

“Transition to fatherhood: how does economic crisis influence the use of parental and paternity leaves?”

by

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Introduction¹

It is well known that periods of economic recession usually have an influence on family formation dynamics and transitions such as cohabitation, marriage and parenthood. Such an influence may be direct, by reducing couples' incomes and their possibilities of childbearing, and indirect, by affecting state family policies. This paper aims to give a contribution to the observation of how macro level economical factors – labor market conditions, welfare policies and especially child care policies – influence couples' transition to parenthood in the Western world, with a focus on Mediterranean Europe. A comparison is proposed between Spain and Italy, as Spain is a country that relies upon a labor market system and a welfare state regime comparable to the Italian ones. In Spain, quantitative studies on how economic crisis and uncertainty in the labor market impact on first time parenthood show that the decision to have a child is more and more postponed, if not abandoned at all, by contemporary Spanish couples. This is due to the increasing economical insecurity deriving from deregulation and transformations in the labor market subsequent to the economic recession. A recent research, though, argues that, while Spanish welfare policies and gender attitudes are changing towards a dual-earner-model norm, in Italy the male-breadwinner model and the reliance on the family for most of the care services are still predominant, both on the institutional level and on the individuals' representations of family life (Noguera, Golsch, & Steinhage 2002; Lapuerta, Baizan, & Gonzales 2011; Naldini & Jurado 2013; Sobotka, Skirbekk & Philipov 2011). In order to give a contribution to better define such a situation, this paper presents the results of an empirical research on how Italian dual-earner couples deal with the transition to parenthood and, especially, how external factors like the economic situation and family policies influence such a transition, with particular regard to decisions couples make about parental leaves and child care organization.

In the next section we present a brief reconstruction of the different transformation of Spanish and Italian context referring to cultural and institutional attitudes towards parenthood and the gender division of care. In par. 2 we illustrate the research question, in the following one the data and methods and in last two we show the result and a preliminary discussion.

¹ This is a preliminary version of the paper. Please do not cite without authors' permission. All comments aimed at improving the paper are welcome.

1 - Setting the context: gender, transition to parenthood and childcare policies in Italy and Spain

Family life transitions have become real subjects of specific public policies only in recent years.

We can individuate, at least, three crucial steps in this slow path. First of all the change in the scientific analysis of welfare regime is strictly linked to the assumption of a gender perspective on the exam of welfare state regimes and public policies. At the beginning of the Nineties the most important classification of welfare regime made by Gøsta Esping-Andersen did not consider both gender and family life transitions (and the different impact on men and women of the choice in the several ambits of life). As outlined by Pfau-Effinger in 1998, even if Esping-Andersen does not ignore gender, his perspective is substantially restricted to the labour market. The family and unpaid work of women are not systematically included. Nor is the fact that the position of women vis-à-vis the welfare state, the family and the labour market is substantially different to that of men taken into account.

Another important step in the comprehension of different family policies is the centrality of the responsibility of care. According Pfau-Effinger 2006 (p.325), in feminist social policy analyses, various approaches have been developed which have classified welfare states according to their care policies. Changes in the social policies towards 'care' have been analysed from several authors (for example, Siim 2000; Lewis 2002; Rostgaard 2002; Meyer 2004). In 2003 Sigrid Leitner suggests to use public policies which explicitly support the family in its caring function as an indicator for familialism and to emphasize the gender perspective of family policy. The overall aim of her work is to develop a gender-sensitive theoretical concept of familialism which allows to identify real world variations of this process. In particular Leitner (re)defines the concept of familialism by drawing from Esping-Andersen's distinction between familialistic and de-familializing welfare regimes and by introducing a more predictable indicator for familialization: policies that actively support the family in its caring role. The empirical analysis of the fifteen EU member states leads to country clusters that differ considerably from the 'three worlds' typology of Esping-Andersen. Moreover, countries cluster differently for different care policies. Both results call for a more differentiated approach in comparative welfare state research. The article further develops a concept to include the gender dimension into the analysis of familialism. Applying gender sensitive criteria to paid parental leave policies in nine European countries leads to an assessment of the extent of structural gender (in)equality. The analysis shows gendered and de-gendered variants of familialism among the countries.

Finally, a gender perspective is important to understand how different welfare regimes to ensure the welfare of citizens and to understand the differences between men and women in the choice to participate or not in the labor market. But it necessary to adopt, also, a life course perspective to underline that the choices of individuals occur within social contexts that define- in a more or less stiff - margins of action. The life courses (for individuals, couples and families) are open and flexible systems within which overlap material and symbolic dimensions, institutional and cultural. From this perspective, individual biographies become part of a continuous and interactive process of historical change. As Elder (1985, pp. 32-33) noted, *Life course dynamics arise in part from the inter-play of trajectories and transitions, an interdependence played out over time and in relation to others. Interdependence emerges from the socially differentiated life course of individuals, its multiple trajectories, and their synchronization. The interdependence... is also expressed in the concurrence and overlap of transitions along different pathways.*

If we consider the individual life course and in particular the trajectories to work career, to marriage or couple cohabitation, to parenthood, the problem of interdependence of pathways becomes particularly complicated.

The transition to parenthood is especially crucial when it comes to assessing change and persistence of the gender binary. As Saraceno and Keck noted, mothers' and fathers' life course paths are clearly differentiated following the birth of children, and, in particular, during the initial years after childbirth (Lalive and Zweimüller 2005; Waldfogel, Higuchi, and Abe 1999). Fathers have higher employment rates than childless men of the same age. The opposite is the case for women, although to a varying degree, depending on the country. However, whereas for mothers a large range of studies show that having children decreases labour market participation, the evidence for the assumptions that men increase working time or employment in response to becoming a father is less clear. There is, however, clear evidence that (full-time) employed men are more likely than non-employed men to become fathers (Blome, Keck, and Alber 2009).

