Gender and Well-Being
Interactions between Work, Family and Public Policies

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Introduction
Throughout history, unpaid domestic labour has been conceptualised in many different ways and given diverse meanings (and values) in different socio-cultural contexts. In this article, unpaid domestic labour is recognised as work that not only produces goods and services but also reproduces gender relations (Berk 1985; Fenstermaker; West & Zimmerman 1991; Thompson & Walker 1989). In addition, it is understood as a means of/channel for creating and depleting well-being in the family that subsequently has an impact on the wider community. This study, based on ethnographic research in a rural area of Croatia draws on rural women’s (and men’s) accounts of their experiences in unpaid domestic labour and their contribution as well as their access to well-being in the family. Specifically, this study aims to examine women’s multiple roles and how they manage multiple tasks simultaneously, their agency as well as new ways of conceptualising domestic labour. It uses a multi-dimensional notion of well-being, which is not confined to material aspects of life but encompasses the social, economic and political opportunities enjoyed by individuals.
Descriptions of Domestic Labour

Researchers have only ‘recently’ considered domestic labour as a fit subject for research.\(^1\) Since it is unpaid, it is not counted or recognised as work and is often invisible, devalued, taken for granted, and without psychological rewards (Bergmann 1986; Gove & Geerken 1977; Gove & Tudor 1973; Oakley 1974; Chafetz 1991; hooks 1984). Moreover, there is no opportunity for advancement or promotion for work well done and less likelihood of receiving gratitude for doing unpaid domestic work. In sum, household tasks have been typically described as ungratifying, unfulfilling, and unenjoyable; tasks that do not give a person a chance to learn or develop as a person (Berk & Berk 1979; Gove & Tudor 1973; Hill & Stafford 1980). Housework has also been represented as isolating (Bernard 1972; Gove & Tudor 1973) and described as routine, monotonous, menial, repetitive, and mindless (Berheide 1984; Bernard 1972; Gove & Tudor 1973; Oakley 1974; Grote, Frieze & Stone 1996). In contrast, Ahlander and Bahr (1995) stress that the moral dimensions of housework should be brought into discussion and recommend that family researchers reconceptualise ‘housework as family work with its basis in moral obligation (1995:54).\(^2\) Bonney and Reinach (1993) also argue that housework is diverse, and the tendency to represent it in negative terms tends to undermine an understanding of its complexity, and its ability to be a satisfying and rewarding form of work. Undeniably, some researchers have shown that a high level of autonomy may be derived from unpaid domestic labour. A lack of supervision, being able to set their own schedules and organise their own work have been reported as the most valued aspects of housework (Bird & Ross 1993; Andre 1981; Berheide 1984; Kibria, Barnett, Baruch, Marshall & Pleck 1990, Ross & Wright 1998). Evidently, it is important to investigate all the different contexts in which domestic work is performed.

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\(^1\) Not one single study on the nature and division of domestic labour was published between the mid seventies and mid nineties in Croatia.

\(^2\) Pertinently, Riley and Kiger (1999:546) contend that Ahlander and Bahr (1995) focus on women (not the family) and housework so that the ‘woman question’ around housework becomes the problem: men are nowhere to be found.
as well as the power-related issues of (in)equity, (in)justice and exploitation if we are to understand more completely the varied meanings it carries for the people that do it.

**Definitions of Domestic Labour**

Prior to paying attention to contexts, power-related issues and varied meanings, it is also important to precisely define what domestic labour is. Earlier definitions of domestic labour were simple and did not include the whole array of activities that constitute this work. Even if simply defined as work that ‘services other members of a household or family’ (Delphy 1984) or ‘everything that is part of organising and caring for the family’ (Mackie & Pattullo 1977) these definitions carry different meanings\(^3\) that may determine and influence attitudes, judgements, and evaluations. Consequently, there has been a call to develop a more complex, comprehensive understanding of the variety of tasks involved in performing family work to replace narrow and imprecise definitions. An all-inclusive definition of family work also needs to take into account different types of ‘invisible work’ that are often overlooked. Besides practical work on people or things (often called “housework” or physical child care tasks) this includes: emotion work (Delphy & Leonard 1992; England & Farkas 1986; Hochschild 1982, 1989), care work (DeVault 1991; Thorne 1992), interaction work (Fishman 1978), sociability work (Daniels 1987; DeVault 1991), kin work (di Leonardo 1987) household management work (Mederer 1993) and status enhancement (Coverman 1989). This expansion of domestic work beyond housework and childcare turns it into social reproduction (Lorber 1994:174) that has an impact on the well-being of all family members.

