

The Caring Function of the Family: Belgium in Comparative Perspective

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Abstract

The paper starts with theoretical considerations about how care responsibilities can be distributed between state, market and private households. Four types of familialism are distinguished that show distinct patterns of service provision and payments for care as well as distinct effects on gender relations. In a second step, the paper will focus on the dynamics of change within familialism. It will be shown how Belgium – as one of the conservative welfare regimes with high priority for the family – changed its social care arrangements in the field of child care and elderly care over time. Traditionally, Belgium is known for a well organised system of institutional child care, but during the last two decades, in addition, payments for care and time rights to enable family care were introduced. It will be shown why care policies were introduced and reformed and how these changes affected social care arrangements. In the concluding section, the findings of the Belgian case study will be interpreted in the light of a more general comparative framework.

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1. Varieties of familialism¹

Within the “welfare triangle” of state, market and private households, caring for children, the elderly and the handicapped can be organised in various ways. In the following, I will distinguish between welfare regimes that rely on and actively support family (and family-like) care arrangements² as the main source of care provision and welfare regimes that attempt to relieve the family from caring responsibilities. Whereas the first type of regime puts the family at the centre of care provision, the second one either socialises or “marketises” the caring function of the family.

Institutional structures which actively aim at strengthening the family in its caring function can be found in the field of child care as well as in the field of care for the elderly and handicapped. The state as a central actor in the field can provide (1) time rights – such as parental leave and care leave –, (2) direct and indirect transfers for caring – such as cash benefits and tax reductions –, and (3) social rights attached to care giving like individual pension rights or the (partial) inclusion in other social security schemes or derived rights for non-employed wives (husbands). Also enterprises and private charity organisations can provide incentives for family care like e.g. wage supplements for the male breadwinner or temporary financial help. These *familialistic* structures of a welfare regime can be contrasted with *de-familialising* structures which aim at unburdening the family in its caring function, like the public provision of child care or social services or the (public subsidy of) care provision through the market or the voluntary organisation of care services by civil society. If we suppose variation, i.e. strong and weak expressions within both kinds of care policies and if welfare regimes may contain combinations of familialistic and de-familialising structures, the following matrix can be drawn (see table 1).

Four ideal types of familialism emerge from this matrix:

- The *explicit familialism* not only strengthens the family in caring for children, the handicapped and the elderly through familialistic structures. It also lacks the provision of any alternative to family care. This lack in care provision by the state, the market or the voluntary sector together with strong familialistic structures explicitly enforces the caring function of the family.
- Within the *optional familialism* services as well as familialistic policies are provided. Thus, the caring family is strengthened but is also given the option to be (partly)

¹ This chapter compiles and supplements parts of Leitner 2003.

² The concept of family which is used here includes all small-scale private care arrangements that provide non-market care. Usually, caring among close relatives would be most typically, but a family-like care arrangement could also include friends and neighbours.

- unburdened from caring responsibilities. In both the explicit and the optional familialism “the right to time to care” (Knijn and Kremer 1997) is honoured by familialistic structures which enable the family to care. Yet, only in the optional familialism is the family’s right to care not equated with the family’s obligation to care.
- The *implicit familialism* neither offers de-familialising structures nor actively supports the caring function of the family through any kind of familialistic policy. Nevertheless, the family will be the primary caretaker in these welfare regimes since there are no alternatives at hand. This type, therefore, relies implicitly upon the family when it comes to care issues.
 - Finally, *de-familialism* would be characterised by strong de-familialising structures due to the provision of care services by the state, the market or the voluntary sector and weak familialistic structures. Thus, family carers are (partly) unburdened but the family’s right to care is not honoured.

Table 1: Combinations of strong/weak familialistic structures and strong/weak de-familialising structures

	de-familialising structures strong	de-familialising structures weak
familialistic structures strong	<i>optional familialism</i>	<i>explicit familialism</i>
familialistic structures weak	<i>de-familialism</i>	<i>implicit familialism</i>

Until now, the analysis has put forward an institutional point of view. But, to determine the type of familialism a welfare regime belongs to, it is important to distinguish between familialistic and de-familialising structures on the one hand which build the institutional frame for family care arrangements, and the use of these structures on the other hand which institutionalises certain family care arrangements. Obviously, an institutional frame might allow for plural options but social practise might show special (cultural) preferences and thus restrict options given by institutional structures. Otherwise, a misfit between structures and preferences might also lead to the development of alternative institutional structures, be it by public policy, the market or the civil society. Thus, the institutional and the cultural level of familialism will have to be determined and contrasted.

Since family care is usually provided by women (wives, daughters, daughters-in-law), supporting the caring function of the family through familialistic structures represents a gendered subject per se. Speaking from an institutional point of view, the implicit familialism does not directly intervene in gender relations. Nevertheless,

on a cultural level it affects gender relations since it simply reproduces gendered (or de-gendered) care arrangements. Similarly, de-familialising structures per se, which we find in the optional familialism as well as in the de-familialism, do not directly intervene in gender relations. But, since they relieve the family from care provision, they provide (labour market) options for family carers. De-familialising structures thus may weaken cultural breadwinner models in which one person is employed and the other person is available for family care and they represent an important structural condition for gender equality in the labour market.³ If de-familialising structures are used for the purpose of labour market participation of family carers, they will have de-gendering effects.

In contrast to de-familialising structures, familialistic structures – which we find in the optional and in the explicit familialism – directly regulate gender relations. On the one hand, they seem to automatically enforce traditional gender roles since they aim at maintaining and strengthening the family's caring function. As family care is in most cases women's work, these policies will not only support the family as such in its caring function but will also strengthen the caring role of women and, thus, reproduce the gendered division of family care. On the other hand, this does not necessarily have to be the case. To avoid the dilemma of validating family care and strengthening the independence of family carers while at the same time engendering family care⁴, familialistic policies could also contain incentives to ensure that care provision is shared on equal terms among male and female family members. Therefore, the explicit as well as the optional familialism hold both options: a gendered or a de-gendered variant. The more so, if we add the cultural perspective: people can use or refuse gendered or de-gendered familialistic structures, therefore changing the overall character of familialism.

Each welfare regime presents its own special profile of familialism. We will probably see different profiles for different care policies – e.g. child care arrangements differ from elderly care arrangements – and there will be changes in the profile of familialism over time. Belgium, as one of the conservative welfare regimes where the family carries the main responsibility for its members welfare (cf. Esping-Andersen 1990; 1999), should be expected to be found either under the explicit or the implicit familialism. Since the “conservatism” of the conservative welfare regimes evolves not only from the central role of the family in care giving but also from the traditional gender division of labour within the family, we should expect a gendered variant of familialism in Belgium. But the following case study shows that instead we find an early period of Belgian de-familialism and a period of gendered optional familialism thereafter which might even have the potential to become de-gendered in the future. Besides going through the development of different policy structures and family care arrangements, the article also offers explanations for the changing profile of familialism. In the concluding section, the findings of the Belgian case study will be interpreted in the light of a more general comparative framework.

³ The effect will be most widespread in the field of child care where formal care arrangements enable parents (mostly: mothers) to participate in the labour market. In the field of elderly care the provision of formal care will have a similar effect only for the younger age groups of carers for whom labour market participation would still be an option.