Several authors have analyzed the gender division of work in household, with regard to welfare state regimes and family supportive policies (i.e. Fuwa 2004; Lewis 1992, 2009; Mandel & Semyonov 2006; Mandel & Shalev 2009; van Oorschot et al. 2008; Orloff 1993).

Gornick & Meyers (2004), for instance, have indicated that Welfare states vary widely in the ways in which they support parents in their efforts to balance employment and caregiving responsibilities; they also vary in the extent to which they encourage gender-egalitarian divisions of labor in employment and at home. Family leave policies can grant parents time for caring for their young children and working time regulations can shore up caregiving time throughout the life cycle. Family leave designs can also both grant men generous paid leave rights and raise the likelihood

that they will take them up, while child care policies that ensure available, affordable and high-quality alternatives to maternal care can strengthen women's employment while enhancing child well-being. Cash benefits, in addition to paid family leave, can shore up family economic security, although their effects on parental caregiving time and gendered labor patterns are ambiguous².

From an institutional point of view, Lewis noted that since the late 1990s there has been a significant change in the way in which work/family reconciliation policies have been framed. From 1998, work/family reconciliation has been more firmly integrated into the Guidelines accompanying the European employment strategy (EES), with the result that, first, the goal of promoting gender equality by changing the behaviour of men has increasingly slipped out of the picture; and second, the policy focus has narrowed substantially to the provision of childcare services, which are more likely to promote female labour market participation than measures – such as long home-care leaves – that provide time to care. Similar indications have been expressed recently by European Commission (2012).

In this scenario, in which not only the care responsibilities *per se* are crucial to guarantee gender equality but the whole transition into parenthood, it is interesting to compare two Mediterranean countries – Spain and Italy - lumped together by a same cultural and institutional background and family policies approach but that in recent year have changed deeply and in different ways.

According Naldini & Jurado (2013), even though Italy and Spain usually are referred to as part of the corporatist/conservative Esping-Andresen's welfare regime, several contributions on the issue consider those two countries as cases of a “family/kinship solidarity model” (ivi: 44), in which the family model based on the male breadwinner is stretched to include not only spouses and children as dependent family member but also kin in order to cover them with social security benefits. Such a model is gender biased, as women's care work within the family is fundamental as a welfare source within the family, and the State provisions on the side of care are very poor. The authors, though, argue that while Italy is still committed to this model, Spain is moving towards a different family model, based on the dual-earner couple, both on the institutional level of state policies, which provide care services to a larger extent, and on the micro level of individual's attitudes towards the conciliation of care and paid work.

In a recent article on use of parental and paternity leave by Spanish fathers, Romero-Balsas, Muntanyola-Saura and Rogero-García (2013) reconstruct the Spanish context underlying³ that: a) the employment of female workers who have children has particularly increased in Spain during the

² On this topic see also the interesting contribute of Chiara Saraceno (2010).

³ Also Naldini e Jurado illustrate, with quantitative and institutional data, analogous the differences in two context.

last decade and this change in female life courses strained a system that was formerly based on a male breadwinner model; b) change in the Spanish family unit is derived by geographical dispersion due to job mobility; c) values have changed towards more egalitarian aspects in the public sphere; d) Spain has one of the widest gender gaps in household activities in the EU, since the increase in men's participation in household activities has been limited. Therefore, women's access to the labour market has not translated into an egalitarian allocation of household labour.

As different authors have pointed out, recently several changes have been implemented in Spanish work and family balance policies (Lapuerta, Baizan, & Gonzales 2011; Naldini & Jurado 2013; Romero-Balsas, Muntanyola-Saura and Rogero-García, 2013). In 2007 the Paternity Leave was implemented (in the Spanish Equality Law of 2007): it covers 15 full-paid days, and it cannot be transferred to the mother (one hundred per cent of earnings). The first two days have to be used at the time of birth (*permiso por nacimiento* i.e. birth leave); the 13 remaining days of Paternity leave (*permiso de paternidad*) can be used during or immediately after the end of Maternity leave (Escobedo & Meil, 2013, p. 255)⁴.

Spanish parents can avail also of two kind of Parental Leave: full-time parental leave (*Excedencia por cuidado de hijos*) that it has a maximum length of three years and is unpaid; part-time parental leave (*Reducción de Jornada*), that is a reduction of the time spent at work with a proportional wage reduction. Parents can take it until the child is eight years old.

In addition, fathers can take two transferable leaves: maternity leave (*Permiso de Maternidad*) and lactation breaks (*Permiso de lactancia*). Maternity leave consists of 16 weeks of full-paid leave. The first six weeks are compulsory for the mothers, but fathers can use the remaining 10 weeks. Lactation breaks consist of up to one hour of reduction per day of paid work until the child reaches nine months of age (Romero-Balsas, Muntanyola-Saura and Rogero-García , 2013, p.679).

Data on use of parental leave by fathers are not so encouraging: a quantitative study (n = 125,165) on Spanish parental leaves analyzed three databases (social security, local taxes and income taxes) (Lapuerta et al., 2011). Educated mothers were more likely to take parental leaves, while fathers were less likely to use parental leave; when they did take them, they were shorter. Nevertheless others empirical analyses have pointed out interesting new trend: a recent survey took into account the use of paternity leave (n = 2026) in the year 2010. This study indicated that 58% of working fathers used two weeks of paternity leave (Marí-Klose et al., 2010). The study shows also that

⁴ This does not apply in the public sector, where the 15 days are considered as a whole, to be taken at birth time as general rule (except when the specific regional government (Comunidades Autónomas) or institution regulates differently). Fathers can use Paternity leave part time with employer's agreement.

young fathers (from 19 to 34 years of age) who had a permanent contract with medium educational levels exemplify the profile of paternity leave takers.

