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INFORMAL ECONOMY, GENDER AND
FLEXIBILITY OF THE LABOUR MARKET.
INDUSTRIAL HOMEWORKING IN RURAL SPAIN

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INFORMAL ECONOMY, GENDER AND FLEXIBILITY OF THE LABOUR MARKET. INDUSTRIAL HOMEWORKING IN RURAL SPAIN

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The growing internationalization of economic activities in recent decades has been accompanied by the relocation and restructuring of work processes in many parts of the world and in different sectors of the economy, especially in labor intensive industries. This process of reorganization of production, lead by the search for a greater flexibility of the labour market, has implied an increasing importance of different forms of "atypical" work which quite often fall within the so-called "informal economy" in which female labour is prominent though it can scarcely be traced in statistical records. Therefore, qualitative field work and a gender-aware approach are needed to explain the nature of these changes as well as to identify some of the forces that shape the new spatial localization of production. A clear example of this restructuring in southern Europe is industrial homeworking that is carried out mainly by women within the context of the black economy.

This essay tries to highlight the nature and function of women's industrial homeworking in the rural areas of Spain within this general context. In the first section we discuss the conceptual framework, the methodology and the presentation of the sample areas. The central section of the paper deals with the characteristics and nature of women's industrial homeworking as derived from the in-depth-interviews and questionnaires of the fieldwork, and in the final section we draw some conclusions.

The Conceptual Framework

A greater flexibility in the labour market and the decentralization of industrial production have become a basic strategy in the overall process of industrial restructuring; it is one of the alternative means by which firms can cut costs and minimize risks in a situation of unstable markets. In terms of labour relations, "flexibility" basically means an increased emphasis on such forms of employment as part time, casual or seasonal work, work on call, homeworking, i.e. forms that largely escape labour regulations as well as fiscal and social security charges. In this context, subcontracting part of production to homeworkers has been a very effective means of coping with international competition for firms in several labour intensive industries such as clothing, food, shoemaking, electrical equipments, etc. and has given rise to interconnected networks of firms operating under different conditions in a hierarchy that goes down from the formal to the informal levels of the economy (Roberts, 1994).

In Spain, as in other countries of southern Europe, different forms of "atypical work", have expanded from traditional settings to new activities and economic sectors (Benton, 1990;

Hadjimichalis & Papamichos,1990; Stratigaki,1994; Vaiou,1994). As an integral part of the development model that allows the accumulation process, informal and unregulated work shows a complete integration with the formal economy with which it has a relation of dependence.

Within this context, the gender approach enables us to make visible the paid work of many women who in official statistics are not counted as part of the labour force and allows a fuller assesment of the impact of reorganization and relocation of industrial activity that takes place in different spheres, not only in the formal economy. In the same way, from a spatial perspective, the structure and the relations within the household have implications that are relevant for understanding the forms of decentralization of production as they shape the possibilities of women's participation in "atypical forms of labour". It is true that this kind of work involves women as well as men, but as one goes down to the lower levels of the informal economy, gender determines that the pressence of women is overwhelming.

In this process of reorganization lead by the search for "flexible labour markets", decentralization of industrial activities has been a prominent feature. In many countries it has taken place mainly in rural areas for several reasons: lower average wages rates than in urban areas; very low degree of unionization; declining income from agricultural activities and therefore an increasing need for alternative sources of employment; and the greater propensity for the social undervaluing of women's work in traditional rural households, where it not seen as real work but as "help" to the family income, in contrast with urban households in which a more individualistic approach to work prevails. In this sense, decentralization of production towards rural areas has emerged as a suitable strategy for firms to cut costs and increased their competitiveness in a international context. In particular, this has happened in industrial sectors that can fragment the productive process, are labour intensive and need large proportion of low-skilled workers. Prime examples are several consumer goods industries like garment, footwear, etc. with markedly seasonal fluctuations in demand due to changing fashions or similar factors.

Several case studies in Spain and elsewhere (Sanchis, 1984; Sanchez López et al., 1984; Ruesga, 1988; Sabaté et al., 1991; Benton, 1990; Gringeri,1993; Oberhauser,1995) show that work in the informal economy is still predominantly done by women. They are the first to become unemployed when firms reduce their staff and, quite often, they are guided by the same firms towards black work in small workshops or at home (Jodar & Lope, 1985; Ruesga, 1988; Sabaté et al., 1991). And among all forms of black work, industrial homeworking is almost exclusively done by women (Sanchis, 1984; Sanchez López et al., 1984; Benton, 1986; Sabaté et al., 1991).

