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**Changes Across Cohorts in Women's Work Histories:
To What Extent are they Due to a Compositional Effect?
A Comparison of Italy and Great Britain**

CRISTINA SOLERA

BADIA FIESOLANA, SAN DOMENICO (FI)

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(cristina.solera@iue.it)

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European University Institute
Badia Fiesolana
I – 50016 San Domenico (FI)
Italy
www.iue.it

INTRODUCTION

In the post-war period the rates of women's employment, especially of married women and mothers, have increased markedly throughout Europe (OECD 1992, EC 2000). This increase has been widely documented and discussed. However, most of its evidence has been based on cross-sectional or time-series data. Few studies have used longitudinal analyses in order to explore changes across time. For some countries, such as Italy, the main reason for this lies in the absence, up to recently, of adequate longitudinal data. In those countries with a longer longitudinal tradition, such as Germany and the UK, the tendency has been to focus on specific crucial phases in female careers or on specific groups of women (namely, on labour market transitions around childbearing or on married women). Rarely changes across cohorts in women's work histories have been addressed explicitly (Joshi and Hinde 1993). Yet, compared to cross-sectional data, longitudinal data are better suited to examine the degree and type of change that has occurred in the last decades. Indeed, they allow one to distinguish different possible components of such change. First, one can examine the increase across cohorts in the percentage of women who enter the labour market and get a job. Second, one can also look at the changes in career patterns over the life course for those that have entered the labour market. Finally, one can see whether factors affecting first entry and subsequent exits from and entries into paid work have changed significantly across cohorts.

By allowing to combine the analysis of changes across cohorts in the incidence of different types of work history (never worked, continuous, curtailed, or discontinuous) with that on the determinants of movements between employment and housework, longitudinal data are powerful in answering a very interesting question: to what extent is the post-war increase in women's employment due to a "compositional effect"? That is, to what extent is it due to the fact that more women in younger cohorts have those characteristics (such as high education and childlessness) that have always been associated with higher levels of participation and continuity? Or, to what extent is it also due to a change in the influence of education, occupational position and family life-course events, and, particularly, in the possibility to combine marriage and children with paid work? Why? As it will become clear in the next section, when I shall locate my research question in the theoretical debate on determinants of women's labour-market supply, the type of "compositional effect" observable in a country depends not only on how women's preferences towards marriage and paid work have changed but also on how the macro set of opportunities and constraints have changed over time. Within this set a crucial role is played by gender-role norms, parenting policies and "women's friendly"

labour-market opportunities and regulations. Hence, by studying changes across cohorts in women's employment patterns, this piece of work also sheds some light on the role of policies and, indirectly, gives a contribution to the ongoing debate on welfare and labour market reforms.

More precisely, in this work the "compositional" issue is addressed by looking at three cohorts of women (those born between 1935-44; 1945-54; 1955-64), at their labour-market behaviour from first job up to age 45, and by comparing two countries, Italy and Great Britain. The comparison between Italy and Great Britain is interesting because these two countries differ greatly in the level, type and pattern of women's employment. They also differ greatly in their cultural and economic context, in their institutional systems, and in the way they have changed in the post-industrial period. Therefore, I also expect to find interesting differences in the compositional nature of women's employment growth.

The analysis draws on the British Household Panel Survey up to the 7th wave (1997) and on the first wave, dated 1997, of the Italian Household Longitudinal Survey. The latter is a very recent longitudinal survey carried out in 1997 by the University of Trento, which collects retrospective history data over a number of different areas, including employment. It represents an important innovation in Italy, where before there wasn't a good national longitudinal survey and where, consequently, research was mainly based on cross-sectional data. What was known on female labour-market transitions over the life course came from longitudinal data either on specific geographical area (Schizzerotto *et al* 1995; Bison *et al.* 1996) or on single cohorts (Bernardi 1999a, 1999b, 2001). At the same time, as far as I know, up to now no research based on the Italian Household Longitudinal Survey has explicitly analysed changes across cohorts in women's work history. Here, instead, I use this relatively new national longitudinal dataset to address this. Namely, I compare Italy with Great Britain, and I employ the technique of event-history analysis in order to examine the effect of various factors on women's transitions out from and back into paid work. Moreover, through a simulation, I estimate how much of the change across cohorts has been compositional.

The paper is organised as follows. In the next section I shall review theories on women's labour-market supply and I shall discuss how useful they are in explaining changes across cohorts, and also differences between countries. Then, I shall briefly illustrate the British and Italian cultural and institutional contexts, how they have changed in the post-war decades and what I expect to be their impact on the "compositional" degree of women's increasing labour supply. After a description of my research design (data, method and variables), I shall present my empirical results. First, I shall examine how the incidence of different labour-market careers has changed across cohorts in Italy and Great Britain. Second, I shall focus only on women who

have started to work and I shall analyse changes in the determinants of women's movements out of and back into paid work. Third, I shall provide a quantitative estimate of what would have happened if only the parameters or the composition had changed. Finally, I shall summarise the main findings and draw some policy implications.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

There are various theoretical approaches that attempt to account for women's labour-market behaviour. Some focus on the supply-side factors, such as human capital resources or work orientation. Others analyse women's labour supply within the context of the household, by looking at the effect of partner's resources and the family-life cycle. Others focus more on the labour-market structure by analysing demand-side type of segmentations. Further, other theories focus on the institutional context that shapes women's choices, by looking at either specific institutions, such as the welfare state or the family, or the whole societal system. These various theories point, more or less explicitly, to different factors affecting women's labour-market participation and predict different types of effects on women's employment transitions. However, none of them explicitly addresses changes across cohorts and the "compositional" nature of such changes. Indeed the term "compositional" has been very rarely used in the literature on women's labour-market participation, where one finds more actor and institutional-centred terms such as strategies, choices, values, opportunities and constraints. Instead, it has been used a lot in social mobility and discrimination studies. Here, with a pure descriptive and technical connotation, are labelled "compositional" those changes that refer to the marginal distribution of the variables, while "non-compositional" are those that refer to the "parameters", that is, to the relations between variables. With a more substantive connotation, in mobility table analysis these two technical components refer to distinct and independent processes: structural mobility and exchange mobility, respectively (Breen and Rottman 1995; Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992). In gender discrimination analysis, the compositional component refers to differences among women and men in human-capital investments, while the discrimination component refers to differences in the return of equal human-capital resources. By drawing on this literature, in this work I use the term "compositional" in the same technical way to describe an aggregate outcome. That is, I simply indicate changes in the composition of the female population, such as an increasing incidence in younger cohorts of women who are not married, childless, with high education. By contrast, and keeping the same example, I speak of a "non-compositional" effect when the influence of marriage, education and children on women's

labour-market participation significantly changes across cohorts. It is important to note that the term in itself does not have any theoretical connotation. Above all, it doesn't imply a refusal of an actor perspective in favour of a functionalist-structural theory, as the term might allow one to think. By contrast, as I shall illustrate at the end of this section, I think that an approach combining a rational-choice with an institutional perspective is the most useful in accounting for the observed "compositional" and "not-compositional" change. That is, behind these technical terms there are women's strategies that reflect their preferences and their response to the perceived set of opportunities and constraints. In the following pages I shall briefly review various theories that say something on women's labour-market behaviour and I shall discuss how useful they are in explaining changes across cohorts, and also differences between countries.

Economic theories

Human-capital theorists explain women's labour market outcomes in terms of their sex-role preferences, their human capital investments and an efficient beneficial family division of labour (Becker 1975 1991; Mincer and Polachek 1974; Polachek 1981; Hakim 1991 1995 1996 2001). Men and women behave rationally in order to maximise their individual utility. As Becker importantly conceptualises in his economic theory of the family, when they marry their utility depends on each other. Hence, husbands and wife jointly decide how to distribute time between the market and the family by comparing their relative marginal productivity in market and household work. As rational actors aimed at maximising their well-being over the life course, women choose particular types of education and market investments on the basis of their work orientation, their expected future marital and child-rearing history and on the basis of their perceived gender division of labour in the society.

Thus, according to these assumptions, human-capital theory predicts that the higher a woman's educational level, the lower is her probability of leaving the labour market and the higher her probability of coming back, with the strength of this effect depending on partner's educational and occupational resources. The same applies to the type of time commitment in the labour market: women working full-time, who, as Hakim would argue, are more market-career oriented, are less likely to interrupt their employment and, if interrupted, more likely to re-start it quickly. Much research shows that such human-capital resources are indeed strong predictors of women's labour market choices. However, as many sociologists have pointed out, the economic human-capital theory fails to recognise the mediating effect played by social norms and institutional arrangements. Moreover, it makes strong assumptions on rationality and

stability of preferences that do not seem to hold in the reality. Indeed, preferences are not constant over the life course. They develop over time in response to opportunities and constraints, and in response to previous experiences (Fagan and O'Reilly 1998a; Crompton and Harris 1998).

Being too focused on the micro level and too static in its models, economic human-capital theory does not say much on changes across cohorts. Or rather, if one follows its logic, it seems to be able to account only for compositional changes. Indeed, if preferences have changed across time, human-capital rational-choice theory would predict a change in women's long-term strategy. More women would invest in education because they are less marriage-oriented, and they would reduce their marriage and fertility rates if they expect that, on the basis of their perceived gender roles and opportunities in the society, they would have to leave the labour market or to move to part-time work. Yet, across cohorts always those with high education and occupational status are less likely to interrupt. Since preferences and constraints are taken as given, economic rational-choice theory also doesn't help a lot in explaining differences across countries. To account for changes and differences, one has to look into other theoretical approaches.

Sociological theories

Economic human-capital theories have been widely questioned by sociologists because they offer an individualist, voluntarist explanation of women's employment patterns that disregards the role of structural, institutional and cultural factors. According to them, and particularly to feminists, women do make choices on the basis of their values and preferences, but these choices are made within available opportunities and constraints, which also affect their preferences. Actors do not behave only on the basis of economic rationality. Indeed, as sociologists open to a rational-choice perspective have argued in polemic with classic strict economic models, while some actions are goal-directed, others derive not instrumentally from values and beliefs. In other words, rationality is, a la Weber, subjective and can take the form of cost-benefit considerations but also include cognitive dimensions (Blossfeld and Prein 1998; Boudon 1998 2001). Similarly, an actor might follow a norm because s/he believes it is right or because others (the family, friends, the community) have internalised it and its violation is perceived too costly. This means that social norms might affect both preferences and constraints and, in either case, might drive individuals to take decisions with sub-optimal results (Ferber and Nelson 1993; Kreps 1997; Marini 1992).

As much comparative research has shown, actors also do not behave only on the basis of their own and their spouse earning potentials. Their decisions are strongly affected by the welfare state, kinship solidarity models, and the regulation of the labour market. Indeed, these institutions influence chances in the labour market and the net return of market work compared to non-market work. By assuming and re-defining specific gender models, they influence norms and preferences too (O'Connor 1996; Sainsbury 1994; Esping-Andersen 1999; Naldini 2003). Thus, they have a significant impact on women's employment patterns. Finally, as labour-market sociologists and heterodox economists have pointed out, individual outcomes in the labour market cannot be explained only by the supply-side. The functioning of the labour market is also very important, particularly its demand-side driven segmentation. Segmentation theories are useful to throw light on the existence of inequalities in the labour market that have important effects on individuals' careers. Indeed, while those working in primary segments have better employment conditions and better occupations, workers in secondary sectors have lower-paid jobs, less job security and career opportunities. In the case of women, this means that the cost of exiting from these primary jobs or sectors is higher compared to those women in secondary jobs or less protected sectors. Indeed, as some research has shown (Bernardi 1999a, 1999b; Saurel-Cubizolles *et al.* 1999; McRae 1993), labour-market position is a crucial factor in determining the propensity of exiting and re-entering the labour market.