Also, a qualitative studies carried out by Meil in 2004 and 2007 highlighted: a) the role of the immediate superior in taking parental leaves, as well as the importance of a work organizational culture (Meil et al., 2007); b) that the most relevant decision making factor was the construction of a new culture of fatherhood that implies a greater involvement in childcare and education (Meil et al., 2007a). In this perspective important results come from the study of Romero-Balsas, Muntanyola-Saura and Rogero-García (2013). The authors aim to understand how Spanish fathers construct and justify their decisions to use both paternity and parental leaves. Specifically, they analyse the fathers' discourse about paid work conditions, the couple's decision-making process, formal and informal care resources, and care and gender equality. In comparing the use of different types of leaves, Romero-Balsas et al. have focused on the discourses that surround the perceived work conditions, the partners' participation in the decision-making process, the need for other care resources, and the degree of care and gender equality. The findings indicate that paternity leave is mostly considered a right, but not a duty, and the decision whether or not to use it is viewed as an individual choice. Fathers who take longer leaves judge time off from work not only as an individual right, but also as a duty to their families. These fathers show a low work-connection discourse, an explicit rejection of other care resources, and a care-sensitive attitude.

In Italy there are three different kind of Leave (Addabbo e Giovannini, 2013, p.163): a) the *Maternity leave (Congedo di Maternità)* (responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policies and (for public employees) Ministry of Economy and Finance) has a length of twenty weeks (five months; at least four weeks before the birth)⁵. The payment is 80 per cent of earnings with no ceiling for salaried workers.⁶ The Leave is funded by the National Department for Social Welfare (INPS), financed by contributions from employers and employees at a rate that is related to the sector and to the type of contract. It is compulsory to take this leave; b) *Paternity leave (congedo di paternità)* (Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policies): one day of compulsory

⁵ For employees and workers enrolled in '*Gestione separata*'¹³³, the 20 week period is compulsory, but there are two options for taking this leave: four weeks before the birth and 16 weeks after (upon presentation of a medical certificate); and eight weeks before the birth and 12 weeks after. The allowance is accorded to autonomous female workers from eight weeks before the birth to 12 weeks after; maternity leave, however, is not compulsory for this category. The mother can transfer two days to the father.

⁶ For home helps, self-employed workers and agricultural temporary labourers, earnings are 80 per cent of conventional earnings determined each year by the law; for non-fixed term workers, maternity leave depends on accredited contributions, though each professional sector has the possibility to determine, with approval by the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policies, a higher ceiling, after considering income and contribution potential of the professional sector and compatibility with its financial.

leave. Fathers can take two additional days if the mother agrees to transfer these days from her Maternity leave allocation. All employees are entitled to take the Paternity leave. C) Parental leave (*Congedo Parentale*) (responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policies and - for public employees - Ministry of Economy and Finance): each parent is entitled to a six months leave, which is an individual and non-transferable entitlement. However, the amount of leave that can be taken by two parents in a family is ten months unless the father takes at least three months leave: in this case, fathers are entitled to one month of additional leave. The payment of parental leave is thirty per cent of earning (when the leave is taken for a child under three years; it is unpaid if taken when a child is three to eight years old).

If we consider, instead, the Italian context, it is clear that families in Italy have changed considerably in recent decades (Naldini e Jurado, 2013; Zaickzyk & Ruspini 2008; Murgia & Poggio 2011; Ranaldi & Romano 2008; Magaraggia 2012; Tanturri & Mencarini 2009; Rosina & Sabbadini 2005).

Behavior and life courses of Italian young cohorts of women have changed with regards to family formation: they remain longer in the parental home; they postpone marriage; they become mothers for their first time later and have fewer children over their life course. Over the last decades, behavior and life course of Italian women have changed also and chiefly with regard to labor market participation. Not only more women enter in paid work: the novelty is that they tend to remain inside the labor market even when they become mothers. From 1995 to 2007 the employment rate of women aged 15–64 years increased from 38% to 47% (Reyneri, 2009). Today, among younger cohorts especially in northern Italy, there is substantial parity between female and male employment rates. In ‘young’ families both fathers and mothers tend to be employed (or were before the birth of their child). In 2006 the employment rate of women aged 35–44 years living in a couple without children was 80%, but 16% of working women left their jobs after childbirth (Istat, 2006).

As Naldini and Jurado (2013) have pointed out, despite these women’s changes several factors indicate persistent difficulties young women are facing in combining family and work. First of all, crossways the country, the division of housework between men and women remains very unbalanced, and the gender gap (even among the younger cohorts) in domestic work among couples remains one of the largest in Europe. This incomplete transformation is evident not only in families but also in labour and social policies and institutions. Labour market settings and policies remain unbalanced by generation and by gender. Despite the fact that unemployment, temporary jobs and precariousness affect primarily young people and women, welfare state policies have not been recalibrated and social protection in those areas remain very low, in terms of both income

replacement and of job guarantee (i.e. one temporary worker might not be entitled by law or might be unable *de facto* to benefit of maternity and/or parental leaves). Scarce development of care services - such as childcare facilities for very young children, and scant development of policies for the reconciliation of work and family life – contribute to maintain a model of ‘unsupported familism’ (Saraceno, 2009). Finally, data on use of parental leave among fathers are not cheering: according to an Istat-Cnel survey (2003) based on a sample of working mothers with children under 18 months, the take up rate of the father is only 7% at national level. On the opposite according to the same survey, the take up rate of a period of parental leave of working mothers with children under 18 is high: 76% at national level (Lo Conte, Prati, Talucci 2003).