⁴ This was called the contemporary variant of the Wollstonecraft dilemma: „We are torn between wanting to validate and support, through some form of income maintenance provision, the caring work for which women still take the responsibility in the ‘private’ sphere and to liberate them from this responsibility so that they can achieve economic and political autonomy in the public sphere.“ (Lister 1994 cited in Knijn/Kremer 1997: 350)

2. The Belgian profile of familialism in child care⁵

In the following, the Belgian development from implicit familialism to de-familialism and further on to optional familialism will be analysed for the field of child care. The first section comprises the time span from the beginning of the 19th century until the early 1970s. Thereafter, the development of the two branches of optional familialism, de-familialising and familialistic structures and their usage, will be focused upon which includes the development of child care services especially for very young children since the mid 1970s as well as the development of care leave policies since the middle of the 1980s.

2.1. From implicit familialism to de-familialism to optional familialism

Starting from the 19th century, child care facilities for children between three and six years of age have already been installed in Belgium. Since 1842, these “berceaux publics” or “écoles gardiennes” as they were renamed in 1880, have been publicly subsidised. Their intention was to provide moral and religious education for the children and to teach them basic skills in reading, writing and calculating: „Für Arbeiterkinder war dies vor der gesetzlichen Beschränkung der Kinderarbeit im Jahre 1889 und der Einführung der allgemeinen Schulpflicht im Jahre 1914 häufig die einzige Gelegenheit, eine gewisse Elementarbildung zu erlangen.“ (Fix 2001: 59) A constant struggle between liberal and catholic concepts of education characterised the expansion of the child care facilities. During 1878 and 1884, the liberal government tried to suppress catholic child care. When in 1884 the Catholics came to dominate parliament, a dualism between public and private providers of child care was institutionalised. In 1954, the conflict arose again with the liberal-socialist government which in 1958 was solved by the catholic-socialist minority government by institutionalising the full subsidisation of both the public and the private education system (cf. Fix 2001). During the 20th century, the “écoles gardiennes” were renamed “écoles

⁵ The Belgian case study will be part of a comparative research project of the author including also Germany, Austria and France.

maternelles” and slightly changed their educational intention towards personality development on a much broader scale than before (Fix 2000: 308). Around the turn of the century, half of all children between two and a half years and five years of age were attending these pre-schools, and during the two world wars the number rose to two thirds of all children in this age group (cf. Bahle et al. 2002). We see a continuous increase in the post-war period (see also table 2) up to the 100% mark in 1970. Thus, Belgium had emerged from implicit familialism that provides neither familialistic nor de-familialising structures to de-familialism where de-familialising structures are strongly developed.

Table 2: Development of institutional child care for pre-school age children

	1961	1970	1981	1990
Pre-school children (in 1,000)	414	459	385	372
As % of population 3-5*	91,8	102,6	106,7	106,4

* Figures may exceed 100% because some children under 3 attend pre-schools.

Source: Bahle et al. 2002: 40.

But the growing extent of subsidised child care did not – as we would assume nowadays – result in a growing female employment rate. In contrast, the female employment rate fell constantly between 1850 and 1960 indicating a “return” of women into the realm of the family: “In the middle of the 19th century, one out of every three women between 15 and 64 years old is part of the ‘housewife labour reservoir’. One century later, a majority of women belong to this category.” (Vanhaute 2002: 64; see also table 3). Yet in 1970, we find, quite contrarily to Germany and France where the three-phase-model of female employment was dominant at this time, that Belgian women left the labour market without return after their first child had been born: „Les taux d’activité féminine sont au maximum autour de 25-29 ans, pour retomber au-delà.“ (Degimbe/Simon 1991: 15) These figures indicate that the potential structural options provided by child care facilities have not been used by Belgian women. Therefore, the development to de-familialism has not enhanced labour market equality between men and women. What we see is a *gendered variant of de-familialism* which is characterised by a mismatch between structural options and social practise.

Three arguments can explain this development from implicit familialism to gendered de-familialism: (1) the development of child care facilities was motivated by the struggle

between the catholic church and the anti-clerical movement over the control of education, (2) the cultural context was in favour of a traditional family model, and (3) social policy supported and enabled the male breadwinner/female homemaker model.

(1) When expanding child care services, the intention was not to facilitate mothers' labour market participation but to gain educational control. The cleavage between the catholic church and anti-clerical forces which resulted from a severe state-church-conflict during the nation building process⁶, led to the creation of a catholic subculture of intermediary organisations in family policy and especially in education policy. The church was very much interested in the institutionalisation of child care besides public child care services and strongly opposed the idea of a "neutral" education system put forward by the liberals and socialists. Its motive to expand institutional child care was thus to watch over the "proper" education of young children and to secure the maintenance of Catholicism. The importance of the catholic church in institutional child care is demonstrated by its share of child care provision: In 1857, 57,4% of all child care facilities were provided by the church and even today, its share amounts to 50% (cf. Fix 2001).

(2) Put aside the economic necessity of women's employment, the options for female labour market participation that are provided by de-familialising policies will probably only be used, if female employment, and especially: the employment of mothers, is culturally desired. But, it seems that the cultural context in Belgium at these times was very much in favour of a traditional family model with a male breadwinner and a female homemaker at its core. For instance, this cultural value of the non-employed mother at home is expressed by the lack of institutional child care for children under three years of age. The care of very young children has primarily been seen as a private responsibility until the beginning of the 1970s. In the 19th century, humanitarian and charity organisations provided institutional child care for children under three years of age, but only in cases of social emergency. The aim was to morally and intellectually educate small children of working class mothers who were forced to earn their living (cf. Fix 2001: 61), but also to reduce infant mortality (cf. Dubois et al.

⁶ Under Habsburg rule, Catholicism became the state religion throughout the present territory of Belgium. But, in the 18th century, the secularisation policy of Joseph II brought catholic groups in opposition. In 1795, France annexed the territory which even increased secularisation policy. In addition, the industrialisation of Walloon led to increasing anti-clerical sentiments in the population. When Belgium became an independent state in 1830, this cleavage between Catholics and anti-clerically was part of its historical heritage. (Fix 2000: 313f)

1994: 6). The first “crèche” was installed in 1845, and in 1883, 24 “crèches” were counted throughout Belgium. Their number rose to 50 in 1910 and to 63 in 1939 and stagnated at 62 in 1944. „Au cours de cette période, les crèches sont considérées comme un mal rendu nécessaire pour des raisons sociales, mais destinées à disparaître en même temps que le travail des mères.” (Dubois et al. 1994 : 8) Thus, the employment of mothers was undesired, working mothers were rather classified as welfare cases and strongly associated with lone mothers and mothers with children from adultery who could not rely on a male breadwinner. At best, the employment of mothers was tolerated as a means to save the family from poverty. In these cases, the provision of child care for very young children helped families to help themselves which was in accordance with the catholic principle of subsidiary intervention. Another example for the cultural norm of the female homemaker is presented by the so called “allocation de la mère au foyer”, a minor flat-rate payment which was introduced in 1949. Until 1957, when the transfer was eliminated, all non-employed mothers qualified for this benefit which provided rising flat-rate payments according to the number of children cared for (Marques-Pereira/Paye 1998: 110f).