If norms, institutions and labour-market conditions matter a lot, one would expect significant differences across cohorts when these change in significant ways. What does it mean "significant"? To answer to this question, one has to look at the literature on the impact of norms and institutions and identify what institutional dimensions affect women's labour-market participation over the life course.

The role of welfare state and labour market regulation

As stressed by the feminist work on welfare state studies (O'Connor 1996; Orloff 1993; Sainsbury 1994; Saraceno 1996), and by recent mainstream analyses (Esping-Andersen 1999), the extent to which women can have a continuous work career strongly depend on "de-familiarising" policies, and particularly on policies supporting maternal employment. Following Gornick *et al.*, these include child-care policies, parental leave policies and public school schedules (Gornick *et al.* 1997). Many studies show that the more generous and flexible these policies are, the less women risk leaving the labour market when they have children. As Esping-Andersen points out (1999), another relevant dimension is income transfers to child families (child benefits or family allowances). Yet, their effect on maternal employment is mixed. On the

one hand, by raising family resources, they might depress a mother's participation. This is what neoclassicals would predict according to their income effects theories. On the other hand, they might encourage labour market participation by reducing reliance on familial care. Indeed, family transfers provide extra-income that might be used to purchase care on the market. Besides policies supporting the employment of mothers, the welfare state facilitates and shapes women's integration in the labour market through other instruments and processes. First, on the supply-side, the tax treatment of spouses and income transfers rules (especially those that determine the benefit reductions associated with family income) significantly affect married women's employment. In particular, they may discourage women with a low earnings potential to enter the official labour market, especially if child care costs are high (Gustafsson 1995; Scheive 1994). Second, on the demand side, through the expansion of the public sector, and, specifically, of social services, the welfare state is a crucial employer for women. Finally, on the normative side, the welfare state is built and developed on the basis of specific assumptions about gender roles. These assumptions are reflected in the implementation of more or less women's friendly policies, which, in turn, not only affect their concrete opportunities but also their and other's values and attitudes (Saraceno 1993, 1996).

Whereas much research has shown the key role played by the welfare state, the labour market structure, and the predominant cultural model (Del Boca 2002; Saraceno 1994 1996; Gornick *et al.*, 1997; Esping-Andersen 1997; Gustafsson 1995), much less well investigated has been the impact of labour market regulation on women's employment. Indeed, while, on the one hand, the feminist literature on women's engagement in paid work has typically focused on the role of "de-familialising" policies, on the other hand, the debate on labour market (de)regulation has been addressed towards the link between labour market performance and the strictness of a nation's employment regulations. Few studies explicitly examine the implications of different institutional labour market characteristics for women (Bruegel and Perrons 1998; Rubery *et al.* 1998; Bettio *et al.* 1996; Cousins 1994; Del Boca 2002). However, by drawing on these studies and on the deregulation debate, it is possible to identify the dimensions of labour market regulation relevant for the analysis of women's employment patterns. These dimensions can be usefully distinguished into two groups: those having a general effect on "weak" workers and those having more specific direct effects on women.

The first group can be derived from the de-regulation literature and consist of types of regulations that have an impact on labour costs, and, in turn, on the demand for the least productive or those believed to be so (namely, less skilled, youths, and women). Following Esping-Andersen (2000), these include regulation through welfare state benefits (mainly

unemployment benefits, pensions, and social assistance payments), wage regulation, and employment protection, especially the cost of dismissals. These three types of regulation all have an effect upon the rigidity of the labour market and, in turn, upon employment opportunities. In particular, as some research shows (Esping Andersen and Regini 2000; Scarpetta 1996; Nickell 1997), more than the level of unemployment they seem to affect its composition, having selective effects on youth, the less skilled, and women. Indeed, rigid labour markets with high labour costs tend to create insider-outsider type of segmentation, protecting those already employed and making it difficult for new entrants to gain access to the labour market. This is, for example, what it is found in Mediterranean and Continental-Corporatist countries, where women (and youths) are often marginalized into housework or the informal economy by an employment regime revolving predominantly around the needs of male-breadwinner industrial workers. Hence, accounts and measures of labour market rigidities across the dimensions typically considered for macro-economic analyses might help to explain certain features of women's employment patterns over the life course. More in details, I think they are relevant in accounting for first entry and re-entries into the labour market: the more flexible the labour market is in terms of entry, the easier is to find a job. This imply not only that women have "real" higher opportunities to re-start working but also that, because they know this, they are less discouraged to try. General labour market rigidity might influence women's propensity to exit from the labour market too. Indeed, the more flexible is the labour market, the less risky is to leave the labour market because it is relatively easier to re-enter.

The second group, which includes dimensions of labour-market regulation having more direct implications on women, can be derived from the vast literature on women's employment and from those few studies that, within the flexible labour debate, explicitly examine the gender effect of different institutional labour market characteristics. The first relevant direct dimension is the regulation of "atypical" employment, particularly of part-time work. Indeed, as much empirical research shows, there is a positive correlation between the level of part-time work and the level of female labour-force participation across countries. Part-time work, in fact, helps women to combine child rearing with employment, that is, to remain continuously in the labour market or to re-enter earlier. However, besides its diffusions, the effect of part-time work on women's labour-market transitions depend clearly also on its characteristics in terms of pay, skill-profile, protection, and career prospects. Indeed, the worse part-time jobs are, the less is the opportunity-cost of leaving them and the fewer are the incentives to re-enter them. Also, the worse part-time jobs are the more they are used by a selective group of women: namely, women with low human capital and/or with less "work-centred" attitudes, whose risk of interruption is

anyway higher. Yet, the effect of part-time work on women's employment depends also on the availability and nature of other women's friendly policies. If women can't rely on good parenting policies, they might have to stop working when children are young regardless the quality and time-quantity of their jobs, unless they (and/or their partners) have relatively high incomes to purchase market care or they can count on family help (Blossfeld and Hakim 1997; Fagan and O'Reilly 1998b; Del Boca 2002; Stier and Lewin-Epstein 2001).

A second dimension of labour-market regulation having a direct implication upon women's employment is the regulation of working time arrangements, particularly of those aspects that affect the chances of combining work with family responsibilities. These are the policies that Bettio *et al* (1996) call "employee-friendly flexibility over the lifecycle", which recognise that working-time needs and preferences of women and men change over the life course, according to the changing nature of care requirements, and to their own preferences between work, leisure, or education. These basically consist of three types of policies: one, leave arrangements, especially maternity and parental leaves; two, the possibility of reducing hours of working when children are young; three, standard hours of work and the regularity or employee-chosen flexibility in working-time schedules (such as weekly or annualised hours types of contract). As for part-time work, the success of these lifecycle flexibility policies depends upon the nature of other types of policies. For example, the possibility of reducing hours of work is successful in France and Sweden where child care services are numerous, cheap and with convenient opening hours, but this might not be the case in other countries where pre-school care is limited and school days short.

Towards an integrated approach

The various theories reviewed in this section have different focuses. Human-capital theories focus on the supply-side, segmentation theories on the demand side, while institutional theories focus on the role of welfare state and labour market regulation. By pointing to different factors affecting women's labour-market participation, these theories can be seen complementary more than alternative. Indeed, economic theories have the merit to consider labour market outcomes as the result of intentional choices. Women are seen as long-term rational actors who choose to invest on skills and abilities on the basis of their preferences, their perceived social norms and structural constraints, and, in turn, on the basis of their perceived future work interruptions. However, economic rational-choice theory doesn't pay enough attention to the role of the context, and to its interaction with individual preferences. Thus, it is also weak in explaining differences across countries and across cohorts. By contrast, sociological theories focus more on

the macro context. Women do make choices but these are embedded in a whole set of social and economic institutions that not only define opportunities and constraints, but they also influence cultural models, and in turn, individual's preferences. Among these institutions, a crucial role is played by the welfare state and by the labour market regulation. In particular, as discussed above, women's employment patterns are strongly affected by parenting policies and by the regulation of "a-typical" employment and working time arrangements.

In order to account for inter-country differences and changes across cohorts, I think that an approach combining a rational-choice with an institutional perspective is the most useful. According to this approach, women are rational actors who make choices by weighting cost and benefits on the basis of their own preferences and individual characteristics, but also on the basis of the existing or expected macro opportunities and constraints. Hence, the extent to which changes across cohorts are compositional depends on which and how all the relevant micro and macro aspects have changed. Over the post-war period everywhere women's educational attainment has increased a lot. As many sociologists have pointed out, this increase has meant an important change in attitudes and preferences, through a redefinition of gender identities and expectations (Blossfeld and Muller 1993, Abbate 1995, Saraceno, 1993). Indeed, also as a result of the feminist movements in the 70s, social norms on the gender division of labour and on women's position in society have been highly contested. Women have started to invest more in education and labour market careers, to delay entry into marriage and motherhood, to reduce fertility and union stability (Sorrentino 1990; Blossfeld 1995). That is, in my terms, the composition of the female population has changed. However, as comparative research shows, these changes in women's attitudes have not led to the same normative and institutional answers. In some countries, typically in Scandinavia, women's paid work has become more socially accepted and the trade off between family and work has been reduced through an improvement of "de-familialising" and "employee-friendly flexibility" policies. In other countries, such as in the Anglo-Saxon countries, women's employment has become more legitimate but institutional changes have been less gender sensitive. In Mediterranean countries little has changed in the set of opportunities and constraints. When the adaptation has been weak, it is reasonable to expect a strong compositional effect in women's employment growth. That is, with a still weak institutional support to the combination of family with paid work, women could only change their choices with regard to the pole of the trade-off. And, indeed, they have increasingly tried to acquire those resources, such as education and labour market experience, that allow them to reach autonomy, good jobs and/or enjoy continuity over the family formation phase, while postponing marriage and reducing fertility. What has happened in

Italy and Great Britain? Before presenting the empirical results on changes in women's employment patterns across cohorts, I shall describe the British and Italian normative and socio-institutional context, how they have changed from the 1950s to the 1990s and what I expect to be their impact on the "compositional" degree of women's increasing labour-market attachment.

THE DIFFERENT ITALIAN AND BRITISH CONTEXTS: HYPOTHESES

Italy and Great Britain differ greatly in the level, type and pattern of women's employment. In Italy the activity rates of women did increase in the post-war period, but not to an exceptional degree, for it resulted insufficient to close the gap with other European countries. Between 1975 and 1990 the rate increase was of 8 points, roughly in line with that of the EU 15. However, since the starting rate was 10 per cent point below the average for Europe, Italy did not catch up (EC 2000, Bettio and Villa 2000). Indeed, it still has one of the lowest women's activity rates in Europe: in 1996 only 44 per cent of working-age women did participate in the labour market, against 57 per cent for the EU 15 (EC 2000). Among married women, in 1996 one out of every two was a housewife (Abbate 1995). By contrast, in the UK women's activity rates have always been relatively high. In 1975 already 55 per cent of women were taking part to the labour market, and from 1975 and 1990 the rate increased of 12 points. Among married women aged 16-59, in 1996 the labour-force participation rate was 67 per cent (McCulloch and Dex 2001). Moreover, unlike Italy where unemployment has been relevant, the major component of this growth has been employment (EC 2000, Bettio and Villa 1993).

