

## **DOMESTIC KNOWLEDGE, INEQUALITIES AND DIFFERENCES**

(Article)

**ABSTRACT.-** Research suggests that domestic knowledge is an expression of gender differences, which is constructed and deployed through unequal social relations, and is able to empower women if it gains collective spaces of expression. The article presents an analysis of parental involvement at school in Spain so as to underpin the former thesis and highlight its connection with the political theory about the 'sexual contract'.

**KEYWORDS.-** Sociology of gender. Sociology of knowledge. Sociology of education.

Feminism. Gender relations in Spain

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This article explores the articulation of domestic knowledge, which is portrayed as a feature of the feminine difference, with class and sexist inequalities. It states that domestic knowledge can empower women in spite of class inequalities. Thus, the article enters the equality--difference contention from an intermediate stance, which rejects the extreme opposite arguments (Subirats, 1998). On the one hand, this thesis reminds that a simple definition of 'equality' as 'access to public resources' is not enough to understand empirical realities and discuss the full extension of citizenship to domestic life. On the other hand, it recognises the importance of the feminine difference, but signals the risk to overstate the point if the concept of inequality is neglected.

The article is divided into three parts. The first one reviews the academic literature about domestic inequalities and differences. It concludes that new opportunities and new mechanisms of regulation have simultaneously emerged. The second part reports a research project about domestic knowledge and parental involvement at school in Spain. It provides evidence to suggest that collective discussion can become a resource of power for women in that context. The third part links these ideas to academic debates about gender relations and citizenship.

### **The restructuring of domestic inequalities and differences**

Twenty years after some Feminists argued that domesticity was a key economic and political area (Molyneux, 1979; Zaretsky, 1976), academic debates on that issue have come to accept they were right. Nowadays it is difficult to assume that domesticity is a residual social element, or a 'natural' phenomenon, since long and vast evidence underpins theories

about its crucial influence on social structure and change. Some authors (Giddens, 1992; Santos, 1991, 1995) have posited that domesticity has become one of the most reflexive and modern fields of social activity, while others (Graziani et al, 1996) have suggested that a post patriarchal order can be emerging from this field. In their view, the social knowledge that emerges from domestic relations can re-equilibrate the gender imbalance.

It is advisable to define what domesticity and reflexivity are in order to discuss their mutual relationship. Domesticity is the field of actions carried out in households, which are residence units culturally contoured (McIntosh, 1987) and structured by long-term processes (Adelantado et al, 1998). Actually, in almost all societies it mediates two sets of social relations: those which reproduce the subordination of women and their alienation from themselves, their body, their progeny and the products of their domestic work; and those governing the performance of social labour other than domestic labour (McIntosh, 1987: 404).

Reflexivity is a property of consciousness, and it consists of the faculty to monitor one's own action (Giddens, 1984/ 1993). At first sight, modern actions are more reflexive than traditional actions, because tradition drew on ritualised and unchallenged formulae of truth while modernity has relied on science and universal principles. The request of proofs and rational arguments has induced to monitor actions on a more reflexive way so far, but post-industrial changes and ecological risks have recently caused a further development which even denies the half-traditional remains included in the idea of progress. Beck (1992) and Giddens et al. (1994) have interpreted that some modern institutions such as science were actually modern traditions, because their practitioners had transformed the faith on progress into a new formula of truth. These sociologists think that the contemporary decline of that faith has eventually accelerated modernization, since those

modern traditions have been challenged on new grounds (for instance, ecological risks or personal--political issues).