(3) As has already been indicated, the cultural preference for the mother at home could only become a general social practise because the financial need for mothers’ employment was reduced by social policy. During the first half of the 20th century, we see a sharp increase of non-wage income: „Before the interwar period, extra income via the earnings of wife and children was necessary. The retreat of young and female workers from the formal labour market was only possible after a massive public subsidising of the family budget (or the male wage) through a range of allowances (...) and tax benefits.“ (Vanhaute 2002: 67) The male breadwinner/female homemaker model was especially enabled by survivors’ pensions (introduced in 1903 within accident insurance, in 1924/25 within pension insurance, and in 1927 within occupational diseases insurance), the inclusion of family members in health insurance (starting on a broad scale from 1920⁷), family supplements for the breadwinner in invalidity, unemployment, and pension insurance (introduced respectively in 1903, in 1944,

⁷ Originally, the voluntary health insurance system of the mutual societies („mutualités“) was organised on an individualistic base, whereas insurance schemes organised by employers have always been attempting to include family members. Only in 1920, family insurance was introduced by law for married couples. „Cette transformation accompagne un puissant courant nataliste qui se manifeste depuis la guerre. Celui-ci fait appel à une valorisation de la famille nombreuse et du modèle familial le plus traditionnel, voire le plus bourgeois.” (Peemans-Poullet 1994: 38; see also Peemans-Poullet 1995) This has been continued with the introduction of the obligatory health insurance in 1944.

and in 1924/25), and the system of family allowances (introduced in 1930)⁸. These “hidden” familialistic policies which only indirectly aim at supporting the family in its caring function also indicate a new stage of Belgian familialism.

It can be claimed that *since the 1920s Belgium should no longer be ascribed to de-familialism but to optional familialism*, because services as well as benefits for family care were in place and both of them were also used. For that matter, it would have to be termed a *gendered variant of optional familialism*: On the one hand, the male breadwinner/female homemaker model was a cultural reality since women’s employment rates were low. On the other hand, on the structural level the explicitly gender-discriminating formulation of the early familialistic policies re-enforced the traditional division of labour between men and women:

- Until 1984, only widows were eligible for *survivor’s benefits* and only married men could claim a *pension supplement* for their spouse.
- In *invalidity insurance*, benefits were flat-rate and differed by gender, family status and number of children until 1951. Thereafter, benefits were calculated as a percentage of former income. Until 1986, the percentage rate was higher for “chefs de ménage” (which usually were men) than for persons without maintenance obligations.
- Similarly, in *unemployment insurance* benefits were flat-rate and differed by age, gender and partly for family reasons until 1971. Thereafter, benefits were calculated as a percentage of former income. Until 1986, the percentage rate was cut for persons without maintenance obligations after one year of unemployment.
- As far as *family allowances* are concerned, the employers had to pay contributions for male and female employees, but the benefit was paid only to one of the parents, usually the (male) breadwinner. “Les cotisations payées du chef du travail de la femme mariée sont donc sans effet sur les avantages accordés à son ménage lorsque son époux est lui-même travailleur salarié.” (Ernst-Henrion 1971: 1132)

This early variant of Belgian optional familialism was further developed from the 1970s onwards. Regarding its de-familialising structures, child care facilities for the very young children emerged increasingly. The other branch of optional familialism, familialistic structures, developed towards a gender neutral re-formulation of derived social rights and the introduction of a leave policy that allows for care leaves from employment.

⁸ Originally, the employers’ reason for introducing family allowances was to avoid general wage increases. It was cheaper to subsidise family breadwinners than to accept the general demand for higher wages (Peemans-Pouillet 1994: 49).

2.2. The expansion of de-familialising policies: 1970-2000

Whereas child care for pre-school age children was already well developed in the 1970s (see table 2) and nowadays is described as being „easily available, convenient, open during the whole working day, and free of charge except for meals and extra services“ (Bahle et al. 2002: 39), subsidised institutional child care for very young children only started to expand in the late 1960s/early 1970s. Yet, by the end of the 1960s, places in “crèches” were still, at least implicitly, reserved for parents with low income: „Child care was subsidized because women had to work to keep the family from poverty; for this reason, the state subsidized the necessary evil of child care, and to a certain extent the stigma remains.“ (Kremer 2002: 123) But, once having been introduced, the state could not simply step back from its responsibility in child care for the very young children. The more so since from the early 1970s female employment was rather becoming part of the emancipation process of women than being an economic necessity for the family. Several reforms were introduced in an initiating process to expand child care services: the professional status of child carers was legally defined, subsidising was expanded, and income-related fees for parents were introduced. As a result, the social structure of parents making use of care facilities for the very young children became more and more heterogeneous, and the number of “crèches” increased tenfold (up to about 600) between 1960 and 1985 (Dubois et al. 1994: 12, figure 1). But, right from the beginning, the “crèches” competed with child care provided by childminders at their private homes, and most of the expansion of child care for the very young children can be described as an increase of places provided by childminders, especially since 1985. While in 1985, the number of subsidised places provided by “crèches” amounted to 18.152 and the number of subsidised places at childminders was 13.833, the “crèches” provided 21.244 places and the childminders 27.855 places in 1992 (Dubois et al. 1994: 18, figure 3). This trend has continued.

The overall number of subsidised child care places provided has risen from 93 per 1.000 children (9,3%) under 3 years of age in 1985 to 131 places (13,1%) in 1992. This indicates a relative increase of 40% within seven years. The coverage of children from working mothers increased from 18,3% in 1985 to 19,2% in 1990 which amounts to a relative increase of 5%

(Dubois et al. 1994: 17f, figure 2). Today, there are places available for about 30% of all children under three (Bahle et al. 2002: 41).

This expansion of child care for the very young children strengthened the de-familialising structures that have already been in place. But, quite contrarily then before, the increasing supply of child care was very strongly linked to an increase of the female employment rate since the 1960s (see table 3).

Table 3: Female labour force as a percentage of female population from 15 to 64 years

Year	1960	1974	1988	1995	2000
Percentage	36,4	42,4	51,2	56,1	59,2

Source: OECD 1999: 41, table 2.8

The rising female labour market attachment indicates a concordance between structural options for labour market participation provided by child care services and cultural preferences for female employment. Moreover, since women's labour market participation grew faster than the supply of child care facilities⁹, it can even be stated a converse temporary misfit between structures and preferences that led to alternative child care arrangements. Since the middle of the 1980s, the expansion of subsidised child care for children under three years of age rather represents a formalisation of informal care arrangements than an increase of the number of children cared for outside the home: „... supervised child minders have displaced the caregiving of grandparents and unregulated child minders“ (Kremer 2002: 119). Nevertheless, though the female employment rate has increased significantly, it has still not reached the high level of female employment in countries which have a comparably well developed structure of child care provision than Belgium.

The rising female employment rate also put forward a new central actor in the field of child care: The ONAFTS (Office National des Allocations Familiales pour Travailleurs Salariés)¹⁰ promoted the creation of a fund (FESC – Fonds d'équipements et de services collectifs) for the financing of child care for their clientele¹¹

⁹ The shortage in child care services for very young children even led to the reduction of the age limit for pre-school attendance from three to two and a half years in 1969 (cf. Ernst-Henrion 1971: 1141).