2 - Research questions

The aim of this paper is to observe whether economical factors’ influence on couples’ decisions change during the transition to parenthood, and whether the birth of the child makes a difference in partners’ representations of work-family balance and career expectation, given the macro institutional factors (labour market features and family policies). A special attention has been paid to the male side of the couple, thus focusing on the transition to fatherhood; within this perspective, practices of doing gender and, more broadly, features of the gender relations within the couple have been taken into account.

Specifically, our investigation focused on three issues. First of all, we intended to check whether the economic recession and its consequences on the labour market and the family policies, together with a welfare regime embedded in an overall traditional gender system, influences a reinforcing of the male-breadwinner model in contemporary Italian couples’ transition to parenthood. This would be due, for instance, by indirectly hindering the taking of parental leaves by men, who usually have the highest income within the couple, and thus fostering the traditional assignment to women of most of the child care work.

Secondly, in relation to the first research issue, our attention drew upon the possibility that the birth of the child itself would contribute to strengthen the traditional gender role system, accordingly to evidence found in other national and international research (see for instance Grunow et al. 2007).

Finally, we intended to analyse the relation between the level of commitment to the taking of the father’s role shown by interviewees and their enacting of alternative strategies to deal with requests both of flexibility on the work place and of child care work, for instance by reducing working hours, re-defining the job career and so on.

The novelty of this study is that the focus is specifically on the *transition to fatherhood* with the aim to enucleate, in fathers' discourses about the use of parental/paternity leave, the decision-making process structured on economic contingencies from the decision-making mechanism supported by a specific orientation about gender role division.

3 - Data and Methods

The research, based on a panel-type design, draws upon in-depth interviews on 17 dual-earner couples, most of them with a higher education level, living in Torino (North-Western Italy) and surroundings. All couples have been interviewed twice: the first time a few months before the birth of their first child, and the second time a year and a half after. First wave interviews have been realized in the period 2010 – 2012; second wave interviews in the period 2011 – 2013. Partners were interviewed always separately⁷. The whole corpus of qualitative data is composed of 68 interviews (34 for each wave). The couples have been identified through a sampling that started with contacts and formal requests for collaboration with institutions, structures and foundations of the Turin area (Birth Points, Counseling Services, centres of midwives and gynaecologists). The majority of respondents is university graduate, in particular the women of the sample. The educational level of our interviewees was significantly higher than the average in the Italian population in which only 25 per cent of women and 16 per cent of men had tertiary education (Eurostat, 2010-2011). The socio-economic variability of the sample was rather limited, the majority being employed in the service sector, i.e. teachers, researchers, administrators, social workers, nurses, technicians, lawyers⁸. For this analysis we have analyzed in more detail the fathers' discourses; nevertheless, since the decision process is a couple's path, it has been essential to take into account during the analysis also the interviews of the partners. The first wave of interviews focused on diverse issues regarding the expectations about the upcoming experience of parenthood, such as decisions or previsions on work-family balance and child care organisation; the second wave of interviews intended mainly to understand whether the reality of parenthood was consistent with the new mothers' and fathers' expectations. In this work, we will present the results of the analysis conducted on interviews to the men, in order to focus on the transition to fatherhood and especially on the influence that the economic situation had on men's representation of mothers' and fathers' roles.

⁷ The qualitative data come from the project "Practices and policies around Parenthood" (supervisor Manuela Naldini, Turin University). For more details see: (http://www.unito.it/unitoWAR/page/dipartimenti8/D072/D072_progetti2?path=/BEA%20Repository/5048067). For a preliminary analysis on this data see Bertolini, Musumeci, Naldini, Torrioni, 2013.

⁸ For more detail on sample's characteristics see tab. 2 and 3 in Appendix.

The analysis of interviews consisted, first of all, of finding in each interview, of both first and second wave, the fundamental concepts on which the interviewee focused. Secondly, we proceeded in defining the transversal themes common to all interviews, and in comparing the interviewees on both a longitudinal level, verifying the recurrence of contents expressed in the first and the second wave of interviews, and on an “horizontal” level, relating interviewees on common themes and concepts. Subsequently, the analysis of the contents consisted of two steps, on two different levels: a descriptive one, and an interpretative one. On the descriptive side, we investigated the general trends of the sample on some dimensions such as: ideals and practices of child care; perceptions and emotions of fatherhood; reference models; patterns and strategies of work-family balance and gender attitudes. Taking advantage of the panel-type design of the research, we observed as well whether such trends are, on a general level, the same between the first and the second wave of interviews, which means, before and after the child’s birth. On the interpretative side, we conducted an in-depth study of each transition, in order to build a typology able to show accordances and discordances between representations of fatherhood expressed before the birth of the child and the practices of parenthood enacted once the child is born. A useful tool for this aim is the Transition Matrix modeled on the base of the SWOT analysis matrix, which takes into account four dimensions at a time and is particularly adapted for analysing decision-making processes (for more details see Armostrong, 1982; Hill & Westbrook, 1997). In this case, the Transition Matrix has been used in order to take time into account, so as to take advantage of the panel-type design of the research, on the specific issue of the influence of the economic situation on the transition to fatherhood, especially on care decisions and strategies of work-family balance. Cases have been put into the matrix depending on their expectations first, and their experience after the child’s birth, over the influence of external economic factors on care and work strategies⁹.

