Chapter 1

Changing families
Configurations, values and recomposition processes

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It is generally agreed that the family is not what it used to be. But there is nothing new about this statement as the same must have been said a century ago by the people studying family relationships and trying to understand society in those days. Specifically, in Durkheim's work, references are found to the family changes that took place in societies' transition from the old regime to modernity; equally, his predecessor Auguste Comte was concerned about the "weakening" of the family institution and the consequences this would have on the social order. Theorists of contemporary society continued to emphasise the changes in the family as one of the most significant aspects of the so-called second modernity. Although addressing different kinds of change, perhaps the allusion made by authors in works separated by over a century have something in common. Both Durkheim, on one hand, and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001), on the other, note the importance of individualisation as a vector by which many of the changes in family life pass. Indeed, in the "first" modernity, Durkheim (1975 [1892]) emphasised the emergence of the conjugal family and the independence of the individuals therein in relation to the networks of relatives. Theories of late modernity stress individual autonomy and reflexivity as aspects that give social agents the capacity to act, take risks and innovate, in accordance with more ephemeral affective relationships that punctuate erratic biographies. New ways of life take on greater significance than the more enduring family. These "pure relationships" are not so long lasting and focus on individual well-being. Here the democratisation of gender relations and women emancipation must be stressed (Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001).

On analysing the trends in the changes that have been occurring in the family in western societies over the 20th century and up to the present day, focus can be given to the reconfiguration process of the family shape and the ways of organising day to day life; equally, however, the emphasis can be placed on the dynamics inherent to the normative frameworks, to the new

meanings of family and the different conceptions about how affection that does not involve heterosexual marriage or procreation can be experienced.

A number of authors have stressed privatisation and the closure of families (Sennett, 1988; Shorter, 1975; Lasch, 1977) and the autonomisation of the nuclear family from the broader groups of relatives, around which the economic support and the protection of its members had been structured in pre-industrial societies. With the emergence of industrialisation and paid work, the family's relationship with the economic activity changed. Compared to the traditional model, the modern nuclear family has lost productive and educational functions, the latter being shared with the school, and acquired new functions at the affective-emotional level and in terms of the development of the child's personality (Parsons, 1955; 1971). Changes have also taken place in values and these have an impact on the individualisation process. The family has become the key location for personal achievement and identity construction, the private sphere that shields individuals from the public, formal and impersonal space and gives them freedom of choice in contrast to the constraints of the community and the pre-industrial extended family.

Since the mid 1970s, studies have identified changes in intimacy (Giddens, 2001), new conjugalities (Kauffmann, 1993; Singly, 1991; Torres, 1996; Aboim, 2006), procreative strategies leading to a considerable drop in the birth rate and linked to the new significance of children (Almeida, 2004; Cunha, 2007), more democratised relationships between the various family members, different representations of the gender roles, now understood as more egalitarian. Greater visibility is given to homosexual unions (Almeida, 2006; Silva, 2006), single parenthood and the family recomposition processes (Lobo, 2007) as a result of continued marital break-ups, current articulations between family and work, with a massive presence of working women, and changes in the way family life is managed (Guerreiro and Ávila, 1998; Torres, 2004; Wall and Guerreiro, 2005).

In all these research dimensions, and particularly with regard to women's situation, there are clear signs, where western societies are concerned, of family realities significantly different from those of late 19th century and mid 20th century families. In some cases, these changes tend to be applauded and regarded as necessary in ending the allegedly harmful effects of certain kinds of family relations, namely those linked to women's subordination to patriarchal dominance. Others tend to emphasise the less positive effects that can arise for the individual and society from the supposed decline or weakening of the family (Berger and Berger, 1983).

Nevertheless, apart from the positive or negative signs given to the interpretation of changes, what we see is that there is still a certain family shape behind the agency and reflexivity of the individuals, whether it has a more orthodox or more innovative configuration. The individual's capacity to confront and manage risk is often a result of the emotional and material support provided by those who are considered to be part of the family, of the social and

affective competencies that the families transmit to their members through socialisation. In fact, these families in their multiple forms are still the source and the cement of moral values for the individuals that were born into them and who form them (Amato and Booth, 1997; Levy, Widmer and Kellerhals, 2002). As Segalen (1993) or Saraceno and Naldini (2003) among many others noted, although the discourse on the declining importance of the family has continued throughout the ages, the family institution in the diversity of models and significances in the different periods of history, has proved to be strong and able enough to adapt to social, economic and cultural changes: it is even considered an active participant in societies' modernisation and transformation processes, although some viewpoints underline the exogenous nature of the changes in family systems (Therborn, 2004).

