

# Good for women? Advantages and risks of a basic income from a gender perspective

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The purpose of this paper is to present a gender analysis of a universal basic income (henceforth, UBI), its aim being to assess UBI's performance in overcoming or softening the main injustices suffered by women given their distinct position in society.<sup>1</sup> By UBI I mean an unconditional income paid by a government to each citizen or permanent resident from the cradle to the grave, its level only varying according to age (with lower UBIs for children being paid to their mothers or main carers).

A central element in women's distinctive position in society is the gendered division of labour. While men tend to specialize in paid "productive" labour (regarded as masculine and to which social recognition is attached), women tend to specialize in unpaid "reproductive" labour (regarded as feminine and seldom recognized as work, let alone as being as valuable as paid labour). Women are housewives or double shifters and expected to be so; while men are breadwinners who do little housework and caring work, and this too is expected from them.

The fact that women are seen and behave as having (exclusive or main) responsibility for socially useful yet unpaid and misrecognized household and caring work has several adverse consequences for women. The most immediate and apparent is deprivation of a (livable and dependable) independent income while living with a (male) partner, and grave risk of poverty after a breakup or death of partner, especially when children are involved. More "immaterial" consequences due to the misrecognition of traditionally female work are the lower status of women and their lower chances to achieve self-esteem, the former being linked to such tangible consequences as increased rates of violence against women, while the latter affects women's ability to develop and sustain a life plan.

Introducing a universal basic income in this context could have both positive and negative effects on women's situation. In what follows, I shall expose the ways in which I think basic income could achieve greater fairness to women (section one), and the ways it could work to the detriment of women's interests (section two). Finally, I shall assess alternative arrangements to see if they could do better (section three). I shall argue that while the introduction of a UBI in the present context could have some important undesirable effects from a gender perspective, these could be mitigated by side-arrangements accompanying the UBI. Furthermore, I shall argue that alternatives such as a homemaker's wage -intended to make women's difference from men less costly- or free and easily available high quality child and elderly care -intended to discharge women from their caring responsibilities so as to allow them to be men's equals in the labour market- have deeper flaws.

## **(1) *Prima facie* case for UBI from a gender perspective**

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<sup>1</sup> As a quick glance at feminist literature rapidly shows, there is no unique feminist approach to any subject- as there is no single mainstream approach-, with social ethics being no exception. It is therefore not my aim to analyse UBI from a standpoint every feminist would regard as his or hers. Rather, I shall assess the proposal from those feminist (or mainstream) intuitions that I find more appealing and those feminist (or mainstream) arguments that I find more convincing.

### a) Providing income security for homemakers and double shifters

All over the world, women are doing most of the unpaid household and care work, while men perform most of paid labour<sup>2</sup>. Even when women do work for pay, they usually accommodate their career to fit their family responsibilities, leading to a less stable and profitable working life. It is therefore not surprising that women make the majority of the poor, with mothering being the single most important factor leading to poverty in old age (L'Hirondelle 2004). Homemaking puts women at a grave risk of financial need because there is neither a monetary retribution for homemaking nor a trustable safety net protecting homemakers from financial need. As L'Hirondelle (2004) points out, "raising the next generation is essential to the health of society, it is work that cannot be abandoned, yet it is work that is currently a huge financial sacrifice for those who do it (though you may be paid with hugs and affection, you cannot pay for your groceries or rent with hugs). The idea that you can work hard and get ahead is only true if you are being paid. If you work hard at unpaid work you get *behind* financially."

A universal basic income funded on income taxes would operate a redistribution from breadwinners (receiving an income for their work) to homemakers (getting no income), effectively protecting the latter from poverty.<sup>3</sup> Many authors have rightly seen this ability of a UBI to provide income security for homemakers to be a strong reason for advocating the proposal from a gender perspective. Alstott (2001), for instance, stresses that American women face two distinctive economic risks the combination of which translates into lifelong income insecurity, namely main responsibility for child care and low earnings (due in part to women's adjusting their working lives to accommodate family needs). Focusing on the plight of single mothers and elderly women, she concludes a UBI is good for women for, by decoupling benefit entitlement from a history of paid work, a UBI is able to meet women's distinctive needs regarding income security. Also stressing the importance of a UBI for carers both in their youth and in their old age, Parker (1993) argues that a UBI would improve "the income security of women during periods of childbearing, childrearing, caring for dependents and old age. (...) Instead of losing out in their old age by doing unpaid work at home, women (and men) would be sure of a decent income in old age." (pp.63-4)

