

**RELATIONAL STRATEGIES AND
CHANGE IN FAMILY, MADRID AND
BARCELONA, 1985**

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Objectives of this paper

Maybe the changes in the family that we have found more striking are those concerning above all its morphology: reduction of the number of children, families formed by just one adult and his/her children or couples with the children of one member or the other (all this being the result, in the majority of cases, of separation), delay in the very formation of the family, appearance of unmarried couples living in a marital way and of families not united by link of marriage and, finally, the sharp increase of the number of children born out of wedlock. All these changes become obvious since 1975 with more or less intensity in Catalonia and in Spain. Some have been spectacular such as the fall of fertility and nuptiality, others less dramatic such as the increase of one-parent families or the extension of cohabitation.

The Total Fertility rate in Catalonia collapsed from 2720 in 1975 to 1489 in 1985, while in Spain it fell from 2781 to 1637. Simultaneously, the high initial Total Nuptiality rates in 1975 (1071 for men and 1077 for women, in Catalonia; 949 for

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men and 1024 for women in Spain) experimented an spectacular fall, more intense in Catalonia, in the period up to 1980-81 (660, 645, 749 and 735, respectively), followed by a smaller decrease between 1980 and 1985-86 (605, 614, 684 and 675). The illegitimate rates rised from 1975 to 1985: in Catalonia from 2,24% to 10,95% (in Barcelona, from 4,6% to 15,95%), in Spain from 2,03% to 7,97%.

It is in the 60's, the mid-60's, that this change, let's say the birth of such polymorphism, is beginning to be noticed in Europe, above all in Northern Europe and especially in Scandinavian countries, before the economic crisis.

The 1975-1985 period was in Spain a Crisis decade, following a period of exceptional demographic growth, and this is worth mentioning. The economic crisis coincided with the Spanish political transition process and coincided too with a deep change in attitudes toward interpersonal relationships.

In this sense, one can be tempted to think that the Catalan case, like other countries of Southern Europe, is but a delay due to cultural particularities, historical avatars or economical under-development. And, we can't doubt it, it is partly true. But we should avoid the evolutionist approach when studying family transformations and keep in mind that the above mentioned transformations have not been reduced to those that can be numerically measured and that anyway it does not seem wise to speak of forced evolution beyond the generalized extension of what is refereed as nuclear family.

In the case of Catalonia, as well as in those of Spain or Italy, the rhythm of familiar change was marked, among other things, by the coincidence with the economic crisis, whose deepness is a factor we cannot ignore. So, the above-mentioned morphological changes can be considered in some aspects as an evidence of the capacity of adaptation of the family in a changing context. Also, one can notice other changes that, to a major or a minor degree of incidence, have altered the internal

relation of the family members and without which it would be difficult to explain the morphological changes. Among them one must mention, first of all, changes in woman's role and secondly, the changes in parents-child relationship as well as inter-generational relations in general.

A period of crisis is characterized because, '...les grandes organisations -les structures économiques, sociales, politiques- qui quadrillent la société et la définissent, ne parviennent plus, ni en théorie ni en pratique, à donner un sens aux pratiques des individus ni à rendre compte des événements sociaux...', while "l'individu ne peut plus être appréhendé comme signifiant de signifiés extérieurs à lui." (JACOB, J.P and SABELLI, F., 1984). In such a context with a lack of references and redefinition of relations we point out the presence of a fracture, that is so to say, of a change emerging as a true returnless trip: we have named woman's role and the way woman is perceived.

By "relational strategies" in the couple we mean the dynamics of forces in the sphere of privacy where the differences and inequalities between men and woman in their daily cohabitation are being confronted, and where the actual situation of woman can be drawn, beyond ideological statements. The study of relational strategies, according to roles, give us the opportunity to approach couples independently of the institutional form of their union and allows us to see in which way these strategies can affect the family.