These comparative analyses tend to be made about western societies and a set of countries that are considered industrialised and structurally distinct from the so-called third world countries. Although the history of the Europe endows it with some specificities, the family in western European and North American society can show a number of similarities resulting from industrialisation, urbanisation and secularisation, which are essential parameters when making comparisons with other regions of the world such as Africa or Asia in terms of a number of demographic and socio-familial variables (Qvortrup, 1989). On the other hand, studies by French (Ladurie, 2000 [1975]) and Anglo Saxon (Laslett and Wall, 1972) historians demonstrated that the nuclear family had preceded modernisation in western Europe and was relatively widespread there as a result of the principle of neo-local marriage. In contrast, the extended family used to be a family form found more in Eastern Europe where the patriarchy was stronger (Berger and Berger, 1983; Therborn, 2004). Safeguarding the internal heterogeneities of each country, over the centuries families in Northern and Central Europe have not only presented distinct characteristics from the families of other societies and cultures such as those of the African and Asian continents or the Islamic world, but they have also distanced themselves significantly from the family models of Southern and Eastern Europe (Goldthorpe, 1987; Therborn, 2004).

Recent decades have witnessed the integration of the Southern European countries in the European political space and, more recently, some of the Eastern European countries so that distinct family traditions now coexist. To what extent do the family differences remain or tend to fade, especially in countries that have now been members for some decades? Have European policies also helped to unifying practices and making configurations similar in the scope of the private sphere? Family models have been going through a long term standardisation process. On the other hand, the alternative lifestyles and the family arrangements that the individuals establish in order to meet their needs and expectations stand out in short term analyses; this leads to more diverse family structures. Furthermore, the paths of daily life and the

transitions that occur in them are becoming less and less sequential and in quite irregular temporal spaces. How does this reflect on the kinds of family in each country? Can patterns be identified in which the lines are associated to different societal profiles? How do the welfare state policies interfere in these processes?

This chapter analyses family configurations in Portuguese society and compares them to the other European Union countries. We first characterise family structures and the main demographic and social indicators from INE (Statistics Portugal) and Eurostat data. For the sake of comparison, we give indications for an understanding of certain specificities in Portugal. This is followed by a comparative analysis of the values inherent to families of different nationalities, based on data from the *European Social Survey*. We also use these data to analyse in more detail trends in conjugality — marriage, cohabitation and divorce in Europe. Lastly, an analysis is made, albeit brief, of the demographic phenomenon of remarriage in the Portuguese society between 2001 and 2005 and a structured set of sociographic characteristics of its protagonists is identified. In addition, the most significant conclusions of a qualitative study on the key moments of transition within a family recomposition process are briefly summarised.

Demographic changes in Europe: specificities of the Portuguese case

When the most recent demographic indicators for Portugal are compared with those of several decades ago, it is found that significant social changes have taken place contributing to the reshaping of lifestyles and family models. While there was a trend towards the standardisation of the characteristic patterns of modernity until the mid 20th century, thereafter the trends inverted and there was a drastic reduction in the marriage (civil and Catholic) and birth rates at the same time as a rise in the divorce rate and the percentage of children born out of wedlock. Men and women are getting closer in age and also older when they officially enter into marriage than in previous decades and the average age of women when they give birth for the first (and for many only) time is over 28 years. The size of the family household is getting smaller, as is the proportion of complex families. On the other hand, households with just one person are on the rise and though these are formed mainly by the elderly, the younger generations are gradually assuming larger proportions. A comparison of the 1991 and 2001 Census figures reveals an exponential growth of young people living alone, even though the figure is only in the region of 3% (Guerreiro, 2003; Wall and Aboim, 2003). There are therefore indications that the family dynamics of Portuguese society are drawing closer to the processes of advanced modernity although some regional differences and continuities can be identified which suggests the overlapping of modern and

more traditional features. For example, despite the decline in the rate of Catholic marriages in the country as a whole, it continues to be much higher in the North of Portugal while lower figures are found for religious marriages in the South and autonomous regions.[1] More traditional values and stronger religious beliefs appear to persist in the north and the centre which is reflected in the fact that this is also where the divorce rate, the proportion of children born outside of marriage and civil unions are lowest.

Another key to the understanding of family behaviours involves the growing participation of women in the labour market, notably when their children are still young. Indeed, the female activity rate keeps on increasing and in certain age groups is getting very close to that of male activity rates. Given the rise in their education levels over the last four decades, women have acquired qualifications and embarked on careers. The impact of their occupational participation on the growth of the working population is notable, despite the strong vertical and horizontal gender segregation still found in the labour market (Ferreira, 1993; Guerreiro, 2000; Torres, 2004).

