Ultimately, it was Richards' effort to standardize and systematize the work of the home that resulted in the establishment of the first

Home Economics program. Furthermore, Nancy Tomes consolidated the invention of the germ theory of illness. Disputing the feminist critiques of home economics that claim home economists made baseless demands for increased cleanliness, Tomes provides ample evidence to justify the argument that the battle with bacteria in the first decade of the century was needed.<sup>6</sup> Public health as an additional concern of the Home Economics movement is linked with today's mental health studies regarding the work of the home, as it will be reviewed in chapter 3.

As part of the drive to professionalize the work of the home, Christine Frederick focused on making the work of the home less burdensome and more attractive through industrial efficiencies. "Fredericks' solution to the modern women's intractable problem of balancing paid work and housework was to make the work of the home easier, more attractive and fulfilling" (Brodeur, 2012, p. 12). As a proponent of Richards' domestic science paradigm, she argued that if women applied Taylorism in the home they could engineer their workflow to ease the time burden of housework and thereby come to find fulfillment in domesticity. Additionally, she argued that women were the primary consumers that would improve the post-war economy. Her focuses, both of which became controversial, were on advertising and the relation between producers and women engaged in domestic work. However, she supported her analysis by stating that housework could be more fulfilling than any other market work.<sup>7</sup>

The contributions of Home Economics movement have been widely analysed. Bettina Berch (1982), for instance, draws on the movement's principles and highlights the fact that women's role in economy has been neglected, even though they have actually

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<sup>6</sup> For a review of Germs Theory and its impact on the understanding of the work of the home and health see Tomes (1997).

<sup>7</sup> For further analysis on Christine Frederick work see Williams Rutherford (2003).

participated in core tasks that have a direct impact in the survival and growth of society through childrearing as the production and training of the future labour force, and household work, including the production of food, clothing, and finance, etc. She stressed the importance of this work as primary in relation to market work that should be seen as secondary, as it emerged in a market-based society.

In a nutshell, home economics as a profession, impacted curriculums in schools and universities, and has been valued for changing the perception of the work of the home and institutionalizing of the notion of the work of the home as 'home management, a profession that required intelligence, thought and study (Brodeur, 2012, p. 11). Nevertheless, this review will demonstrate that contemporary thinkers on the work of the home have actually recovered, Beecher's initial contribution of housework as the core of human and social capital generation.

While the understanding of home economics as a profession was being advanced through curriculums, high levels feminization of the work of the home furthered concerns. Charlotte Gilman Perkins (1860-1935) raised the first concerns surrounding the segregation of the work of the home as non-work done mainly by women during the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> In her agenda to free women from domesticity, Gilman still acknowledge the value of the work of the home and believed a better understanding of its professional elements will lead to a more egalitarian society in which the work of an individual is not valued by its individual utilitarian needs but as a expenditure of labour of society as a whole in order to comply with its organic functions.

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<sup>8</sup> Gilman Perkins (1899) first publication raised this issue clearly.

*“Gilman’s entire body of writings, from her poems to her fiction essays, are all built on a hope for change, for progress, and for integrating private responsibilities, such as domestic service, with public life” (Miskolcze,2000, p. 154)*

As it will be addressed in chapter 3, the idea of social individuals replacing utilitarian individuals will be revisited by contemporary scholars in the re-dignifying agenda of the work of the home.

Gilman was not alone in her concerns. After the industrial revolution reconfigured the work of the home as a feminine task

*Women, and urban, white, educated, middle-class women in particular, often regarded housework as drudgery unbecoming of their education and status. Men regarded the home and its care as a sphere benefitting a weaker, less capable sex, and lacking in broader scope or significance in its aims and influence. As the industrial economy expended in the early twentieth century, the home and its work became a contested space. Radical material feminists railed against the gendering of work and private sphere, arguing that it made the home a prison and degraded women by preventing full development of their capacities (Brodeur, 2012, p. 3).*

## **2. Politicization of the work of the home: the ‘Suspicion Model’ and the ‘Communion and mutual service Model’**

With the inescapable politicization of the work of the home came a second wave of feminism in the sixties. Simone de Beauvoir (1949) published “The Second Sex” as an inspiration for many feminists in the post-war years. In this book, de Beauvoir criticized the work of the home for limiting women to the domestic sphere, and

contributing to their exclusion and inferiorization vis-à-vis men. Furthermore, Betty Friedan's critique not only targeted the home but also the institution of marriage as a way of gendering the public and private sphere. Consequently she saw the rapid increase of women obtaining paid work outside the home, combined with falling birth rates as a positive road to a more egalitarian society.