Domesticity has experienced a similar process. One hundred years ago Western modern states and national markets transformed domesticity into an exclusively feminine social space (Carrasco & Borderías, 1995). A set of disciplinary controls was institutionalised to patrol that social boundary and make sure that it was differentiated as a social region where women had to care for other people under strict public surveillance (Milkman, 1987; Berg, 1985; Stolcke, 1992). That discipline constituted a modern tradition whose formula of truth relied on the moral prescription of the sexual division of labour. But the circumstances are not the same at the end of the twentieth century. Women's labour activity has dramatically increased in many countries (Carrasco & Borderías, 1995) as well as women's access to schooling (Baudelot & Establet, 1992). Furthermore, the new situation has compelled many women to be responsible for both public and domestic activities at the same time, whereas men are seldom involved in domestic activities. Double workdays and double presence (Balbo, 1978) have been institutionalised as women's problems and have become the expressions of a restructured patriarchy. Although the sexual division of labour has not been overcome, public surveillance of the domestic boundary is not so direct today as it was fifty years ago.

Has this social change meaningfully modified the relationship of domesticity and reflexivity? Has domesticity become one of the most reflexive social fields? Even though the optimistic interpretations give affirmative answers to these questions, a brief review of these ideas suggests that they have highlighted emerging contradictions, which should be grasped in a more dialectic way in order to qualify some overstatements. Certainly, there

are new potentials for individualization once disciplinary controls have been mitigated, but inequalities persist under these new circumstances.

1. The 'reflexive modernization' thesis provides the first argument. It posits that the self has become a reflexive project for almost everybody (Giddens, 1992), because individuals cannot take for granted a highly institutionalised set of life trajectories any longer. Thus, women are better prepared than men to develop these projects, because their historical proximity to the romantic quest for love drives them to continuous self-analysis.

Nevertheless, the emergence of reflexivity is a contradictory trend that does not carry one-dimensional effects. It certainly broadens the social opportunities to introduce everyday life and domestic interests into politics (Giddens, Beck, Lash, 1994), but this fact does not mean that everybody enjoys a broader range of action. On the contrary, a new system of action emerges where reflexive and cosmopolitan individuals have the most privileged and powerful positions. Global élites and local groups (Castells, 1997), as well as integrated individuals and 'negative' individuals --- whose social bounds have been broken down; Castel, 1995 ---, do not have the same resources. The decline of the old domestic discipline has certainly open new spaces for some women, but it has also reproduced old inequalities in a new fashion, like the high risk of exclusion that single-mothers run under these new circumstances.

2. The 'end of patriarchy' thesis provides the second argument. It points out that patriarchy has definitely finished because some social changes have reinforced the importance of symbolic mediation, which is the source of feminine authority. Mediation is a set of social practices that bridge the cultural categories (domestic/ public, masculine/ feminine, present/ future, young/ adult/ elderly, etc.) that other social practices tend to separate. It entails a conscious monitoring of action, which becomes a more and more

influential social resource due to the spread of individualization. In these authors' view, these new circumstances create new spaces where the feminine way of being into the world and knowing it surfaces out of patriarchal controls (Graziani et al., 1996; Piuksi, 1990, 1996).

However, once again the optimism about the benign effects of the alleged decline of discipline runs the risk of overstating the point. The mere recognition of mediation does not cancel regulation, even though it makes social agents aware of the feminine side of culture. For instance, Scandinavian research indicates that a democratic access to public services softens the patriarchal discipline, but eventually it substitutes the disciplinary control of housewives by a new bureaucratic dependence or public patriarchy (Hernes, 1990).

Both theses suggest that new forms of subjectivity emerge who can subvert patriarchal inequalities by empowering the oppressed feminine difference. Those inequalities have obscured the importance of reflexive identities and mediation so far, but this situation becomes untenable once the widespread individualised selves need to monitor themselves and redefine the former clear-cut cultural categories. It is also argued that the alleged new potential comes from some identities and symbolic constructions that patriarchal discipline had restricted to domesticity. But both theses also seem to assume that the new potential is an inexorable force.