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\(^3\) Speakman & Marchington (1999) suggest that servicing suggests subordination while organising and caring might suggest skill, control and inner motivation.
Satisfaction with Divisions of Domestic Labour

Various studies have shown that most aspects of unpaid domestic labour remains stubbornly segregated by gender, in that they continue to be, in practice, primarily 'women’s work' (Armstrong & Armstrong 1990; Weiss 1990; Kiernan 1992; Bittman 1999; Wilkie, Ferree & Ratcliff 1998). Inescapably, there are several disadvantages if women’s energies are concentrated in unpaid work as this leads to financial dependence that may entail abuse and coercion, more poverty and a lack of pension benefits among women, as well as more involvement in the informal work economy that is often underpaid and insecure (Elson 1998). Nevertheless, a large percentage of women seem paradoxically untroubled and seemingly unconcerned by the explicitly inequitable divisions of labour in the home. Many studies have found that women, despite the fact that they are responsible for the bulk of the work, are satisfied with an ‘unfair’ division of labour (Benin & Agostinelli 1988; Blair & Johnson 1992; Lennon & Rosenfield 1994; Greenstein 1996; DeMaris & Longmore 1996). A number of explanations have been suggested to clarify these apparently contradictory arrangements of inequitable divisions of labour within the home. First, some studies suggest that a woman’s lack of resources and power within families leads women to accept unequal divisions of labour (Lennon & Rosenfield 1994; DeMaris & Longmore 1996). Second, a model of gender role ideology asserts that beliefs about and attitudes towards gender roles are responsible for the division of domestic work (Baruch & Barnett 1981; Deutsch et al., 1993; Greenstein 1996; Huber & Spitze 1981). A third explanation is that wives spend fewer hours in paid employment so it is inevitable that housework then becomes the women’s responsibility and not an opportunity to have more leisure time (Coverman 1985). A fourth explanation is that women enjoy housework tasks more than men and are therefore satisfied with arrangements that leave them with the bulk of household work (Berheide 1984; Kahn 1991). In effect, all these explanations conceptualise the division of labour as an outcome rather than an interpersonal process of dividing labour, such that the implicit assumption seems to be that the division of labour is based on a
static agreement between spouses (Pittman, Solheim, & Blanchard 1996). Clearly, it is important to investigate and understand how couples actively and continually (re)construct, (re)negotiate and resist gender roles and to pay attention to the way interpersonal processes in combination with prevailing discourses (e.g., in the media, community, government policies, etc.) constitute, maintain and enhance a gendered division of labour. This article uses a gender constructionist argument; doing housework and childcare (and being satisfied with this arrangement) is more an indication of what women and men ‘should do’ than it is about their actual resources, possibilities, time availability and affinities (Oakley 1974; Berk 1985; West & Zimmerman 1987). Hence, the concept of doing gender is indispensable when explaining patterns of housework performance; this labour is productive in material terms (e.g., tidy home, clean clothes, cooked meals, etc.), but the gendered division of household labour is viewed as a way to “do gender” that also produces proper gender relations (Berk 1985; Brines 1994; Coltrane 1989; DeVault 1987, 1991; Fenstermaker, West, & Zimmerman 1991; South & Spitze 1994; Blain 1994) and social identities (Fraser, 1989). Thus, decisions about who does what at home are not first and foremost determined by the needs of the household but rather reflect and reinforce the much broader organisation of society around assumptions of gender that affects the well-being across individuals and social groups.

Aspects of Well-being

Since it is increasingly being acknowledged that well-being is multidimensional, several authors have moved beyond income, earnings and consumption and have focused on additional dimensions of well-being like education, health and capabilities (Nussbaum 2000; Narayan 2000; Sen 1973, 1987a, 1992). For example, Narayan (2000) identifies material well-being, psychological well-being, bodily well-being, social well-being, freedom of choice and action, and security. Another similar approach is that of Allardt
who makes a distinction between “having” (i.e. economic resources, housing, employment, health education, working conditions), “loving”, which refers to contacts with friends, local community, family, associates etc., and “being”, which includes political activities, self-determination, leisure time activities, meaningful work, opportunities to enjoy nature. On the other hand, the capability approach proposed by Sen expands the range of well-being dimensions by focusing on “states of beings” more than on material attributes.

“The well-being of a person may plausibly be seen in terms of a person’s functionings and capabilities: what he or she is able to do or be (e.g., the ability to be well-nourished, to avoid escapable morbidity or mortality, to read and write and communicate, to take part in the life of the community, to appear in public without shame)” (Sen 1987b: 8).

He also develops the range of well-being dimensions by exploring the relationships between goods, personal characteristics and social factors in the achievement of individual well-being. The relationship between goods and achievements is influenced by three different categories of factors that include: personal characteristics (such as sex, age, job status, intelligence, physical condition, etc.); social factors (like values, habits, traditions, power relations, prejudices, etc.); and environmental factors (such as infrastructures, climate, public goods and the availability of social services, etc.). These characteristics/factors will be considered in this article, to determine the extent to which some of these elements affect a person’s ability to translate access to goods and services into a functioning, which influences the way in which well-being is distributed within a society.