However, feminists were disappointed when it was confirmed in the eighties that women, despite their shift to market paid work, continued to perform the majority of housework load. Dolores Hayden (1982), in her material feminism, argued against patriarchal structures that secluded women to some places and she included the home as one of these sites. Further along, Arlie Hoshchild, in 1989, published "The double bind" in which she catalogued this phenomenon as a double shift, bearing in mind that now women not only had to fulfil housework tasks but also attend to their market job full time, which resulted in a double shift. The increasing focus on the double burden theory led to a promotion of microwaves, pre-packed dinners and automatic clothes dryers, as convenient allies in the struggles to overcome the time pressures faced by dual-earner families.

Precisely, this focus on the time bind and time pressures had a deep impact on attitudes toward the work of the home. The intensification of the critique of the gendering of housework, the accelerated incorporation of women into the workforce and the practical considerations surrounding the home generated tensions for families about how to balance paid work with the work of the home. This was manifested in the proliferation of time-use studies throughout the 70s, 80s, and 90s, examining the balance of labour between dual-earner husbands and wives in attending to household tasks. Domestic work, as market labour but inside the privacy of the home became a new paradox for sociologists. Early studies in the

80s focused on tracing the historical roots of domestic work to slavery, given the constant higher representation of women from minority groups (ethnic, racial, migrants), and the inherent injustice that was held in it.<sup>9</sup>

A belief in the burdening nature of the work of home led to the analysis of technologies that could facilitate the different tasks attached to this work. This analysis was done based on the assumption that technologies modify our modes of sociality, which are designed on the imaginary of an existing neo-liberal individual as a culture of one (Strathern, 1992, p. viii), ignoring the social role of human being, especially in the household. Their main concern is how domestic life has been suffused by technologies as a central component of family and household culture (Silverstone and Hirsch, 1992, p. 1). Nevertheless, once domesticated, these technologies were thought to enhance sociability within the household. Many authors supported the idea of the work of the home as representing a moral economy, an idea that, as we shall see, was later recovered in contemporary studies of the work of the home.

In this vein, Cynthia Cockburn (1993) focuses on the microwave and its gendered design, Leslie Haddon (2004) analysed the home computer, and Sonia Livingstone (2015) takes on a broader analysis of the gendered practices that these technologies introduce in households. These studies, press as the core of the analysis technologies and gender, whereas the home is merely a context in which these elements are analysed. Furthermore, they focused on how these technologies further enhanced gendered dynamics in the home that could contribute to more inequality. In studying these dimensions, the authors unintendedly, highlighted the permanence of this work in the lives of women.

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<sup>9</sup> Bossard, James (1966); Coser, Lewis (1973), Rollins, Judith (1985); Cohen, Philip (1998); Anderson, Bridget (2000).

Parallel to these studies, a representative amount of literature between the 80s and 90s, dedicated sociological efforts to explaining inequalities in work at the home from a gender perspective. These studies are divided into time allocation, “doing gender” and power bargaining, as variables that helped to explain the persistence of the inequality in the division between women and men of the work of the home. These gender scholars found economic studies to be a relevant basis for their analysis and focussed on identifying different housework tasks and studying their distribution. Even though their contributions furthered the understanding of the work of the home and its nature in many relevant aspects, this approach soon became obsolete, mainly due to the fact that the empirical findings were increasingly inconsistent. Not long after, the scholarship on housework became segregated into gender inequality concerns and a new approach became necessary to address concerns about the nature of the work of the home.

