

Rosemary Crompton**Employment and the Family. The Reconfiguration of Work and Family Life in Contemporary Societies.**

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The main objective of this complex book is to examine the changes in the articulation between employment and the family in contemporary Western societies, together with its main consequences. One of the most important factors behind these transformations is the recognition of women's rights to equality with men. This was a long process, but in the recent decades, women's employment has become widespread and is now considered "a fact of modern life".

Multiple dimensions are taken into account. Firstly, an historical, long term perspective, mostly based on the evolution of the family in Great Britain, is used to introduce the main questions. It shows quite interestingly that the British family evolved since the industrial revolution toward the male breadwinner model and its normative accompaniment, the ideology of domesticity, which was based on the institutional separation of women from the political, and much of the economic spheres of human activity. During the 19th Century and a good part of the 20th, institutional arrangements such as school hours, pensions, family wage for men, benefits for women as wives and mothers, and others, developed and became solid foundations of the social structure. On the economic side, Fordism developed as a system, characterized by mass production, full employment for men, the development of state welfare and rising standards of consumption. Gradually though, during the 20th Century, women acquired political and civil rights in Britain as well as in most Western countries. At the core of the early 21st century's preoccupations, we find the new balance that has been reached since women, and mothers in particular have entered the labour force. Where are we in terms of women's equality? How is work, including both domestic and market activities, distributed between men and women, and is this distribution the same in each social grouping?

Secondly, the sociological perspective is based on several theoretical notions developed by the author herself and many other sociologists. Crompton structures and builds her thinking as a constant discussion between her own thoughts, sociological theories and some empirical evidence, both qualitative and quantitative. This approach makes for very interesting reading, but demands a persistent effort from the reader to follow the complex reasoning. The main object of this approach consists in conceptualising and analysing the interdependence between "work" and "caring". It draws on the idea that in modern reflexive societies, global work (Glucksmann's total social organisation of labour, TSOL) has been divided up between and allocated to different structures, institutions and activities. A second and very important element is that formal and domestic economies are embedded in changing cultural and political contexts. This being said, the central question facing contemporary societies is how the "care" activities can be accomplished without provoking inequalities between men and women and between social groups. "Care" has a dual nature: one that can be marketised, i.e. that can be considered as work in an economic sense; one that cannot, i.e. that can only be exchanged and provided by those bound by the ties of kinship, affection or both.

Moreover, changes in the world of work in the economic sense have created jobs that are more often short-term and flexible, without the stability attached to full-time work on which a career could be built. In addition, the nature of individual qualities and behaviours required to move out of lower level jobs is likely to increase work pressure as well as working hours. These features are likely to

maintain gender inequality and support the persistence of the ideology of domesticity.

Finally, the notion of “choice” or individual preferences is discussed. The author recognizes the increase of choices in respect of residence, occupation, consumption and personal life. But the social constraints limiting the significance of these choices are examined and the notion of “class” is welcome to better understand the limits of the preferences that men and women have. Here again the cultural settings are determining, and have consequences for social policies. The policies themselves are important as it is shown that in nations where social policies and dual-earner family support are universal and well developed, both class and gender inequalities are lower; on the other hand, in nations where targeted / market-oriented or basic social security policies are prevalent, gender equality is medium and class inequality is highest.

The third perspective is the confrontation of ideas with empirical evidence, both qualitative and quantitative, completed with comparative analysis of nations. The qualitative material comes from 126 work-life interviews conducted in Britain in 2001-2003 in the Organizations, Careers and Caring project funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (refereed in the book as the JRF project). The interviews cover three service sectors — retail banking (Cellbank); supermarket retail (Shopwell); local government (2 localities, Sheffield and East Kent, 4 employers) — and were conducted at all organizational levels up to middle management, with both men and women. The quantitative data comes from the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey and the International Social Survey (ISSP). Taken in many countries since 1983, ISSP includes modules for specific topics every year, as well as a core questionnaire repeated each year; a module on family and gender roles was integrated in BSA in 1989, 1994, 2002. Moreover, in the Economic and Social Research Council project, a set of questions on careers and organizational experience was included in the British family module of 2002. Access was obtained to the 2002 ISSP family module for France, Norway, Finland and Portugal.

From the methodological point of view, excerpts from qualitative material were well integrated to reinforce the theoretical reasoning. Quantitative data was used in support of some hypotheses, mostly as simple crosstabulations drawn from survey data; regression models were put in the appendix where appropriate. Finally, two types of comparative analysis of nations were presented: “variable oriented” to emphasize similarity; “case oriented” to emphasize specificity.

The book comprises eight chapters. After an introduction presenting the main questions and summarizing the various chapters, chapter 2 focuses on the class differences in gender roles and the division of labour within families. It shows that since the 1980s a major and generalized change occurred in gender role attitudes and attitudes to employed mothers. Despite the depth of the change, variation by occupational class is still observed: routine and manual employees being the most conventionally “familial”, and routine and manual women most likely to reduce their level of employment when they have children. Is this the result of preferences or a rationalisation of the constraints of class-related inequalities? Chapter 3 deals with careers and the impact of organisational change on their evolution. Careers have become more individualised and more flexible. A case study shows evidence that even at the lower levels of the job ladder managers and supervisors were expected to show their commitment by working long hours. This obligation made these jobs unattractive to workers who had caring responsibilities, and for those ones who took these jobs an increased level of stress was observed. This seems particularly difficult for women who did not enjoy domestic support. Chapter 4 continues to explore the employment relationship and looks at the total hours that couples work in their jobs. Britain differs from Europe, with its “one and a half” breadwinner model, where the total number of working hours is lower than in the case of two

full-time workers. Positive “work-life” or “family-friendly” policies are examined in the context where other managerial strategies to increase work intensity and commitment can have a counter effect. Chapter 5 looks at international comparisons of statutory policies to articulate employment and family, trying to study their impact on inequalities of class and gender. Scandinavian countries score well on these grounds, showing low levels of work-life conflicts, while Britain and the US have the highest levels, with long working hours and marketised family supports. Chapter 6 turns to the division of labour in the household; as expected, women carry most of the domestic work in the six countries studied, but France and Portugal reported the most traditional gender domestic division of labour. Contrary to the arguments of traditionalists who have argued that men and women are happier when gender traditionalism prevails, it was shown here that the most “liberal” combination of gender role attitude and division of domestic work is associated with highest levels of personal and family happiness. Chapter 7 turns to “choices”, and analyses the complex relationship between attitudes, institutional constraints and circumstances; class plays an important role and the class-related employment status of women could lead to deepening gender and class inequalities. Finally the concluding chapter raises many theoretical and conceptual questions that are critical to our understanding of the reconfiguration of work and family life in contemporary societies.

This summary of the book does not do justice to the contribution that the author makes to the debate around these questions. For the family demographer that I am, the book is a very stimulating one. It shows that the necessity of taking into account the way both members of a couple devote their time between work and care. Most importantly, it also confirms the usefulness of reintroducing “class” or social group in analyses done by demographers, which are usually based on individuals. It is indeed one of the main contributions of this book to illustrate and discuss the impact of belonging to a particular social group on reaching or getting away from equality between men and women in the process of the family-work relationship reorganisation. The only serious limitation of the text relates to the lack of consideration of family changes other than the entry of women, or mothers, in the labour force. Contemporary family dynamics are also strongly influenced by growing conjugal instability, leading to the increasing importance of new family models such as lone parent families as well as step or blended families. Can one assume that the balance between family responsibilities and work is not affected by this other type of “reconfiguration” that the family is undergoing in contemporary Western societies?

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