A basic income would also mean a substantial improvement in the situation of those double shifters working on an unsteady basis and/or for low retributions, for it would assure them a higher and/or more stable income floor during their working years, and a secure and sufficient pension in old age. This group represents the majority of double shifters and those in greater need of income security (because their incomes are insufficient or not dependable, thereby leading to meager or no pension and social security entitlements). Most single mothers are in this group, but also many married or cohabiting women who take part-time jobs.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations' *Human development report 1995* attempted to draw attention to this fact and its adverse consequences for women. The situation, however, has not changed much ever since.

<sup>3</sup> At least if defined in absolute terms. A livable UBI would by definition put an end to *absolute poverty* by endowing everyone with a livable income. However, the incidence of a UBI in *relative poverty* (or income differentials) is more ambiguous. On the one hand, a UBI would have the *immediate effect* of redistributing a great mass of income from breadwinners (mostly men) to homemakers (mostly women), hence softening the income gap between the sexes, but on the other hand, if a UBI produced a strengthening of the gendered division of labour (sorting out men and women even more neatly into the breadwinner and homemaker role) it could have the *equilibrium effect* of entrenching a substantial income gap between the sexes. "In the worst case scenario the basic income could become a minimum income for men (a floor on which they can build) and a maximum income for women (a ceiling above which they find it extremely difficult to rise)." (Carlson 1997: 9)

<sup>4</sup> For a number of double shifters with intermediate earnings, a UBI could be thought of as an income transfer from one shift to the other, with the total net income remaining about the same. Income *security* would nevertheless be increased for this group too, since a UBI would probably make part of their income more dependable than it previously was. As for the smaller group of higher earners, a basic income would also guarantee them a stable income floor (which would be valuable in case their employment situation changes) but so long as they retain their positions, the taxes required to fund the basic income would

**(b) Enhancing women's bargaining power**

A livable UBI would greatly enhance most women's bargaining power by substantially improving their fallback option (in giving them a modest but sufficient income they can count on no matter what). This enhanced fallback option would benefit women: I) by endowing them with the power to exit (or not to enter) undesirable relationships, and II) by consequently enhancing their voice within relationships (and hence the power to shape them so as to make them more satisfactory).

I) The power to avoid undesirable relationships

If we cannot count on the means to provide for our subsistence and that of our dependents we are effectively at the mercy of he who has the power to give or withdraw these means at will. We just cannot afford not to agree to his terms, except at an enormous cost to ourselves.

As shown by Goodin's analysis, a person is most vulnerable to exploitation by another when four conditions obtain:

"(1) the relationship embodies an *asymmetrical* balance of power" [meaning one party cannot match the threats of the other to withdraw from the relationship],

"(2) the subordinate party *needs* the resources provided by the relationship in order to protect his vital interests" [so he cannot just choose to do without them in order to avoid accepting the superordinate's terms],

"(3) for the subordinate party, the relationship is the *only source* of such resources" [so he cannot turn to some other provider to avoid accepting exploitative conditions by the superordinate party],

"(4) the superordinate party in the relationship exercises *discretionary control* over those resources" (1985: 195-6) [since in order for the superordinate to be able to impose his terms it must be up to him to decide whether or not to provide the subordinate with what he vitally needs].

Nevertheless, a high risk of exploitation exists even if there is (as there often is) more than one potential provider, for she who needs milk for her children cannot keep looking indefinitely for a more merciful partner or employer. So she is pressed by her impossibility to wait into accepting the terms of this one partner or employer who is now in front of her, especially when better substitutes are probably not waiting round the corner.