It is my view that the opposite theses about the probable substitution of discipline by other personalised forms of power should be reminded in order to moderate that optimism. Actually, it is reasonable to accept that the domestic--public boundary is not so tightly regulated by discipline as before, but it is still regulated. From a philosophical stance, Foucault (1975) has suggested that the political anatomy of disciplined bodies can be substituted by a 'bio-power' regulating populations instead of individuals, that is, direct

surveillance may have been substituted by less visible controls ranking people along prestige lines they have to discover on their own. Elias (1982) has also defended the same interpretation when arguing that the modern 'civilising spurs' relied on both explicit norms and self-constraint. Therefore, the domestic--public boundary was not only established by discipline but also by other personalised controls. Nowadays these personalised controls intermingle with the struggle of many women to re-structure it drawing on their historical resources, such as personal reflexivity and the authority legitimised by mediation, but they are also submitted to new regulation and self-constraint mechanisms that reproduce class and sexist inequalities in a new fashion.

### **Domestic Knowledge and Parental Involvement at School**

The analysis of a key element of the feminine difference --- namely, domestic knowledge -- within a specific set of unequal class and sexist relations concerning the domestic-public boundary --- namely, parental involvement at school --- can sketch the dialectic approach those optimistic theses lack.

In the Nineteenth century the disciplinary norm was that women had to teach basic knowledge to children at home. It stressed the 'natural' feminine traits of girls, whereas at school the state (and the Church in Southern Europe) transmitted the public knowledge that was necessary to become a citizen, or simply not to be stupid, as in Southern Europe more rhetoric liberal states (Bonal, 1995; Araújo, 1996). The obvious conclusion was that women were educated to educate, and that middle-class women had to control the educational practices of working-class and peasant mothers (Araújo, 1994; Ballarín, 1993; David, 1980; Woodhead & McGrath, 1988; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989; Pascall & Cox,



1993). In brief, domestic education of both mothers and children became a kind of discipline patrolling the domestic boundary with the same technologies of the self as were deployed to normalise sexuality and the body (Foucault, 1976, 1977) or good manners (Elias, 1982).

How is this set of social relations changing? Although it has not been read in these terms yet, it is reasonable to understand that the discourse on 'parental involvement at school' (Epstein, 1987; Davies, 1987; Tschorne, 1987) aims to substitute direct surveillance of parents' educational styles by stimulating new forms of reflexive domestic education. Parental involvement at school requires explicit self-monitoring of family educational practices and parents' ideals in order to make sensible decisions. Its supporters argue that it is possible to develop such a faculty by making the options and the steps clear to participants.

However, class and gender inequalities can be reproduced by these 'neutral' claims (Acker, 1994; David, 1993; Ball et al, 1995; Lutrell, 1995; Boulton & Coldron, 1996; David et al, 1997; Ball & Vincent, 1998). As a matter of fact, research about family educational styles has vastly proved that family reflexive practices eventually become decisive social resources for children's promotion in the field of schooling, because they stress the elaboration of linguistic contexts (Bernstein, 1990, 1996; Morais & Neves, 1992) and individualise children by means of the negotiation of roles (Kellerhals & Montandon, 1991; Montandon & Perrenoud, 1994). The same research has also found out that these educational benefits eventually raise social and cultural reproduction for two reasons. On the one hand, those social resources are quite more common among middle-classes than working-classes or ethnic minorities (Reay & Ball, 1998; Rambla, 1998); on the other

hand, if involvement is highlighted in an abstract fashion, women's actual contribution is entirely forgotten (David, 1993; David et al, 1997).

Therefore, at first sight the empirical expression of domestic knowledge seems to reinforce the same vicious circle. Certainly, parents who can monitor their educational styles from a self-conscious or reflexive stance often involve at school in a more influential and educational way than those who cannot. However, empirical research shows that collective domestic knowledge can overcome this inequality partially. Domestic knowledge is the everyday image that people produce of social relations within the household.