Turning now to the European context, a comparative reading of the family and employment indicators show equivalent trends in the various countries towards a delay in certain phases of people's trajectories and, hence, the timing of the transitions leading to the formation of new families. Schooling tends to be prolonged and insertion into the labour market is more syncopated and reversible, as are the processes of independence of young generations from their parents, the structuring of life as a couple and entry into parenthood (Guerreiro, Abrantes and Pereira, 2004). The effect of this and of other frameworks of values, meanings, orientations and constraints on family and marital life is that young people continue to live with their parents until later, the average age of marriage and of women having their first child is rising, and there is a sharp fall in the birth rates and a steady growth in the number of working women. On the other hand, there is an increasing dissociation between procreation and formal marriage and the number of children born from informal relationships is growing. Official marriages have generally declined and the proportion of civil unions has grown significantly. The amount of single parent families continues to be moderate as the increase in separations is associated to remarriage and recomposition of families. Couples with and without children, with fluctuating figures, constitute the most representative type of family in almost all European countries.

While this is the overall scenario, there are still differences between countries that underline specific profiles on the socio-demographic family map of Europe. Table 1.3 shows that demographic and family patterns in Northern Europe stand out as being quite distinct from those of Southern and

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1   An analysis of these figures is found in Lalanda (2002).

Table 1.1   Evolution of the family and occupational activity indicator

	1960	1991	2001	2006
Average age on 1st marriage				
Women	24.8	24.2	26.1	27.5
Men	26.9	26.2	27.8	29.1
Average age on birth of 1st child				
Women	25.0	24.9	26.8	28.1
Marriage rate (1)	7.8	7.3	5.7	4.5
% Catholic marriages	90.7	72.0	62.5	52.1
Divorce rate (2)	0.1	1.1	1.8	2.2
Birth rate (3)	24.1	11.8	11.0	10.0
Synthetic fertility index (4)	3.2	1.6	1.4	1.3
Births out of wedlock (5)	9.5	15.6	23.8	31.6
Average household sizes (6)	3.8	3.1	2.8	–
Living alone *	11.5	12.4	15.5	–
Young people living alone (15-29 years)**	–	1.4	3.2	–
Complex households (6)	15.4	13.9	10.4	–
Female activity rates				
Overall	13.0	35.5	45.5	47.7
25-29 years	19.8	74.1	85.0	85.4
30-34 years	16.6	72.3	83.3	88.3
35-39 years	15.3	69.0	79.9	87.0

Notes: (1) marriages x 1000/average pop.; (2) divorces x 1000/average pop.; (3) births x 1000/average pop.; (4) number of children per woman in fertile age 15/49 years; (5) total of liveborns outside of marriage per 100 liveborns; (6) the criteria for the definition of this kind of family can be found in Almeida et al. (1998: 49).

Source: Almeida et al. (1998); Almeida et al. (2007); INE, Social indicators 2006; INE, Employment Survey, 2006; *Wall and Aboim (2003); **Guerreiro (2003).

Table 1.2   Demographic indicators by region

NUT II	Catholic marriages	Cohabitations*	Gross marriage rate	Gross divorce rate	Gross birth rate	Synthetic fertility rate	Live births out of wedlock
Portugal	52.1	3.7	4.5	2.2	10.0	1.36	31.6
Mainland	53.3	3.7	4.5	2.2	9.9	1.36	31.9
North	63.3	2.1	4.9	2.0	9.6	1.26	21.9
Centre	56.4	2.8	4.3	1.9	8.7	1.24	26.7
Lisbon and	39.0**	6.1	4.2	2.5	11.4 ***	1.55	42.9 **
Tagus Valley	57.3 ***	–	–	–	8.4 ***		27.0 ***
Alentejo	47.3	4.7	3.6	1.9	8.4	1.30	37.6
Algarve	33.8	7.3	4.0	2.4	11.5	1.70	48.7
Azores A.R.	25.9	1.9	6.0	2.4	11.6	1.48	22.6
A.R.	42.6	2.3	5.4	2.3	11.9	1.46	29.6

* Individuals declaring that they have a civil union in the 2001 Census, in Almeida et al., 2007;
**Lisbon;
*** Médio Tejo (Mid Tagus).

Source: INE, Social indicators, 2006.