Additionally, being caught in an asymmetrical relationship of the sort described above is a bad thing even if we have a merciful partner or employer who *could* –but *will not*– take advantage of his power over us, since the mere fact that he *could* do it arguably constitutes a harm in itself (Pettit 1997). It considerably restricts our ability to plan our own lives and it pushes us into demeaning defensive tactics such as adulation or avoidance. Furthermore, since asymmetries in power tend to be highly noticeable and to constitute public knowledge, they affect people's status<sup>5</sup> and, as pointed out by Goodin, drawing on Postow's (1978-79) research, it is likely to have an effect on self-respect as well for "it is demeaning that you must count on the good grace and moral rectitude of another to provide you with what you need" (1985: 195 fn).

In giving women a more workable fallback option from any relationship, a UBI would protect women from being forced into (or trapped in) exploitative or otherwise abusive and demeaning relationships out of fear of material deprivation for it would endow them with the power to exit (or refuse to enter) undesirable relationships of any sort. As pointed out by Van

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necessarily reduce their profits. Even for this group, then, income security would be enhanced, be it at a cost to their present net income. In any case, my concern in this paper is with those women who are being unjustly treated given their distinct position in society. This last group is probably not suffering from income insecurity, even when it can suffer along with the rest of women from other forms of injustice.

<sup>5</sup> Pettit presents these three reasons to support his claim that non-domination –the condition of being more or less immune to arbitrary interference by others– is a primary good (1997 ch. III section I) to which socioeconomic independence is a prerequisite (1997 ch. V section II).

Parijs (2001b: 127), part of the job of just institutions is “to protect a formal right of exit, and to shape the features of the fallback position in case a worker wants to quit or a partner to separate. Here again, obviously, a UBI is of crucial importance in turning the formal freedom not to enter or not to put up with an unfair relationship of whatever kind into a real freedom not to do so”. With a UBI, failing to accept a nasty low-wage job would no longer lead to not being able to pay the bills. Similarly, choosing to end an abusive relationship with one’s partner would no longer entail putting oneself and one’s children on the brink of poverty. Granted universally and unconditionally as a right, a UBI provides some protection against the tyranny of husbands and bosses without making women vulnerable to the whim of public officers either, as when subsidies are granted or denied at their discretion (Van Parijs, 2001a: 20). Women would no longer be forced into any sort of undesirable relationship out of fear of material deprivation.

## II) The power to make relationships fairer

As a consequence of their enhanced ability to withdraw from or to refuse to take part in unfair relationships, women would gain a greater power to shape the relationships they may choose to enter. Their bargaining power within relationships would raise as it would be public knowledge that they may indeed choose to exit (or not to enter) the relationship should its terms be sufficiently inconvenient.

Two favourable labour market trends can be thought to result from this enhancement of women’s bargaining power relative to potential employers:

- i) a trend towards *higher wage rates* for intrinsically unattractive women's jobs (since women would no longer be forced into accepting nasty low-wage jobs for fear of destitution).
- ii) a trend towards *greater intrinsic attractiveness* of women's jobs (for, given that women would not be willing to do unattractive jobs unless they are well paid, employers would have an incentive to make jobs as attractive as possible, so as to be able to pay lower wages).

Even though these trends could have the effect of pricing unskilled female labour out of paid work, it should be noted that the disappearance of monotonous dead-end low-paid jobs is not to be regretted. Rather, as suggested by Parker (1993: 45), policies facilitating education and training should accompany the introduction of a UBI so as to help unskilled women find a new occupation if they so want.

Finally, as women would also have a greater bargaining power relative to their partners, a further beneficial effect can be thought to result, namely:

- iii) that women would enjoy *more favourable household life conditions*. (As results from section I above, thank to their improved exit option, women would be better off while living with a male partner for they would more often end undesirable relationships, no longer trapped into them for fear of financial need -increased divorce rate in NIT experiments can be interpreted along these lines. However, this enhanced exit option would also endow women with some power to shape their relationships into fairer ones, for the improvement of women’s exit option would lead to their voice being paid more attention<sup>6</sup>. As pointed out by Okin (1989: 167) “Hirschman’s argument about the effects of persons’ relative potentials for exit on their power or influence within relationships or groups” is fully applicable to marital relationships: “the asymmetric dependency of wives on husbands affects their potential for satisfactory exit, and thereby influences the effectiveness of their voice within the marriage.” Some empirical evidence from Pahl (1989) and Ott (1995) reviewed by Robeyns (2001: 92) also supports Okin’s conclusion by showing that “women with paid employment have on average more power than women working unpaid at home” and that “education and non-labour income increase the power of housewives in the household.”). Although this increased bargaining power is surely welcome, we should beware of overestimating its impact, for economic

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<sup>6</sup> It is also possible, however, that given the availability of the exit option women be less prompt to use the voice option. This would be bad, but it is nevertheless fair that women enjoy the same exit option men presently enjoy, especially since this is necessary to protect them from abusive relationships.

dependency is far from being the only factor contributing to men's ability to impose unfair terms on women.