4 - Results

If we consider the attitudes toward the use of parental leave (I wave) and the concrete practices of fathers (II wave) after the baby’s birth, qualitative data confirms the scarce propensity of men to take a withdrawal period from paid work. Table 1 shows whether fathers and mothers decided to plan to use of parental leave (and paternity, for men) and if they have taken it after the baby’s birth¹⁰. Differently to the female sample, only two fathers out 17 (Bluma and Citiso) have decided to take parental or paternity leave.

⁹ A SWOT analysis is a structured planning method used to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats involved in a project or in a business venture. This methods of analysis is used in management researches. SWOT analysis may be used in any decision-making situation when a desired end-state (objective) has been defined.

¹⁰ For more detail on planning of child care arrangements see Bertolini, Musumeci, Naldini, Torriani, 2013.

Among the most frequent motivations for not taking the parental leave, at the first place we find the economic situation in which the respondents are. But in which way the uncertainty about work conditions influence the decision to use parental leave?

Table 1- Plans and practices about the use of parental leave

Paternity/parental leave (Fathers)				
Planned and Taken	Planned but not taken	Not Planned and not taken	Not planned but taken	Not entitled
Citiso (Parental leave)		Albizia, Cerfoglio, Falasco Loglio, Lupetto, Mercorella Mirride (*), Oki, Poli, Robini Salice, Solarino, Tamerici	Bluma (paternity leave)	Ciclamino Loto
Parental leave (Mothers)				
Planned and Taken	Planned but not taken	Not Planned and not taken	Not planned but taken	Not entitled
Albizia, Loglio, Lupetto Mercorella, Robinia	Salice	Ciclamino, Citiso, Falasco Oki (*), Poli, Solarino	Loto, Mirride, Tamerici	Bluma Cerfoglio

Note: (*) the interviewee does not exclude to take the parental leave in the future.

In order to answer to the first research question, we first analyzed the transitions by means of the Transition Matrix, used so as to consider expectations of the interviewees regarding the care strategies linked to the economic situation to the couple, and the enacting of such strategies once the baby was born (see Fig.1). In particular, we paid attention to information about income and working conditions, perception of stability on the job, career expectations, knowledge about parental leave and decisions whether to take it or not, or on how to share it within the couple. In so doing, we found, first of all, that for ten men out of 17 the income and the job situation of both themselves and their partners are a source of concern before the transition, and proved themselves to be right after the birth of the child, as the care arrangements they made respond mostly to a criteria of saving money, apparently on a “rational choice” basis.

Fig.1 - Influence of the economical situation over the transition to fatherhood (SWOT – Transition Matrix)

		II WAVE – practices	
		<i>Threats</i>	<i>Opportunities</i>
		Economic situation <u>DID</u> have an influence over the transition	Economic situation <u>DID NOT</u> have an influence over the transition
I WAVE - previsions	Weakness	Economic situation <u>WILL</u> have an influence over the transition	Bluma <i>Cerfoglio</i> <i>Ciclamino</i> <i>Citiso</i> Falasco Loglio <i>Loto</i> <u>Poli*</u> Salice Tamerici
	Straight	Economic situation <u>WILL NOT</u> have an influence over the transition	Lupetto <i>Mirride</i> <i>Oki</i> <u>ALBIZIA</u> Mercorella <i>Robinia</i> Solarino

Note: (We took into account information expressed by interviewees about income and working conditions, perception of stability on the job, career expectations, knowledge about parental leave and decisions whether to take it or not, or on how to share it within the couple.

Kind of arrangements for reconciling work and care responsibilities (legend):

- **Breastfeeding allowance;**
- WORKING HOURS REDUCTION
- Temporarily unemployed
- *Vacation/other allowances*
- No work-care arrangements

*he took a short vacation when the baby was born then lost his job a few weeks afterwards; at the time of the second interview he is unemployed.

Most of them have an higher monthly income than their partners, but still a medium-low one, below 2000€ and for some of them the situation after the birth of the child is worse, as, according to our data, some interviewees suffered a reduction of their income, one lost his job and one of them took advantage of the unemployment insurance. The working situations of the interviewees in this group is stable, in both the moments of interview, only for 6 men in this group, 5 of which have a full time permanent work contract, and one who is self-employed. This last case, though, experiences a strong unbalance between working time and income, since he works 60 hours per week and earns monthly around 1200€ an income that rises to 2000€ though, at the time of the second interview. In the first wave of interviews, furthermore, two men have a temporary job contract (Poli and

Citiso)¹¹, which remains such in the second wave for one of them, but turns into an unemployment situation for the other; one has a full time job with no contract in both the moments of interview, and the last case considered takes advantage of the unemployment insurance before the birth of his child, a situation that gets slightly better in the second moment of interview since he finds a job with a temporary contract.

Because of the instable job situation experienced by most of the men in this group, the couples' decisions over care arrangements usually lead to the taking of the parental leave only by the women. Most interviewees in this group claimed, indeed, that it would have been impossible for them to leave their job for long periods of time without severe consequences on their careers, in some cases the loss of the job. Such considerations, together with the fact that these men's income is, while medium-low, still on average higher than their partners', lead to the interviewees' decisions to delegate most of the care work to their partners, so as to preserve a sufficient family hood income. The same outcome is extendable the whole sample of interviewees: the great majority took vacation or allowances in correspondence with the children's births, only very few took advantage of specific parental allowances. This result is consistent with data from national surveys that show very low percentages of Italian fathers taking parental leaves: Ranaldi & Romano (2008) report, for 2005, only 7,5% of Italian working men taking parental leaves, which means less than one out of ten (see also Crosta 2008, in Zaiczuk e Ruspini 2008).