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4 Sen (1987a:36) contends that a functioning is an achievement more directly related to living conditions, whereas a capability is the ability to achieve that is linked to a notion of freedom and real opportunities.
Historical overview of research on domestic labour in Croatia

Socialism brought about many changes to the social position of women in Croatia and in countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Correspondingly, industrialisation as well as urbanisation, mass education, new social rights, etc. brought about the emancipation of women in which women could acquire a higher level of education as well as improve their economic and social independence. Moreover, if one considers the high female employment rates during this period (more than in the West), family rights and allowances (maternity leave, child endowment, state-funded nurseries and kindergartens) it can be concluded that during socialism, family policies to facilitate motherhood and employment were very liberal (similar to Scandinavian countries) (Zrinščak 2003: 92-3). However, in reality this was not the case. First, in many studies it has been emphasised that these were “sex blind” policies that depended on equality only as equality in terms of employment (Paci 2002: 9-10). Hence, women’s employment was seen as a national duty (Scott 1974) but due to the low quality and shortage of services or the financial impossibility of using some services, women were burdened by double work in a much higher proportion than women in the West\(^5\) (Pascal & Manning 2000; Puljiz & Zrinščak 2002). Moreover, owing to the distinctly patriarchal character of socialist societies, men were reluctant to participate in or share this double burden of work in both the public and private spheres in these countries. In other words, women’s position in the family did not significantly change compared to her position in society (see Katunarić 1987). Egalitarian ideology did not have a direct influence on behaviour in the family, so that women were co-responsible for the family income but also had to hold onto the ‘traditional women’s duties’ in the household. For example, Mihovilović (1975) conducted a study among 201 employed as well as 93 unemployed women in urban areas of Croatia in 1969. Research findings indicate that 80% of employed women (compared to more than 90% of unemployed women) besides their formal work

\(^5\) The total workload of women in CEE approximated 70 hours per week, about 15 hours more than in Western Europe (UNICEF, 1999: viii).
obligations carried out and were responsible for household work. Dissatisfaction was voiced by a third of the employed women because they felt overburdened and too busy. Massey, Hahn and Sekulić (1995) also examined the “second shift” in the former Socialist Yugoslavia (1989-90) among a random sample of 7,790 adults in the paid labour force. They found that despite working outside the home, women were primarily responsible for housework. They concluded that neither education, occupation, urbanisation, nor participation in the informal economy has a significant effect in reducing this; only the presence of an older female in the household measurably reduces an employed woman’s participation in the second shift. Thus, in reality, women did not achieve complete equality as they were still largely responsible for household duties, their earnings averaged less than those of men, and they only rarely reached the highest levels of economic or political decision-making (Leinert-Novosel 1999; Rihtman-Auguštin, 1985).

Following the collapse of socialism, there was a rise of traditional gender attitudes and a subsequent decline in women’s status throughout Central and South Eastern Europe. Scholars have offered four explanations for these changes (see Kunovich & Deitelbaum 2004:1091-2): First, issues of gender equality in these countries were closely linked to discredited communist regimes (Jaquette & Wolchik, 1998; Nowakowska, 1997; Ramet, 1996; Verdery 1994). In other words, many were quick to dismiss policies that promoted gender because it was not only communism but anything that was associated with this system that was rejected. Second, researchers have argued that the lifting of multiple burdens of employment/politics might have led to the retreat of women into the private sphere (Lobodzinska, 1996; Milić, 1993; Szalai, 1998). Third, the gender issue was ignored by politicians because of the number and severity of problems during transition (Lobodzinska, 1996; Ramet, 1996). Namely, gender issues were seen as less important in comparison with inflation, increasing unemployment and redistribution of state-owned resources. Lastly, churches throughout the region gained a great deal of power with the collapse of communism (Alsop & Hockey, 2001; Glass & Kawachi,
2001) and have played an active role in the propagation of traditional gender ideologies.\(^6\) In addition to these four explanations, war in Croatia (1991-95) following the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia relentlessly complicated transition processes that had already begun at the beginning of the nineties. Undisputedly, this further aggravated the economic situation as well as strengthened patriarchal and nationalist attitudes that subsequently worsened and marginalised women’s position.\(^7\) Beyond doubt, transition and war undoubtedly worsened women’s situation as they had to forfeit many of the ‘rights’ (family rights and allowances (maternity leave, child endowment, state-funded nurseries and kindergartens) they had been entitled to during socialism. Resurgent nationalist movements, prenatal population policies and other public discourses (e.g., in educational and religious institutions) all echoed a retraditionalisation of female roles in Croatia. In many instances, as a backlash against socialism and socialist policies, women were mentioned mainly in the context of reproductive rights. This advocated that a woman’s primary place is in the home and motherhood is seen as her only purpose in life. As Tomić-Koludrović and Kunac (1999:96) conclude: Croatia became an independent nation state with a new political system in the midst of a war and economic crisis that undoubtedly strengthened existent patriarchal values in which women were being depoliticised, disciplined and domesticated.

Beyond doubt, traditional domestic roles were glorified for women in Croatia and did not change for the most part during transition, war, and independence. Even at the end of the 20\(^{th}\) century, in a study involving 3,200 women in four counties of Croatia,

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\(^6\) Croatia is a country with a relatively high religiosity in comparison to many other European countries and with one dominant Church – the Catholic Church. According to the 2001 Census there were 87.83% Catholics, 4.42% Orthodox, 1.28% Muslims, 0.14% Greek Catholics, 0.14% Jehovah Witnesses, while all other religious communities amounted to 0.53%.