We define industrial homeworking as paid work in the productive sphere and performed by the worker at home. This work is "invisible" in the sense it is performed within the private sphere and it is not counted in the official records; at the same time it is undervalued even by the people who perform it as it is not considered a "real" work. However

industrial homeworking is fundamental in southern Europe in explaining the decentralization of production and the increasing casualization of work. In this sense, industrial homeworking is a clear example that shows how gender roles and relations can be used by firms to ensure low wages and casual and irregular work (Allen & Wolkowitz, 1987; Beneria & Roldan, 1987).

In fact, from an analytical point of view, the productive activity in the domestic sphere points out the shortcomings of those approaches that separate the analysis of home and salaried work (Hanson, 1992). The analysis of industrial homeworking is closely related to the understanding of these links between household and production and requires a focus on the penetration of capitalist work processes that reinforce patriarchal relations (McDowell, 1991). Only such an approach can modify a dominant conception of work that marginalizes many forms of economic activity and especially those that are performed within the household. This approach can change the blueprint of the housewife who performs marginal work and opens the way to a more real image of women who combine unpaid housework with paid industrial homeworking through the extension of her working day.

The Study Areas: Catalonia, Galicia, Valencia and Andalusia

We present the first results of an ongoing and wider research on industrial homeworking by women in rural Spain. Four highlight areas have been chosen (Catalonia, Galicia, Valencia, Andalusia) in order to underline the decisive elements in the different family strategies of adaptation to different social and economic environments, such as personal and family pluriactivity patterns, job alternatives for women or social relations within the local community.

Our sample does not claim to be statistically representative. First, the universe of the concerned persons is unknown, and, second, we are mainly interested in (i) the study of gender relations within the family units (ii) the analysis of the work process, (iii) how gender relations create and reproduce patterns of life and work that constantly modify the family structures and the labour relations, as well as the gender roles themselves in both contexts.

The research is based on qualitative fieldwork. Eighty women have been interviewed, twenty for each area. A questionnaire and an in-depth interview are carried out with the same person, one after the other; the interview lasts about one hour and later on the transcription is made for the analysis of its content.

In Catalonia the interviews have been made in small inland villages located about 90 Km from Barcelona. The villages have an old industrial tradition in the textile sector where female work has always been significant. Nowadays, the industrial structure is more diversified and includes a number of firms in the metallurgical and the service sector, mainly small firms and workshops operating on a subcontracting basis. The age of the interviewed

women falls between 43 and 59 years, they have basic education, are married and their children are about 20 years old. It was difficult to find younger women in this situation and we think that this might reflect the availability of alternative job opportunities. All of them work in the garment industry at home and they have (since very young) work experience in textile factories or workshops. In three cases, they work for workshops that are subcontracted by large firms located in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area.

In Galicia the interviews have been carried out around the city of La Coruña, in rural villages with dispersed settlement. Galicia has a large active population in agriculture (over 40% of the economically active population) and is a low income region by Spanish standards, as it lacks any significant industrial tradition, with the exception of fisheries and a small number of industrial enclaves. The interviewed women are between 29 and 43 years old, they did not finish primary school, are married and have one or two children between 3 and 17 years old. They live in rural houses with an extended family (parents or parents-in-law), they work also in the small vegetable garden and take care of small livestock. They work in the women's garment sector for workshops subcontracted by large firms (based in La Coruña) that operate for the national market.

The women interviewed in Valencia live in rural towns in the inland part of Castellon province. The area has a strong industrial tradition in shoemaking as well as in commercial agricultural for export (citrus). Shoemaking has been a monopoly of a few large firms that were traditionally the main local employers of men as women who complemented their family income with earnings from some agricultural activity. Although Valencia is a major producing and exporting region in the shoemaking sector, the activity is undergoing a deep restructuring process with the closing of large factories and the subcontracting of work to many small workshops and homeworkers. Manual or machine sewing of shoes at home is virtually the only alternative for women in this area. The interviewed women are between 21 and 46 years old, they have basic education, are married and have two children between 7 and 18 years old. All of them have earlier experience in this work, first at the factory and later at home for different subcontracting workshops.