1.2 Metodology

This paper is the result of the suNey: Household formation, Madrid and Barcelona, 1985", carried out the same year by the Centre d'Estudis Demografics and sponsored by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (C.I.S.). The work was resulted from the interest in explaining the sudden decrease of marriage over the previous years, in the context of changes in the couple values. It payed special attention in catching how individuals

interpreted their own attitudes, which reference frames they used to do so and how they situated their behaviour in front of the social context and the changes that they could perceive. The research was directed by Anna Cabré, demographer, director of the Centre d'Estudis Demogràfics (C.E.D.), Anna Alabart, sociologist, Professor at the University of Barcelona, and Verena Stolcke, anthropologist, Professor at the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

The study consisted in three phases: in the first one, a field work was carried out, based on open and semistructured in-depth interviews, in Madrid and Barcelona. This method was chosen because it was considered to be particularly advisable for an exploratory-type study. Categories are defined according to sex, age -from 20 to 40 years old- couple situation - alone, married, cohabiting-, instruction level -elementary, medium and university-. The cross-referencing of all these variables resulted in a total of 144 interviewed people. The general criterion was to grab the broader universe possible and include the maximum occupational diversity, spatial situation in both cities, political tendencies and religious beliefs. The interviews lasted from three quarters of an hour to an hour and a half. The transcription respects as much as possible the spoken language, be it Spanish or Catalan; the use of language can be a possible object of research in the future.

Once the interviews were realized and computerized, the second phase took the major part of the 1986 year and consisted in the elaboration of a code of thematic analysis of discourse that would allow further automatic treatment of the texts. At the same time, a biographical card was made for each interview, including the essential points to recompose the life cycle of each individual (and of the person he or she lives with, should such be the case) through systematic of the information gathered in the interviews. In a parallel way, and according to the above-mentioned code and biographical card, a computer programme was carried out to make possible both the automatic selection of texts and the crossing of diverse study themes.

The third phase consisted in the exploration of material based on an hermeneutical approach to the selected texts, the reference mark being consensual unions and the study being concentrated on the third part of the interviews corresponding to cohabitants; this phase was concluded in 1987 with the composition of a report entitled *La Cohabitación en España. Un estudio en Madrid y Barcelona* (1988). Also, a first approach to the differences in daily life and role distribution existing among cohabitants and married couples gave way to *Els Rols en el matrimoni i en la cohabitació: un estudi a l'area de Barcelona* (1988). Finally, a study of the interviews to the persons under 25 years old living in Barcelona was produced under the title *Joventut i emancipació a la ciutat de Barcelona: família, parella i habitatge* (1989).

The study on the theme of cohabitation reached the conclusion that communication, exposed as the touchstone of the relations between cohabitants, could be understood as the verbalized formalization of the intensive regulating of the relations, that is to say, of the pact as an emblem of what has come to be called new associative couple, in counterposition to married couple, the latter being characterized by the asymmetrical complementarity of its components. A new division of roles in the couple based on an equalitarian principle is one of the capital elements of this pact. It is from the very study of what we have called "relational strategies", limited to roles here, that we are now proposing to undertake the consideration of family transformations in the present times.

In this paper, we are only taking into consideration the results from the Barcelona interviews.

Relational strategies and Roles

Generally speaking the change in woman's role can be observed in both male and female discourse, both showing a clear influence of feminism, at least at a formal level. Also, the expressed practice (with the inevitable occultations and reconstructions) shows a very large acceptance of female activity outside the home and of male activity inside the home. Despite of this acceptance, the male and female roles have not been altered in an essential way: the complementarity model remains still in force. Help is the word that almost all the married men and women interviewed employ more frequently to exemplify their "incursions" in what is still perceived as the other's domain and reversely in what is felt as an incursion from the other in one's own domain.

1.- Woman's work outside the home is accepted as long as it does not interfere with what is ascribed as her main function, that's to say, the care of the family and the home and as long as this activity does not give her with any economic or professional advantage on her husband. The criteria of economic rationality, earnings and profit, with the globality of the home as a reference, compose the symbolic male framework in which opinions and concrete practices on women's activity are to be explained. It is worth noting that in the case of men, this global evaluation is never made: his work out of the home is never questioned, but rather seen as a necessity in itself.