## **(2) Possible effects detrimental to women's interests**

As I have argued so far, a UBI has the power to meet women's most pressing needs. By doing it unconditionally, it would also enhance women's bargaining power relative to partners, employers and public officers, protecting them from being forced into abusive and demeaning relationships out of fear of material deprivation and thereby providing them some power to shape their relationships into fairer ones. However, some fear that a UBI could in more subtle ways be detrimental to women's interests. A key conjecture behind these fears is that more women than men would take advantage of their UBI to reduce or interrupt labour market participation in order to care for dependent children or adults (Fitzpatrick 1999: 167). A UBI would thus lead to a reinforcement of the gendered division of labour.

The conjecture that more women than men would reduce their attachment to the labour market is plausible in the light of evidence from some opinion surveys, negative income tax experiments (henceforth, NIT) and gender-blind career interruption schemes, such as the Belgian career interruption premia. These premia are paid by the government to male or female employees choosing to temporarily interrupt their labour market participation or to temporarily reduce their working hours. As noted by Robeyns (2000) drawing on Szabo's (1997) findings, "85 percent of the employees making use of this system are women. The motivation for taking a career interruption equally differs: women leave their job to raise small children, whereas men try to start an independent business, or use it as a transitional stage to early retirement" (p. 123). Evidence from NIT experiments is also useful to speculate on the likely effects of a UBI scheme, given the similarity between both types of policy. The analysis of the four NIT experiments carried out in the United States and Canada from 1968 to 1980 shows that while under a NIT scheme married men would work for pay tenuously less or about as much as they do now (their decline in labour supply ranging from 0 to 9 depending on the study and data), the labour market participation of single mothers would decrease slightly more, and married women would reduce the hours spent on paid work by around 20 or 30 percent (Widerquist, 2005).

However, some may be reluctant to see any harm in women's more often choosing to be homemakers or to "lighten the 'double shift' at certain periods of their lives" by going part-time (Van Parijs 2001a: 20), especially with a UBI protecting them from poverty and securing a workable exit option and the enhanced bargaining power that goes with it. "Good for them, one may conclude: this shows that a basic income would be more valuable for women than for men." (Van Parijs 2001b: 127). If anything -the argument goes- a UBI would enlarge women's options, should we not be glad that they thereby have options they obviously value and want to choose? Why would this be a *bad* consequence of the introduction of a UBI rather than a good one?

Robeyns (2001a) points at one possible answer to this question: if under a UBI scheme more women than men reduced their labour market participation in order to take up an even larger share of domestic responsibilities, negative spill over effects on other women can be expected. Effectively, this would bring about an increase in statistical discrimination that would work to the detriment of those women who remain committed to their careers, in making it even more difficult for them to get hired or promoted, as they would be seen by potential employers – more than they already are- as statistically less reliable than equally qualified men. Not knowing how committed an individual woman may be, it is rational for employers to fear she will display the traits that are typical of the classes to which she belongs (*inter alia*, of the class of female workers). If a UBI scheme makes women more likely than they presently are to reduce their labour market participation to raise small children (while leaving men's tendency not to do it virtually unchanged), this will in turn boost employers propensity to regard women as less

committed workers than men, as workers, that is, less worth investing in.<sup>7</sup> Why bother to hire, train or promote a woman (who may subsequently take a parental leave or go part-time to raise a family) when we could equally hire a man (whose wife will probably raise his children for him)? Intuitively, statistical discrimination of this kind looks patently unfair to career oriented women who are uninterested in (or prepared to renounce to) having a family, for these women will be discriminated against even though they are *ex hypothesi* equally suitable for the job than similarly qualified men<sup>8</sup>.