Andalusia has traditionally been one of the less developed regions in Spain and has a relative large agricultural population (over 23% of the economically active population). Latifundia dominate the landownership system and day labourers constitute the bulk of agriculturally active population. Up to the present, industrial activity has been almost nonexistent in most rural areas of the region. Since 1983, the policies of subsidizing agrarian unemployment in Andalusia (and Extremadura) have had a significant impact on the economic basis of rural households. Such policies aim to complement the income of casual or seasonal income of day labourers and provide a significant part of the earnings of many families in rural Andalusia. The women interviewed live in Osuna, a rural town at 90 Km of Sevilla, where above half of the active population works in the agrarian sector mostly as salaried casual labourers in large latifundia. The women are between 26 and 46 years old, two of them have no schooling, they are married and have two children between 1 and 19 years. They

work at home for workshops subcontracted by large or middle size firms in the garment sector, located in other towns; they often combine homeworking with the work on the fields as day labourers at the harvesting time (to be entitled to the agrarian unemployment subsidy) and with work as domestic servants on a per hour basis.

INDUSTRIAL HOMEWORKING IN RURAL SPAIN: ANALYSIS OF THE IN-DEPTH-INTERVIEWS AND THE QUESTIONNAIRES

A long and segmented working day

The complete working day of the interviewed women is very long (14 hours as an average in all areas) and always comprises several tasks. Salaried and domestic work together with family care are common to all of them, though in Galicia women also devote some time to the garden and pigs and small livestock.

Industrial homeworking is their main paid work and, if possible, they do it year round. Andalusian women, however, combine the period of low textile activity with agricultural work as day labourers, mainly in picking olives, or, in some cases, work in so-called "community work" organized by the local administration (the town council). In Andalusia and Valencia, some women work sometimes or have worked as domestic servants.

As far as the working schedule is concerned, a common feature is that any time span not devoted to paid work is occupied by domestic work and family care, and none of the interviewed women mention any leisure time or time devoted to some personal activity. The working schedule is highly discontinuous for women in Galicia, Andalusia and Valencia, as it alternates paid and domestic work up to four times during the fourteen working hours. The interviewed women wake up between 7 and 8 a.m. to start their domestic tasks (children's care, breakfast, basic food shopping such as bread, house cleaning, lunch etc.); about 10 a.m. they start with paid work which they discontinue about noon to prepare lunch and sometimes to pick up children from school. After washing up and cleaning the kitchen they go back to paid work which is again interrupted to prepare afternoon snacks for the children (merienda); later on they resume the paid work until about 8 p.m. when they prepare the family dinner. Only a few women resume paid work after the meal.

This conspicuous shifting between activities contrast with the fact that the interviewed women scarcely recognize the simultaneity of paid and domestic work. The only domestic task that they acknowledge combining with salaried work is doing the laundry.

In Catalonia, the working schedule is perhaps less fragmented, as it is organized in two neatly different parts: during the central hours of the morning (from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.) and the afternoon hours (from 3 to 7 p.m.) they are with their salaried work which is rarely

discontinued. Probably this is connected with the fact that they do not have children of school age.

During the weekends, women work much more with domestic tasks and much less with paid homeworking. Almost all of them declare that they engaged in salaried work only five days a week and take advantage of weekends to "have a rest" which means doing major house cleaning, the weekly shopping (on Saturdays) and doing the laundry and ironing (on Sundays), alternating with some leisure activities such as to go for a walk and to visit some family members. Nevertheless, when the paid work is very urgent or when they have some free time, they also may engage in industrial homeworking for several hours; this pattern is more common in Galicia and Catalonia and very rare in Andalusia.

The seasonality of industrial homeworking is much more marked in Galicia and Andalusia, where the interviewed women can have their working hours shortened to a half, than in Valencia and Catalonia where the working schedule is more regular during year round. This fact can be partially explained by different firm strategies but also by differences in patterns of seasonality of each branch of industry. All the interviewed women take some kind of vacations in summer (mainly August) when most firms stop their activity.

The specificity of industrial homeworking.

A special feature of this type of work is that it is done by the working woman at home and it is paid at piece rate (a destajo). The working women do not have any work contract and consequently they have neither a regular minimum wage, nor social security or retirement, paid vacations or entitlements to unemployment subsidies as enjoyed by workers with a legal contract. Usually they have a direct relationship with the person -- a middleman -- who offers the work with whom they discuss the piece rate and the deadlines for finishing the task. Quite often this middleman supplies them with the materials and sometimes even the tools and the machine when it is needed. The women themselves freely organize their working schedule and keep control of the working process.