\(^7\) Leinert-Novosel (2000:7) identifies a number of transitional effects, which primarily have had an impact on the position of women in Croatia. These include: job loss, longer periods of unemployment, a decrease in financial family support, a lower standard of life, a growth of domestic violence, as well as the disappearance of women from the higher levels of political power.
Tomić-Koludrović and Kunac (2000) found that mothers are still the primary caretakers of children, especially when their children are sick (73% compared to 4% men). This research also shows that women readily accept their ‘given’ prescribed roles as housewives, housekeepers and as protectors of the family. They most readily identify with and prefer the traditional woman’s role of mother (93.4%) and wife (76%), while the role of employed woman is in fifth place. As expected, housework duties are also rigorously gender segregated. Most of the women said that they did the most time-consuming household tasks such as ironing (95.6%), laundry (95.9%) cooking (84.5%) dishwashing (80.7%) sweeping and vacuuming (74%) whereas their husbands only do traditional men’s work.\(^8\) minor repair work of appliances (84.6%) changing the gas bottle (72.4%) changing fuses (80.3%) filling up car tank (72.2%). Topolčić (2001) specifically investigated the segregated nature of housework among 152 employed married couples in Zagreb. His results suggest: 1) that the segregation of household labour between marriage partners is still unequal, whereby women do most of the domestic duties; 2) men take care of the children more than they do housework and 3) housework is to a large extent gender segregated since more than 90% of women in his sample cook, iron, and wash. In another study, with 907 adults from rural villages throughout Croatia, Kodrnja (2002) found that most respondents (80.5%) accepted and affirmed patriarchal values. Some of the ‘most acceptable’ attitudes among participants of Kodrnja’s study (2002: 166) include i) a well organised state should look after the needs of its members like a father looks after members of his family; ii) if only one marital partner is employed this naturally should be the man and iii) most household duties are more appropriate for women. Similarly, in another study conducted on a representative sample of the Croatian population in 2004 among 1,202 respondents, woman as wife-mother is the most desired role for women today (Galić 2004). Nearly half of the respondents (49.6%) agree that a woman fulfils the true meaning of her existence when she becomes a mother while as many (49.7%) feel that it is most natural

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\(^8\) An urban lifestyle in a flat without a backyard has considerably reduced the amount of traditional men's work in the family while this is not the case in rural spaces.
for a woman to take care of her children, husband and home. Even among younger populations, these traditional gender role divisions are evident reflecting the strength of socialisation practices within the family and other circulating discourses. For instance, a study was conducted among 612 secondary school students in Croatia in 2004 which revealed that 57% of the boys and 42% of the girls consider that women are responsible for bringing up children and housework (Cesi 2004).

To reiterate, this study attempts to show how domestic labour is embedded in complex and shifting social processes relating to the construction of gender and well-being of families. Since these patterns can only be understood by addressing the symbolic significance of domestic labour, the social construction of gender in rural households will be considered as well as the social, cultural, economic, and political contexts in which these women and men attribute meanings to their lives and sustain their families (including the process of “making lives”, caring for the family, providing necessities and building relationships). Personal characteristics as well as social and environmental factors will be considered to determine the extent to which access to well-being is facilitated or impeded.

Field Research

Fieldwork for this study was among both women and men in six rural villages in Slavonia, in the County of Vukovar-Sirmium, one of the 21 counties in the Republic of Croatia that was established in 1993, following Croatia’s independence. The county is situated at the very north-east of Croatia. Research for this study involved structured

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9 Research for this study was conducted in rural villages that are very close to the border of neighbouring Bosnia-Herzegovina. They included Gunja (popn. 5,033), Bošnjaci (popn. 4,653), Drenovci (popn. 3,049), Posavski Podgajci (popn. 1,568), Rajevo Selo (popn. 1,407) and Račinoveci (popn. 982) (Census 2001). The villages in this county are relatively large with a satisfactory level of infrastructure compared to other rural spaces in Croatia.
questionnaires for demographic details and open in-depth interviews designed to explore a variety of gender issues (on their family life, socialisation practices, personal life choices, perceptions of womanhood in rural spaces, ideal femininities, household division of labour, gender roles and expectations, education and work experiences, women’s rights and aspirations, conflicts, etc.). Selected questionnaires followed by interviews were completed by 67 rural (farm) women (single, married and widowed mostly in their 30s and 40s) as well as some of their husbands (14) in their homes. Only through comparisons of women and men, is it possible fully to understand the ways in which gender is constructed and the ways in which it is linked with levels of well-being experienced by both women and men. This research also included time that I spent with village women and girls in less structured settings that helped me understand more about their experiences and lives, for example helping women with their household chores or preparation and participation in community events such as feasts and holy days as well as rites of passage.