2.- In a parallel way, man's work inside the home is welcome and even required, provided that it will not interfere with what is ascribed as his main function, which is, earn money and family status and as long as their activity at home does not affect the quality of homemaking. The qualitative criteria, with as a reference family harmony and adequation of domestic skills and techniques judged upon 'female' criteria, compose the symbolic female framework in which opinions and concrete practices in this domain are to be explained. And we should like to point out here that for women their work at home is not

judged in these terms either: a woman, simply because she's a woman is supposed to be skilled for tasks that are commonly thought as feminine.

3.- The delimitation of domains and activities draws a network of practices and relations where, together with the equalitarian demands and declarations, there is often some mixing with a more or less explicit will on part of both sexes to keep control over the domains that have traditionally been ascribed to them and that still identify them.

II.1 Woman "helps" man

Woman's work is nothing new in Catalonia; in this sense it would be good to remember that industrialization process in Catalonia was at the beginning mainly textile with an important participation of woman. At the time of our study, in 1985, everybody recognizes the abstract right of women to work and even the opportuneness of it, but a majority of the interviewed married people of both sexes agree, when particularizing, to remove importance to woman's work outside the home and to consider it as a dispensable contribution to family economics, as a way of dodge tedium or as a transitory imperative resulting from an economic problem.

The accessory tone of the discourse decreases when listening to more instructed women; in that case work outside the home is for them and for their husbands a logical consequence of their training and of the life expectations that these women had bred for themselves and the lifestyle that their husbands had thought. Nevertheless it is in terms of professional consecution and not of earnings that their work is evaluated in this case and, in addition to that, the arrival of the first child can put at risk the continuity of the woman's working life.

Woman's work is a source of tension in the couple's relation. The economic crisis had played in this sense a

contradictory and remarkable part, for on one hand it has proscribed a lot of women from the labour market and on the other hand it has made possible the incorporation in this market, and mainly in the informal sector, of other women coming from a medium clearly hostile to feminine activity.

What is most interesting for to us is to consider the impact on different social classes and generations who have seen their family relation being altered because of these processes.

II.2 Men "helps" women

Domestic work is still incumbent on women, independently of the fact they work or not, they earn little money or a lot; men, when they participate, always appear as collaborators, depending on their ways of being or on their ideological sensibilization.

In this sense, the economic crisis has served, the majority of cases, as an ideological alibi for men. As a matter of fact, the need to calm the uneasy conscience that feminism has more or less sharply waked in men as a consequence of their lack of interest in domestic work adopts as a first line of defense the weak position of women in labour market. The crisis, and particularly unemployment, symbolically reinstall women in the home.

Women who see themselves rejected from the labour market oscillate between the frustration provoked by their professional discontinuance and the development of an obsessive domestic hyperactivity, often meaningless, as though they wanted to justify their lack of economic contribution to the home.

Another important number of women are forced to do a double day's work, often as insatisfactory outside as inside the home and this generates the particular attitude of some

instructed women in our sample who sarcastically refuse the possibility of an activity outside the home.

II.3 When help is perceived as an intromission

The word "help" that appears constantly in mutual reference means in fact, under the appearance of change, limited responsibility and rejection of the alteration of roles.

Nobody can deny the effects of these past years ideological change, nobody dares to speak against the transformations in the roles of men and women nor against their extension, but married men and women still justify in a more or less direct way the sexist attribution of roles. To a virtual exigency of a change in attitude an equally virtual division of skills and techniques is being opposed. Discussions, pacts multiply themselves in this field and outline short run tactics which in the majority of cases allow married men to avoid the problem and feel comfortable and long run strategies that delegate equality in future generations of women.

Relational strategies and Re-presentation

If we compare, in general terms, the married people's discourse with the cohabitant's, cohabitation appears as an equalitarian model where at least in principle, there is not clear ascription of roles based on sex. In this sense cohabitation has been said to be a feminine strategy, for beyond the strong influence that feminism may have had in the re-estructuration of roles, women have often seen in cohabitation a way of guaranteeing their independence.