Nevertheless, Van Parijs (2001b) thinks a case can still be made for the admissibility (or perhaps even the desirability) of statistical discrimination. This sort of discrimination would be justifiable –he claims- if it effectively enhanced productivity hence enabling an increase in the social product that could be used for the worst-off (128). Robeyns' (2001a) rejoinder is that statistical discrimination is unacceptable all the same for in her view (1) it is more likely to lower aggregate productivity than to enhance it (and can nonetheless be expected to persist), and (2) even if it “lead to efficiency gains, it should still be condemned on moral grounds” (94). The reasons for this, however, she fails to spell out, short of saying it would violate “the basic principle of equal concern and respect for all individuals” (94). Van Parijs (2001b) is thus unconvinced: “if such statistical discrimination rests on nothing, it will not persist. If it rests on real (though only probabilistic) differences, it can be justified, like talent-based inequalities, in terms of the greater efficiency –in this case in terms of average hiring and training costs- which, as Robeyns recognizes, ‘can be used for the worse off’”(128). After all, his argument goes, we see no harm in discriminating for the sake of efficiency against people “who are too small for some jobs, or do not possess the right sort of intellectual capacity” even though the relevant traits are neither chosen nor easy to get rid of, “why would the first case raise any problem that the second does not?” (128).

As I shall argue, statistical discrimination is objectionable for, given the importance our societies attach to paid work, systematically restricting the access to the best positions of members of a highly visible group has grave adverse consequences that cannot be justified by the promise of increased prosperity, even if the resulting wealth were to be distributed among the victims of the restriction. The adverse consequences that can be expected to issue from statistical discrimination are as follows:

- i) As statistical discrimination increases, all women would have **lesser opportunities to succeed in the workplace**, and hence less of them would effectively achieve positions of prestige and authority. Women's applications would be more frequently turned down, sometimes in favour of less apt or less qualified (though statistically more reliable) men, who will therefore increase their background and may subsequently improve their qualifications, as wider training opportunities will be open to them. Snowball effects would then be set in motion, to the further detriment of women's opportunities of advancement in their careers and to the further benefit of men's. As noted by Valian (1998) small differences in women's and men's ability to accumulate advantage and to profit from their achievements can easily lead to significant effects on their careers in the long term, through the snowball effect.
- ii) Having less than equal opportunities of succeeding in the only arena that is socially valued, women's **opportunities to achieve self-esteem would be severely curtailed**, especially since the labour market is thought of as a fair arena where talented people should be able to get through. Institutions providing unequal opportunities for different groups are particularly

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that if a UBI made *both* women *and* men more household oriented to a more similar extent and thus more equally prone to reduce their attachment to the labour market at certain stages of their lives, statistical discrimination of the sort described above would be reversed rather than enhanced.

<sup>8</sup> Provided these men are not of the “uncommitted” sort that share household and caring work with their wives equally, in which case, career oriented women would advantage them in having more “adequate” attitudes.

damaging when they keep the appearance of treating everyone evenhandedly. For not only do they unjustly reduce some people's opportunities for success, but they also make their victims look responsible for their lesser achievement.

- iii) As employers' hiring and promotion decisions are supposed to be based on the merits of (prospective) employees, women's lesser ability to climb up to the top will be readily interpreted (not only by them but also by others) as a sign of their lesser capacities or inadequate attitudes, leading to a **decline in women's status**. In addition, the very reinforcement of the gendered division of labour that would trigger this increase in statistical discrimination and the decline in women's status that follows from it, can also independently work to the detriment of the status of women. Cross-cultural research on the determinants of women's status, as summarized by Kimmel (2000) show that "the more that men participate in child care and the more free women are from child rearing responsibility, the higher women's status tends to be" (53). Women's having sole responsibility for child rearing hampers their ability to fully participate in social and economic life, what can easily lead to a lower status. But additionally, sociologist Scott Coltrane "found that the closer the relationship between father and son, the higher the status of women is likely to be" and that "in cultures where fathers are relatively uninvolved, boys define themselves *in opposition* to their mothers and other women, and therefore are prone to exhibit traits of hypermasculinity, to fear and denigrate women as a way to display masculinity", what suggests male uninvolvedness in child rearing could causally contribute to lowering women's status in a more direct way than through hampering women's ability to pursue socially valued activities (Kimmel 2000: 53).
- iv) Most seriously, the lower status all women will have as a result of increased statistical discrimination is bound to have graver effects than misrecognition, since violence tends to be directed towards lower status groups or individuals (Kimmel 2000: 37), which explains why societies where the status of women is lower exhibit **higher levels of violence against women**. Cross-cultural studies effectively show a negative correlation between women's status and rates of violence against women: "the lower women's status in a society, the higher the likelihood of rape and violence against women" (Kimmel 2000: 54). In reviewing cross-cultural studies on women's status, Kimmel (2000) notes that two of the central determinants of women's status (fathers' involvement in child rearing and women's control of property after marriage) "are also determinants of violence against women" (54). In one of the most wide-ranging comparative studies of women's status, Peggy Reeves Sanday found that "women had the highest levels of equality, and thus the lowest frequency of rape, when both genders contributed about the same amount to the food supply" (Kimmel 2000: 55).