**Indicators of Traditionalism**

Research results based on the demographic data of those who participated in this study indicated that traditional trends are at work in the rural villages of the County of Vukovar-Sirmium. First, extended households are common in this sample and virilocal residence is the norm. This is a consequence of inheritance and residence practices to date, whereby men usually inherit land and women customarily move to their husband’s house upon marriage. Under these circumstances, women are clearly disadvantaged because they often experience a rupture with their previous single life and are often reduced to their reproductive biology whereby they have two crucial but limiting roles - effective housekeeping and bearing children (preferably sons). Their domestic position

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10 These practices can be traced back to the *zadruga* (a large joint family or clan in which a group of patrilineally related males along with their spouses and children lived together) in which there was a strict gendered division of labour and hierarchical relations where women were often in a subordinate position. The *zadruga* persisted as a formally constituted kin group until well after WWI in Slavonia.
is weak and tension often develops within the triangular relation of mother, son and daughter-in-law. Second, their education levels are low and there is little aspiration to pursue further education among the women in this sample. Almost half of the women (43%) in this sample only finished some grade of primary school, most commonly a lower grade while two never attended school. Nearly as many (38%) only finished secondary school. Fewer women (16%) completed some level of tertiary education. A low level of education and a lack of ambition especially among women in this region can explain why traditional gendered ideologies and practices have persistently survived and lasted (Šikić-Mićanović 2007). Formal education as a channel for social promotion could contribute to gender role change—affecting attitudes towards marriage, motherhood, division of labour and decision-making within the household. Predictably then, in view of their traditional upbringing and perspectives, levels of education, limited paid-work opportunities as well as the paucity of childcare provision in rural areas, more than three quarters of the women in this sample are not formally employed.

Unpaid and domestic: Who does this work?

Research has long established that gendered divisions of labour in farm/rural households have cultural rather than biological foundations (Brandth 1995; Haugen 1998; Shortall 1992; van der Burg 1994; Whatmore 1994). Unquestionably, women in this sample spend significantly greater amounts of time on unpaid domestic labour than men; they undertake the bulk of housework duties, childcare and other ‘invisible’ tasks that are a crucial part of domestic work. This social reproduction occurs mainly in the home and includes all of the work that is required to provide for the health and well-being of families. Hence, beyond providing for the family’s physical maintenance, this work also supports the emotional and psychological well-being of both individuals and

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11 The share of women that are illiterate amounts to 5.16% in this county (Census 2001).
12 Apart from their resourcefulness, women are expected to be versatile. They also need to know how to do men’s work in their absence although men are not expected to do women’s work.
the family collectively. Women in this study do this ‘homemaking’ by e.g., managing mealtimes to suit all members, cooking food that they like as well as managing interaction and relationship-building between family members to instil a feeling of affection and belongingness. Further, the women in this study do not transfer parts of domestic labour they are responsible for to the market economy e.g., they do not buy prepared-to-cook foods, they do not hire commercial services for duties like child care, cleaning, gardening, and painting. They also contribute to the family’s economic well-being by being thrifty in the home, by making and repairing clothing as well as home décor, and by growing and preserving their own fruit and vegetables, which is all a part of ‘being a woman’ and unpaid in these communities.¹³ Thus, in addition to doing more, they also feel responsible for family members’ well-being and are more likely than are men to adjust their work and home schedules to accommodate others. Evidently, the domestic work that they do affords little freedom of choice (e.g., doing dishes, preparing dinner, bathing children, changing nappies) and cannot be easily postponed; they have to be done. In comparison, domestic work for men (e.g., mowing grass, outdoor work, repair work) is high-control. These types of tasks allow a good deal of choice and flexibility in terms of when and how they are performed. Moreover, the time most of these women spend in domestic labour varies throughout their life course, as they never retire. Correspondingly, they expand and contract their work schedules in compliance with their responsibility for others (i.e., care of their children, spouse, the elderly and sick). In comparison, almost regardless of their position in the life course, men’s weekly hours of domestic work tend to be minimal and fixed that are not regulated by immediacy or changes in the family’s needs. In other words, domestic labour rarely disrupts the careers of men but seemingly has unfavourable affects on the life paths of women. The social disadvantages that flow from employed women’s family responsibilities have been studied (see Bittman 1999). These include: i) interrupted labour force attachment and downward social mobility; ii) lower lifetime

¹³ It should be noted that many women work in the informal economy (handiwork, selling produce at market, catering) to make ends meet which enables them to structure their day around family’s schedule.
earnings, less employment security; iii) increased exposure to the risk of poverty; iv) increased dependency on a male provider and low marital bargaining power; and v) restricted opportunities for public participation since family responsibilities are organised around family homes. Since less than a quarter of the women in this sample are employed in the formal sector, the situation is seemingly worse. Access to paid employment (despite the social disadvantages mentioned above) provides ways of accessing welfare and social rights whereas many of these women face social exclusion from sources of information, relief and income as well as social networks. Reflecting depletion of well-being, most often women talked about problems related to financial dependency and a lack of time to do anything else as well as insecurity, especially later in life. Unfortunately, domestic work is not counted as real or vital for the economy in Croatia, even though it is just as important to the maintenance of society as the productive work that occurs in the formal market economy. It remains invisible because it is carried out mainly in the private sphere of the home yet includes all of the work that is required to provide for the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of families. It has been noted that states often rely on women’s participation in their communities to promote health, harmony, and social cohesion (Hirschfeld 2000). Beyond doubt, the health sector in Croatia, perhaps more than any other area, has relied on traditional gender roles assigned to women and their unremunerated work.