The women from Catalonia, Galicia and Andalusia work in the garment sector on behalf of small workshops subcontracted by large firms; the business is based on the distribution or the putting out of the sewing process (by hand or machine), though personnel with legal contracts are also employed (for instance for cutting and for coordinating the whole process). The women from Valencia work in sewing shoes also for small workshops subcontracted by large export-oriented firms.

The overall work system is similar in the four areas considered, as it is unregistered work based on payment by piece rate, lack of any legal protection etc. However, a closer look shows significant differences concerning the type of activity and the personal and social features of the working women.

The type of work performed changes according to whether the women manufacture the entire product or just a part of it, and whether it is done by hand or by machine. Quite often it is a kind of chain work among several homeworking women who make different parts of a garment, or among the home working women and the staff in the workshop or factory. Most of the interviewed women (all of the Andalusian and Valencian women and part of the Galician and Catalanian ones) only performed a very specialized segment in the production process. Only a few of them make the whole garment, usually in lesser quality garments made by machine (blouses, etc.) or in complements for higher quality garments that are hand made (belts etc.). In most cases, such tasks are not performed in workshops or factories.

The apprenticeship process is not paid as the majority of these women, especially in areas with a long industrial tradition (Catalonia and Valencia) are quite familiar with the type of work. In the other two areas, Galicia and Andalusia, it is not uncommon for some women to have to go to the workshops in order to be taught how to do a particular task. In any case, this is never paid and many of the women interviewed complain that in the first weeks or months of work their earnings are very low as they are still in the process of learning the job.

Usually the means of production and materials are just a sewing machine, often a specialized one (in Valencia to sew shoes and in Andalusia to sew anoraks or parkas), the pieces of cloth, thread, needles, buttons, zippers, foam, ornaments and stickers. Materials are always supplied by the firms with the exception of thread that, like the sewing machine is supplied (only in some cases) by the firm, according to its particular strategy of cost reduction and control. Quite often the women have to buy the machine on credit from the employer and have to pay maintenance and repairs; sometimes this is a condition of getting the work. Frequently, they also have to buy the thread and needles from the same employer, at a reduced price according to the women. A way to ensure "loyalty" from these women to a particular firm is by lending them the machine (for example, in Catalonia). Of course, the overhead costs of lighting, heating, foam, working space and storage are incurred by the women. In this way the firms not only cut monetary costs but also escape potential risks that they would incur with inadequate work conditions in their own shop.

All women interviewed declare that they choose the quantity of work they perform though they admit that there is a minimal amount of production. In fact, the amount of production is a major form of control of homeworking, specially taking into account that it is paid at piece rate. All the women agree that the more work they take or/and the quicker they perform and deliver it, the better they get paid. Payment by piece work becomes a powerful mechanism to ensure not only the intensity of work but also its rhythm and continuity with the same employer (some Catalan women say that they take more work that they would like in order to show their reliability to the employer).

The women point out the flexibility of this system as it allows them to work more or less according to their needs for income and their availability of time. But they consider

themselves to be exploited as they feel that the piece rate is low, though they do not consider the agreements on the amount of production in terms of abuse and control.

It is impossible to assess the average earnings by the hour for all areas due to the very nature of this payment system. However, some degree of homogenization among homeworking women in the Valencia area can be estimated around 40,000 pesetas per month for 7 work hours during 5 days a week. This homogenization comes from the fact that all of them performed a similar work and that there are many shops offering the same type of work which standardizes earnings. In the other three areas the earnings fluctuate between 15,000 pesetas per month (6 hours a day during 5 days a week) and 80,000 pesetas per month (9 hours a day during 6 days a week).

The women make agreements directly with their employer although there is hardly any possibility of bargaining. First, the middle persons pretend to identify themselves with the working women, arguing that the piece rate is decided by the firms and assuming that they established it on the basis of the standard time required by each task (if a particular worker does earn less it is thus explained by the fact that she is slower than the average). Second, the availability of workers in some areas as Valencia allows the middle person to discard those women who disagree with the conditions.

None of the women interviewed has a direct knowledge of the employers and the labor relationship with the firm is only the informal agreement with the middle person with whom the conditions of work and pay are "negotiated", who supplies the materials and to whom the finished goods are delivered. Galician women usually travel to pick up the material and to deliver the garments to the shops that usually are in the larger towns in a region of very dispersed settlement. In Andalusia it is also very common for the women themselves go to the shops (in the same town) even when the bulk of the finished product is very considerable; sometimes they are helped by their husbands with a car. In the other regions the middle persons always put out the materials and pick up the final product (in Valencia almost on a daily basis).