¹⁰ „The expansion of its activities to child care can only be explained by their strong relation to the female labour market.“ (Bahle et al. 2002: 41)

¹¹ For the complications in the development of this fund between 1968 and 1974 see Marques-Pereira/Paye 1998: 115-118 and Dubois et al. 1994: 38-39.

which eventually resulted in the public subvention of child minders starting from 1974. The installation of the FESC also attests to a new perception of female employment. Subsidised child care was now considered as a return for women's social security contributions and as a tool to establish equal chances for men and women at the labour market (Dubois et al. 1994: 39).

Contradictorily, the ideal of full time mothering was still widespread among the population. In 1976, the political struggle about the introduction of the so called "allocation socio-pédagogique", a premium for child care at home, concentrates around these conflicting ideals of the "right" role for mothers. The socialists voted against the premium, whereas the christian-socialists were in favour of the premium. In the debate, an egalitarian and a modernised familialistic position could be distinguished.¹² The egalitarians wanted the state to strengthen institutional child care in order to reach the aim of gender equality in the labour market. Their counterparts pled for the right of free choice: If the state subsidises institutional child care (now even by the newly found FESC), he should also subsidise child care at home. For Marques-Pereira and Paye this argument represents a "modernised familialistic model": „d'un côté, il admet le droit des femmes de mener une vie (notamment professionnelle) à l'égal des hommes, mais de l'autre, il considère que les femmes désireuses d'endosser certains rôles traditionnels (l'éducation des jeunes enfants, par exemple) ne doivent pas en être dissuadées.“ (Marques-Pereira/Paye 1998: 123) In our terminology, the modernised familialistic model resembles the optional familialism. The ideology of free choice which is served by optional familialism is not only a liberal concept but also very important for consociational democracies. In Belgium, again the conflict between Catholics and anti-clerically calls for compromises: „In such an institutional setting, 'free choice' becomes a vital concept. (...) Freedom of choice would be an empty concept if the state did not guarantee choice. Pillarized societies are, therefore, characterized by 'subsidized freedom'; the state must have respect for people's choices and enforce pluralism and diversity.“ (Kremer 2002: 127f) Nevertheless, concerning the „allocation socio-pédagogique" the concept of free choice did not succeed. Since optional familialism is more costly (because it comprises subsidies for service provision as well as payments for care) than an egalitarian model of de-familialism (with subsidies for service provision only) or a traditional model of explicit familialism (with payments for care only), its realisation depends heavily on supportive economic conditions. The beginning economic crisis of the early 1970s thus blasted the introduction of the "allocation socio-pédagogique". So, in a way, the decision for the expansion of child care

¹² For an extensive analysis of the debate see Marques-Pereira/Paye 1998: 119-124.

subsidies for the very young children in 1974 hindered the introduction of the “allocation socio-pédagogique” in 1976.

Yet, the ideology of full time mothering was transformed and can be recovered within subsidised child care provision which since 1974 focused disproportionately strong on the expansion of places at child minders. This development corresponds to the politically promoted ideal of the “surrogate mother”: „According to this model, good care is still best given by a mother, even if it is not the mother of the children. Care is done by a child minder, baby-sitter, or family provider, usually for little pay, and because it is offered in the provider’s home, it most closely resembles home-based care. (...) surrogate mothers, however, are considered to have the same kind of qualities as mothers have – motherly warmth, attention, patience – yet they remain surrogate, because it is still better if motherly warmth and attention is given by the real mother.“ (Kremer 2002: 130) The „surrogate mother“ fits quite well into the christian-democratic ideology which prefers self-help (instead of institutionalised help) and care arrangements in the private home. And it also exerts a negative influence on female labour market participation since it strengthens the ideal of the non-employed mother: „The strength of this ideal helps explain why – though the level of state-subsidized child care in Flanders [and in Walloon, SL] is as high as Sweden’s – the female employment rate falls short. It also explains how it is that a Christian Democratic regime came to invest so heavily in child care.“ (Kremer 2002: 137)

Thus, besides the expansion of de-familialising policies and the increase of female labour market participation, we see a continuous cultural preference for the mothering role of women. In a way these contradictory philosophies demand for alternative policies to reconcile child care and employment like parental leave schemes that allow employed parents to interrupt their job for a certain period of time. We will see this kind of familialistic structures emerge in Belgium from the mid 1980s onwards.

2.3. The development of familialistic care policies: 1985-2002

Following up at first the indirect familialistic policies which constituted the early optional familialism, we can see a development towards structural gender neutrality: „... the demand for equal rights and the obligation to conform to EC law have led to the reformulation of

various provisions in gender-neutral terms ...“ (Bahle et al. 2002: 72) In 1984, survivors' pensions became eligible also for widowers and pension supplements for spouses became also available for married women. In 1986, the replacement rates in invalidity insurance and in unemployment insurance became gender neutral.

From an institutional point of view, these reforms contributed to the development of a de-gendered variant of optional familialism. But considering the social effects of the gender-neutral legislation it becomes quite clear that gender discrimination continued:

- *Survivor's pension*: As a matter of fact, the survivor's pension is only of minor importance for widowers (Pichault 1988: 90) since a person who is eligible for an individual pension and a survivor's pension can only receive the higher of the two (which for men is usually their individual pension) and the cumulating of pensions is restricted to a minimum (Scheiwe 1999: 169). This means in return that most widows decide to turn down their individual pension for the sake of their survivor's pension: „Le montant moyen de la pension de survie ‚pure‘ (droit purement dérivé), est plus élevé que le montant moyen de la pension de retraite d'une femme ayant exercé une activité professionnelle et ayant donc acquis, par son travail, des droits directs.“ (Peemans-Poullet 1994: 54).
- Similarly, the *pension supplement for spouses* is only of minor importance for married women: „[O]n vise ici principalement le travailleur dont l'épouse est ou a été au foyer; depuis la Loi de 1984 la mesure est réversible, mais les conditions d'octroi sont telles que peu de travailleuses en bénéficieront, car les hommes au foyer restent l'exception.“ (Pichault 1988: 89) Far from creating gender equality, the pension supplement is even an incentive for women with very low individual pensions to turn down their individual pension for the sake of the pension supplement of their husband: „Da nicht nur die Ehe, sondern auch die wirtschaftliche Abhängigkeit der Partnerin Anspruchsvoraussetzung für den höheren Rentensatz der ‚Ehepaarrente‘ ist, verzichten (...) viele Ehefrauen auf ihre eigenen Rentenansprüche, wenn sie niedriger sind als der 25%-ige Zuschlag auf die Rente des Ehemannes.“ (Scheiwe 1999: 168)
- *Invalidity insurance*: There are three replacement rates in invalidity insurance since 1986: 65% of former income for persons with maintenance obligations, 45% for persons without maintenance obligations living on their own, and 40% for persons without maintenance obligations living in a household. Women are over-represented in the lowest benefit category whereas men are over-represented in the highest benefit category (cf. Wattier 1988).
- *Unemployment insurance*: Similarly, there are three replacement rates in unemployment insurance since 1986. Whereas persons with maintenance obligations receive 60% of their former income, persons without maintenance obligations living on their own are cut to 42% after the first year of unemployment. Persons without maintenance obligations living in a household receive 55% for the first year, 35% for the next three months and a flat-rate payment afterwards. Again, we find women over-represented in the lowest benefit category (Devos 1988: 61). „La division en catégories [...] a pour effet que les cohabitants, qui sont chômeurs de longue durée, sont suspendus de l'assurance-chômage. Suite à cette mesure, ce sont

essentiellement les femmes qui perdent leurs droits individuels dans les autres secteurs de la sécurité sociale, les rendant ainsi financièrement dépendants de leur conjoint." (Moestermans 1997: 872)¹³

Thus, as far as social care arrangements are concerned, formal gender equality did not change the male breadwinner/female homemaker character of the optional familialism. The only female group that profited from the reforms were single mothers who were classified as persons with maintenance obligations which formerly was a category nearly exclusively reserved for male breadwinners (Scheiwe 1999: 370).