14 It also makes women invisible because it effectively silences discussions and challenges to the status quo.
15 A number of pro-natal policies (e.g., maternity leave lasting 3 years for mothers of three or more children have been proposed in Croatia to entice women to give birth and care for children rather than be efficient and productive employees and professionals. Undoubtedly, this is a retrograde way of implementing pro-natal policies because women in all probability will not have jobs to return after a three year break and this lengthy leave would be detrimental in terms of career advancement. Since the unemployment rates for women have ranged between 52-60% in the last decade or so (Women and Men in Croatia 2007: 42) women do not need ‘career stoppers’ such as these. On the other hand, the government sees it as a convenient and multipurpose policy because women could then devote their futures to the care of their children, husband and elderly -- all at home. Thus, there would be no need for state-run kindergartens and homes for the elderly and presumably there would be less crime and a higher level of morality in the nation. Needless to say, this entails no empowerment for women because this policy does not give them financial independence even though a greater input is expected in terms of childcare, elderly care and domestic duties from them.
Ideals and aspirations: Who do they want to be?

Researchers have claimed that in a patriarchal society ‘work for a wage is less important to a woman’s social identity than her domestic duties’ (Massey, Hahn and Sekulić 1995: 360). Other researchers have found that respondents raised in rural settings in Croatia tend to hold more negative attitudes towards women becoming involved in wage labour (Brajdic-Vukovic, Birkelund and Štulhofer 2006). Hence, one would expect that women’s options are often already shaped by the belief that it is best for mothers to stay at home with their children, coupled with traditional divisions of labour in patriarchal, rural settings. Women in this study unanimously claimed that wage work/careers outside the home are not compatible with being a good mother, wife and homemaker. The conceptualisation of womanhood in these rural spaces is inextricably related to childcare and upbringing, domestic work and tending to the family’s well-being. Evidently, this can also be a source of stress if it disrupts their leisure time, which is an important component of a person’s well-being. Most women claimed that they have little leisure time and if any is available they spend this time with their children. They often highlighted their contribution to children’s well-being in that mothers have more time for their children, are more aware of their whereabouts and that they never ‘leave them’. This is perceived by both women and men as one of the advantages of village life. All the women interviewed regard being a mother as a source of personal fulfilment and identity and none of them complained about the work children represent. Rather than being conceptualised as “more work and less leisure,” this study showed that children can often provide women with economic and emotional security. Children are a reason for marriage (that corresponds to Catholic beliefs) as well as a guarantee that

16 This unfair division also has disadvantages for men because it excludes them from a child's development and makes less competent at fatherhood.
17 Although this is true considering their workloads, the contexts in which they live must also be taken into account. Few of these women drive and none walk around their neighbourhoods unless there is a reason for doing so. Moreover, there is little to do in the village in the form of sport or recreation as soccer and cafes are not for married women.
their marriages will stay intact because women can demand that their husbands fulfil their obligations as fathers. Sons allow women to gradually exercise control and influence as well as gain respect in the family and the community. Especially later in life, children can contribute to women’s well-being in particular by providing economic aid, company, social support and security.

Correspondingly, many of the married women I spoke to have very real and concrete interests in preserving the image of a harmonious and stable family in which everyone gets along. They explained to me that this is very important to them because a woman in these spaces is perceived as primarily responsible for the house, family problems, and children’s upbringing. Particularly in rural communities, domestic space and the labour within these spaces are closely tied to a woman’s identity. For instance, the ability to cook and the availability of homemade meals, that is, to provide ‘proper’ meals for their families, was viewed as vital by most women in this study: it was a fundamental part of women’s roles as wives and mothers. They felt that the kitchen was their domain and like to be in control of it. The preparation and giving of food (as well as the growing and preservation of food) not only contribute to the well-being of the family but is closely related to femininity and the subjective experience of being a woman in these rural spaces. In other words, doing femininity properly can reduce psychological stress among women since there is an enduring dominant belief that the ‘ideal’ woman is a good (domaćica)\textsuperscript{18} housewife and mother.\textsuperscript{19} Her place is at home because if she is doing all of these things properly (tending to her children, husband and home) she has neither the time or yearning to wander around. A good ‘domaćica’ and mother is attentive to her family’s well-being and acts as its moral guardian teaching moral and spiritual

\textsuperscript{18} Domaćica is defined as 1a) the wife of the domaćin; domaćin’s wife 1b) a female who does not work outside the home; who manages the household; housekeeper 2a) a female who manages the serving of food and is responsible for a homely atmosphere; 2b) stewardess. In comparison, domaćin is 1a) the head of the family, one who manages the household 1b) a male who is committed to the home, who manages the households well 2) caretaker; 3) host at a formal celebration or occasion (Anić 2003).