In only two cases in the whole sample, opposite to expectations expressed before the birth of the child, the father took advantage of a working time reduction as a support to breastfeeding allowance for six months after the birth of the child. In these cases, though, the reason of such a care arrangement was that the mother of the child was not entitled to any kind of parental leave. It is the case of Carlo (BLUMA, II wave), a 42 years old bank employee who took advantage of the said allowance since his partner, who has a research scholarship, was not entitled to take a parental leave:

“Since she didn't take advantage of any, how to call it, any leave I could take the breastfeeding [allowance] (...) she told me «take it, so that I can continue to do something for my job too» (...) and I took it”

[Non avendo usufruito lei di nessun tipo di, come dire, di congedo io ho potuto usufruire dell'allattamento (...) lei mi ha detto prendilo perché almeno se c'è da così posso continuare anch'io a poter far qualcosa del lavoro (...) e io l'ho preso].

¹¹ Fantasy names and surnames.

The same happened to *Ciro* (FALASCO, II wave), a 40 years old full-time worker whose partner is a self-employed surveyor. Since she was not entitled to take parental leaves, he took advantage of the breastfeeding allowance, and wishes to keep working with reduced hours when the allowance will expire as well, even though he knows it would be hard as, according to the law, he would suffer from an income reduction, so:

“If it was possible yes, I would like to [keep the reduced working hours], but it is not possible, because the 53/2000 law says that one of the parents has this allowance since the 4th month until the 1st year of age, so there are no more /paid/ (stressed) allowances”

[Se fosse possibile sì, mi farebbe piacere, ma non è possibile , perché la legge 53/2000 prevede che uno dei genitori abbia questo riposo dal compimento del quarto mese fino al compimento dell’anno di età , quindi non ci sono più altri permessi /retribuiti/ (marcato)].

For three of the men interviewed, the consequences of the economic situation were not foreseen before the birth, but showed themselves afterwards; in these cases, the lack of provisions over the influence of financial issues on the transitions was due to a general low attitude towards short run forecasting or a lack of awareness about the transition they were going to live. *Adamo* (OKI, I wave), for example, says about his perception of becoming father: “for now I haven’t realized yet, I will realize when we will be there, when he will be born, for now...” [Per adesso non ho ancora realizzato, realizzerò quando saremo lì, quando sarà nato, per adesso...]. The men in this group have all a stable work situation: they all have full time permanent job contracts, and even though one of them occasionally takes advantage of the unemployment insurance due to a managerial decision of his employer, his job is not at risk.

Finally, four interviewees were not concerned about financial issues before nor after the transition. This group of men is characterized on average by the best economic and working situation in the sample, since three out of four of them are self-employed and earn around 2000€ per month at the time of the first interview. The last man in this group has a permanent job but takes occasionally advantage, in both moments of interview, of the unemployment insurance: in his case, the lack of concern for the economic situation of the family hood is due his values set, characterized by the belief that earning money should not be a person’s first concern in life:

“I have always been interested basically in functionalizing work for living, not living to functionalize... it’s right to work limited to what you need to live a fair life but it’s right to recover

time, which is the only thing you cannot turn into money, in order to get the chance to dedicate myself to educational activities, of personal enrichment and so on.”

[A me ha sempre interessato fundamentalmente funzionalizzare il lavoro per vivere, non vivere per funzionalizzare... è giusto lavorare limitatamente a quello che serve per fare una vita dignitosa però è giusto recuperare del tempo, che è l'unica cosa non monetarizzabile, per far sì che io possa dedicarmi a delle attività personalmente educative, di crescita ed altro.] (MERCORELLA, II wave).

Finally, if one of the interviewees has a lower income after the birth of his child due to a reduction of the working hours, two cases see an increasing of their earnings, which in one case reaches around 3000-3500€ per month.

Interestingly enough, the fathers of this last group share with those of the first group, as a general trend, traditional attitudes towards the father's and mother's roles, expressing the idea that the mother has the primary care responsibility and predicting that she will be more committed to care practices, and therefore they observe, after the birth of the child, the existence of a “special bond”, of an “instinctual” nature, existing between their partners and their children. Before the birth, many men of the sample express the prevision that their partners will perform most of the care work, and leave little space for them to participate:

“I think that the mother the first year [does] 90% [of the care work]”

[Io ritengo che la mamma il primo anno il 90% (del lavoro di cura).] (MIRRIDE I wave)

“I think that it will be all the time managed by her like «do this, do that»... that maybe she organizes more the management of the baby and of the house and I will adapt to it”

[Secondo me sarà dettata sempre da lei nel senso “fai questo, piuttosto che fai quello”... che magari si organizza lei per gestire più il bambino, più la casa e io mi adeguo.] (ROBINIA I wave)

After the birth of the child, the fathers' sensation is that their role is subordinate to their partners', and they feel a different bond with the baby.

“let's say that most of the time she takes care [of the baby], yes. I help her, I assist her (...) she's there, I help her but if my, how to say, my availability would be needed I am there, it goes without saying” [Ma diciamo la maggior parte delle volte se ne prende cura lei, sì, sì. (...)] Io gli dò una

mano, la assisto (...) C'è lei, io gli do una mano ma se servisse il mio, come si dice, la mia disponibilità io ci sono, ci mancherebbe anche.] (CICLAMINO, II wave)

“I think that the mum should spend as much time as possibile with the baby, because the feeling with the baby that comes out is not comparable with anyone else” [penso che la mamma dovrebbe stare il maggior tempo possibile col bimbo, perché il feeling che si crea col bimbo penso che non sia equiparabile con nessun altro] (FALASCO, II wave)

“Well, the first year [a baby's biggest need is] the mum for sure. Meaning that I see, I am developing a strong bond but since six months ago, meaning that the first year really the baby's need is the mum” [Ma, il primo anno sicuro la mamma. Nel senso che io vedo, mi sto legando tanto ma di qui ai sei mesi, nel senso che nel primo anno veramente le esigenze del bimbo sono quelle della mamma] (ROBINIA, II wave)

Most of the fathers in the sample, thus, align to an interpretation of the father's role as subsidiary to the mother's: the fathers' contribution to care work is often, and despite intentions and desires of involvement expressed sometimes, subordinate to the mothers' (Fägerskiöld 2008; Magaraggia 2012).