These indirect familialistic structures have finally been complemented by direct familialistic policies starting from the mid 1980s. In 1985, a leave scheme called "interruption de carrière" was introduced that allowed employees to interrupt their job or reduce their weekly working time for a defined period of time (for details see table 4). The main precondition demanded that a person currently covered under the unemployment protection scheme had to be hired to replace the person on leave. As a compensation and incentive for the employer he was partially exempted from the social security contributions for the unemployed person hired. Those employees who were on leave were entitled to a benefit according to their former weekly working time and its degree of reduction. The benefit was financed by unemployment insurance and carried all social rights of an employed person (except sick-pay). In addition, the person on leave was protected against dismissal during the first three months of his/her re-entering after the leave. For public employees, the new leave scheme was an individual social right, but for employees in the private sector the accordance of the employer was required to be entitled to a leave. This requirement of the employer's accordance was introduced due to a political compromise with the liberal wing of the government¹⁴.

Table 4: Interruption de carrière – overview of the regulations

Year of introduction	1985
Pre-condition	The worker on leave has to be substituted by an unemployed person who receives social benefits; enterprises with less than 10 workers are exempted from this regulation; for private sector employees the employer has to agree to the leave (the leave is an individual right only for public employees)
Dismissal protection	Workers on leave are protected against dismissal during three months after their leave has ended.
Social security protection	The worker on leave is protected in all major insurance systems, in pension insurance, the first 12 months of the leave are covered and may be extended up to 36 months if the worker on leave has a child under 6 years of age

¹³ The European Commission filed a lawsuit at the European Court of Justice for indirect sex discrimination in the case of Belgian unemployment and invalidity insurance. But the Court decided in favour of the Belgian government, "estimant que le gouvernement belge avait démontré que les réglementations en cause répondaient à un objectif légitime de politique sociale et étaient justifiées par des raisons étrangères à une discrimination fondée sur le sexe" (Coernelle/Ottevaere 1994: 881).

¹⁴ Interview with Michel Hansenne (01/10/2003), the former minister of employment who initiated the "interruption de carrière".

a) "Interruption totale"	Full-time leave from work
duration	3 months at least, 12 months at maximum at a time; altogether 60 months throughout the whole working life
benefit	For full time workers: 324 € per month (2002); 355 € per month if the leave is taken within 3 years of the birth of a second child; 385 € per month if the leave is taken within 3 years of the birth of a third (or a subsequent) child. For part time workers: reduced amount depending on hours worked in relation to full time
b) "Interruption partielle"	Working time reduction to half-time, or by 1/5, 1/4 or 1/3
duration	3 months at least, 60 months at maximum (for workers over 50 years the duration can be extended until they reach pension age)
benefit	Reduction from full-time to half-time: 162 € per month (2002); higher benefits if the reduction is taken for a second (177 €) or a third child (193 €); the amount varies according to the extent of the reduction and is higher for workers over 50 years (324€ per month for a reduction to half-time)

Source: Verbrugge 2002c: 86-90.

Since 1985, the leave scheme was constantly under reform. Its development can by and large be interpreted as an attempt to strengthen the rights of private sector employees and to extend the scheme by focusing on special care obligations: „Peu à peu cependant et dans le cadre de négociations collectives, les partenaires sociaux vont, par le biais d'accords sectoriels, ériger un droit individuel à l'interruption de carrière dans certains situations spécifiques et notamment pour des raisons familiales." (Verbrugge 2002a: 2) Although it has not been a strategically planned development but rather a continuous process of social bargaining on the basis of experiences from and confidence in the leave scheme,¹⁵ there has been a step by step evolution from collective agreements in some branches to general collective agreements and finally to national laws. The most important steps of reform were the following:

- 1989: Introduction of a higher benefit for leaves after the birth of a second child.
- 1990: Introduction of a reduced leave called "interruption de carrière réduite", a full-time leave for three months of child care after the end of maternity leave.
- 1991: Introduction of a higher benefit for leaves after the birth of a third child.
- 1993: General collective agreement on an individual right to the leave scheme for at least 1% of all employees in each enterprise.
- 1990s: Introduction of the individual right to special leaves called "congés thématiques" by several sectoral collective agreements.
- 1994: Law on the introduction of a "congé palliatif".
- 1997: Law on the introduction of an individual right to the leave scheme for at least 1% of all employees in each enterprise.
- 1997: Law on the introduction of a "congé parental".
- 1998: Law on the introduction of a "congé pour l'assistance ou l'octroi de soins à un membre du ménage ou de la famille gravement malade".

¹⁵ Interview with Michel Hansenne (01/10/2003).

- 1999: Law on the introduction of an individual right to the leave scheme for at least 3% of all employees in each enterprise.
- 2001: General collective agreement on “*crédit-temps*” which introduces the individual right to an interruption of one’s job to all private sector employees.

Although the leave scheme has not been especially designed as a familialistic policy but rather as an unemployment policy,¹⁶ its impact on family care giving is nevertheless of interest for our analysis since the leave can also be used for family care purposes. Right from the beginning, women willing to take a career break in order to care for their children at home were expected to be a main target group of the leave scheme (Hansenne 1985: 68). In a way, the “*interruption de carrière*” also worked as a substitute for the introduction of a “real” parental leave scheme which would have had no chance to see the light due to the economic crisis situation.¹⁷ In 1997, the introduction of the “*congé parental*” finally institutionalised a parental leave scheme within the frame of the “*interruption de carrière*”.

Thus, the introduction of the “*interruption de carrière*” also marks the beginning of a *new period of Belgian optional familialism in child care* which now offers not only services and indirect social benefits via the breadwinner model but also, finally, direct benefits for child care. But still, Belgium resembles a *gendered variant* of the optional familialism. Looking first at the structures of the leave regulation, it can be stated that the flat-rate benefit provided is rather small (385 € per month at maximum). Thus, although the leave can be taken by men as well as by women, it will probably strengthen the mothering role of women. Since the maximum duration of the leave is rather long (five years), there would be a negative effect to the labour market attachment of the persons on long-time full-time leave.