The working space and its environment are crucial in any analysis of salaried industrial homeworking. Virtually all the women have a room specially devoted to this paid work. The woman considers this space of her own as fundamental for her work. She values highly a large size and day lighting; they also value the fact that this physical separation allows them to keep the rest of the domestic space quiet and proper (they complain about the dust and fluff of some materials and, of course, about the noise of the machines). The availability of such space also allows them to adapt its furniture and other conditions to the requirements of the work. In Galicia, this work space is usually on the ground floor of the rural house, close to the kitchen and to the vegetable garden, allowing the women to combine several tasks and shaping the space for women's multiactivity pattern in this area.

The availability of space becomes a crucial issue in this type of work and quite often it is a condition for becoming also a middle person while still being a homemaker. Some interviews show that some women can store huge quantities of material at home which presents many inconveniences and also risks for the women (like fire, robbing, toxic smells) and benefits for the employer.

The decision to work for a salary as a homemaker

A common feature in all interviews is that the major reason to do homeworking is to earn money, although some women declare their wish to have some independent occupation. Personal fulfilment is never a major reason to work.

None of the women interviewed appears to have to work to ensure the "physical" survival of the family, and according to them, homeworking has a main function of raising the quality of life. But this has a very different meaning in the social, economic and cultural contexts of the different regions. In fact, in Andalusia this income from homeworking appears to be decisive to stabilize a very low family income from other sources (agricultural work, unemployment agricultural subsidies, "community employment" etc.).

Most of the women do the accounting of the family income although contributions from children are irrelevant and the retirement pensions from grandparents are only significant in Galicia. Many of them recognize that their own earnings are devoted to expenditures related to the children (clothes, schooling, leisure activities etc.) and, in fact, it is one of the major reasons behind their decision to work. They also spend their earnings on other domestic needs although the basic ones such as food and maintenance of the house are covered by the husband's wage. Some of the women interviewed devote all their earnings to building and buying the equipment for a new house (in Galicia and Valencia).

It is very common in Galicia, Valencia and Andalusia for women to declare that they work at home in order to be able to take care of the children, which does not mean to stay with them (as most of them go to school) but rather to prepare their meals at certain times, go with them to the doctor, take care of them when they are ill etc. They say they do it because they do not have members of the family nearby who could take care of them or they cannot afford to pay for the meals in school. This is very much enforced in Galicia by the dispersed settlement that imposes severe restrictions for women when looking for work. Although they do not say so, one of the major reasons for this choice is the possibility of tending to the husband or other family members, because it is clear that the fragmentation of their work

schedule adjusts to the requirements of children's care but also to that of their husbands, in particular to meal times. This is very obvious in Catalonia where the children are grown up.

Finally, a common answer in Valencia, but also in Galicia and in Andalusia, is the lack of other work alternatives for women in the area. Probably the existence of other work alternatives in Catalonia explain the bias towards the higher age of the Catalan sample.

Entire responsibility for household tasks and family care

A common feature in all the areas considered is the entire responsibility of women for household work and family care. At best, husbands may help in particular activities (shopping, cooking, setting the table etc.) but they never share domestic work and children's care with their wives. In many cases the women interviewed admit that their husbands do domestic work out of necessity when they see them working all the day long, which implies that otherwise they would not help them. Women complain about this behaviour but curiously, many of them educate their children along the same pattern. In this way, they expect their daughters to help them, especially on Saturdays when the general cleaning of the house takes place.

An undervalued effort and work

All the women interviewed consider themselves to be insufficiently paid and most of them feel that they are exploited in relationship to the time consumed by this work. Although they claim to be more or less satisfied with their way of life, almost all of them would quit that type of work and take a better paid one, even outside the home, if they could.

The advantage they find in doing industrial homeworking is that they can easily shift from the paid work to the domestic tasks and consequently the flexible time schedule. The main inconvenience is that if they work in a shop they would enjoy social security, a fixed amount of working hours, paid vacations and retirement. One of the most common complaints is that their extremely long working day, including productive and reproductive work, always in the same place, can become overwhelming and oppressive.

It has to be taken into account that this type of work for long periods often carries severe consequences for women's health. Women frequently suffer back and arm aches, sight troubles, allergies to the materials, circulation problems and psychological disorders deriving from an exhausting schedule with minimal personal fulfillment and little recognition from the family. It is in this way that husbands scarcely recognized the importance of their wives's work as they consider that industrial homeworking is not "real work".