As shown from previous longitudinal research, also the type of labour-market career over the life course is very different in Italy and Great Britain. When they work, Italian women work predominantly on a full-time basis. Moreover, a considerable sub-set of them exhibits continuous employment (Rubery *et al* 1998; Bernardi 1999a; Bison *et al.* 1996; Schizzerotto *et al.* 1995). On the contrary, in Great Britain the typical pattern is one of interrupted employment: women tend to drop out of the labour force when they have children and to return when the children go to school, often on a part-time basis. This discontinuous pattern has changed over the last few decades in that the time spent out of work has progressively shortened and the incidence of continuous careers has increased. Yet, a break in the period around childbearing is still peculiarly common in Britain (Jacobs 1999; Joshi and Hinde 1993; Joshi *et al.* 1996). Because of the higher percentage of returners, in Great Britain the overall activity rate of women

is higher than in Italy but relatively low compared to those countries where women tend to have continuous employment throughout their life course, such as in Scandinavian countries.

Italy and Great Britain differ a lot also in their institutional systems, and in the way they have changed in the post-war decades. In Italy the institutional setting has changed very little from the Fordist welfare regime. The Fordist regime was organised around the male breadwinner worker and the housewife woman. Indeed, male breadwinners started to be protected via relatively generous social insurance schemes and via strict labour market regulation. This was aimed at guarantying a “family-wage” through a life-long secure career of husbands. At the same time, according to the principle of subsidiarity, the family was considered the main provider of care and income support (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999). This Fordist regulation arrived comparatively late in Italy, in the late 1960s-early 1970s, but it has also shown resistance to change. Until the mid-1990s there has been very little official labour market de-regulation and welfare state reforms. In particular, finding a job still requires long time and part-time jobs and flexible working-time schedules have remained scarce. Only women working in the public sector, which have short full-times, and those working in a family firm, who schedule their working time flexibly, can more easily combine work with family. Also the provision of child-care services for the under 3s has not increased, and the opening hours of the universal pre-primary school is still incompatible with full-time work. Maternity leave, which was first introduced at the beginning of the 1900 and then improved in 1971, is comparatively generous. Yet, self-employed women and atypical workers are still poorly protected. Women working in the informal economy (which are not few in Italy) are obviously excluded. They not even can rely on income transfers. Indeed in Italy there has never been a universal child allowance, or a general national minimum income scheme.

In Italy also gender-role attitudes seem to have changed little. Or rather, the change has been almost entirely compositional and has preliminary come from women. In a cross-country study on attitudes towards married women’s employment based on the ISSP dataset, Treas and Widmer show that everywhere women tend to be more supportive of maternal employment than men, particularly when children are young. Yet, Italy (together with Ireland) is the country across Europe with the largest gender gap (Treas and Widmer 2000). This suggests that women’s preferences have started to change despite a negative normative climate and that such change has not lead to a general attitudinal shift. Indeed, by using the same dataset, Scott finds that for Italian women differences across cohorts on the approval of maternal employment disappear when one controls for educational level. For Italian men the same occurs when, besides education, one controls for wife’s work experience (Scott 1999). In other words, Italians

in younger cohorts show less traditional gender-role attitudes, at least as far as women's employment is concerned, because a higher percentage of them is well-educated or, in case of men, because a higher percentage is married to women who work.

Since in Italy little has changed in the general approval of maternal employment and in those institutional dimensions that are relevant for women's labour-market participation, I expect to find a strong compositional effect in women's employment growth. That is, without a flexibilisation of the labour market, finding a job is still not easy so that women's risk of permanent interruptions should remain constant. Further, without any significant improvements in support of the combination of work and family, also the factors affecting women's exits should remain fairly constant across cohorts. Instead, it is women's strategies and choices that have changed. Women in younger cohorts are more market-oriented. However, in front of an unfriendly set of opportunities and constraints, in order to work and improve their careers women have had to invest more on education, to delay entry into marriage and motherhood, or to reduce fertility and marriage. Education should result, in old as in young cohorts, one of the strongest determinants of women's work histories.

In Great Britain women typically don't stay in the labour market over the family formation phase: they tend to leave the labour market when they have a child and return to work, often on part-time basis, when the child goes to school. Indeed, both in the post-war decades, with the Beveridgean gender-biased concept of universalism, and later under the Conservative Governments of the 1980s and 1990s, with their liberal ideology of the privacy of the family and the efficiency of the free market, the welfare state's support to maternal employment has been limited. Maternity leaves, that were introduced in the second half of the 1970s, had surely a positive effect on women's' possibility to remain attached to the labour market around childbirth. Yet, since entitlement was based on the criteria of continuous employment with the same employer, women with short-term jobs in the secondary labour market did not qualify. Moreover, it lasted only 18 weeks and it provided a low-income compensation. Under Thatcher and Major statutory maternity payment and rights (right to reinstatement and protection against unfair dismissal) were further differentiated on the basis of previous work histories. The most generous provision (*Statutory Maternity Pay*) was based on criteria of continuous employment with the same employer (five years if she is a part-time worker, and two years if she is a full-time employee) and consisted in 6 weeks of payments at 90% of salary and 12 weeks, at a flat rate of £39.25 in 1990/1. A lower flat rate was made available as *Maternity Allowance* for 18 weeks to women with only 6 months continuous employment as long as they had paid NI contributions. Although encouraged, supplementary payments from employers remained scarce

and concentrated in specific industries and occupations (Ringen 1997; Commission of the EC 1972, 1988, 1998). In 1988, 60 per cent of pregnant women qualified for SMP and the right to reinstatement and only 14 per cent of women, mainly in the public sector, received contractual maternity pay (McRae and Daniel 1991). As many studies have shown (Joshi *et al.* 1996; McRae 1991 1993; McRae and Daniel 1991), gains from maternity leave and other family-friendly employment policies have been far from uniform. This has gone along with insignificant improvements of the already scarce provision of both public and private childcare services (Cohen 1990; Randall 2002; Ringen 1997), and with a progressive decline of the real value of the universal Child Benefit scheme, whose level was already much below the cost of child maintenance when it was first introduced in 1976. So, both in old and young cohorts, mothers wanting or needing to keep their jobs have had to rely on informal childcare arrangements (family members and baby-sitters) and/or to work part-time, often in the evenings or nights when children can be left with their fathers.

As said, also in Italy the provision of publicly funded childcare services for the under 3s have been limited: at the beginning of the 1990s only 2 per cent in Britain and 6 per cent in Italy of children aged 0-3 were covered (Ruxton 1996). Yet, unlike in Great Britain, in Italy the help from the extended family is very widespread so that mothers have more chances to pursue continuous work histories (Saraceno 2003). This help works in the form of monetary transfers, but especially in the form of child-care services, which are not class-related. In absence of such strong “family compensation”, the scarce support to caring responsibilities offered by the British Welfare State has produced high divisions among women. Indeed, it has an unequal impact upon mothers in low-paid jobs as opposed to those with better education and higher incomes, who can afford to pay for private care (and, thus, not to exit the labour market or to have a quicker return), and upon lone mothers as opposed to married mothers, where the latter can at least rely on the partner¹.

¹ Also in Italy the scarce support to caring responsibilities has negative implications. Even though extended family solidarity is strong, not all women can rely on it, because either they don't live close to their relatives (especially parents or parents in law), they don't have time or they don't want. Moreover, when relatives are available, women receive surely a precious support but they also depend on them. Which, as any form of dependency, has its prices. Indeed, even in a context of Catholic family values and of a strong ethic of intergenerational mutual assistance, needing the help of the extended family might hinder emancipation and require difficult negotiations. For those who receive help, it might favour labour market career but reduce privacy and autonomy. For those who give help, mainly grannies, it might mean less time for leisure and for gaining an economic independence. In other terms, while the support network allows younger women to remain in full-time employment over the family formation phase, the women who provide this support (mainly the mothers), in absence of flexible working time arrangements in the regular economy, are themselves confined to a mixture of domestic and informal work (Bettio 1988).

If quitting the labour market for British women is often a constrained choice on the basis of the scarce child care support, it is also a relatively safe choice in that the flexible labour market allows for easier re-entry (even though it is risky in terms of downward mobility). The British labour market has always been relatively unregulated. In particular, part-time work has never been prohibited either by statute law or by collective bargaining, so that it was able to develop much earlier than in the rest of Europe. However, it is since the 1980s, when Conservatives came to power, that deregulation and de-institutionalisation of the labour market has been strongly pursued in order to improve, it was argued, labour market outcomes such as unemployment rates, productivity growth and duration of unemployment. This deregulation and liberalisation has particularly concerned atypical employment and wage levels. Rather than the wholesale removal of employment protection, changes in employment law have brought about a partial removal that focused especially on part-time work under 16 hours, casual work, and temporary work. As many studies have shown (Bruegel and Perrons 1998; Cousins 1994; Deakin and Wilkinson 1991; Barrell 1994), the outcomes have been quite negative. While Thatcher reforms have succeeded in reducing union power and increasing the incentives to work, they have not improved the response of real wages to unemployment nor the transition out of unemployment, especially for men. Moreover, they have produced a rising wage polarisation and an expansion in the numbers of the working poor and of social-assistance poor, which have particularly affected women. This, as already said, has gone along with very little improvements in family policies. I expect to see the consequences of these Thatcher's policies in my third cohort (who in the 1980s was in its family-formation phase). In particular, I expect to find an increasing incidence of fragmented careers, and an increasing differentiating effect of social stratification factors on women's transitions into and out from paid work.

Thus, in Great Britain, like in Italy, "women's friendly" institutional arrangements have changed little from the 1970s to the 1990s. Yet, in Great Britain gender-role norms have changed more across cohorts. In the same study mentioned earlier Scott shows that in Great Britain, once controlled for education and women's labour force involvement, more recent cohorts still show a significant higher propensity of endorsing mothers working. This happens for both men and women. The same difference emerges when one looks at gender-role attitudes in general. By comparing the mean score of the two age groups aged 16-45 and 46-98 across 5 ISSP items, Künzler shows that Italy has one of the lowest gap (2.78) whereas Great Britain one of the highest (3.31)² (Künzler 2002). Since in the society the employment of mothers has

² Many studies use the ISSP dataset, which is cross-sectional, to draw changes over time by comparing the various years (1988 and 1994) and by using age groups as a proxy of cohort. However, unlike longitudinal type of data, cross-sectional data don't

become more acceptable and women have become less oriented towards a “marriage career”, I expect that, across cohorts, they have generally reduced exits or postponed them from the time at marriage to the time at childbirth, that they have increased their re-entry and shortened their breaks regardless their family and personal characteristics. Yet, since the welfare state still doesn't support adequately the conflict between family and work, the strategy to solve it will depend on differences in education, social class and income, as well as differences in preferences. In other words, with the relaxing of the traditional “male breadwinner” norm but without a parallel improvement in pro-women's policies, women's career paths have become more heterogeneous but also more polarised.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Data

In this study I use individual-level longitudinal data from Great Britain and Italy in order to examine patterns of women's labour-market participation and the determinants of mobility between employment and housework at various stages of the life course. The analysis is based on the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and on the Italian Household Longitudinal Survey (ILFI). The BHPS started in 1991 and since then it has been carried out every year on a nationally representative sample of over five thousand households across England, Wales, and Scotland South of the Caledonian Canal. The ILFI (Indagine Longitudinale sulle Famiglie Italiane) was carried out first in 1997 by the University of Trento, Istituto Trentino di Cultura and ISTAT (Italian Statistics) on national representative sample of 10,423 individuals belonging to 4,714 households. A second wave was carried out in 1999 and a third in 2001. Both surveys combine a retrospective with a prospective panel design and use standardised interviews that include questions about the life courses of respondents over a number of different areas (such as education, family events, work and job history).