The previously mentioned work, however, focused neither on the value nor the status of the work at the home in society. This is due to primarily to the focus on gender inequality and housework, which was only the case study through which this could be analysed. Various scholars have referred to this approach as guided by the suspicion model.<sup>10</sup> This model assumes that men will not comply with their obligations as husbands and parents, and enhance the gender division, rather than contributing to the building of trust relations and the solution to this problem.<sup>11</sup>

Sociologists and other found this model to be compelling due to its reflection of current social issues

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<sup>10</sup> Alvare, Helen (2009).

<sup>11</sup> The most well known proponent of the suspicion model is Martha Alberton Fineman, but others have followed this model. See Fineman (2008) and Hamilton (2004) among others.

*There is a historical record of men's inclination to dominate women, both within the family and in legal, social, political, and other institutions. This has been accompanied by a devaluation not only of women's work inside and outside the home, but also of their persons, including their very capacity for rationality... women perform a great deal more care-work for children than men perform. Even today, with high numbers of women in the paid workforce, women on average are still performing more housework and childcare than men (Alvare, 2009).*

Nevertheless, the model makes problematic assumptions and ignores multiple basic conditions of the work of the home. It disregards sexual difference, viewing the body as a mere tool and denying its agency. It ignores the social functions of the work of the home, and assumes that the state or the market can replace housework as an outright.

Against the suspicion model scholars focusing on the family, as the primary institution that supports the work of the home, proposed an analysis of the relations within the household based on consent. "The family is primarily supposed to rest upon consent- that is on certain spontaneous attachments such as occur in animals and plants" (De Silva, 1990, p. 144). Discussions about the inequality in the division of the work of the home were criticized for missing the qualitative elements to the equation. How power was balanced at the home, could be related to the type of power women and men had were qualitatively different but equally important.

Furthermore, homemaking was seen as a full time job, that child rearing and constructing a home was an end itself and should not be undermined in comparison with the labour market (De Silva, 1990, p. 146). The underlying argument remains that the work of the

home is not a source of coercion; rather a place where human beings are fulfilled and this status should be recognized, dignified and supported

*The home as a sphere of vast social importance and supreme spiritual significance...There may be women who are uncomfortable in family life...There are wives who do not want to be mothers and there are lawyers who do not want to be judges. But, taking normal human nature and historic tradition as a whole, we cannot be expected to start the discussion by assuming that these human dignities are not the object of human desires...We cannot assume that bringing forth and rearing and ruling the living beings of the future is a servile task suited to a silly person" (De Silva, 1990, p. 150)*

Among the most compelling argument to dignify the work of the home has been related to child rearing, yet the work of the home must be seen as a unity, as a whole. These scholars have been careful to attach child rearing to the rests of this work, given that it should all be dignified and taken into account.

*To grow and thrive, children need not just food and material goods but also care and affection that promotes their health, cognitive development, and social and emotional well-being (Waldfogel, 2006, p. 1).*

The engagement of scholars on the work of the home solely as child rearing, for the interest of society, is a basis for the work of the home as a qualitatively important, but it can suffer for its narrow sight of the work of the home as a fractioned work were mechanic tasks are relegated as domestic undervalued work and care and child rearing as the relevant and dignified work of the home.

A model that can counter-balance the problems of the suspicion model and fill its voids is the communion and mutual service model (from now on “the communion model”.) This model approaches the concerns of the suspicion model by calling men to comply with their human responsibility as fathers and upon governments to step in when families are suffering (Alvare, 2009, p. 192). “The model adopts a notion of the meaning of the service or gift exchanged between men and women, a notion that fundamentally tries to reorient the dialogue between the sexes toward a positive outcome” (Alvare, 2009, p. 192).

Furthermore, in a revision of feminist and gender studies’ assertion of women’s absolute oppression through the work of the home, Catherine Hakim proposed an analysis of the diversity of women’s choices and preferences, demystifying the role of homemakers as coercive. She also contradicts the feminist claim that with rising rates of women joining the labour market, the division of housework will become more egalitarian. Additionally, the overwhelming focus on the second shift of women from the household to the workforce has been overstated, bearing in mind that “apart from the creation of segregated part-time workforce there have been no substantial changes in the level of female employment for over 150 years” (Hakim, 2004, p. 2).