Although the sexual division of labour probably patterns men's and women's domestic knowledge in quite different ways, in a general sense we can assume that it is a social representation. All social representations construct and delimit social reality and prescribe a desired behaviour (Moscovici, 1984). They include some collective images establishing which social actors are salient, what is social action, and why something happens (Windisch, 1992). The most important facets of the representations underlying domestic knowledge are reasoning and rationalization.

a) Reasoning outlines the form of these social representations. It is the everyday interpretation of the own and the others' practices in base to discursive patterns that connect an image of the others and a view of action with an account of the factors that explain the situation. As to school choice, those who state their choices and those who are not explicit about them not only draw on different reasons but also articulate them in different ways. The first ones are often middle-class parents with some previous knowledge of schools and professions, who share an individualistic pattern of reasoning: it realises which are the subject and the other views, it induces to negotiation, and combines several factors in order to account for an event or a decision. They draw on the image of

‘calculation’, since they portray a relatively abstract picture of the immediate circumstances and then consider which is the best option. The second ones are often working-class parents with a previous knowledge of their locality, who share another pattern of reasoning. It blurs differences and expresses uncertainty about the other, and it induces to withdraw from action because the circumstances appear to be inexorable (Ball et al, 1995; Windisch, 1992; Rambla, 1998). They draw on the image of ‘reification’, since they portray the circumstances as though they were beyond their range of action. ‘Reification’ (in Latin ‘res’ means ‘thing’) is an extreme form of objectivation (Berger & Luckman, 1971) which is able to block social action. Of course, class shapes –but not determines—reasoning in this setting because middle positions are more influential in advance, but reasoning needn’t to be the same in other settings.

b) Rationalization outlines the content of these social representations. According to the psychologist Carol Gilligan (1993), rationalization can justify a decision in base to principles (ethics of justice) or particularities (ethics of care), and women have developed rationalization through particularities more than men due to their social responsibility for caring. Apparently, when people are socialised to care for other people, they learn to consider particular circumstances and features salient for decision-making; for this reason, if morals are reduced to principle thinking as Piaget did, feminine moral development is not properly understood. Besides, modern patriarchy has induced women to learn how to rationalise through particularities, because it has restricted caring responsibilities to a kind of domesticity ‘feminised’ by disciplinary power.

The next pages will provide evidence to argue that calculation and dual rationalization empower collective domestic agents to face public services or defend private rights, even though calculation shows a class bias in individualised and formal

settings. Calculation reinforces the speakers' reflexivity. Dual rationalization draws on principles and particularities at the same time. It mediates between the public 'ethics of justice' and the more domestic 'ethics of care' Gilligan (1993, 1994), which are not equally distributed between men and women. Collective discussion can even out both class and gender rhetorical inequalities by generalising calculation and opening new spaces where dual rationalization attains a more prestigious position.

In base to fieldwork carried out in Spain from 1994 till 1997 two samples of interviewees (mostly mothers) have been compared with regard to their domestic knowledge about schooling. The first sample has answered a semi-focused interview and the second one has participated in focus groups (1). The following table summarises the main findings and suggests four propositions:

'Table I here'

I. Class polarised reasoning in semi-focused interviews.

II. Both calculation and reification made a dual reference to particularities and principles in semi-focused interviews.

III. All focus groups used calculation and combined rationalization through particularities with rationalization through principles.

IV. The perspective of working-class women shifted from one occasion to the other.

*I. Class polarised reasoning in semi-focused interviews.*

Most middle-class mothers used calculation while most working-class mothers used reification. That polarization was noticeable when outlining other people's practices, making reference to one's own involvement in action, or sketching the explanation of social phenomena.

a) Many middle-class mothers were very good at comparing the others' practices. They drew a whole radiography of localities distinguishing middle-class and working-class areas, and they were also used to calculate the advantages and disadvantages of each school. On the contrary, most working-class mothers expressed a deep uncertainty on the features of local areas or local schools.

b) Whereas middle-class mothers negotiated with teachers recognising each part's interests and possibilities, working-class mothers declared to wait and see.

c) Middle-class mothers mentioned a variety of factors to account for school problems or events. For instance, some of them pointed out that success not only depends on academic but also psychological factors, or that choice was intrinsically difficult due to the partiality of available sources of information. Conversely, one-cause accounts were very common among working-class mothers. Thus, some of them considered that children simply learnt to read and write at a certain age, others argued that school life depended exclusively on a vague factor defined as 'what you have inside', and others stated that vocational guidance is always misleading due to the economic crisis.