Here I use the first wave of the Italian survey, dated 1997, and the retrospective and prospective information of the BHPS up to the 7th wave, dated also 1997. More precisely, for Great Britain I use the data on the employment and occupational history that were constructed

allow to distinguish between cohort and age effect. In particular, as far as attitudes is concerned, the use of different age groups as a proxy of cohort is based on the assumption that orientations are formed and internalized early in the life course (during childhood, youth and early adulthood) and that since then they remain relatively stable. This is obviously a disputable assumption. Yet, in absence of national or cross-national longitudinal surveys, ISSP remains the best comparative source on attitudes.

by Brendan Halpin at the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex. These data combine the retrospective labour-market history collected in the waves 1992 and 1993 of the survey with information on employment and occupational status collected the following waves. I also use the retrospective lifetime information on marital and fertility status collected in 1992, which I have updated to 1997 using the prospective panel part³. Moreover, being interested in women's labour-force movements over the entire adult life course, my British sample is composed only of those women for whom one has the full life history. That is, those women who were interviewed in 1992 and 1993, when the retrospective questions in the BHPS were asked. Women entering the survey later have been excluded. As a whole, and looking only at women born between 1935 and 1964, the samples I have used are composed of 2352 women in Great Britain and 2680 in Italy. These are further reduced when one focuses on women who have started a labour market career. More precisely, in Great Britain the sample passes from 2352 to 2316, while in Italy, where the share of women who never officially start to work is much higher, the sample drops from 2680 to 2102.

Method

As already mentioned, my attention focuses on a relatively long span of adult women's life course and on the behaviour of three different cohorts of women, who entered the labour market and formed their families and careers in different decades, from the 50s to the 90s. More precisely, I open my observational window at the time when women start their first job and close it at age 45. Therefore, I observe women's employment dynamics over long periods of historical and individual time. This is relatively new in women's labour market research. Indeed, most previous research has mainly focused on specific crucial phases in female careers, or on specific short historical periods, without addressing changes across cohorts. When changes across cohorts have been examined, they have often been done in a one-country study or using cross-sectional data. This approach has several important advantages. First, the use of longitudinal data and the comparison across time and space (that is, across cohorts and countries) allow one to better examine the "compositional versus non-compositional" nature of changes. In particular, it helps to see how different normative and institutional contexts shape women's work choices and outcomes in the labour market. Second, the relatively long observational window chosen also has the advantage of avoiding the problematic sample selection inherent in research that focuses on specific groups of women, such as those analysing women's labour-market behaviour around childbirth. As Drobnic argues (2000), since in these

³ I would like to thank Sheila Jacobs for her precious suggestions on how to carry out this updating process.

cases only women with children or women who were working during pregnancy are observed, it is not possible to distinguish the impacts of other factors that might affect all women similarly, regardless of their childbearing and marital status.

However, comparison across cohorts is limited by the shorter time of observation for the last cohort. Indeed, given the date of the last interview (1997) and the relatively long observational window chosen, the youngest birth cohort (1955-64) can be observed at most to age 42-33, while the first and second cohort can both be observed up to age 45 (with the exception of women born in 1953-1954 in the second cohort). This means that for the youngest cohort one might fail to observe exits and re-entries into paid work simply because they might happen later. While in the regression analysis this problem of the shortest time of observation for the last cohort is overcome by controlling for age and duration in current labour market status, in the descriptive figures on career patterns it remains. For this reason I have looked at types of individual work history both up to age 45 (fig. 2 and 4) and 35 (fig 1 and 3). Indeed, while comparison up to age 45 between the last cohort and the two earlier cohorts is limited, the comparison both across countries and across cohorts is fully possible when the maximum is age 35⁴.

In order to analyse changes across cohorts in the relevance of different types of labour-market careers, I have built a summary work-history variable based on the number of family-care breaks experienced by a woman by age 45 or 35. In particular, I have distinguished between five career patterns: “Never Worked” for those women who have never had a job episode; “Continuous Participation” when a woman has never left employment to become a housewife while she might have stopped working for different reasons (unemployment, full-time student); “Curtailed Participation”, when a woman withdraws from the labour market and does not come back by age 45 or 35; “One Break, with Return” when a woman re-enters the labour market after a housework break without interrupting her participation again; “Two Breaks or more” for those women who experience several movements between employment and housework over their life course⁵.

A woman might experience entry into and exit from employment more than once over her adult life course. The widening of the individual observational window to age 45 would allow me to study repeated events and to see whether the factors affecting women’s first exit and re-entry are the same as those for the second. However, in Italy a very small percentage of women

⁴ To be more precise, also not all women in the third cohort can be observed up to age 35. Those born in 1963 and 1964 are 34 and 33 years old in 1997. Yet, these are relatively few.

⁵ A woman is defined employed when she has a job, when she is on maternity leave or on other paid leaves, and, for Italy, when she is on “Cassa integrazione guadagni ordinaria”.

experience a housework break more than once. Thus, for comparative reasons, in this paper I only focus on the first transition out from and back into employment.

In order to study labour-market transitions, I use discrete-time hazard rate models by fitting simple logit regressions to the data. As argued (Allison 1982 1984; Yamaguchi 1991), the use of discrete-time models instead of continuous-time ones might be appropriate and convenient for different reasons. First, a lot of events occur only at discrete time points. This is the case of labour-market changes in most countries: typically people leave a job at the end of the month and start a new job at the beginning of the month. Second, when dates are all measured in months, the time interval is small relative to average durations. This implies that the conditional probability of changing labour-market status is very small, so that month discrete-time models are a good approximation of continuous-time models. Thirdly, compared to continuous models, discrete-time models are relatively easy to handle. They allow a straightforward introduction of time-dependent covariates and they can be run using standard statistical packages (Wolbers 2000).

To be able to fit logistic regressions I have transformed the original data from the BHPS and ILFI into a “person-month file”, where for each person there are as many observations as the number of months passed from first job up to age 45 for the first and second cohort, and up to age 33-42 for the last cohort. Thus, the dependent variable is the log-odds of the monthly conditional probability of making the transition over the observed life course. More precisely, when studying the transition out from employment, the dependent variable is the conditional probability of leaving employment within a particular month, given that the person has worked until that time. For the opposite transition, the dependent variable is the conditional probability of re-entering paid work, given the fact that the person has been a housewife until that time.

Variables

On the basis of what the BHPS and ILFI offer, in my work I have operationalized relevant concepts deriving from different theoretical approaches to measure their effect on women's exits from and re-entries into employment. More precisely, as explanatory variables I have included measures of women's human capital, labour-market position, and family situation. Most of these factors change over the life course of a person, thus they are introduced as time-varying covariates.

As human-capital and stratification factors I use measures of education, labour market experience, type of job (full-time vs part-time) and social class of current or last job. More precisely, *education* is measured in 4 categories: no qualification, lower-secondary degree,

upper-secondary degree, and higher education⁶. However, since in Italy relatively few women exit and very few re-enter, I have treated educational level as a continuous variable in order to reduce the number of parameters to estimate. *Type of time commitment* in the labour market is measured by distinguishing between full-time and part-time jobs. While in the ILFI the time commitment is asked to all types of workers, in the retrospective part of the BHPS the distinction between part-time and full-time is made only for employee. Thus, for Great Britain, I have always coded self-employed women as full-time workers. Further, I measure *labour-market experience* by distinguishing between duration dependency and lagged duration dependency (Heckman and Borjas 1980). Duration dependency, that is, the time spent in current status, is measured monthly as a continuous variable. Lagged duration dependency, that is, the length of previous episodes, here refers to the duration of the previous employed spell when women are having their first housework episode, that is, when they are at risk of making the first transition from housework to employment. Finally, *social class* is coded with a collapsed 5 categories version of the EGP classification: service class (1+2), routine non-manual employees (3a+3b), petty bourgeoisie and farmers and smallholders (4a+4b+4c), skilled manual workers (5+6), unskilled manual workers and agricultural labourers (7a+7b).

In my models I do not use measures of other relevant labour-market segmentation factors, such as the size of the firm, the labour market sector, and the type of contract, because in the BHPS such information are available in the panel part of the survey (thus, from 1991 to 1997), but not in the retrospective life-history part. In the Italian survey these information are fully available, but they have not been used here to make the results more comparable with Great Britain.

As widely shown, women's labour market choices are strongly influenced by the family life cycle and the family circumstances. Changes in marital status, in the number and age of children, in the situation of the partner change the demand for family care, both in terms of time and in terms of financial resources. In order to account for these family life influences, in my analysis I use the following variables. First, a set of time-varying dummy variables on the *age of the youngest child* that should account for differences in the time-demand of care. The distinction is between 5 states: not having children, being pregnant (either of the first, second, third, etc child), having the youngest child aged 0-3, in the pre-school age (0-5 for Great Britain, 0-6 for Italy), and older than 5/6 years. Second, in my models I include, in a continuous form,

⁶ For Great Britain, lower-secondary degree corresponds to GCE O levels, upper-secondary degree to GCE A levels, while higher education to any further level of education, such as nursing, teaching, first or higher degrees. For Italy, basic qualification corresponds to "Scuola elementare", lower-secondary degree to "Scuola media", upper-secondary to "Diploma", and higher education to "Laurea" or more.

the *number of children*, that should account for the greater demand of time but also for the greater financial needs of families with several children. Finally, changes in *family status* are described by 3 states: single, cohabiting or married, and being divorced, separated, or widowed. Since information neither on the characteristics of the partner nor on the personal and household income was collected retrospectively in the BHPS, in my models I do not control for the effect of husband's occupational and educational resources and for income effect.

Another important time-varying variable included in my analysis is *age*, here updated every month. Age has often been used as an indicator of family responsibilities or of other life-course characteristics. By directly measuring marital and childbearing history and also employment and occupational history, age in my models doesn't work as a proxy of family and work life cycle. It, instead, captures other life-course aspects that I haven't directly measured. As well documented, women's participation in the labour market according to age follows an M-shaped curve. In order to capture this nonmonotonic relationship, I include age in linear and quadratic form. Also, age here controls for the shortest time of observation of the youngest cohort.

As widely documented, in Italy *regional differentiation* is very strong. Thus, in the analysis of women's transitions in Italy I use a three-category variables distinguishing between Northwest, Third Italy, and the South⁷.