Nonetheless, it is easy to observe that this equality has been established on the basis of homogeneize between the members of the couple what has traditionally been assigned to men. So, in practice, woman's work outside the home is

unquestionable among cohabitants, above all in its more masculine aspects: as an activity that provides contact with the external world (which is precisely why it is valued). The monetary retribution that this work supposes for the domestic economics will be reinvested in the couple relation on the grounds of larger autonomy of both members and the enjoyment of spare time, individually or together. These are the two axes of a quality on which both members try to build cohabitation rules.

On the contrary, domestic work between cohabitants, although in fact it is generally thought as a burden to be shared by the two members of the couple, in practice -and this is interesting to note- it is still, in the majority of cases, the woman's responsibility. It is true, however, that compared with married couples the level of participation of males is usually higher.

Therefore we can assert that cohabitation, as the interiorization of an equalitarian model, is established on the basis of masculine values: productivity and individual progress, while domestic work is systematically devaluated by both members of the couple, while marriage, under the juridical cover and the social representation implied, pre-establishes a model of relation where the divisions of roles appears clearly defined.

Cohabitation seeks in its refusal of actual marriage the values of an ideal marriage which is impossible from the very moment when it is institutionally recognized. Cohabitants would then refuse to marry precisely because they fear they could not possibly achieve this ideal, centered around love, if they did so. Cohabitation understood in this way could act in fact as an initiation to a new model of marriage.

At this stage we can speak, in Spain and particularly in Catalonia, of cohabitation as the reaction against a marriage where the symbol has been deprived of its meaning and where cohabitants only through seeing themselves (and being seen from the outside) as not married can try new practices and experiment

with new values. We could wonder, then, if the revalorization of the symbol and of the family relation network that they are contributing to is going to lead towards new marriages and new marital morals, made on the basis of a cohabitant strategy and if this could be the case of an increasing number of couples who have never cohabited.

To conclude:

Over the 1975-1985 period some important changes have intervened concerning the formation of couple in Spain and Catalonia, coinciding with the economic crisis and the political transition. Eluding the sterile and equivocal discussion about the family crisis but taking the concept of crisis as an imaginary representation that informs reality, we should pay attention to the impact that this crisis has had on the family.

1- Among all the occurred changes, those on the role and position of women, Ideologically impulsed by feminism and largely accepted by the population, are striking. The image of women has also been deeply modified.

2- Over this period of behaviour remodelling and rule re-definition, men and women have developed various relational strategies. Concrete practices have developed in a constant effort to redefine rules.

3- These relational strategies in the field of marriage, concretely referred to the working activities of women outside the home and to men's domestic work, have not altered basically the traditional division of responsibilities. Beyond ideological speech we can observe practical reluctance. Cohabitation, on the contrary and because it avoids social representation, has made manifest, in certain social sectors and especially for instructed women, the need to assert and carry out this restructuration of roles.

4- In practice, cohabitation, at a different level, still delimits generic symbolical frameworks too. Cohabitation, leaving apart its appearance marked by a strong ideological conscience, has meant an experimentation field where symbolical distance from marriage permits to try new arrangements. Cohabitation in Catalonia and in Spain is as important or more as an emblem of the changes spreading around than as an alternative life-style model.

5- The economic crisis has had a contradictory effect on roles: it has frustrated the working expectations of lots of women, above all the incorporation into labour market of young professionals, and at the time it has integrated in the informal sector women that perhaps had never expected working outside the home.

6- The economic crisis, as well as the imaginary crisis that it has provoked, has had a strong impact on the generations and individuals that have seen how their system of values (more or less traditional) was collapsing and have been obliged to an accelerated acceptance of the changes. The crisis has increased the speed of the change in Catalonia and in Spain, not the tendency, of it similar that in the rest of European countries.

7- Some questions: What is the re-estructuration of roles that emerges from the crisis? To what extent does this re-estructuration affect the imaginary models ordering our perception of the other?.

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