The most relevant contribution Hakim has made to the study of the work of the home, bearing in mind that her main focus is not housework but women’s labour, is the preference theory. This theory explains women’s choices between market work and family work. Highlighting that women cannot be treated as a homogenous group in modern societies, she inquires into the diversity of women’s lifestyles. She divides these lifestyles in three types: a. Adaptive, b. Work-centred and c. Home-centred, arguing that the second case is the least common, whereas the adaptive option that balances work

and home is the prevalent. Home-centred women only represent one fifth of her sample, however, she includes it as a free choice based on their preference and not coercion. Her analysis of the work of the home is guided by economic standards of tasks measured by quality in relation to time, which serves her to conclude that housework, nevertheless important, does not equalize to wage work in the competitive market economy (Hakim, 2004). This approach reflects a focus on individual choices and individual interest driven market, which will further be questioned by contemporary scholars in the next chapter.

### **3. Rethinking the work of the home as a producer of human and social capital**

*On the whole, I am rather less interested in what people do than in why they do it. (The Ball and the Cross, G.K. Chesterton)*

Rethinking the work of the home, after decades of debate around its content and its division, meant a shift towards explaining why do people engage in the work of the home and how these motivations dialogue with other spheres- such as the wider economy, society, politics, health- placing the work of the home at the centre of human sociality.

Sergio Belardinelli (2011) has made an encompassing analysis of the work of the home as a central sphere of social capital production. The home as a crucial factor to how our society works, however, has been neglected. Belardinelli accounts for the highly unsettling concerns that the segregation of the work of the home can bring to our society. He illustrates this contradiction by highlighting that the fact that the dominant culture tends increasingly to consider the home and the family, as an eminently

“private matter,” even though the family is a place where society creates its ethos, its fundamental values, which are essential for ensuring an ordered civic life. He points to the need to recognize this fact as a first stepping stone that would lead to radical changes for the subjectivism which dominates our culture.

Belardinelli also recovers past concerns regarding the suspicion model versus the communion model, as does Pierpaolo Donati (2012).

*The way in which women enter the world of employment, almost as if they can achieve true ‘self-realization’ only by leaving the walls of the home, denotes a dramatic tension between family life and social life (Belardinelli, 2011, p. 2).*

This tension persists today, and Belardinelli appeals for an urgent reconciliation of family time and work time, bearing in mind that the life and work of the family are reflected in the life and work of society. His emphasis on the family and the work of the home expounds on their strengths as the place where intergenerational links are established and the traditions (memories, identities and hopes) of communities are safeguarded. Recognition of the value of the work of the home is necessary to counter-balance the overwhelming force of individualism which, ultimately, leads to a growing indifference towards any idea of good, much less one that can be shared or encouraged as a common good.

In this line of thought, Maria Teresa Russo (2011) provides a conceptual basis for rethinking the relation between the market and the work of the home. She asserts that the home is the starting point where subjectivities are shaped, making it the most important sphere in an individual’s life.

*Domesticity indicates a relational dimension, which is expressed in a way of living together is materialized in a sum of habits and practices which are, at the same, its reflection and condition. A family's life can only be built through the definition and the sedimentation of actions and attitudes, which express everyone's ability to give themselves without keeping an account, and which regulate the small events of life. (Russo, 2011, p. 5)*

She argues that domesticity seems to be going through a time of crisis where family ties are more fragile and social life is increasingly atomized. On this basis, she advocates for recognition of the home's importance, "The current consumer mentality creates the risk of turning domestic work into a factory of desires, where any service has to be paid for and the gratuitousness seems to have disappeared" (Russo, 2011). As a solution to this she proposes promoting a culture of care in political, professional and cultural life.

Given widespread evidence across disciplines of the relevance of work of the home, Maria Sophia Aguirre studies the link between the work of the home and the analysis of social issues. In her analyses of sustainable development, focusing on human being's centrality and their relations, she highlights the importance of the work of the home as the epicentre of social production determining the social relations that make human advancement possible.<sup>12</sup> This integral approach to sustainable development, in relation to the work of the home, demystifies the assumption that human individuals act as maximizers of individual interest, bearing in mind that their decision-making cannot be distinguished from their social nature. This focus on the sociability of human beings in their initial and determining environment, such as the home, is essential to grasping these authors' contributions to the literature.