*II. Both calculation and reification made a dual reference to particularities and principles.*

It was very easy to spell out how calculation combined particularities and principles. Empathetic recognition, subtle negotiation, or multi-factorial accounts were told by means of short stories that embraced any particular circumstance, but they were also explicitly oriented by some educational principles.

On the other hand, even though a previous hypothesis guessed that uncertainty, withdrawal and one-dimensional causality were not expressing any moral theory but the consciousness of being subordinate, reification neither nullified references to principles nor to particularities. Content analysis found out that this mechanistic view of reality was embedded in stories led by general principles such as the need to study. Particularities were not so clear as in calculation, but they were salient. Listing the academic problems of a child or the schools at the locality, in spite of exaggerating the external constraints, requires some attention to particular circumstances. Probably they were not so subtle as in calculation, but particularities were there.

*III. All focus groups used calculation and combined rationalization through particularities with rationalization through principles.*

Middle-class and class-mixed focus groups drew on calculation reasoning either to defend the advantages of their school or to prepare arguments to complain. That discourse often alluded to some principles such as the need to control schools, pedagogical ideas or the educational importance of parental involvement. And these principles were accurately qualified by references to particularities, since many stories

about students' personal or academic circumstances were reported, and even more, many mothers stated they were involved in associations for personal fulfilment.

Working-class focus groups drew on the same discursive resources in a different way. Reification was scarce in those discussions, and never patterned the whole interview. For instance, one group started with an inexorable view of school problems -- namely, the bad conditions of the playground and the distance between policy-making and people's life ---. But later on all these assertions were counterbalanced by many comparisons, instead of uncertain references to other people, and the discussion ended with a structured and multi-factorial account of children's behaviour. Calculation, on the contrary, was quite more common than it had been in the interviews. For instance, two signals of this pattern of reasoning were an empathetic approach to teachers' concerns or the former account of children's behaviour.

As to particularities and principles, working-class focus groups combined them in a specific way. Certainly, educational principles (for instance, education in values or the importance of parental involvement) were mentioned and supported by stories on particular circumstances, as the other groups had done, but this was not the only discursive function of particularities. In other occasions they challenged official classifications (good vs. bad schools, good vs. bad children, non-gipsy vs. gipsy neighbours), asked 'silenced' questions (how can we speak to children, how should we punish them), or even denounced aggressions (girls' sexual harassment by some male teachers).

*IV. The perspective of working-class women shifted from one occasion to the other.*

The middle-class discourse displayed a congruent homogeneity after comparing both samples. Respondents exhibited an informed perspective on the schools and areas at their locality, reckoned the advantages and disadvantages of each decision, recalled a variety of factors to explain why educational problems appeared, or portrayed a very rich picture of the school influence on domestic life.

Conversely, working-class perspectives about localities and educational problems dramatically changed from interviews to focus groups. In the interviews, uncertainty on urban areas or schools portrayed localities where reification was the discursive pattern. No action seemed possible if those accounts were to be believed. Nonetheless, reification was secondary in class-mixed and working-class groups. Although the presence of middle-class women in the former can have raised this effect, it's not the point if the latter are considered. In fact, in all those groups consensus perspectives stated that unity and involvement help to know the locality and teach values. In the respondents' view, this local knowledge could be useful to overcome social problems such as drug-addiction or racism.

Even though reification had led working-class women to attribute educational problems to deep and unknown factors in interviews, the working-class view on this issue was quite more complex in focus groups. Certainly, in some interviews it had been argued that reality compels everybody to study in spite of the inexorable economic crisis, but that sense of impotence was not reproduced in working-class focus groups. Then participants started with similar doubts, but their discussion led them to share their concerns. For instance, they were worried about the difficulties to understand their children or the domestic use of television. A particularly burning topic was that of



punishment, since most working-class mothers agreed that they had learnt how to punish from their mothers, that these methods were not appropriate any longer, and that they felt bad themselves after imposing these sanctions. Here an open question replaced uncertainty.