There is a difference in the two mentioned main groups, though, on the side of men's commitment to the “male-breadwinner” model, and here we come to the second research question. For most of the men interviewed, the birth of the child does bring to the strengthening of traditional gender role attitudes concerning care practices (as demonstrated in tab.1 in the section linked to the planning about use of parental leave), as most of them predict a weak involvement, and behave accordingly to such prediction, performing on average 40% of the care work. Though, we found evidence of the fostering of the male-breadwinner model, with a strong commitment to paid work as an identity field and considering a man's job to provide the economical support to the family, only among those men who were not concerned about economic issues during the transition. Luigi (ROBINIA), for example, is a self employed physiotherapist, who earned on average 2000€ before his child was born, and whose income increased, together with an increment of his working hours, to reach on average 3000-3500€ per month, while his partner earns monthly, in both the moments of interview, around 900€. The economic situation of the family hood is stable, to make Luigi wish that his partner would leave her job to stay at home and care for the child, since her income does not constitute a contribution to the financial status of the family. He is strongly committed to his job, to which he dedicates up to 50 hours a week, and participates to the care work only for the 20% of the total work, as predicted before the birth of the child. According to Habib's (2012) report of the kind of father's roles categorized in the social sciences, Luigi finds himself committed to the “provider”

role, being the main source of income for the family hood and investing most of his energy on such a role.

Linked to these findings is our third research question: how do those cases who are not committed to a male breadwinner model nor show traditional gender attitudes deal with the transition? What kind of care strategies are put into being, taken account of the economic situation and of the opportunity to take parental leaves with its consequences on the job?

The only case of explicit commitment to a gender-equal sharing of care work and responsibility is represented by Enzo (LOTO), a 41 year-old employee who was taking advantage of the unemployment insurance at the moment of the first interview. Before the birth of his child, he expressed the idea that the mother's and the father's role are the same, and that both parents should take care of the child the same way; he predicted a fair share of the care work with his partner, 50-50%. Talking about the fact that he was not working at the moment, he expressed the idea that on one side it would have been easier to manage the child care, as he was at home and could take care of the baby himself:

“On the one hand I hope to go back to work and for obvious reasons, on the other hand I would say I don't, meaning that it would simplify from a certain point of view the management of the baby, meaning that we wouldn't need anyone taking care of her, like I could easily take care of her”

[per certi versi spero di tornare a lavorare e per ovvie ragioni e per altri quasi quasi no, nel senso che semplificherebbe da un certo punto di vista la gestione della bambina, nel senso che non avremmo bisogno di nessuno che ce la guarda, cioè potrei tranquillamente guardarla io.] (LOTO, I wave)

At the moment of the second interview, Enzo has found a new job, and his income is lower than his partner's; even though he expresses a sense of relief for having got back into the labor market, he claims that he is not interested in his career, nor considers his job as a field of self confidence and realization. He took care of 70% of the childbearing after his daughter's birth, while he was not working yet, and since he got back to work the share of the child care work is 50-50%; he claims that the only field in which the parents are not interchangeable is natural breastfeeding, otherwise the father is, in his own experience, just as good as the mother in providing material care to a baby. Enzo seems, thus, committed to a scope of gender equality in parental roles, and quite far from the traditional male breadwinner role, maybe due to the awareness that his income is not the main source of financial maintaining of the family hood. Referring again to Habib (2012), Enzo is the

only “shared caregiver” in our sample, who is “sharing tasks and responsibilities more or less equitably with mothers” (ivi: 104).

5 - Discussion and conclusions

In this paper the aims are to a) check whether the economic recession and its consequences on the labour market and the family policies, together with a welfare regime embedded in an overall traditional gender system, influences a reinforcing of the male-breadwinner model in contemporary Italian couples’ transition to parenthood and fatherhood; b) understand the possibility that the birth of the child itself would contribute to strengthen the traditional gender role system; c) analyse the relation between the level of commitment to the taking of the father’s role shown by interviewees and their enacting of alternative strategies to deal with requests both of flexibility on the work place and of child care work, for instance by reducing working hours, re-defining the job career and so on.

Differently from Spanish fathers who consider parental leave a right for men (although not a duty) (see Romero-Balsas, Muntanyola-Saura and Rogero-García , 2013 p.688), the Italian ones do not consider the parental or paternity leave neither a right nor a duty, just a *possibility*. The recourse to parental leave is, for the most part of fathers, an *extrema ratio* when the other solutions are not practicable (for instance when the mother is not entitled to take the parental leave).

Qualitative data show also a differentiation in the decision-making process. For the most part of the sample (10/17) the concern for the economic and occupational situation prevails: in this group, however, half of the fathers have resorted to some care arrangements to conciliate work and family responsibility (parental leave; breastfeeding allowance; paid vacations). In this group the discourses about the decision to use the parental leave are often connected with evaluations of economic opportunity: parental leave is seen as an anti-economic tool, for this fathers the thirty per cent of earnings (when leave is taken for a child under three years) is a too low quota for facing the cost (also in relation to work career) to take parental leave. Clearly in these cases, work conditions, such as employment stability or more father-friendly workplaces, would encourage employees to take more time off (Lapuerta et al., 2011; Meil et al., 2007a).