Until 1997, the individual right to a leave (for whatever reason) was only granted to public sector employees, private employees were dependent on the accordance of their employer. This changed for leaves taken for child care purposes with the introduction of the “*congé parental*” (see table 5) which further strengthened the familialistic side of optional familialism. The introduction of the law was directly initiated by EU-legislation on parental leave, although there have been sectorally agreed collective parental leave schemes in Belgium before¹⁸. Like the other “*congés thématiques*” the “*congé parental*” carries a higher benefit than the “*interruption de carrière*” (537 € per month at maximum) which also points out the political will to increase the benefit for those

¹⁶ „Ce sont les nécessités de la lutte contre le chômage et pour la compétitivité des entreprises, et non un positionnement idéologique, qui amènent l’État à instaurer des incitants financiers favorisant le retrait temporaire ou partiel du marché de l’emploi, notamment du „parent qui choisit“ de garder lui-même ses enfants.“ (Marques-Pereira/Paye 1998: 136)

¹⁷ Interview with Michel Hansenne (01/10/2003).

¹⁸ For public employees there has already been installed the right to a parental leave scheme within the frame of the „*interruption de carrière*“ in 1990: „l’*interruption de carrière* reduite“.

on leave due to care reasons¹⁹. Nevertheless, the amount provided still seems too low to attract men instead of women for parental leave. The more so since the leave is only available once per child for one of the parents and can not be shared among the parents. On the other hand, the duration of the “congé parental” is very short: only three months for a full-time leave. Thus, it avoids the danger of labour market detachment. But since the “congé parental” can be prolonged by an “interruption de carrière”, the negative effects for persons on long-time full-time leave persist.²⁰

Table 5: Congé parental – overview of the regulations

Year of introduction	1997
Pre-conditions	Leave has to be taken during 4 years after the birth or the adoption of a child; the leave is an individual right, but the worker must have been with the employer for at least 12 months before the leave otherwise the employer has to agree to the leave; until 2002 the worker had to be replaced by an unemployed person (see “interruption de carrière”)
Dismissal protection	Workers on leave are protected against dismissal during three months after their leave has ended.
Duration	3 months for a full-time leave; 6 months for a reduction from full-time to half-time (this is not guaranteed as an individual right in enterprises with less than 10 workers), 15 months for a reduction of full-time by 1/5
Benefit	537 € per month (2002) for a full-time leave

Source: Verbrugge 2002c: 98-100.

In 2001, the „interruption de carrière“ was replaced for the private sector by a new collectively agreed leave scheme called „crédit temps” (see table 6) which introduced an individual right to a career break for the private sector. At the same time, the obligation of the employer to replace the person on leave with an unemployed person was eliminated not only for the new scheme but also for the “congés thématiques” and for the “interruption de carrière” which is still in place for the public sector. Thus, the whole character of the leave policy has changed dramatically: „... , le crédit-temps n’apparaît plus comme un réel instrument d’une politique de l’emploi, mais comme un moyen de satisfaire les aspirations des individus dans l’organisation de leur temps de vie et de travail. Un glissement s’est donc opéré de l’intérêt collectif (partager le travail disponible entre les citoyens) vers l’intérêt individuel (mieux concilier vie professionnelle et vie familiale ou sociale).” (Verbrugge 2002a: 3) But still, the main focus of the reform was not on care policy. “Crédit temps” was initiated to increase flexibility in work careers by granting an individual right to a career break.²¹ And although the obligation to replace the person on leave with an unemployed person has been suppressed, the new leave scheme is conceived by the Belgian government as an unemployment policy being in line with the European employment strategy.²²

¹⁹ Interview with Bea Cantillon (30/09/2003), director of the centre for social policy research at the University of Antwerp.

²⁰ At the moment there are two proposals for a reform of the congé parental under discussion (Verbrugge 2002a: 105).

²¹ Interview with Bea Cantillon (39/09/2003).

²² Interview with Pascale Vielle (01/10/2003), researcher at the Université Catholique Louvain.

Table 6: Crédit-temps – overview of the regulations (private sector)

Year of introduction	2001
Pre-conditions	Individual right except for workers in enterprises with less than 10 workers; the employer is not obliged to replace the worker by an unemployed person; if an enterprise has reached a threshold of 5% of all workers, the right to crédit-temps is exempted
Dismissal protection	Workers on leave are protected against dismissal during three months after their leave has ended.
a) “crédit temps”	Career break full-time or half-time
Duration	3 months at least, 12 months at maximum (expansions up to 5 years maximum for the whole working life are possible if collectively agreed)
Benefit	For workers who have been in the enterprise for less than 5 years: 387 € per month for full-time leave, 193 € per month for half-time leave; for workers who have been in the enterprise for at least 5 years: 516 € per month for full-time leave, 258 € per month for half-time leave
b) Reduction of working time by 1/5	Only for full-time workers who have been at the enterprise for at least 5 years; reduction refers to one day or two half-days a week; duration is at least 6 months and at maximum 5 years (during the whole working life); benefit amounts to 127 (164 if the worker is living alone or is a single parent) € per month
c) Reduction of working time for 50+ workers by 1/5 or to half-time	Only for full-time workers who have been at the enterprise for at least 5 years and who have been employed for at least 20 years; duration is at least 3 months for reduction to half-time and 6 months for reduction by 1/5 and can last until pension age; benefit amounts to 385 € per month for reduction to half-time and 179 (216 if the worker is living alone or is a single parent) € per month for reduction by 1/5

Source: Verbrugge 2002b; 2002d.

However, also “crédit temps” provides a gendered structure for those who want to take the new leave for the purpose of child care: Under “crédit-temps” the benefit is in general higher than under “interruption de carrière” (except for the third child) but lower than under “congé parental” if the person has been employed for less than five years in the enterprise. Therefore, the gender bias of the benefit remains the same. The duration of the leave is now limited to one year but can be expanded to five years if the employer agrees, thus holding the same danger of labour market detachment like the “interruption de carrière”.

These gendered familialistic structures are reflected by social care arrangements.²³ Analysing the structure of persons who have taken a career break since 1985, we see that women represent continuously more than 80% of the total number of persons on leave (see table 7). Thus, we recover the gendering effect of the regulation expected due to the low benefit of the leave scheme. Since the data collected by the ONEM (Office National de l’Emploi) do not distinguish between different reasons for leave taking, we do not know exactly how large the

²³ In general, the division of labour in private households is – “despite some tendency towards more equal sharing since the mid-1970s” (Bahle et al. 2002: 33) – continuously traditional. In 1986, a Belgian couple spent 52 hours a week on unpaid work in the private household: the woman 40 hours (76%), the man 12 hours (24%). If the woman is employed, the whole amount of weekly hours worked in the private household is cut to 48: 34 hours and 27 minutes are put in by the woman (72%), 13 hours and 27 minutes by the man (28%). This unequal sharing of unpaid work occurs independently of the number of children living in the household. (Vos 1991: 32)

share of child care leave is within the scheme of the “*interruption de carrière*” as a whole. But, if we break down the data by age groups it becomes quite clear that “*l’éducation des enfants constitue une motivation très importante pour solliciter l’interruption de carrière chez les femmes*” (ONEM 1995: 4.9) since most women on leave are between 25 and 40 years old. At least, this argument holds true until the early 1990s. Since then we see a shift towards older age groups indicating that child care is no longer the primary reason for taking an “*interruption de carrière*”.