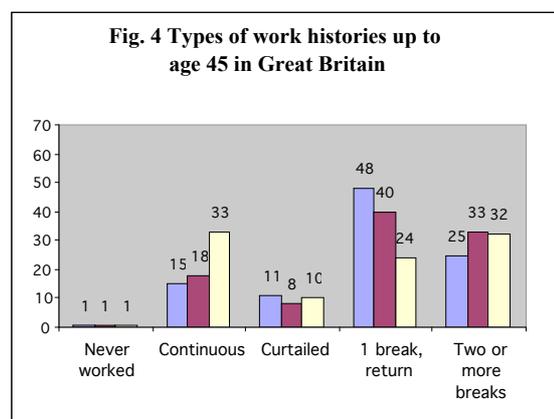
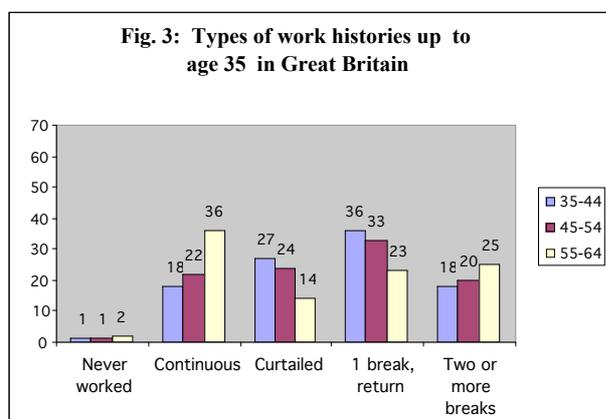
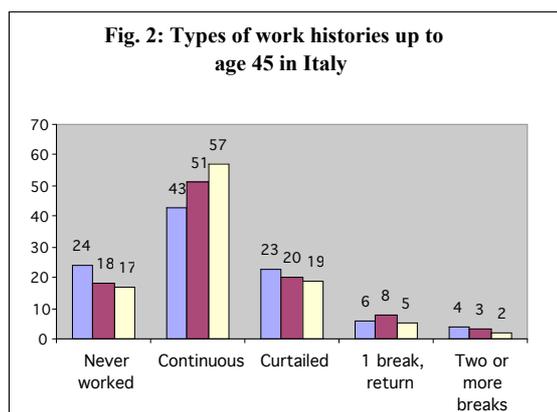
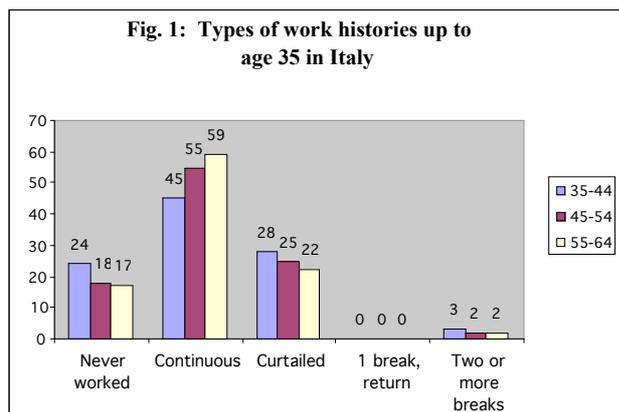
PATTERNS OF WOMEN'S LABOUR-MARKET PARTICIPATION OVER THE LIFE COURSE

Both in Italy and Great Britain continuous participation has increased across cohorts. However, its incidence compared to other types of career patterns, and the way it has changed differs. As expected, in Italy a substantial sub-set of women never enters the labour market. Among those who do enter, the patterns followed are basically two: they never stop working, or, if they stop, they never re-start. Continuous participation is by far the most typical pattern. On the contrary, in Great Britain nearly all women enter the labour market, but their work histories are much more differentiated. Indeed both continuous and discontinuous participation are relatively common. Moreover, of those who interrupt, some never come back into the labour market, some do come back and never re-exit, others move in and out of employment several times. In

⁷ The existence of regional differences within Great Britain in women's exit and entry rates, which might be due to different labour-market structure and economic performance, different institutional provisions, or social norms, was tested by using a 5 categories variable: London + the south of England, the Midlands, the northern regions, Wales + the South West, and Scotland. Since it resulted insignificant, for Great Britain the variable on region has then been excluded.

addition, while in Italy the biggest change in the incidence of different career patterns occurred between the first and the second cohort, in Great Britain it is the last cohort that differs more. In fact, in Italy one out of four women in the oldest cohort never takes a paid job, compared to less than one in five in the younger cohorts. Among those that start working, the incidence of continuous careers has increased, but not greatly. In Great Britain, by contrast, continuous participation increases a lot for the last cohort. One out of three women born between 1955 and 1964 do not experience a housework break, compared to one out of six (the half) among women born between 1935 and 1954. Yet, this relatively high increase might be partly an “observational effect”. When looking at work histories up to age 35, the gap is indeed less, but only slightly. Thus, while in Great Britain for the first two cohorts having one break and coming back is the most common history, for the last cohort continuous participation has “really” become the prevalent pattern. Interestingly, this increase derives from a reduction in “curtailed” and “one break, with return” types of career, but not in the “two or more breaks” pattern. In line with previous findings and my hypotheses, British women have become more attached to the labour market, but also more polarised.

Not only the incidence, but also the timing of women’s types of work history differs in the two countries. When comparing figures on work histories up to age 35 with those up to age 45, one can note that in Italy nearly all women who have discontinuous careers stop working before age 35 and, among the few that re-start and never stop again, all seem to do it after age 35. By contrast, in Great Britain a relevant proportion of re-entries occur earlier, already before age 35. Thus, compared to Great Britain, in Italy, women who start working more often enjoy a continuous full-time career. Yet, those that interrupt, tend to spend more years in housework, because they leave the labour market definitively or they exit earlier and re-enter later.



These results are in line with previous findings. Many authors describe Italy, like most Southern European countries, as having an “opt in-opt out” participation pattern, rather than a universal model of curtailed or continuous participation, which one finds in other countries (Kempeneers and Lelievre 1991; Rubery *et al.* 1995). Indeed, as Billari argues (1999), in Italy until relatively recently the central issue has not been about resuming employment after childbearing, as in the UK, but whether to enter the labour market or not at all. In the 1950s and 1960s a high share of women never officially worked. This share decreased noticeably in the following decades: generations born after the mid-1950s exhibit a higher and higher propensity to enter the labour market and to pursue a continuous career. On the contrary, in the UK a break around childbirth has been the peculiar pattern in post-war decades. Kempeneers and Lelievre (1991) show that, amongst women born between 1930 and 1955 in the European Community, 45 per cent had discontinuous work histories. British women were exceptional: in the 1930-45 and 1946-55 birth cohorts (nearly my two first cohorts), 67 and 69 per cent respectively moved out and back into paid work. Also in younger cohorts the discontinuous patterns prevail, but women are less ready to remain out of the labour market during the entire family formation phase, until all children are old. Rather, they start to return into employment more often between

births and more quickly after childbearing. As Joshi and Hinde argue (1993), this reduction in the time spent outside the labour market has been the major source of female employment growth in post-war period, at least up to the 1980s. Among women who were bearing their first child in 1946, only around one in 20 had re-entered the labour market before the first child was one year old. For their daughters, women born in 1946 who were mostly having children in the 1970s, the proportion was around one in five. One year is also the duration of the protected maternity leave in Italy. Indeed, many Italian mothers who result having a continuous work history are actually at home taking care of their children. Probably, if British women could have benefited from the Italian parental leave scheme they would not have exited from the labour market. In figures 1 to 4 the time spent on maternity and other types of leaves has been considered as “employment”. It would be interesting to recalculate those figures by considering episodes of leaves as breaks from the labour market. But unfortunately the data on the use of maternity leaves available in the ILFI are not good. Only about 5 per cent of working women declare to have had episodes of maternity leaves over their life course. The proportion of women who have had children while working as employees (the beneficiaries of the most generous maternity leave) is much higher⁸.

Are these changes across cohorts in women’s career patterns due to changes in the factors that keep women in the labour market or drive them back after an interruption? Or, to what extent are they due to changes in the composition of the female population? By looking at the determinants of women’s transitions in and out of the labour market, the next section tries to give an answer to this question.

DO FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN’S EXITS FROM AND ENTRIES INTO PAID WORK CHANGE ACROSS COHORTS?

Great Britain

Table 1 shows single models on women’s transition rates from employment to housework and from housework to employment for all three cohorts. In bold, one finds the effects that differ significantly between Italy and Great Britain⁹. As evident by the descriptive figures in the previous section, in Great Britain younger cohorts, and particularly the last cohort, are less likely

⁸ My own calculations.

⁹ To test differences between Italy and Great Britain I pooled the data and run a single model with the interactions between each covariate and the country dummy. The same proceeding was followed to test differences across cohorts. That is, I run a single model for all three cohorts with the interactions between each covariate and the two cohort dummies.

to leave the labour market. However, if they do leave, they are more likely to come back. These changes across cohorts in exit and entry rates seem not only explainable by changes in the composition of the female population. Indeed, the cohort coefficients result significant after controlling for important individual characteristics¹⁰. This means that something has changed in the effect of one or more of these variables and/or in the distribution and effect of unmeasured factors. Which, in turn, suggests that something important has changed not only in women's attitudes but also in the set of opportunities and constraints that influence women's work choices.

Table 2 shows separate models for each cohort, and, in bold, the effects for the second and third cohort which differ significantly from the effects for the first cohort. As many studies argue, the main change has come from married women and mothers. Indeed, the effect of marriage on exit from the labour market gets weaker, while the effect of children, and particularly of pregnancy, gets stronger. As expected, this suggests that the timing of employment interruptions has changed: if women from the older cohort typically stopped working when they got married, in the younger cohorts women tend to withdraw later, when they have their first child. The influence of family events also differs for the transition back into the labour market. For women born in the 50s being married is no longer a disincentive to take a paid job: married women from the last cohort are more likely, in relative terms, to come back. Further, unlike the previous cohort, women in the second cohort are more likely to re-enter when their children are grown up.

Thus, social norms on women's work and family responsibilities have changed over time. In the past only single women without children were accepted to work. Women with household and childcare responsibilities typically interrupted employment and fewer of them re-started to work. Also as a consequence of changes in women's orientation and choices, in later times the employment of married women and mothers has become more acceptable. Women in younger cohorts tend to work regardless of their family status and, when they have children, they tend to return to work faster and on a greater scale. However, their labour-market participation remains strongly affected by the family-life cycle. The tendency to stop working when the child is very young has remained constant while it has increased during pregnancy. That is, over time women have started to postpone exits, keeping their jobs after marriage. Yet, in a context where gender norms, although changed, still assign the main responsibilities of family care to women and

¹⁰ In my models, by controlling for relevant stratification aspects and family-life events, the cohort variable should capture those changes net of the measured compositional changes.

where statutory maternity payments and rights have remained poor and uneven, many women are not protected and leave paid work before the child is born.

The biggest changes across cohorts seem to have occurred in the first transition out of the labour market. This transition is very important since it distinguishes between women with a continuous or discontinuous work history. For the older cohort housework interruption was mainly driven by family-related factors: women were more likely to quit the labour market when they were married or cohabiting, and when they were pregnant or their child was young. Education, labour-market experience and position mattered little. Only women working part-time, and women from the petty bourgeoisie showed a significantly lower propensity to exit. Subsequently, as expected, women start to become more differentiated. Indeed, for younger cohorts the time spent in employment and the social class also start to play a role. The least likely to quit the labour market are smallholders and women from the petty bourgeoisie, followed by women in the service class. Women in the other social classes have almost the same risk of quitting. As expected, class differences become more accentuated with the last cohort, who builds its families and careers under the Conservative's de-regulation of the 1980s and 1990s. Instead, in contrast with human-capital predictions, women with different educational levels do not show significant differences in their job-leaving rate¹¹. Only if one omits class from the model education becomes significant. Evidently in the UK education itself doesn't guarantee employment continuity. Rather, women who, in Hakim's term, are not "home-centred" need to have spent long time in the labour market and to have reached relatively good positions in order to enjoy some maternity protection and/or sufficient incomes to purchase care.