In summary, reasoning can reproduce class and gender inequalities in individual settings, but that effect is overcome in collective settings. Then working-class mothers manage to go beyond reification and to suggest new educational questions combining calculation, rationalization through principles and rationalization through particularities. In this sense, it can be argued that collective domestic knowledge can empower women by bringing subordinate concerns to the surface. Parental involvement at school illustrates this possibility empirically as far as the social crossroads of class and gender are projected over such phenomenon.

### **Domestic Knowledge and the Sexual Contract**

Collective domestic knowledge broadens mothers' margin of action at school. The former conclusion shows that domestic knowledge can certainly empower women in spite of those inequalities caused by the class structure and patriarchy, because that form of knowledge has been constructed as a part of the feminine difference and operates in the midst of a specific set of social relations.

The point is that social differences are articulated by codes of classification. These codes entail social rules according to which gender (Arnot, 1982, 1984), gender

and ethnicity (Afshar & Maynard, 1994), or class, gender and ethnicity (Mc Carthy, 1993), become meaningful in a specific setting.

Classification codes shape family--school relations too. In the mentioned fieldwork middle-class women normally were assertive about the reasons of their choices and strategies. They took for granted both a sexist distribution of responsibilities and the class prestige of a 'rationalist' way of doing things, even domestic things. Working-class women presented themselves as powerless when interviewed, but could activate the local solidarity to ask new questions in collective discussions. They had also assumed a gender bias concerning the distribution of responsibilities, but they expressed it in different ways depending on their access to a resource of power, e.g. a space for discussion. Therefore, middle-class women established a meaningful connection between some 'masculine' and 'feminine' categories, whereas working-class women presented their 'gendered' concerns depending on their social resources.

With regard to the optimistic theories, it is true that domesticity is less isolated from public life than it was when discipline controlled its social boundary, as well as it is true that mediation is a crucial skill to supply any social service dealing with that boundary. Domestic 'experts', mostly mothers, can exert new influence on these grounds. However, that possibility is not the effect of a deep social trend, but a specific situation emerging from specific systems of action. It is not a vague and general change, but concrete actions articulating social attributes, what empowers people.

Thus the sociological analysis of domestic knowledge can be read in the terms of the political theory of the 'sexual contract', because both of them stress the dialectic articulation of gender inequalities and differences. Certainly, gender differences can

entail new potentials if democratic rights are to be effectively extended to the domestic sphere of life (Pateman, 1988, 1992). However, these potentials cannot be actualised if renewed inequalities keep subordinating women. It can be argued that, if Sexism no longer obscures mothers' contributions to citizenship, men and women can become more equal, collective life can be more reflexive, and society can benefit from a more prestigious mediation work; however, this is only a political possibility.

Parental involvement at school provides a good example of such dialectics. Sociological and educational research show that mothers fulfil a crucial function inasmuch as they take care of domestic education. If that contribution is made more visible, it will become clearer that fathers' low involvement is actually a negative contribution. Women's presence in domestic life will be presented in a positive way, as well as the desirable equal involvement of men and women. But the valuation of domestic education would also made clearer that public education actually needs a collective involvement from both the domestic and the public spheres of social life. However, schools undervalue domestic education because class inequalities and the sexual division of labour eventually polarise the spontaneous patterns of reasoning about education, silence some women's voice more than others', and denies a prestigious status to mothers' contributions, such as dual rationalization.

Let us remind the political and educational message of mothers' discourse in order to discuss its importance for a new sexual contract. To start with, middle-class mothers always supported the official theory postulating that education consists of the development of free individuals. Their reasoning and their dual rationalization made reference to individual action or particularities in order to stress the importance of individualization. And what is more, working-class mothers did not refuse that theory,

although they didn't feel comfortable with it. Certainly, they were uncertain when interviewed and doubtful in focus groups. Their doubts were how to understand children and how to deal with domestic conflicts, since they noticed that traditional advice didn't work any longer. But they also wanted their children to become autonomous individuals.