\textsuperscript{19} In comparison, according to the participants, an ‘ideal’ man is a man who provides the main source of income -- who looks after his family.
values.\textsuperscript{20} Unquestionably, this is one of the most effective and visible ways of ‘doing gender’, i.e., a way of doing ‘respectable femininity’ for these women as well as a way of accessing well-being.

Inevitably, domestic labour is also subject to a strict measure of public control in these rural spaces, which usually means more work for women. Those women who do not keep up the standards of housekeeping (especially if this can be seen by others) are gossiped about in the community, which is detrimental to their well-being. As a consequence, besides all of her other jobs, a ‘good’ housewife needs to make sure that their husbands and children are well-kept (clean, ironed underwear and clothes) because if their clothing is soiled or creased this is more a reflection of her lack of competency and laziness; she is not doing ‘respectable’ femininity properly.\textsuperscript{21} Whatever is publicly visible is always on show and women go to great lengths to make this look ‘the way it should’ in Slavonia. As a rule, windows facing the street are spotless and the footpaths in front of their houses are always the first thing that women sweep before they do anything else. Their laundry is always impeccably white and bears witness to the hours of boiling it has been through. These tasks are more complicated for women in rural Slavonia since this region is notorious for its mud/dust and water problems which considerably intensify domestic labour. Performing burdensome amounts and an inequitable share of domestic labour are likely to reduce perceived control over one’s life and, in turn, decrease well-being. However, if this yields a clean and pleasant living environment (that is closely monitored by the community) and if this division is tied to the broader organisation of society around gender this may also be a source of well-being.

\textsuperscript{20} Women are principally responsible for bringing up their children in a religious way. It is their duty to encourage children to pray at home, to say grace before meals, to fast and abstain, to go to mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation, to receive the sacraments, to go to confession at least twice a year, etc.

\textsuperscript{21} For instance, an elderly man explained to me that whenever he visits someone he always looks at their tablecloth. If it is ironed out like a sheet of glass then he knows exactly what the woman’s underpants are like!
**Invisible domestic labour: Kinwork**

Kinwork tasks are a way of sustaining family networks in Slavonia and like housework, are a woman's task. Based on fieldwork data, women often play an important role as the organisers of social interactions between families on feast days, religious holidays, rites of passage, etc. This is an important female role that foregrounds the discursive position of women as responsible social beings and good ‘communicators’. In particular, family and kinship played a crucial role in providing care for displaced persons and refugees during the war period in Croatia. Since the County of Vukovar-Sirmium was heavily affected by war, destruction and high levels of displacement and exile, many families in this region not only provided refuge for their kin but also took in refugees from neighbouring Bosnia. While men were at the frontlines, women had the responsibility for the welfare of traumatised persons who were forced to leave their war-torn homes. Beyond doubt, regardless of the circumstances, women can be seen as constituting part of the interconnecting "system" and the way households (mostly kin-related) are tied reciprocally to each other. However, kinwork can also be viewed from Bourdieu’s perspective (Bourdieu, 2001: 105) as no more than an example of women functioning to produce and reproduce social capital, creating ties between men which serve men’s interests as in status enhancement work (e.g., preparation of dinner parties for husbands’ work colleagues). While accusations that men benefit unfairly, without labouring, from women’s kin and interactional work may be experientially true, the benefit may be only peripheral compared to women’s ‘benefits’ and access to well-being. Many women in this study talked about their engagement in kinwork and many felt that this intensified a sense of belonging to their family, friends and local neighbourhood that is important to them since most move away from their natal households upon marriage.

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22 Approximately 80% of all refugees lived in the families of relatives and friends, and only 20% were housed in state and other institutions, collective centres, and camps (Human Development Report 1997).
Norms and Taboos: Why don’t men do women’s work?

Since gender is a relational term, the minimal requirement for ‘being a man’ is ‘not being a woman’. Accordingly, men are under pressure to constitute themselves as masculine behaviourally by avoiding forms of behaviour/work whose primary association is with women/femininity (see Cameron 2000). In other words, if men do ‘women’s work’ they risk being tainted by feminine attributes, which would, in effect, jeopardise their masculinity. Unmistakably, in this study, a man who does what is classified as women’s work in these rural spaces (e.g., dish or clothes washing, cleaning, ironing, vacuuming, washing windows, hanging out clothes or painting) is exposed to mockery, laughed at and congratulated on 8th March; his masculinity is at stake. Moreover, she is not ‘doing femininity’ properly and others in her household and the wider community look upon her very negatively because she is not playing according to the ‘rules of the game’. Overall, negative reactions are often expressed when men deviate from traditional gender norms within the household in comparison to positive reactions for women who are praised for ‘doing it all.’ The following comments reflect the social construction of gender and the rigidity of this gendered division of domestic labour even when the wife is employed and has children.