¹¹ This holds also when one treat education categorically (my own calculations)

Table 1: Estimated rate of women's first transition from employment to housework and from housework to employment IN GREAT BRITAIN and ITALY (Discrete time hazard rate models)

	FROM EMPLOYMENT TO HOUSEWORK		FROM HOUSEWORK TO EMPLOYMENT	
	Britain	Italy	Britain	Italy
<i>Baseline birth cohort: 1935-1944</i>				
- 1945-1954	-0.18***	-0.06	0.11	0.18
- 1955-1964	-0.51***	-0.01	0.39***	0.07
Age	0.02	0.17***	0.003	-0.23**
Age ²	-0.001	-0.003***	-0.001	0.002
Duration in current status	-0.002**	-0.001	-0.002**	-0.002
Level of education	-0.07**	-0.45***	0.10***	0.18
<i>Baseline social class current or last job:</i>				
<i>Service</i>				
- routine non manual workers	0.41***	1.20***	-0.13	-0.40
- petty bourgeoisie + farmers-smallholders	-0.96***	0.78***	-0.07	0.04
- foreman+skilled manual workers	0.46***	1.29***	-0.28**	-0.50
- unskilled manual workers	0.46***	1.15***	-0.26**	-0.43
<i>Baseline type of current or last job: full-time</i>				
- part-time	-0.06	-0.07	0.12	-0.26
Length of previous employed spell	na	na	0.001	0.001
<i>Baseline family status: single</i>				
- married/cohabiting	1.44***	0.80***	0.38**	0.05
- divorced, separated, widow	1.10***	0.49	0.30	1.99***
<i>Baseline child status: no children</i>				
- pregnant	3.70***	1.27***	-1.62***	-1.47***
- youngest child aged 0-3	2.72***	0.47***	-0.34**	-0.75**
- youngest child aged 3-5(6)	1.51***	-0.38*	0.40***	-0.03
- youngest child aged 5(6)+	1.40***	-0.38*	0.58***	0.26
Number of children	-0.71***	-0.26***	-0.02	0.29***
<i>Baseline Region: :north-west</i>				
- Third Italy	na	0.14*	na	0.20
- South-Island	na	0.17*	na	-0.53***
Constant	-7.19***	-0.68***	-4.66***	-1.36
LOG-LIKELIHOOD	-6963.9	-5214.3	-7617.6	-1684.2
NUMBER OF OBSERVATIONS	286268	390629	139468	117799

* p< .10; ** p< .05 ***p< .01 Na = not applicable.

In Bold = coefficients that are different between Italy and Great Britain at least at .10 probability level.

Source: BHPS and ILFI; my own calculations.

Table 2: Estimated rate of women's first transition from employment to housework and from housework to employment IN GREAT BRITAIN, by BIRTH COHORT (Discrete time hazard rate models)

	FROM EMPLOYMENT TO HOUSEWORK			FROM HOUSEWORK TO EMPLOYMENT		
	1935-44	1945-54	1955-64	1935-44	1945-54	1955-64
<i>Age</i>	0.09	-0.02	-0.02	0.05	-0.14**	0.14
<i>Age</i> ²	-0.002	-0.000	-0.001	-0.001	0.002*	-0.002
<i>Duration in current status</i>	0.001	-0.002	-0.004***	0.002	-0.004*	-0.003**
<i>Level of education</i>	-0.08	-0.06	-0.06	0.10	0.09	0.10
<i>Baseline social class current or last job:</i>						
<i>Service</i>						
- routine non manual workers	0.11	0.42***	0.47***	-0.11	-0.25*	-0.07
- petty bourgeoisie + farmers-smallholders	-1.39**	-1.41***	-0.39	1.16**	-0.51	-0.50
- foreman+skilled manual workers	0.09	0.36*	0.77***	-0.36	-0.42**	-0.14
- unskilled manual workers	0.04	0.52***	0.64***	-0.15	-0.37**	-0.29
<i>Baseline type of current or last job:</i>						
<i>full-time</i>						
- part-time	-0.8*	-0.11	-0.01	0.15	0.10	0.17
<i>Length of previous employed spell</i>	na	na	na	0.003	-0.000	0.002
<i>Baseline family status: single</i>						
- married/cohabiting	1.86***	1.34***	1.19***	-0.04	0.16	0.71***
- divorced, separated, widow	1.54**	0.44	1.17***	0.13	0.15	0.53*
<i>Baseline child status: no children</i>						
- pregnant	3.11***	3.97***	4.08***	-1.37***	-1.93***	-1.63***
- youngest child aged 0-3	2.42***	2.95***	3.02***	-0.65***	-0.11	-0.24
- youngest child aged 3-5(6)	0.82	0.63	2.47***	0.03	0.87***	0.31
- youngest child aged 5(6)+	-0.52	1.56***	2.53***	0.03	1.17***	0.44
<i>Number of children</i>	-1.02***	-0.80***	-0.41***	0.02	-0.05	-0.06
<i>Constant</i>	-7.76***	-7.16***	-7.03***	-4.98***	-1.97*	-6.97***
LOG-LIKELIHOOD	-1943.8	-2673.5	-2254.7	-2306.4	-3097.9	-2213.7
NUMBER OF OBSERVATIONS	70926	109983	105359	47610	57350	34508

* p< .10; ** p< .05 ***p< .01 Na = not applicable.

In Bold = coefficients of second and third cohort that are different from the first cohort at least at .10 probability level.

Source: BHPS and ILFI; my own calculations.

Interestingly, part-time work influences significantly neither exits nor re-entries into employment. This is reasonably due to a problem of small numbers in my data: few women work part-time at the beginning of their labour-market career. Indeed, part-time work in Great Britain is strongly associated with motherhood. As widely documented, most women enter part-time jobs after a housework break. This means that the importance of part-time in women's life courses is not captured in table 1, because it starts to matter after the first transition out of and back into the labour market. Indeed, if one studies the subsequent labour-market transitions, one

finds that women who re-enter the labour market on a part-time basis more frequently interrupt for the second time compared to those working full-time¹². This positive effect of part-time on women's second exit might be due to the lower opportunity cost of quitting a part-time job compared to a full-time one. But not only. It might also be due to a long-term strategy of those women who expect to have employment interruptions as a result of child-care responsibilities. Indeed, part-time also has a positive effect, although insignificant, on the probability of re-entering the labour market after the first break. Thus, the causal relationship might be inverse: it is not that women leave and re-enter the labour market because they work or worked part-time, but they work part-time because they expect to move between employment and housework.

In contrast with what happens for the first transition out from paid work, factors affecting transitions back into the labour market have changed little across cohorts. The re-entry into the labour market of the oldest cohort was affected only by childbearing and childrearing responsibilities. Education, previous labour-market experience and previous social class seemed not to matter. Women were likely to come back to paid work when they were small self-employed and unlikely when they were pregnant and their children were in the pre-school age. Most of these effects do not change in subsequent cohorts. Namely, the probability of re-entering still does not differ significantly for level of education, and type of job.¹³ This might be partly due to a sample selection effect. Indeed, women at risk of making the transition from housework to employment are obviously only those that have earlier exited from employment. And these discontinuous women very rarely have high education and high social classes. Yet, unlike in the oldest cohort, the time spent out of the labour market now affect women's propensity to re-enter employment. The more time women stay at home, the less they re-start working. As just noted, the same negative duration dependency is evident in the third cohort for the transition out. This is in line with human-capital arguments. The more time a woman spends in the labour market, the less rational she is to leave it. Indeed, the more she works, the more she accumulates work experience and other resources that increase her career prospects and the rewards, and, in turn, increase the opportunity-cost of quitting their jobs. In the same way, spending time out of the labour market leads to a depreciation of human-capital resources that negatively affects future employment prospects. However, in addition to classic human-capital arguments, the type of institutional protection available might play a role. Indeed, in Great Britain only women who have worked continuously for the same employer are entitled to

¹² My own calculations.

¹³ If education is introduced as a categorical variable, women with tertiary level of education result significantly more likely to re-enter employment compared to those with only an elementary school degree. Instead, women with middle levels of education seem not to behave differently.

Statutory Maternity Pay and more frequently receive supplementary benefits from their employer. Moreover, behind the negative duration dependency of the probability of re-entering the labour market, there might be also a process of “doing gender”. A woman that spends a long time as housewife might be less disposed to re-start working not only by her previous preference towards the marriage career, as human-capital theorists would say, but also by a process of identification in her new current situation or by expectations that others (the partner, children, mother, etc) have built on her role. In Janet Finch’s words (1993), she might follow her moral career.

Italy

As expected, in Italy the increasing entry and attachment to the labour market across cohorts observed in figures 1 and 2 seem basically due to a compositional change. This is evident in table 1 where the cohort coefficients are insignificant once they are controlled for important individual characteristics. This is also evident in table 3 since the factors that keep women in the labour market or drive them back after an interruption are incredibly constant across cohorts. Hence, in younger cohorts fewer women exit the labour market and more come back, but this seems to occur because more women have acquired those characteristics that have always fostered their labour-market participation.¹⁴ What are these characteristics?

As Bernardi (1999) and Bison *et al.* (1996) also show, social stratification factors importantly distinguish between women who leave the labour market and those who have continuous careers. The higher the level of a woman’s education, the less likely she is to interrupt employment. Moreover, if she works in the service class, her risk of interrupting is lower compared to women working in the other classes. This difference is very strong for skilled manual workers, but also relatively strong for routine non-manual workers and for unskilled manual workers, whose exit rate is fairly similar. It is, instead, weaker for smallholders and petty bourgeois women. Thus, as in Great Britain, only three groups of social classes have distinct behaviours: the service class, the petty bourgeoisie, and all the others¹⁵. However, while in Great Britain the least likely to leave the labour market are petty bourgeoisies women, in Italy the least likely are women from the service class. Moreover, in Italy the social class have a

¹⁴ Indeed, when regressing only on cohorts, one finds for the later cohorts a significant lower propensity to exit and a significant higher propensity to come back (my own calculations).

¹⁵ In both countries farmers and smallholders have a lower propensity to exit compared to the service class, but this difference is not significant. This is probably due to small sample problems. Indeed, very few women are farmers and smallholders: at age 25, only 38 women in Italy and 3 in Great Britain (my own calculations). For this reason I have included that in the same category with the petty bourgeoisie.

stronger influence. The same is true for education. Compared to Great Britain, in Italy the differences in exit rates across various level of education are bigger and also more linear¹⁶. As Bettio and Villa show, Italy records one of the highest gaps in participation between poorly and highly educated women (2000). Indeed, in a context of poor job opportunities and low mobility chances as the Italian (Pisati e Schizzerotto 1999 2003), education offers competitive advantages. In particular, it easier the access not only to many good occupations and to the career ladder but also to many family-convenient jobs as those in the public sector, which normally have short working days. Whereas in the “deregulated” Britain women can get a new job relatively easily, in the “rigid” Italy women’s future work career and their possibility to combine it with children strongly depend on initial conditions, particularly on the education they got and the type of job they start with. Education, in fact, exerts a strong and direct influence on first occupational attainment (Schizzerotto and Cobalti 1998). On the contrary, in Great Britain the association is, by international standards, weak. Given the high career mobility in Britain, this association strengthens as the person’s career develops (Heath and Cheung 1998). Yet, only those having a continuous type of participation enjoy a career development. As widely documented (McRae 1993; Jacobs 1999; Davies and Joshi 2002; Elliott *et al.* 2001), women returning to work after a childcare break usually experience downward mobility.