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<sup>12</sup> Aguirre (2007, 2014 and 2015)

Focus on the development of human capital in the family through the work of the home has been justified in multiple fronts. A first focus has been on children, and their differential advantages and capabilities to be contributing members of society depending on how they live sociality at home. These scholars specifically advocate for functional families and stable marriages, based on the reasoning that they can be determinant in a child's development, social performance and psychological and physical stability. In turn, this production of social capital through the nurturing of members of the household, in the right condition, has a direct impact in labour market. Their performance in the economic realm is dependent on their socialization into economic life within the family.<sup>13</sup>

In one of her studies, Aguirre illustrates her case in the specific analysis of children's behaviour in relation to family dinners and family conditions (Aguirre 2007.) Bearing in mind that the family and work of the home play an important role in the production of human beings, as social and moral capital, Aguirre focuses on the ways both parents and children spend their time and consume goods as an indicator of the values parents place on the attainment of certain skills and the quality of consumption. Her main research question is how they make their choice on the allocation of time and how that has affected family dinners. A historical review shows that dining has always taken a central role in human interactions and relations. Not only with regards to the content of the meal but the form and the environment in which this takes place has been the subject of great attention by households. Today its central role has not been forgotten and Aguirre's findings show that the frequency of

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<sup>13</sup> The literature that highlights the importance of family structure for the economy and social stability as well as for health, psychological stability and social cohesion is very large. Some of the writers include Becker *et al* (1993), Akerlof and Cranton (2010), Akerlof *et al* (1996), Aquilino (1996), Wilcox *et al* (2015), Amato and Keith (1991), Aguirre 2006a and b), Jaynes (2001), and Holmes *et al* (2007).

family dinners strengthens family relationships, increases academic performance and helps prevent substance abuse (Aguirre, 2007, p. 6.). Due to the importance of family dinners and adequate time allocation, Aguirre concludes that

*Governments can foster and promote the family through using multiple tools, taxes, education, health care, homeownership, and work participation policies. Within this context if governments aim at increasing the quality and frequency of family dinners, three issues need to be addressed: working hours, after school activities and long commutes... Policies to be effective must address the needs of the family as a unit and not the needs of each of its members independently of each other...At the private sector level, businesses also need to respond to the need of strengthening the family (example: flexible working hours for men and women, work sharing, and the provision of facilities that allow parents, especially the mother, to work from their home some days of the week. (Aguirre, 2007, p. 12).*

Hellen Kersley (2011) furthers an understanding of the value of the work of the home by distinguishing between three economies: the Natural Economy, the Market Economy and the Core Economy. The latter is where humans as social resources are made and it underlies the other two economies. She holds that our ability to function in the market as well as in society depends on this economy. In her analysis of sustainable development policies, she proposes ways to rethink the distribution of income and time in order to strengthen the core economy, which, ultimately, is the only way development can actually be sustainable. Admitting the value generated in the core economy brings forward the gap that exists between care professions and other professions that, proportionately, do not produce as much social value as the former.

In order to illustrate her point, she uses a 2009 case study from the New Economic Foundation (Lawler *et al* 2009), which shows that while a childcare worker produced 10 pounds value for each pound they were paid, a banker ultimately destroyed more than they were creating. In the current system, what people are paid does not necessarily reflect their worth to society. For example the fact that a hospital cleaner sits with the relative and gives them a cup of tea represents value, yet this is not taken into account when determining their wage. Kersley argues that these types of tasks are actually the glue that holds society together, and the fact that we do not pay for work in the household already has an implication for the way we think about its value. The strategy then must be to value and dignify the work of the home as a starting point to re-evaluate wage allocation in ways that further sustainable development.