It should be taken into account that a theory is not only grounded on its tenets but also on prestige. Nowadays pedagogic approaches to motherhood in Spain stress the importance of individualization and moral involvement of parents at school (Tschorne, 1987). Under these social conditions, working-class women cast doubt on an anomaly of the official paradigm on mothering; namely, they ask how can children be individualised when social conditions constrain the very opportunities of individualization. Did they really trust the account they expressed in the interviews, it would be logical to transmit a clear-cut message to children on the inexorable character of circumstances and the hardness of life. They would be rejecting individualization, and therefore official education, due to their anxiety about what can happen. Nevertheless, after collective reflection, they came to ask a more precise question, which challenges that principle: if individualization has to be stressed even in vulnerable social positions, how should socio-economic constraints be managed? Clearly, this question sketches a reflexive account of their own position and a new pattern of mediation between school life and domesticity.

This question is a political question for several reasons. Its very formulation claims for a voice that official education has not accepted yet. Furthermore, if any answer is to be provided, research efforts and resources should be devoted to this social and scientific problem. And finally, it unveils a current struggle between everyday

perspectives on education. Although there are not two distinct perspectives in contention, the interest to reinforce individualization in the abstract and the interest to embed it in social positions can conflict.

Such a political problem recalls what Pateman has defined as the paradox of citizenship: women have been included in citizenship as mothers and been simultaneously excluded because motherhood has been labelled as a particularistic and not rational activity inappropriate for a citizen (Pateman, 1988, 1992). If the domestic--public boundary is not tightly submitted to discipline, the paradox re-appears in a new fashion, since women are required to enter the public regardless of their motherhood at the same time as state institutions aim to re-shape this social responsibility. In fact, a school-based dialogue will not modify this reality by itself. Actually, only long and deep but conscious processes can (Troyna & Vincent, 1995). But schools should recognise women's interest to have a collective voice if they are to be democratic public services. From this point of view, domestic knowledge is not a matter of symbolic difference, but a matter of power (Finzi, 1992).

## **Conclusion**

Domesticity has changed since discipline gave up controlling all its contours. As a consequence, domestic reflexive knowledge may be more salient nowadays than it was years ago. Research underpins the former theoretical argument because it shows that some features of domestic knowledge can empower women. To be precise, these features are calculation reasoning and dual rationalization based on both principles and particularities.

Fieldwork conducted in Spain aims to test the former hypothesis by comparing women's discourse in semi-focused interviews and focus groups. Interviews show a biased class polarization in terms of patterns of reasoning, since middle-class mothers use calculation and working-class mothers use reification to address school issues. Reification seems to hinder action, at least at a representational level. However, it is not important in focus groups, where calculation is pervasive. On the other hand, whereas reification constrains dual rationalization in a one-to-one interview, calculation enriches it in collective discussions so much that working-class mothers posit challenging questions about education for autonomy.

It can be stated that a feminine different voice maybe entails a more reflexive stance, as advanced by some authors, but it does not constitute an essential feminine difference. On the contrary, social position and power resources impinge upon that difference in such a way that domestic knowledge becomes a matter of power. Further research and reflection should explore this issue from both the psycho-sociological and the political points of view.

#### **Notes: Methodological appendix**

(1) With respect to *methodology*, other approaches to domestic knowledge have drawn on several research designs. Lareau (1995), Gilligan (1993), David (1993) and Ball & Vincent (1998) interviewed women so as to explore their views on several aspects of social life. These works have found out the class distribution of some discursive patterns, and the power relations between public services and domestic carers. Waerness (1987/ 1996) and Ribbens (1994) have critically interpreted written and oral discourses on domesticity in order to spell out the 'rationality of care' or the 'philosophy of education' they entail. In

spite of their interesting insights, these researches have only provided fragmentary evidence to answer empirical questions about empowerment, since they were not directly looking for the interactions where domestic knowledge is deployed.