Inasmuch as these consequences can effectively be expected to issue from statistical discrimination, they should also count as adverse effects of the introduction of a UBI for -as argued by Robeyns- a UBI is likely to trigger statistical discrimination. As pointed out above, some of these negative effects (namely the decline in women's status and the rise in violence against women that goes with it) may follow directly from an intensification of male uninvolvedness in child rearing.

### (3) Assessing alternatives

As I have argued in the preceding section, in spite of all its virtues, a UBI has the ability to reinforce the gendered division of labour, to which a number of undesirable consequences are

associated. Even though some of these consequences (namely income insecurity and the exploitable dependencies that go with it) would be effectively countered by a UBI, others (such as lesser chances to achieve self-esteem, lesser status and the increased threat of violence that goes with it) would still be likely to take place. While some might suggest this is a reason not to introduce a UBI in the present context, advocates' position is rather that we should introduce a UBI along with complementary policies aiming at mitigating its adverse effects (Walter 1989: 121-2, Robeyns 2001b: 86, Van Parijs, 2001: 129).

A number of suggestions have been made as to what these complementary arrangements should include (Fitzpatrick 1999: 174, Robeyns 2001b: 86, Van Parijs 2001b: 129-130). However, the question remains whether alternative arrangements could fare better than a UBI in improving women's ability to lead the life they may want to. Two main competitors need to be assessed: (a) free and easily available high quality childcare and elderly care –intended to discharge women from their caring responsibilities so that they can devote themselves to full time breadwinning –as men do- unburdened by domestic duties, and (b) a homemaker's wage -intended to make women's difference from men less costly. Both, I shall argue, have deep flaws. While a homemaker's wage may be shaped so as to escape from the various objections fitting its bolder variants, it can only meet them all by slipping into an arrangement very similar to a UBI.

#### **a) Discharging women from caring responsibilities**

If major responsibility for unpaid misrecognized care work is hampering women's chances to achieve economic independence and self-esteem and lowering women's status, why not just discharge women from caring responsibilities through state-funded high quality easily available child and elder care provision, so that they can devote themselves to full time breadwinning –along with men- unburdened by domestic duties? This is what Fraser (1996) terms the “universal breadwinner” model of social security and Bambrick (2006) describes as the “adult worker” model, whose closest incarnation is to be found in the welfare arrangements of the Scandinavian countries. According to Fraser, this is one of three conceivable welfare regimes driven by feminist concerns, the other two being what she calls the “caregiver parity” and the “universal caregiver” models, the former aiming at making women's traditional role less costly by introducing a homemaker's wage, and the latter aspiring to encourage men and women to share both paid and unpaid work. The ideal in the “universal breadwinner” model is to have every adult getting him or herself an independent income in the labour market by engaging in full-time paid work. In order to enable women to be full-time breadwinners along with men, they have to be discharged from caring responsibilities, ideally by free and easily available high quality care provision services. Caring is not seen here as a valuable yet misrecognized and maldistributed work, performers of which are made to pay a huge economic cost due to unjust institutional arrangements, but as a burden impeding women to pursue valuable activities outside the home on a par with men. The solution, accordingly, is seen in the state's taking over the burden, rather than promoting greater recognition and more equal sharing of care work, while ensuring carers are not penalized through financial insecurity and economic dependency.