Table 7: Development of the number of persons taking an “*interruption de carrière*” or a “*congé parental*” by sex

Year	Interruption de carrière		Congé parental	
	Total (absolute numbers)	Women (% of total)	Total (absolute numbers)	Women (% of total)
1985	2.019	No account	0	-
1986	6.895	86,05	0	-
1987	15.905	85,53	0	-
1988	27.447	85,14	0	-
1989	37.610	84,52	0	-
1990	45.654	84,63	0	-
1991	49.354	85,55	0	-
1992	57.994	86,27	0	-
1993	55.961	87,02	0	-
1994	51.654	87,47	0	-
1995	50.124	87,35	0	-
1996	49.892	86,40	0	-
1997	55.451	85,87	0	-
1998	66.362	85,95	547	94,12
1999	74.882	85,20	4.662	95,09
2000	86.978	83,65	7.145	94,30
2001	99.988	82,38	8.045	93,11
2002	93.476	82,89	11.605	91,22
2002*	23.165	61,72	-	-

* persons taking a “*crédit-temps*”

Source: Data from 1985-1998: www.onem.fgov.be; Data from 1999-2002: ONEM 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003; calculations partly by the author.

If we look at the development of the number of persons taking a “*congé parental*”, we find a highly gendered structure with women representing more than 90% of all persons on “*congé parental*” (see table 7). Since this special leave can only be taken by one of the parents and once per child, these figures are not surprising given the traditional gender division of child care and the low benefit attached to the leave. So far, the gendered structure and the gendered social effects of the policies match. Unfortunately, there is no corresponding data on the structural effect of labour market detachment due to the possibility of stretching the duration of a leave up to a maximum of 5 years. According to the general assessment of the “*interruption de carrière*” by the socialist women’s organisation (Femmes Prevoyantes Socialistes) “*on ne peut isoler l’interruption de carrière de son contexte social et culturel qui fait qu’actuellement elle est un frein à la poursuite – ou au moins handicapé*”

sérieusement – de la carrière et la promotion professionnelle de ceux qui y recourent, en l'occurrence, les femmes" (Hennin 1994: 77).

2.4. The development of familialism reconsidered

The development of Belgian familialism in the field of child care can be split into four periods. The first one lasts *from the beginning of the 19th century to the early 20th century* and has been shown to be the period of *gendered de-familialism*. It is characterised by a remarkable development of child care services for pre-school age children and a decrease of the female employment rate. This at first glance contra-intuitive development can be explained by three factors: The expansion of child care services was motivated by the struggle between the catholic church and anticlerical forces over the control of education and not by the wish to reconcile child care and work for mothers. Furthermore, the cultural preference was in favour of the male breadwinner model and, last not least, this cultural preference was enabled by the emerging welfare state that allowed women to reduce their labour market participation.

From the 1920s onwards, the increasing importance of derived social rights marks the beginning of the second period which adds indirect familialistic policies to the gendered de-familialism. Since these are explicitly gender discriminating structures which only allow for a gendered usage, the second period resembles a *gendered variant of optional familialism*. Within both of the first two periods the ideal of the full-time mother at home is the dominant role model for women.

From this follows the further development of the two branches of optional familialism. Firstly, we see an expansion of child care services for the children aged under three as well as an increase of the female employment rate *since the 1970s*. Contrarily to the first period, this time the options for labour market participation offered by the expansion of child care services are used. This development is due to the emancipation process of women. But there are also contradictory cultural preferences for full-time motherhood at place which can be seen in the discussion about the “allocation socio-pédagogique”. Thus, in the third period two ideals of parenting coexist simultaneously: *the working mother and the full-time mother at home*.

Secondly, the branch of familialistic policies is developing *since the mid 1980s*. On the one hand, a de-gendering of the derived social rights takes place, mostly due to EU-legislation on gender equality. Thus, on the structural level, we see a *move towards a de-gendered variant of optional familialism* allowing for a reversal of traditional gender roles. But, this move towards gender equality is not reproduced on the social behaviour level. On the other hand, direct familialistic policies are introduced for the first time. Located within the context of unemployment policy the “interruption de carrière” introduces a new ideal of parenting which is also supported by the “congé parental”: *the working mother who interrupts her job for the purpose of child care*. This reconciliation policy is gendered on both the structural and the social behaviour level.

At the end of this development of Belgian familialism in child care we see plural options on the structural level: the full-time mother/father at home, the working mother/father, the working mother on child care leave. On the social behaviour level the inclusion of fathers into parenting has not yet taken place. This seems to be due to the fact that the option of parenting is still weakly individualised since the derived rights and the small amount from the parental leave scheme cause dependence on a breadwinner. Other preconditions for a future move

towards a de-gendered variant of familialism would be enhanced gender equality in the labour market as well as changed cultural preferences on gender roles. In 2001, Belgium introduced a paternity leave scheme. The leave can be taken for a maximum of ten days within the first 30 days after the birth (or the adoption) of a child. The benefit amounts to 100% of the wage for the first three days and is cut to 82% (with a maximum of 99,23 € per day) for the next seven days. (Canazza/Vielle 2003: 49f) If this first attempt to include fathers into child care will lead the way to a de-gendered optional familialism remains to be seen.

3. Care policy for the elderly in Belgium: From implicit to explicit familialism

As has been suggested in the introductory section, the profile of familialism not only changes over time but also varies for different fields of care policy. For the Belgian case this becomes very clear by contrasting the development of familialism in child care with the field of elderly care. The main difference evolves from the weak establishment of formal care services: About 15% of all elderly people need care. Two thirds of them are cared for by family members at home and only 5% of the elderly receive (subsidised) professional care²⁴ (Buggenhout et al. 1994: 127). Thus, the role of the family in caring for the elderly is still very important. Since the principal family carer is mostly a woman²⁵, Belgium seems to resemble a *gendered variant of the implicit familialism* in elderly care. Yet, the value of derived social rights seems as important for family carers of the elderly as for family carers of children. Considering the development of derived social rights described above we can, thus, claim a *move from implicit to explicit familialism* in elderly care since the 1920s and a change *on the structural level from a gendered to a de-gendered variant* of familialism in the mid 1980s.

Looking at the further development of familialistic structures for elderly care, the “*interruption de carrière*” as well as the “*crédit-temps*” could represent a leave scheme for elderly care, especially for people over 50 years of age for whom the benefit is higher and the

²⁴ Commercialised services are hardly in place. The estimations given were made about Flanders, but the situation in Walloon is comparable if not even worse (interview with Jef Breda 06/10/2003, professor at the University of Antwerp).

²⁵ Men are also involved in elderly care if their partner needs care, but they do less than female carers; especially with regard to personal hygiene (interview with Jef Breda 06/10/2003).

duration of the leave can be extended until pension age (see tables 4 and 6). We have already stated that the age structure of those taking a care leave has shifted towards older age groups since the 1990s. Whereas in 1990, 21% of all women and 34% of all men taking an “*interruption de carrière*” were in the 45+ age group, the percentage increased to 35% for women and 59% for men in 1998 (www.onem.fgov.be). Table 8 shows that this trend has continued. Unfortunately, the data collected by the ONEM do not display for which purpose the “*interruption de carrière*” is taken. As far as men over 50 years of age are concerned, it is presumed that most of them use the leave as a pathway to retirement (cf. Thomas 1998²⁶). It remains unknown for the group of women over 50 if early (partial) retirement is also the primary reason to take a leave. Considered that, in general, most carers are already within pension age themselves, the 50+ labour force would be too young to qualify as family carers for the elderly. Thus, the “*interruption de carrière*” would be of minor importance for the purpose of elderly care. But given the fact that in the future family care will depend on the availability of family carers in younger age groups (OECD 1996: 19) the leave scheme will eventually be increasingly used for elderly care in the years to come.