Interestingly, while education and social class influence Italian women’s likelihood to stop working, the time spent in employment does not matter. This further reinforces the role of education and social class. A poorly educated woman who is not self-employed or in the service class risks, in relative terms, exiting from the labour market regardless of how long she has been employed for. This is again different from what happens in Great Britain, where labour market experience does matter. Also working part-time doesn’t make a difference in the probability of withdrawing from the labour market. In Italy part-time is very rare and is fairly similar to full-time in terms of wages, social security and other working conditions. Previous labour market experience and type of job do not matter also in driving back women into the labour market.¹⁷

¹⁶ In this paper the level of education is treated as a continuous variable. In order to check for linearity, I have also run a model with education as categorical. In Italy the relation between exit and re-entry rates and education is reasonably linear, although not significant for re-entry rates. In Great Britain the assumption of linearity is more problematic. Indeed, there is an increasing effect across educational levels both on the probability of leaving and coming back. However, only lower secondary school, although at 0.10 level, and higher education result significant. Upper-secondary education doesn’t. Yet, I have kept education as linear because of too small cells’ numbers when one estimates separate models by cohorts.

¹⁷ To be more precise, for some cohorts part-time results slightly significant. Namely, while in older cohorts women working part-time had a lower propensity to exit compared to those with full-time jobs, in younger cohorts the propensity becomes higher. Further, women in the last cohort whose last job was part-time show a slightly lower probability of re-entering compared to those who were previously working full-time. The effect is not significant for the first and second cohort.

Not surprisingly, the family situation also distinguishes importantly between women who leave the labour market from those who have continuous careers. As in Great Britain, Italian women are likely to withdraw when they are pregnant and when they are living with a partner. Moreover, probably in response to the greater financial needs of their families, women are less likely to retire the more children they have. The age of children, by contrast, does not make a lot of difference. Only when the child is 0-3 years old are women relatively likely to withdraw from the labour market, compared to when they are childless. However, this effect is significant only for the first and last cohort and only at 0.10 probability level. Women with school-aged and grown up children do not behave significantly differently from childless women. If compared to Great Britain, where public facilities for the under-3s are equally scarce, the absence of a “young child penalty” might come as a surprise. One possible explanation could lie in the diffusion and in the cost of private market care. However, private welfare services are rare and expensive in both countries. As Esping-Andersen argues (1999), for both Britain and Italy one might speak of concomitant welfare state and market failure. As previously discussed, what makes the difference is the “family compensation”. This is very strong in Italy, whereas it is weaker in Great Britain.

In both countries pregnancy and marriage do increase the risk of leaving the labour market. However, they have a weaker effect in Italy than in Great Britain. As seen, in Great Britain the marriage effect gets weaker across cohorts. The typical time of exiting shifts from marriage to childbirth. At the same time, the proportion among married women of continuous careers increases. In Italy, by contrast, the marriage effect was already relatively low in the oldest cohort and it hasn't changed substantively for the next cohorts (tab. 3). Indeed, in Italy the majority of married working women have always had continuous careers. Moreover, compared to Great Britain women in Italy enjoy much better protection during pregnancy and after childbirth (if they are in the formal economy) and can more frequently rely on the help of the extended family to solve their childcare needs.

Table 3: Estimated rate of women's first transition from employment to housework and from housework to employment IN ITALY, by BIRTH COHORT (Discrete time hazard rate models)

	FROM EMPLOYMENT TO HOUSEWORK			FROM HOUSEWORK TO EMPLOYMENT		
	1935-44	1945-54	1955-64	1935-44	1945-54	1955-64
<i>Age</i>	0.37***	0.09	0.03	-0.13	-0.31**	-0.42*
<i>Age</i> ²	-0.007***	-0.002	-0.001	0.001	0.003	0.005
<i>Duration in current status</i>	-0.001	-0.002*	0.001	-0.004	-0.002	0.003
<i>Level of education</i>	-0.43***	-0.50***	-0.40***	-0.06	0.39**	0.32
<i>Baseline social class current or last job:</i>						
<i>Service</i>						
- routine non manual workers	1.06***	1.29***	1.17***	-0.93*	-0.23	-0.63
- petty bourgeoisie + farmers-smallholders	0.30	1.24***	0.73**	-0.61	0.22	-0.03
- foreman+skilled manual workers	1.24***	1.55***	0.81**	-0.83	-0.11	-1.65**
- unskilled manual workers	0.92**	1.35***	1.12***	-1.55**	0.13	-0.60
<i>Baseline type of current/ last job: full-time</i>						
- part-time	-0.60*	0.41*	0.009	-0.58	0.38	-1.13*
<i>Length of previous employed spell</i>	na	na	na	-0.001	0.006**	-0.001
<i>Baseline family status: single</i>						
- married/cohabiting	0.68***	1.03***	0.85***	-0.18	-0.01	0.59
- divorced, separated, widow	0.82	0.78	0.39	1.77***	2.35***	2.24**
<i>Baseline child status: no children</i>						
- pregnant	1.30***	1.19***	1.23***	-1.63**	-0.46	-2.44**
- youngest child aged 0-3	0.52*	0.19	0.53*	-0.79	-0.05	-1.06*
- youngest child aged 3-5(6)	-0.68	-0.48	-0.31	-0.21	0.63	-0.08
- youngest child aged 5(6)+	-0.37	-0.56*	-0.60	0.004	0.82	0.40
<i>Number of children</i>	-0.32***	-0.16	-0.16	0.30*	0.47***	-0.04
<i>Baseline Region: north-west</i>						
- Third Italy	0.04	0.24*	0.27	0.40	-0.17	0.57*
- South-Island	-0.23	0.15	0.60***	-0.10	-1.31***	-0.13
<i>Constant</i>	-11.03***	-8.05***	-6.94***	-1.73	-1.24	1.17
LOG-LIKELIHOOD	-1610.1	-1953.1	-1617.9	-529.9	-703.2	-426.9
NUMBER OF OBSERVATIONS	112112	157923	120594	43113	46385	28301

* p< .10; ** p< .05 ***p< .01 Na = not applicable.

In Bold = coefficients of second and third cohort that are different from the first cohort at least at .10 probability level.

Source: BHPS and ILFI; my own calculations.

While both family and social stratification factors affect a woman's exit from the labour market, her re-entry is independent of the social class of her last job and of her level of education. As already noted, it is also independent of the type of job and the time previously spent in employment. Yet, as in Great Britain and as for any transition that is "second", this might be partly a sample selection effect having reduced the variability of these factors. But in Italy the selection is probably stronger for the difficulties in finding a new job. Unlike in the

flexible British labour market, in Italy leaving the labour market might mean permanent exclusion. Thus, women who anyway decide to interrupt are a very selective group: typically with a low-level of education, mainly working in the informal or low-grade regular employment, and/or with a preference for the “marriage career”. After having interrupted, only few circumstances seem to foster or inhibit their return to paid work: number of children, divorce, pregnancy, and region. The more children a woman has, the less she leaves the labour market and the more she comes back. Again, the age of children makes a difference only when children are very young. Further, in Italy women who have exited the labour market tend to re-enter when they get separated or divorced. Plausibly, this is greatly due to the prevalent demographic profile of separated or divorced women. Until recently in Italy separation and divorce has been largely a middle and upper class phenomenon. That is, they have concerned women who are relatively well educated with a high earnings potential (Barbagli and Saraceno 1998). However, the positive effect of separation on re-entry might also be a welfare system effect. Indeed, a part from general family allowances where the woman is an employee and she has a low income, Italy does not provide any specific income support for single mothers. It also doesn't provide any general national minimum income scheme. Thus, in the absence of a husband's support and without any relevant welfare state income support, divorced women might actually need to work. In Great Britain, by contrast, divorce does not seem to drive women back to work. This might be due to the different welfare system. British single mothers who do not work can rely, like any other person without earnings, on means-tested benefits. These are relatively ungenerous. However, for a woman who has experienced human capital depreciation by interrupting her labour market career, entering the labour market may not pay off. Indeed, by leaving income support a mother loses entitlement to free school meals and milk for her child, and to the full coverage of housing costs and interest on mortgage payments. In addition, if she has a young child, she needs to find childcare arrangements and to pay for them (Solera 2001).

While re-entry rates are higher when women are separated and divorced or when they have more than one child, they are significantly lower when women are pregnant or with young children and when they live in the South. Women from the South have also a higher propensity to exit the labour market compared to those living in the Central-northern part of Italy. Indeed, as is well known, in the South of Italy employment prospects are much worse and gender norms more traditional, so that women might be discouraged to work. The difference becomes particularly accentuated with the last cohort, who entered the labour market in the 1980s and early 1990s when economy was mainly stagnant or under recession.

To what Extent are the Observed Changes across Cohorts Compositional?

A simulation

As seen, both in Italy and Great Britain women's participation and attachment to the labour market have increased in the post-war period. This increase might be seen as coming from two different components: from a change in the composition of the female population or from a change in the effects on women's labour-market outcomes. As already mentioned, technically the first refers to the distribution of the covariates while the second to the parameters estimated. Through an appropriate decomposition, it is possible to distinguish between the two and give a quantitative estimate of how much of the change across cohorts is compositional. Let's consider the following equation on which the logistic regressions shown in my tables are based:

$$\log (h(t) / 1- h(t))_i = a_k + \sum_k b_k X_{ik} + e_i \quad (1)$$

$H(t)$ is the hazard rate that reflects the conditional probability of an event occurring at time t giving that this event has not occurred prior to time t . The hazard rate is a function of a k number of individual characteristics, that is, of a k number of covariates. As well-known, one uses the log-odds of the hazard rate to have linearity in the parameters. In table 2 and 3 I have estimated separate logistic models by cohort. In order to see how much has changed from one cohort to the other, one can follow the same method used in discrimination studies. These studies are concerned with wage differentials among different groups of people (men and women, black and white, etc) and they try to estimate how much of their difference in average earnings is due to their different human-capital composition and how much is instead due to their different return of human-capital investments. The last is a measure of discrimination because it implies that people with the same characteristics are treated differently (BrucchiLuchino 2001). These studies are based on cross-sectional data. Here I apply the same decomposition technique to longitudinal data. However, I'm aware that this is problematic. The last cohort is observed for a shorter time compared to the other two. Moreover, most of the covariates are time-varying and their distribution depends not only on the original distribution at the beginning of the risk set but also on the hazard rate of the various groups. Say, for example, that 60% of women are low educated when they start their first job. However, if they tend to leave the labour market more and quicker, the result in a person-month file is that, when analysing the transition from employment to housework and calculating the average education, one gets a lower incidence of low educated women. Given these limitations, the decomposition proposed here has to be taken

as a rough exercise in order to give a supplementary piece of evidence to the compositional nature of changes across cohorts.

How does the decomposition work? Let's compare the first cohort with the second, and let's call $yb1disc1$ the value of the dependent variable as indicated in equation (1) for the first cohort, and $yb2disc2$ the value for the second cohort. To be more readable, Y stands for "dependent variable" (here the log-odds of hazard rates), b_n and $disc_n$ indicate that the value of y is calculated referring to the coefficients of cohort_n and to the distribution of the covariates for cohort_n.

The difference between the average log-odds of cohort 1 and cohort 2 can be represented by the:

$$yb1disc1 - yb2disc2 = \sum_k b_{k1} X_{ik1} - \sum_k b_{k2} X_{ik2} \quad (2)$$

For simplicity's sake, the constant and the error term are omitted. As shown in discrimination studies, through simple algebraic passages, equation 2 can be re-written as follows:

$$yb1disc1 - yb2disc2 = b1 (\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2) + (b1 - b2) \bar{X}_2 \dots \dots \dots (3)$$

In equation 3 the difference between the log-odds of the probability of making the transition of the first cohort and second cohort is decomposed in two parts. The first part is the difference between the average characteristics of the two cohorts (the average educational level, the average number of children, the proportion of married women etc.) weighted for the coefficients estimated referring to the first cohort. The second part represents the difference between the coefficients of the first and second cohort, weighted for the average characteristics of the second cohort. In other words, the first part represents the "compositional change" while the second part the "parameters change", that is, the change in the effects of the individual characteristics included as covariates.