‘if a man washes the dishes, he’s not a man!’
What is he then?
He’s henpecked - tied to his wife’s apron-strings (laughs).
Vinko, 38

I don’t do woman’s work! I don’t cook, I don’t wash the dishes, I don’t vacuum, I don’t iron, but let’s say I bring in the vacuum cleaner…..If there’s a difficult man’s job (e.g., cutting the grass) to do -- that’s my responsibility but easier jobs are my wife’s and they are connected to the home......
While the above-mentioned domestic activities are the most stigmatizing, some such as childcare and cooking are becoming more acceptable. In any case, only a quarter of the husbands participate in some domestic labour, which varies from household to household (i.e., just cooking and childcare to a range of tasks). Some admitted that their husbands are embarrassed if they are seen doing these tasks so they do them behind closed doors. Some only do these jobs when their wives are sick because they have to be done and there is no one else to do them. This indicates that the division of domestic labour is far from equitable, even in cases where both are employed. Nevertheless, most of the women in this study are not willing to dispute or even question an inequitable domestic arrangement. Paradoxically, most seem untroubled and seemingly unconcerned by this ‘unfairness’. I only came across one self-assured woman who spoke about this inequality and her struggle to change this traditional division of labour. Predictably, this farm woman is exceptional in many ways. She has a university degree, lives in her parents’ house and is considerably older than her husband. Moreover, her leisure activities are very different from other women in these rural communities and she lived abroad for many years before she got married and had three children.

It is difficult to get a man used to this. I had problems. For him, it was unthinkable that a man does this type of work but for me it was unthinkable that I had to do everything, clean after him..... He would say: This should be done by a woman! (Laughs) This is a woman’s job! (Laughs again) I had to fight (repeats

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23 They may be more acceptable because they may are also be the most enjoyable (see Berheide 1984 and Kahn 1991). It should also be noted that not ‘all’ tasks related to these jobs are carried out by men. For example, an employed woman in her forties told me that in her lifetime she has never heard of or seen a man changing or feeding a baby or pushing a pram in these rural spaces.

24 Unsurprisingly, they all live in nuclear households, except for one woman who is frequently absent due to her voluntary work in a folklore group. In five cases, the men are absent at work for most of the year so their involvement is not ongoing.
and I’m still fighting because he forgets quickly, but I’m persistent. Vesna, 47

Clearly, in these villages, there is precise consensus about rules, roles and norms and both women and men stick to an allocation of responsibilities by ‘blatant normalcy’. There does not seem to be uncertainty and unconcealed conflict about gender roles; at best, men are making selective choices such that change is confined to the more enjoyable or more highly valued activities. Some researchers have found that traditional wives and wives with traditional husbands are more inclined to avoid conflict when they experience discontent with the division of domestic labour compared to egalitarian wives or wives with egalitarian husbands (Kluwer, Heesink & Van de Vliert 1997). This lack of open conflict over domestic labour is also a way of ‘doing gender’ for women. Contesting traditional roles in these spaces is not appropriate for their gender or ‘natural’ so it is still difficult for women to complain and engage in conflict over the division of labour especially in extended households. Being a ‘wife’ in these rural communities demands a certain amount of submission and compliance with no claim to superiority or dominance over a husband or in-laws which can be seen as a depletion of well-being. On the other hand, they can access well-being by affirming themselves as ‘proper women’ and reinforcing their position as ‘good wives’ and ‘good mothers’ in a farm/rural household to ‘fit in’, gain social power and appear in public without shame.

Concluding remarks (to be developed)

In this study, women play a dynamic role through their daily rehearsal of socially expected gender roles and relations in the production and reproduction of gender inequalities. In other words, gender inequalities are reflected in, and reinforced by women's participation in domestic labour that encapsulates a system of gender relations that silently disadvantages women in their access to power relations. However, the homemaker role is viewed as a desirable role of moral superiority for women by both
women and men even though it is not rewarded financially or in any other way. It is recognised as a component of women's marital and/or child-rearing roles and there is little questioning of women’s subordination or lack of potential for personal development. Satisfaction with doing all aspects of domestic labour reveals what women ‘should do’ -- as a way to ‘do gender’ that produces proper gender relations. They firmly hold onto these beliefs and practices because this means belonging to a culture in which they live. This sense of belonging is important to them and it inevitably increases their contributions and access to well-being. Thus, by ‘doing femininity’ properly in unpaid domestic labour they reinforce and solidify bonds between family members and between women in the wider community. Seemingly, the constraints and frustrations associated with domestic labour (worry, overload, lack of challenge, little control, stress, feelings of inadequacy) in these rural communities seemingly go unacknowledged because it is unpaid, private and often invisible. As a consequence, this may lead to depletions of well-being for women (in terms of a person’s functionings and capabilities: what she is able to do or be) in these rural communities. For example, since there is no anonymity in these rural communities there is a distinct lack of privacy which makes it difficult for women who are survivors of abuse to access support in a safe and confidential way. Or a lack of time limits their ability to participate and benefit from developmental activity particularly at decision-making levels. Thus, although women may be fully capable of resisting, they do remain constrained by an overarching social system such that scattered and uncollected resistances do not disrupt existing unequal gender roles and relations.
References