Furthermore, Datiles (2009) has argued for the necessity of valuing the work of the home as a public matter. Recovering accomplishments of the Home Economics Movement, she analyses historical efforts that point to a necessity to professionalize the work of the home. She holds that the value of the work of the home has been hindered by financial value, which disregards human value. "Work in its multitude of forms, is recognized and valued as work, protected in labour law as work, and remuneration is given to those who work. Domestic work or housework, though called work, remains an anomaly." (Datiles, 2009, p. 1)

The usual justification for excluding housework from the category of "labour" is that it goes beyond the law's boundaries since it is done out of love and devoted ministrations. It is also denied legal status in social security benefits. Also, only labour can be taxed, so unpaid housework cannot be. The fact that the work of the home is exempted from legal standards when done by a family member has

affected domestic paid work as well, making it considered to be lesser than other types of work. Even though domestic paid work falls under labour law and contract law, because paid housework is done in the private sphere of the home it usually is treated differently from other works. Datiles thus highlights the existence of a critical disjuncture in that society and law do not give domestic work financial value, caused by a “failure to appreciate the work of the home as true work benefiting humanity, irrespective of the monetary” (2009, p. 12). This disregard of housework as productive work effectively kept paid domestic workers from the legitimate protective legislation that covers most other forms of work.

To contradict the currently accepted statement that the closer to private life the farther from the market, Datiles recovers Anne Brodeur’s historical account of housework prior to industrialization, when a family-run farm existed for the family and the market. Yet, today there is no social recognition of this kind of work, due to the fact that it has been historically assigned to marginalized communities such as slaves, servants, or members of lower economic classes (Datiles, 2009, p. 10). This has resulted in the lack of recognition of the work of the home as labour with crucial and undeniable benefits for humanity.

As a proposed solution, Datiles argues that the work of the home has evolved into a de facto profession. It presently does encompass three out of five elements that make up professions which are: 1. Remunerated work, 2. Certain level of education or training, 3. Local, national and international organizations, 4. A professional code of ethics, and a 5. License to practice. The work of the home lacks the last two elements, yet with further efforts this could be accomplished, and Datiles seems optimistic about it. She shows the professionalization was mostly due to the efforts of nineteenth

century Home Economics, which has been an inter-changeable term with work of the home in various places and moments in time.

In order to strengthen her case Datiles quotes Raymond Le Guidec's support for the professionalization of the work of the home:

*The work at the home, like any other profession, requires that those performing this work and service benefit from a strong, foundational education in their field to a level corresponding to their choice of specialization...By shifting the focus from remuneration to being acknowledged as socially useful, thus laying the basis for its formal recognition, we give the work of the home grater quality within the world of work. Recognizing that work is also a means of participation in social integration and as such deserves to be supported in the name of social solidarity (Raymond Le Guidec, 1995, p. 645).*

### **Furthering the field**

Home Economics as an extended antecedent to sociological analysis of the work of the home as well as sociological, is useful to understand how contemporary literature has recovered continuous concerns of the social and human value of the housework. This has been systematically undermined by concerns highlighted by feminist agendas. This was partly cause by the impact that the shift of women from housewives to employees in the labour market, had in the modes of perception of gender. This shift was seen as absolute and as the focal point to study and view the work of the home. In turn, this view foreshadowed a more comprehensive analysis of the history of the work of the home as Anne Brodeur (2012) has reminded us.

Contemporary analyses of the work of the home as the central producer of human and social capital, dignify housework as a paradigm to approach social, economic and public policy issues,

bringing to the fore the social nature of human beings and the fictitious nature of divisions between economic and social matters, as well as between emotions and rationality, and private and public matters. These authors seek to demystify the imagined division between the labour market and housework, and the subjugation of the latter to the former.

Identifying the dialectic in which the work of the home is immersed in allows for acknowledgement of its importance.

This approach, both novel and having substantial precursors in the literature over the past several centuries, has filled a missing gap in addressing the work of the home, its meaning, necessity, and value. It is based on concerns over time regarding the segregation of the work of the home as complementary and secondary in relation to dominant spheres in public life, such as the market and the state. What is clear is that these spheres have failed in numerous ways to actually tackle social issues such as security for young people, sustainable development and reduction in violence rates. These authors highlight that this failure can be partly attributed to a total neglect of the importance of the work of the home. In doing so, they open a path for an ample and fundamental future research agenda. Further studies on the humanizing role of the work of the home, its necessity and professionalization, as well as the construction of a pedagogy about its importance, are pressing in order to bring this agenda forward.

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