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Industrial homeworking in general, and in our case in footwear and garment industries, appears to be a form of production with substantial advantages for the firms. This is confirmed

by the diffusion of this type of work in areas with a long industrial tradition that are undergoing a process of restructuring (as is the case of Catalonia and Valencia) as well as its recent intrusion in areas with a weak or non-existent industrial tradition (as it is the case of Andalusia and Galicia). This industrial decentralization is linked to an important social issue, that is, the division of labour by gender and especially the value which is put upon women's work, which is looked upon only as a complement to family income; this attitude is deeply rooted and taken for granted in the rural environment, even by many women themselves. Besides, women homeworkers are not considered "skilled" workers, due to the fact that "nimble fingers" (that are really necessary to do the job) are considered "natural" and not acquired and thus are not paid extra (as if domestic activities were not an important training for nimble fingers).

But these advantages for the firms consist not only in low wages and savings in social security and means of production but also in the availability of different forms of control and exploitation that regulate productivity and work performance in informal homeworking. There is a strong control of the quantity and quality of production. A fixed minimum amount of work is required from every working woman and there is a direct correlation between quantity of work performed and remuneration -- faulty work is not paid. Conversely, the illusion that women organize their work schedule hides the fact that they have to extend their working hours as long as necessary to be able to deliver the finished product in the pre-established schedule. The control is even subtler when women feel that they have to fulfill pre-established engagements with the firm concerning the quantity of pieces and the delivery deadlines. It has to be remembered that freedom to determine the quantity of work that each woman worker is ready to perform is an illusion when the precariousness of her labour relationship with the firm is taken into account. Therefore, industrial homeworking achieves a quite high productivity thanks to self-exploitation by the working women who are ready to extend the working day or to speed up their work rhythm; they do it by flexibly organizing their working day in order to combine work that is perceived as necessary (the paid work) and work that is perceived as a duty (domestic work).

Industrial homeworking is quite often presented as a free choice by women who try to make two activities compatible (the domestic work and the paid one) but, in fact, this "free" choice has to be directly related to the restrictions deriving from gender roles and relations within the family unit. In this sense, the idea that women are first and foremost housewives economically dependent on the husbands, the heads of the family, still dominates the cultural patterns concerning work in rural areas; and this contributes to a permanent marginalization of working women as workers as well as women, leaving unquestioned their role in the reproductive sphere.

In industrial homeworking the geographical context plays a crucial role and, in our case, the rural environment appears to provide a pool of female workforce available for this type of work, which is made evident by the localization of firms (in urban areas) and the residence of the homeworkers (in the rural areas). Another differential feature that appears in

this rural environment is a particular type of adjustment of families to a new social and economic situation by this model of pluriactivity at a family level that we find in all the areas considered. In Andalusia, it is clear that industrial homeworking by women is a necessary complement to increase an unstable family income. In Galicia, this work offers an occupation to many women "trapped" in an isolated and dispersed rural settlement; in this case, family income is derived from various sources besides the husband's wage, such as retirement pensions of the elderly, self-consumption and the sale of the products of the small farm etc. In Catalonia, women contribute with their earnings to raise the already stable income derived from the husband's salary. Finally, footwear homeworking in Valencia represents the best solution for many unemployed factory women to maintain their family funds.

And each particular social, economic and cultural context becomes visible in the different job opportunities for women and their personal implications. In this sense, in Catalonia the women interviewed are older and they do not have daughters working with them because there are alternative opportunities for employment and the children have received a significant degree of formal education. But in Andalusia, for instance, some daughters work together with their mothers in the workshops (and even in the fields) as long as they stay single, although there is an increasing awareness that only education will give to women more opportunities to upgrade their standard of life and enjoy some degree of social mobility. And in no other region is it more clear that in Galicia that we are dealing with a "captive" workforce with no other local job opportunities.

Finally, we would like to stress, on the one hand, that the "integrated" or double approach in the analysis to both spheres together (production and reproduction) is the most appropriate one to fully understand not only the nature of women's work but also many of the processes linked with the new restructuring and decentralization of industrial production based on a greater flexibility of the labour market, and this is a basic contribution of current feminist thought to social theory. Conversely, it is clear that the local cultural and economic environment plays a decisive role in the construction of gender and this is very important for geography; it is quite evident that the nature and history of the productive system (industrial tradition, local cultural, alternative economic opportunities etc.) are intimately connected to the construction of gender roles and relations. And only through the analysis of the socially-determined gender constructions within their own specific geographical contexts can we attain an understanding of the nature of rural women's work and its regional variations.

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