Table 8: Percentage of persons over 50 taking an “*interruption de carrière*” by sex

	1999	2000	2001	2002
Men	56	58	60	65
Women	28	30	31	35

Source: ONEM 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003; calculations by the author.

Within the general frame of the “*interruption de carrière*” we find also the “*congé pour soins palliatifs*” (see table 9) which was introduced in 1995 as an individual right to a leave for the purpose of caring for a person who is terminally ill.²⁷ Although this “*congé thématique*” is not exclusively focusing on the care of elderly people, it can nevertheless be used for the terminal care of elderly family members at home. Yet, since its duration is, by nature of its definition, very short, it can for sure not be classified as a major policy in the field of elderly care. Nevertheless, the structure of its usage can strengthen the argument that

²⁶ Also: interview with Thérèse Jacobs 26/02/2003, general director of the centre for population and family studies in Brussels.

²⁷ Soins palliatifs: “...toute forme d’assistance, notamment médicale, sociale, administrative et psychologique, ainsi que les soins donnés à une personne souffrant d’une maladie incurable et se trouvant en phase terminale.” (Verbrugge 2002c: 94)

family care for the elderly is provided overwhelmingly by women: For instance, in 2002 113 of 146 persons (= 77%) taking a “congé pour soins palliatifs” were female (ONEM 2003: 81f).

Table 9: Congé pour soins palliatifs – overview of the regulations

Year of introduction	1995
Pre-conditions	The leave is an individual right; the worker does not have to be replaced by an unemployed person
Dismissal protection	Workers on leave are protected against dismissal during three months after their leave has ended.
Duration	One month at least, two months at maximum; the leave can be taken as full-time leave or reduction of working time by 1/5 or to half-time
Benefit	537 € per month (2002) for a full-time leave

Source: Verbrugge 2002c: 94-96.

The first direct familialistic policy in the field of elderly care which was explicitly meant to support elderly people and their family carers was introduced in 1999: the Flemish care insurance.²⁸ Its introduction was motivated on the one hand by anti-poverty policy since being in need of care had increasingly become an income risk for the elderly and, thus, a threat to social spending (cf. Jacobs 2002). On the other hand, attempts to introduce a care insurance on the federal level had failed due to financial reasons. Since the Flemish regional budget had reserves in this regard and also because there was a generic fiscal interest in the decentralisation of social security, the Flemish care insurance was also earmarked to be the first pillar of a decentralised Flemish social security system.²⁹ Due to the fact that the Flemish government is not authorised to tax incomes, the contributions paid to the care insurance are flat rate. Every Flemish person above 25 years of age is obliged to pay 25€ per year which cover about half of the expenses while the remaining half is financed from the regional budget. Benefits are paid after a severe need for care has been assessed by social nurses. The assessment is based on the ADL (activity of daily living) and requires in the case of family care giving that the elderly person is cared for during at least three days a week. Until the end of march 2002, 76% of all applications (= 60.741) have been accepted which also indicates a nearly complete coverage of all persons in need of care (Jacobs 2002: 8). The benefit

²⁸ There have been local models of payments for family care providing very small benefits: “On average, the allowances cover about 16.2% of home care’s additional costs. Therefore, such payments should be seen as an appreciation paid in arrears, rather than as a financial stimulus for informal home care.” (Buggenhout et al. 1994: 140). These local models are increasingly replaced by the care insurance in Flanders (Jacobs 2002: 4).

²⁹ Interview with Bea Cantillon 30/9/2003 and Jef Breda 06/10/2003.

provided is rather low (90€ per month) and is not paid to the family carer but to the cared for person. Yet, there is no control about the passing on of the benefit to the family carer. As a consequence the “payment” of the family carer is often not taking place. However, the benefit can be classified as a symbolic payment rather than as a financial incentive for family care: “From the point of view of the caretaker, especially if she is still in the active population and if the care giving consumes most of her time, these symbolic payments are completely insufficient to overcome the opportunity costs.” (Jacobs 2002: 11) Thus, the Flemish care insurance seems to be of only minor importance with regard to the development of familialistic structures in elderly care.

In comparison to the field of child care, the Belgian familialism in elderly care is characterised by a severe lack of de-familialising structures and only partially developed familialistic structures which could become stronger in the future if the “*interruption de carrière*” will be used more frequently for the purpose of elderly care. The development processed from gendered implicit to gendered explicit familialism.

4. What can we learn from the Belgian case?

Drawing some general conclusions from the Belgian case study, I would like to highlight three main points which could be of importance for a comparative perspective on familialism. Firstly, the *differentiation between structures and social behaviour* enabled us to discover discontinuities in the development of familialism that provide explanations for change: The child care services provided from the beginning of the 19th century neither have been intended to be an incentive for female labour market participation nor have they been used this way until the early 1970s. Similarly, the structural de-gendering of derived social rights did not change their gendered usage. And the provision of familialistic structures for elderly care within the frame of the “*interruption de carrière*” is not used since it does not seem to fit with the social care arrangements. Thus, the structures of familialism partly provide(d) more options than are (were) used. In the case of child care services, the use of the attached labour market options evolved with a time lag in the 1970s. Such a time lag of usage could also happen in elderly care if the age structure of family carers changes towards younger age groups which are still part of the labour market. Thus, to a certain degree structures enable(d)

changes in the social care arrangement in a top-down process; even if the structural options provided have not been politically intended in the first place.³⁰ Contrarily, we have also seen a bottom-up development of familialism when in the 1970s female employment rates were increasing and the lack of child care services for children under 3 years of age was substituted by alternative structures of care provision which finally led to the expansion of subsidised child care services.

Secondly, the Belgian case has shown that *modernisation processes of gender relations are not one-dimensional*. Rather, we have seen a simultaneity of the emancipation of women on the one hand and the persistence of traditional cultural preferences for full-time mothering on the other. As a result, there are various models of caring in existence today. At the structural level there are: the full-time carer (male/female) at home, the employed child carer (mother/father), and the carer (female) on leave from employment. At the social behaviour level we find: female full-time carers (for children and/or the elderly) at home, employed mothers, and mothers on leave from employment. Apart from this multidimensional development it is striking that the question of gendered care giving is much less of a topic in elderly care than in child care. This might be due to the fact that most family carers of the elderly are not part of the potentially active labour market population.

Last not least, the general *importance of a country's economic performance for social policy development* can be recovered in the development of Belgian familialism: Financial restrictions hindered the introduction of the "allocation socio-pédagogique" in 1978 and caused the small-scale size of the benefits attached to the "interruption de carrière", the "congé parental" and the Flemish care insurance. Especially the future development of de-gendering familialism by including men into child care and elderly care will depend on the availability of adequate resources; the more so since it seems that care policies which have much less of a social policy tradition than the different branches of social security are particularly exposed to financial constraints.

³⁰ Neither have the early child care services been introduced to provide labour market options for mothers nor has the „interruption de carrière” been intended to be a policy for elderly care. Nevertheless, the early child care services founded the path for the expansion of this policy in the 1970s. The development of the “interruption de carrière” could be of a similar “path dependence” in the future.

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