Between 1994 and 1997 several *fieldwork projects* have been conducted in Catalonia, Madrid and Castilla-La Mancha (Spain) so that teachers and mothers discourses on schooling were recorded and analysed. They were framed within the Critical Coeducation Program at the Institute of Education (I.C.E) at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. That Program aimed to promote Anti-Sexist schooling through action-research, and scheduled some analyses of families' views as well as the assessment of families' intervention in action-research during 1996 and 1997. A sample of semi-focused interviews was conducted in the nearby of Barcelona in 1994 so as to analyse families' views; in 1997 several focus groups were hold in the nearby of Barcelona, in Madrid and Castilla-La Mancha in order to assess the intervention of families in the program. The 1994 project was funded by a PhD scholarship (Beques de Formació del Personal Investigador, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and Generalitat de Catalunya, 1992--5). The 1997 project was funded by an agreement between the ICE-UAB and the Instituto de la Mujer at the Ministerio de Asuntos Sociales from the Spanish Government, and it was also supported by the Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia.

In both occasions interviewees were required to compare schools and urban areas within their locality. Thus, the 'locality' and 'problems with education' became the *common focuses* of semi-focused interviews and focus groups, although the interview focus was narrower because interviews were shorter and individual. As to interviews, an external interviewer visited the families at home and asked some questions about the schools. It was often the mother who received the interviewer and answered. The situation was quite similar to that of family-school regular interviews: a formal setting and a representative of the family (normally the mother) discussing education with a professional. As to focus groups, a group discussed some questions about the school with an external moderator. The situation was quite different to regular family-school meetings. To start with, the group went to the meeting to speak instead of receiving information. Besides, their interaction triggered both surface and deep problems that were taken into account depending on a negotiated degree of formality, and it was easy to ask any question about the research to the moderator before or during the meeting. As a consequence, oral

discourses expressed domestic knowledge in both occasions, but semi-focused interviews recorded individual knowledge whereas focus groups recorded collective knowledge.

Gender and class criteria were taken into account to devise the *sample*. It was aware that women are often in charge of domestic education, but did not prevent anybody from attending any interview or meeting. A few fathers collaborated in the interviews, but it was mothers who eventually answered in most cases. In focus groups a few fathers were also present, although their number was insignificant compared to women's. In 1994 respondents to interviews came from three schools in the urban area of Barcelona that had a different intake: to be precise, they could be featured as a middle-class, a socially mixed and a working-class school. These respondents were classified as middle- and working-class in base to a short questionnaire about their family social position (namely, husband and wife professional category and educational level). In 1997 participants in focus groups also had a different social origin. Some discussions were hold with members of parents' associations in Catalonia. Since these associations often attract middle-class mothers, three homogeneous middle-class and four mixed middle- and working-class groups were gathered, but it was not possible to find an homogeneous working-class group. Later on, three homogeneous working-class groups were sorted out from two schools in Castilla-La Mancha, whose intake had this social origin. All participants were asked to describe their own and their partner's job, and were classified as middle- or working-class in base to their answers.

*Transcripts* were analysed to find out patterns of reasoning and rationalization. Texts were cut into different allusions so that the pattern of reasoning could be found out at different points. Although interviews and focus groups did not only draw either on calculation or reification, their internal consistency was high. Allusions were framed within the whole text when searching for their patterns of rationalization.

The article does not include direct *quotations* for several reasons. Firstly, translation should have taken account of many Catalan and Spanish language varieties in Catalonia and Castilla-La Mancha. Secondly, many references to schools should have been framed within the undergoing educational reform, whose evolution differs from one region to the other. Finally, many quotations needed a long space in order to show their whole meaning.



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**Table I: Comparing Domestic Knowledge in Interviews and Focus Groups**

<b>¡Error! Marcador no definido.</b>	Semi-focused interviews	Focus groups	
Reasoning	Class biased distribution of calculation and reification (I)	Pervasive calculation (III)	
Rationalization	Dual reference to principles and particularities (II)	Dual reference to principles and particularities (III)	(IV)