There are several weak points in this model. First, it presupposes that there are (or could be) enough well-paid jobs for every adult to live on. Second, by unjustifiably restricting the right to an income to those in paid work, it unjustly penalizes those willing to contribute to society through unpaid work by making them economically vulnerable. Third, it further diminishes women's traditional work in conveying the message that only paid work is valuable (both from an individual and societal standpoint) for performance of unpaid care work is not shown to be a valuable option for individuals (who are to be unburdened from it) or to society (since only those in paid work are entitled to an income). Given that we should expect a great deal of care work to continue to be performed by women at home (be it willingly as part of their life plans or unwillingly as part of a second shift they cannot easily get rid of), this devaluation of women's traditional work is not without consequences, even in a model intending to unburden women from this sort of work. Forth, also because housewives and second shifters are

not bound to disappear through the introduction of child and elderly care facilities, this model would not by itself attain equality of opportunities for self-esteem or equal status for men and women (through women having lesser chances for advancement in their careers due to their heavier load at home, statistical discrimination and snowball effects).

### **b) A wage for homemaking**

On the opposite side of Fraser's spectrum we could embrace the "caregiver parity model" and go instead for a homemaker's wage, as advocated by Krebs (1998). Women's work as housewives and carers –she claims- is true work in the economic sense of being a purposeful activity leading to the production of a good that is enjoyable by others and that partakes in the exchange of goods and services in society. The fact that this particular form of work – disproportionately done by women- is unpaid and misrecognized effectively constitutes a major cause of women's disadvantageous position in society. Should we then not follow Krebs' proposal to pay women for their housekeeping and caring work? Thus, women too would have an income for their work (even if not in the labour market), and they would see their work recognized as such (since the homemaker's wage would be there to say housewives too are doing valuable work worth paying for). Housewives' wage could also protect them from poverty and exploitable dependencies, provided it were high enough to live on. Equally important, it would grant them the freedom to choose to work inside the home, without financially penalizing them for that choice (as would happen in the universal breadwinner model).

However, a number of problems arise when we try to spell out how exactly a homemaker's wage would work. A homemaker's wage could be defined as an income paid by the state<sup>9</sup> on a regular basis to people of either sex who take primary responsibility for housekeeping and caring work at home. This characterization, however, leaves a number of important issues undefined:

- (a) if homemakers are paid for their caring work, should there be **any checking of whether the work has been done**, and done properly? Comprehensive checking is certainly out of the question, for it would constitute an excessive intrusion in people's lives (not to mention the tremendous financial cost such control would have). Some minimal requisites, however, such as children's attending to school or to health controls, could be justifiable and not costly to enforce<sup>10</sup>,
- (b) should it also be **paid to those who employ domestic help**? It may at first seem somewhat odd to pay a homemaker's wage to someone who will hire someone else to do the job. However, I think this possibility should be open for at least three reasons: first, if hiring a cook is not allowed, what about ordering a hot pizza or buying half-prepared food in the supermarket or already baked bread? where will we draw the line?, second, even when we may delegate some tasks to third parties, many tasks cannot be passed on

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<sup>9</sup> The possibility of a housewife's wage being paid by the husband has had its advocates in the Australian public debate surrounding a parliamentary project for a housewives' wage in the 1920's (Traikovski 2003). The proposal does not merit, however, serious consideration. It fails to recognize women's caring work is not just to the benefit of their husbands but benefits society at large. It would make the wife into her husband's employee, a subordinate having to comply with the husband's standards and definitions of the work at hand. And it would not solve the income problem of the wives of men whose income is insufficient, not to mention the needs of single mothers, who would at best receive an even lower income than actual wives.

<sup>10</sup> School attendance is a condition commonly imposed in child benefit schemes, as in Brazil's Bolsa Familia and Mexico's Progresas. Some advocates of a UBI such as Argentinean economist Rubén Lo Vuolo think it could be advisable to make reception of universal child allowances (the first step towards the introduction of a UBI scheme) conditional upon satisfaction of this sort of minimal requisites, which in his view would enhance the efficiency of educational and public health policies without significantly restricting access to income provision or invading private life.

and in any case final responsibility for coordinating always rests with the homemaker (as pointed out by McKay (2001) and others, emphasis on the aspects of homemaking that can be taken over by the market obscures the importance of those that cannot), third, a homemaker's wage that prevented the recipient from delegating some of his or her responsibilities would certainly fall too short of maximally enhancing his or her ability to fully participate in social life.