Nevertheless the discourses clearly founded on a the *ideology of separate sphere and on the male breadwinner model* emerge only among those men who were not concerned about economic issues during the transition (third group). They show a traditional discourse with respect to care and fatherhood based on a sexual division of labour that posits paternity leave as a strategic tool only for

women.

It is clear, nevertheless, that in our Italian sample there is only a pioneering father who defines his role including new practices that show awareness of childcare as a responsibility to be assumed by both parents.

Contemporary Italian parenting relationships are rich with contradictions between practices, desires and social norms. Those fathers who eager to be caring, participatory and emotionally involved and who reject the conventional model of the peripheral father (Starace 2000; Magaraggia 2012) must constantly deal with past cultural norms that are unable to integrate innovative practices. The result of these negotiations is a complex redefinition of what it means to be a father today whereby aspects of both past experiences and new social expectations are accepted and rejected. These contradictions are at the root of what is one of the characteristics of modern industrial societies: while maternal behaviour, although changing, seems to maintain a stability of traits, 'fathers' behaviours seem to be dependent on a wide range of factors, including those related to the personal and social sphere' (Bertocchi, 2009: 99). In particular, when the ambit of economic and occupational is under attack as in these periods of financial crisis, it seem too difficult for the fathers to take into account the gender equality issue in their decisional processes. It does not mean that they are similar to their fathers in the gender attitude: often they are in not father-friendly work places that do not help an equal sharing of care.

A new asset of policies to support parents could take into account that in order to improve the use of parental leave among fathers it is important to change the perception of this tool: sharing the care with the mother is not only a right but also a duty; but in time of occupational and economic insecurity the parental leave should be more economically attractive.

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Table 2

		I WAVE			
Interviewee	education	profession	job contract	income (€)	partner income (€)
ALBIZIA	degree in literature	computer science consultant	self employed - full time	2000-2500	1400
BLUMA	high school diploma	bank section vice-director	full time; permanent labour contract	1800-2000	1600 + extra
CERFOGLIO	high school diploma	mechanical designer	full time; permanent labour contract	1650	1000-1100
CICLAMINO	middle school diploma	gardener	full time - no contract	1100	1200
CITISO	degree in aerospace engineering	high school teacher	full time - temporary worker	1300	600
FALASCO	conservatory diploma	specialized worker	full time; permanent labour contract	1250	900-1000
LOGLIO	degree in physics	researcher	full time; permanent labour contract	1500 circa	1000 circa
LOTO	high school diploma	programmer	temporarily unemployed (unemployment insurance)	2000 (when he was working)	1400
LUPETTO	degree in economy	bank employee	full time; permanent labour contract	1700-2000	1000-1200
MERCORELLA	high school diploma	commercial manager	part-time unemployment insurance	1700	680-700€since she has a part-time (before: 1100 circa)
MIRRIDE	high school diploma	technician	full time; permanent labour contract	2500 circa	2000
OKI	professional qualification	employee in automotive factory	full time (occasional unemployment insurance)	1300	1200
POLI	degree in economy	sales engineer	full time - project worker; fixed term contract	1400	1600
ROBINIA	degree in physiotherapy	physiotherapist	self employed - full time	2000 circa	900
SALICE	degree and PhD in law	lawyer	self employed - full time (60 h/week)	1200 circa	1300 (according to her partner: 1200 or even less)
SOLARINO	high school diploma	associate and trainer in a gym	self employed - full time	1800	1200
TAMERICI	degree and PhD in physics	high school teacher	full time; permanent labour contract	1400	950

Table 3

		II WAVE			
Interviewee	education	profession	job contract	income (€)	partner income (€)
ALBIZIA	degree in literature	computer science consulent	self employed - 30 h/week	1300 circa	1400
BLUMA	high school diploma	bank employee	full time; permanent labour contract	reduced (no other indications)	500
CERFOGLIO	high school diploma	mechanical designer	full time; permanent labour contract	1650	-
CICLAMINO	middle school diploma	gardener	full time - no contract	1000-1300	1000
CITISO	degree in aerospace engineering	high school teacher	full time - temporary worker	1300	unemployed
FALASCO	conservatory diploma	specialized worker	full time; permanent labour contract	reduced (breastfeeding allowance)	900-1000
LOGLIO	degree in physics	researcher	full time; permanent labour contract	1650	900 circa
LOTO	high school diploma	programmer	full time - temporary worker	1300-1400	1500-1600
LUPETTO	degree in economy	bank section director	full time; permanent labour contract	2000 circa	1000 circa
MERCORELLA	high school diploma	commercial manager	part-time unemployment insurance	1000-1100 (even though he says it's the same since the first interview)	680-700€since she has a part-time (before: 1100 circa)
MIRRIDE	high school diploma	technician	full time; permanent labour contract	2500 circa	1200 circa
OKI	professional qualification	employee in automotive factory	full time (occasional unemployment insurance)	1300	reduced (?)
POLI	degree in economy	unemployed	-	-	1600
ROBINIA	degree in physiotherapy	physiotherapist	self employed - full time	3000-3500 circa	900 circa
SALICE	degree and PhD in law	lawyer	self employed - full time (60 h/week)	2000 circa	1300 (according to her partner: 1200 or even less)

SOLARINO	high school diploma	associate and trainer in a gym	self employed - full time	2000 circa (non specificato)	850
TAMERICI	degree and PhD in physics	high school teacher	full time; permanent labour contract	1400	1300 circa