In order to estimate these two different components, one has to simulate what would have been the transition rate of one cohort using either the effects (the β_s) or the composition of the other cohort. The results are reported in table 4. To be more precise, the method used is the following. First, I take the model for the first cohort (that is, first column in table 2 and 3) and I compute the average dependent variable of the first cohort given the composition of the same cohort ($yb1disc1$). I do the same for the second cohort ($yb2disc2$). Then I take the average composition of the second cohort with respect to all the independent variables and I use that composition to predict with the first model the average value of the dependent variable

(yb1disc2). By comparing this simulated average with the actual averages one can get an idea of the compositional effect. More precisely, the exponential of difference between the actual average of the second cohort (yb2disc2) with the simulated average (yb1disc2) indicates what it would have been the odds ratio of the transition rates if the composition would have been constant and only the effects would have changed. Similarly, the exponential of the difference between the actual average of the first cohort (yb1disc1) with the simulated average (yb1disc2) indicates what it would have been the odds ratio if only the composition would have changed.

The results of this simulation confirm what was previously suggested by looking at how the effects on women's exits and re-entries have changed across cohorts. Compared to Great Britain, in Italy the compositional effect seems much stronger. Very little has changed in the parameters (values close to 1). Indeed, the differences in the odds ratio if only the composition had changed are very close to the real predicted difference. The only exception is the change between the 2nd and 3rd cohort for the re-entry transition where also changes in the effects seem to play a role. In Great Britain the observed changes do depend on both the composition and the parameters. These often work in different directions. For example, in the transition out, if only the composition had changed there would have been even more difference than observed. This is because the change in the effects is opposite in sign and offset the compositional change.

Further, while in Great Britain the biggest changes across cohorts have occurred in the transition out of the labour market, in Italy the biggest change concerns re-entry. In Great Britain hardly anything changes between the first and the second cohort in the probability of re-starting to work. Between the second and the third cohort very little change in the demographic and social profile of women that have interrupted, but relatively a lot changes in the factors that drive them back. By contrast, in Italy for both transitions little changes in the effects, whereas changes between the first and second cohort in the composition are bigger for the transition back into the labour market compared to that out of it¹⁸.

¹⁸ As already noted, when evaluating the compositional effect of the transition back, one needs to keep in mind that this transition imply a sample selection: those women with a continuous type of participation are obviously excluded from the analysis. This means that the compositional change depends on changes not only in the composition of the all female population but also in the effects on the probability of interrupting.

Table 4: Decomposition of the predicted difference between cohorts in the odds ratio into two components (ref. tab. 2 and 3):

1--the difference if only the parameters changed *and*
 2--the difference if only the composition of the covariates changed

Transition from employment to housework Transition from housework to employment

Great Britain

COMPARISON 1ST AND 2ND COHORT

Real difference 0.88

If only the parameters 0.72

If only the composition 1.23

COMPARISON 1ST AND 2ND COHORT

Real difference 1.002

If only the parameters 1.002

If only the composition 1

COMPARISON 2ND AND 3RD COHORT

Real difference 0.86

If only the parameters 0.74

If only the composition 1.16

COMPARISON 2ND AND 3RD COHORT

Real difference 1.28

If only the parameters 1.35

If only the composition 0.95

Italy

COMPARISON 1ST AND 2ND COHORT

Real difference 0.92

If only the parameters 1.02

If only the composition 0.90

COMPARISON 1ST AND 2ND COHORT

Real difference 0.76

If only the parameters 1.08

If only the composition 0.70

COMPARISON 2ND AND 3RD COHORT

Real difference 1.25

If only the parameters 1.07

If only the composition 1.16

COMPARISON 2ND AND 3RD COHORT

Real difference 0.96

If only the parameters 0.86

If only the composition 1.12

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

In the post-war period women's employment has increased markedly throughout the advanced countries. Indeed, not only have women begun to enter the labour market on a more massive scale, but they have also reduced their exit rates or they have shortened their family-care breaks. To what extent is such increasing participation and attachment to the labour market due to a compositional change in the female population or to what extent is it due to a substantive change in the influence of social stratification factors and of marriage and children? In this work I have compared Italy and Great Britain and I have addressed this "compositional effect" issue by using longitudinal data and by looking at women's employment dynamics over long periods of

historical and individual time in two countries. Namely, I have observed women from first job up to age 35-45 and I have compared three different cohorts of women (those born between 1935-44; 1945-54; 1955-64). These birth cohorts have entered the labour market and built families and careers at different historical time periods, when the socio-economic context and the normative and institutional settings were different. This long observational window is relatively new in women's labour market research. Indeed, most previous research on women's labour market participation has mainly focused on specific crucial phases in female careers, namely on the behaviour around childbearing, or on specific short historical periods, without addressing changes across cohorts. When change across cohorts has been examined, it has often been done in a one-country study or using cross-sectional data.

What have we learned from this piece of work? In Great Britain women's attachment to the labour market has increased across cohorts. More women in younger cohorts never leave the labour market and, if they do leave, more come back. However, among those who come back, a higher proportion experiences other housework interruptions over their life course. This change is particularly strong for the last cohort, that is, for women born in the late 50s and in the early 60s. Indeed, whereas for women born between the 1935 and 1954 having only one break was the most common work history, for women born later continuous participation becomes the most widespread, but at the same time, as expected, variability of and fragmented patterns of labour-market careers increases. As many authors show, in the 80s polarisation among women has indeed grown. This has been largely the outcome of Thatcher's policies, which consisted of strong deregulation without any parallel improvement in education and training policies and in women's friendly family policies. Also in Italy women's attachment to the labour market has increased across cohorts. Yet, in a different way. In Great Britain, where also in the post-war decades nearly all women were having some work experience over their life course, this has occurred through a reduction in discontinuous careers or in the duration of employment breaks. Instead in Italy, where in the 1950s and 1960s about one out of four women did not enter the labour market at all, women in younger cohorts show a higher attachment to paid work mainly because they start to enter the labour market more often, and to do it even when job opportunities are scarce, as in the South. Moreover, when they start to work, they tend more to have continuous careers. In Italy the biggest change occurred between the first and second cohort, namely, with women that were in their 20s during the 1970s, when labour demand and family policies became more women's friendly. But, as in the past, once starting to work, women differ little in the employment paths that they follow over their adult life course: either they never stop working or, if they stop to take care of their families, they never re-start.

Continuous participation was and still is by far the most typical pattern. Thus, compared to Great Britain, in Italy more women are permanently excluded from the labour market. However, those that get access to it seem better off: their chances to enjoy a full-time continuous career are much higher.

In Great Britain these changes over time in women's career patterns are not only due to a compositional effect. Indeed, many factors affecting women's exits from paid work have changed across cohorts. The employment of married women and mothers has become more acceptable over time. In the past women typically left the labour market at the time of marriage, regardless of their level of education, their social class, and their labour-market experience. Only smallholders and petty bourgeoisies women, those working part-time, and those with a tertiary level of education had a lower propensity to interrupt. In later times women have begun to withdraw at the time of childbirth. Together, other social classes and the time spent in employment have started to matter. That is, women's behaviour has become more differentiated. By contrast, what drives women back into the labour market has changed little across cohorts. Only the effect of petty bourgeoisie and family status changes significantly. Indeed, re-entry rates of self-employed women decrease across cohorts. And, whereas in the past women who were not single were discouraged in coming back, since the 70s, and particularly in the 1980s, married women become relatively likely to return in the labour market. This further underlines changes in social norms on marriage and motherhood. Yet, it might also reflect changes in the economic needs of families.

Whereas in Great Britain changes over time in the incidence of different types of work history have also been due to substantive changes in the factors affecting women's movements in and out from the labour market, in Italy they have been mainly driven by changes in the composition of the female population. Indeed, the effects of education, social class, type of job, family status, and children have remained incredibly constant across cohorts. Women are more likely to leave the labour market when they are pregnant, when they are married, and when they are manual workers or routine non-manual workers. They are less likely, on the other hand, when they are well educated and when they work in the service class. Moreover, women exit more if they live in the South of Italy and when the child is very young. They exit less the more children they have. While many factors affect women's exit from paid work, few seem to influence their re-entry. This might be partly due, as for Great Britain, to a sample selection effect. In addition in Italy there might be a "small sample size" effect. Indeed, in Italy few women exit and even fewer re-enter. Thus, results have to be interpreted with cautiousness. In Italy it seems that social stratification factors are less important in affecting women's probability

of re-entering the labour market compared to family-related factors. In particular, women are relatively more likely to come back into the labour market when they get separated or divorced, and when they have big families. They are less likely to return if they live in the South and if they are pregnant or they have a child aged 0-3. Interestingly, in Italy education and social class play a role in distinguishing women with a continuous from those with a non-continuous career, whereas they seem not to matter once women have withdrawn from the labour market. Also in Great Britain social class and education have little influence on the transition back into the labour market. Yet, unlike Italy, the time spent out of the labour market do. Further, compared to Italy, in Great Britain the effect of both education and social class on women's exit rate is weaker. More precisely, in all British cohorts, once controlling for social class, higher education doesn't help to guarantee continuous employment. The reason is likely to lie in the different institutional settings. In the UK, where a highly de-regulated labour market has allowed for a wide spread of earnings both within industries and between and within occupations and where a residualist welfare state has pushed to rely on the private (market and family) but where the informal help from the extended family is weaker, also highly educated mothers need to have long work experience or high-class jobs in order to enjoy some maternity protection or sufficient incomes to purchase care. Their stronger work orientations emerge later, in their timing and probability of re-entering paid work.

Therefore, as also Schizzerotto *et al.* argue (1995), in Italy it is more a "compositional effect" than a "gender inequality effect" which explains the post-war growth of women's employment. That is, within the female population the incidence of those characteristics (such as educational level, and childlessness) that have always been associated with higher levels of participation has grown. Education has been the key variable in driving changes both in attitudes and actual labour-market supply. In other words, in order to increase their participation in the labour market and to improve the length and the quality of their careers women have had to become well educated. But not only. With no significant improvements in de-familiarising social policies and in women's friendly flexibilisation labour market policies, in order to keep attached to the labour market women have also had to reduce their marriage and fertility rates. In Great Britain marriage and fertility have become more compatible with employment. However, women are still strongly conditioned by their family responsibilities. As previously noted, the support to maternal employment has changed very little since the 1970s. And, compared to Italy, "family compensation" is weaker. So a lot of women are still forced to interrupt when they are pregnant and when the child is young. The flexibility of the labour-market allows them to re-get a job relatively easily. However, especially if low educated, they are likely to get low-paid jobs

in the secondary labour market and to further weaken their human-capital resources. That is, they pay a high price in terms of career opportunities, job satisfaction, and often poverty.

The comparison of Italy and Great Britain is very interesting to draw some policy conclusions. In particular, it confirms the role of institutional settings in shaping women's labour-market choices and outcomes. In both countries family policies fail to provide adequate support to the combination of work and family. This has negative effects both at the individual and at the societal level. In Italy, where such lack is combined with a strong labour-market regulation producing an "insider-outsider" divide, the outcome is the well-known low fertility-low participation equilibrium. In Great Britain, where inadequate family policy reforms have gone together with a strong wage de-regulation and with weak training policies, the outcome is, at the aggregate level, a low-skill, cheap-labour equilibrium, while, at the individual level, the risk of poverty and of fragmented careers.

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