- (c) should the **amount be the same irrespective of the number of people in the household** and regardless of how many of them are **sharing household responsibilities**? Can every adult in the household claim to be the homemaker? If we answer any of these questions negatively, surveillance of household composition would be due, and with it a huge intrusion in people's lives. The latter question can hardly be answered positively if the homemaker's wage is substantial and restricted to those *not* in paid labour, for it would provide strong disincentives to engaging in paid work, thus endangering the economic feasibility of the proposal. On the other hand, if the homemaker's wage were substantial and compatible with paid work, it would be virtually undistinguishable from a UBI.
- (d) should it be **paid only to homemakers taking care of dependent children or adults** (who *could not* take care of themselves) as proposed by Krebs (1998) or to all homemakers (i.e. also to those just caring for partners who *could* perfectly well take care of themselves albeit not without costs to their possibilities for career advancement)? If the rationale is that homemakers should be paid for they perform economic work and are disadvantaged by not being paid for it, then why not pay also to homemakers who care for non-dependent partners? Krebs' reason is that this work should be distributed rather than paid for (otherwise, we would be cementing oppressive gender roles). However, equal sharing of unpaid work will not be brought about overnight (and can be expected never to be brought about for *every* couple), and hence some homemakers will keep being exploited and in financial risk. As pointed out by Okin (1989), even though we should strive for a more equal distribution of unpaid work, protection from poverty and exploitable dependencies is also due to those women who willingly stick to traditional roles. Unlike a UBI, a homemaker's wage restricted to dependency workers (as proposed by Krebs) would not meet these women's needs. On the other hand, if extended to all homemakers, it would certainly contribute to cementing traditional gender roles, in reinforcing the view that domestic work is women's responsibility, the work they are paid to do.
- (e) should it be **restricted to people doing no paid work at all**, whether waged or self-employed?
- If the homemaker's wage were restricted to people doing no paid work and were high enough to live on, it would have the adverse effect of trapping housewives into their traditional role, as taking up a part-time job would entail losing their (higher and/or more dependable) homemaker's wage. Being granted only to full-time homemakers, it would force women to choose between full-time breadwinning and full-time homemaking if they want to ensure a livable income of their own. Intermediate options combining both roles would be thus penalized. These options are, however, particularly valued by many women who refuse to choose between the two roles and would rather combine them. Besides, by making the option between breadwinning and homemaking an absolute one, a homemaker's wage incompatible with paid work would be but one more obstacle on the way to gender justice for those who consider the latter to entail men and women sharing domestic responsibilities (Okin 1989, Fraser 1996, Krebs 1998). On the other hand, if set at a level insufficient to live on, a

homemaker's wage would not be enough to protect women from poverty or exploitable dependencies, while also contributing to the devaluation of housewives' work in conveying the message that it is not worth more than it is paid for. One way or the other, a homemaker's wage that banned recipients' performance of paid work is no improvement on a UBI.

- However, if the homemaker's wage is to compensate those who bear the lion's share of responsibility for unpaid work, there is no reason why it should only be paid to full-time homemakers rather than also to double-shifters (who do their second shift of unpaid work in addition to their first shift in the labour market). What then if we make the homemaker's wage compatible with the performance of paid work? Thus, we would also enable couples to share both paid and unpaid work. However, would there remain any significant difference between this improved homemaker's wage and a UBI?

#### **(4) Conclusions**

As I have tried to show, a UBI has the ability to provide income security for homemakers and double shifters alike. By doing this unconditionally, it has the virtue of enhancing women's bargaining power, thus protecting them for exploitative or otherwise abusive relationships. While its introduction in the present context could lead to some adverse effects issuing from a reinforcement of the gendered division of labour a UBI could help to produce, this is no reason for rejecting the proposal but rather for exploring accompanying arrangements aimed at mitigating these adverse effects. The analysis of UBI's virtues relative to alternative arrangements further reinforces this conclusion.

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