Table 1.3 Family and employment indicators in Europe

Countries	Non--related people household	Living alone	Childless couples	Couples with children	Parent with children	Complex, extended and multiple families	30-34 year-people living in parents' home	Cohabitation	Marriage rate	Divorce rate	Fertility index	Gross birth rate	Female employment rate
Total (average)	–	–	–	–	–	–	13.4	–	4.88**	2.0**	–	10.57*	58.3*
Belgium	–	–	–	–	–	–	10.0	–	–	2.9	–	11.50	55.3
Czech Rep.	2.0	30.3	18.5	32.1	12.1	5.1	11.3	2.7	5.15	3.1	1.33	11.30	57.3
Denmark	3.4	36.8	26.8	20.6	4.5	7.8	–	11.5	6.70	2.8	1.83	11.95	73.2
Germany	1.0	35.8	28.0	24.7	5.5	4.9	6.8	5.5	4.54	2.4	1.32	8.16	64.0
Estonia	3.1	33.5	16.6	23.7	11.7	11.4	10.0	7.6	5.18	3.0	1.55	11.07	65.9
Greece	3.9	19.7	18.1	31.7	6.8	19.7	21.3	1.3	5.18	1.2	1.39	10.05	47.9
Spain	4.0	20.3	15.3	32.8	6.3	21.3	22.7	2.2	4.80	1.7	1.38	10.94	54.7
France	2.0	31.0	24.3	29.6	7.0	6.1	7.2	-	4.34	2.5	2.00	13.13	60.0
Ireland	7.1	21.6	16.4	36.6	10.1	8.2	15.6	4.8	5.13***	0.8	1.93	15.07	60.6
Italy	2.5	24.9	19.4	37.8	8.1	7.3	26.1	2.2	4.13	0.8	1.32	9.50	46.6
Cyprus	2.1	16.0	19.4	39.6	4.7	18.2	10.7	1.0	6.80	2.0	1.47	11.30	62.4
Latvia	3.4	25.0	15.5	30.1	20.3	5.8	21.4	–	6.39	2.8	1.35	9.73	64.4
Lithuania	0.4	28.7	14.9	17.3	3.5	35.3	–	2.4	6.26	3.3	1.31	9.21	62.2
Luxembourg	–	–	–	–	–	–	9.9	–	4.12	2.3	1.65	11.66	56.1
Hungary	2.9	26.2	20.7	29.3	9.2	11.6	13.5	5.3	4.42	2.5	1.34	9.91	50.9
Netherlands	0.7	33.6	29.1	29.2	5.6	1.9	4.8	9.7	4.35	2.0	1.70	11.32	69.6
Austria	2.2	33.5	20.4	27.5	8.8	7.6	10.4	5.8	4.46	2.4	1.40	9.40	64.4
Poland	1.6	24.8	14.2	35.6	11.0	12.7	16.1	1.3	5.93	1.8	1.27	9.81	50.6
Portugal	1.9	17.3	21.8	39.3	7.0	12.7	15.1	4.0	4.52	2.2	1.35	9.96	61.9
Slovenia	1.9	21.9	13.9	36.6	10.2	15.5	22.6	4.7	3.17	1.3	1.31	9.43	62.6
Slovakia	1.7	19.4	14.9	8.8	3.6	51.7	14.5	0.6	4.81	2.1	1.24	9.99	53.0
Finland	2.5	37.3	23.7	23.2	7.3	6.0	5.9	9.7	5.36	2.6	1.84	11.17	68.5
United Kingdom	–	–	–	–	–	–	7.9	–	5.23***	2.2	1.84	12.34	65.5
Romania	1.8	18.9	19.1	31.5	7.7	21.0	12.0	3.0	6.79	1.5	1.31	10.16	52.8
Bulgaria	–	–	–	–	–	–	11.7	–	4.26	1.9	1.37	9.60	57.6
Liechtenstein	1.9	32.5	21.4	32.3	6.3	5.5	8.4	4.1	4.31	2.3	1.42	10.30	–
Norway	1.1	37.7	20.6	28.8	8.0	3.8	6.0	9.5	4.66	2.3	1.90	12.56	74.0
Sweden	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	71.8
Switzerland	2.0	36.0	25.8	27.0	4.8	3.7	4.8	5.8	5.32	2.8	1.43	9.80	71.6

Source: Eurostat, Census 2001; INE, Demographic Statistics, 2006; Employment Survey, 2006; *Europe 27 countries; ** EU27, 2005; ***2005.

Eastern European countries, while an intermediate situation is found in the countries of Central Europe, albeit closer to Northern Europe in some cases.

People living alone, mainly the elderly but with young people assuming greater proportions, also have a strong expression in Nordic countries. This is where fewest couples with children are found and it is usual for offspring to become autonomous from their family of origin when they reach adulthood. This is why there are fewer adult offspring living with their parents in these countries. There are higher rates of cohabitation, marriage (in some countries, e.g. Denmark and Finland) and fertility, which mean that the predisposition and conditions of independence for moving into adult life and parenthood in these countries. The Nordic countries have the highest rates of female employment, well above the 60% target of the Lisbon Strategy, in addition to a much broader coverage of care facilities for children and dependents, on one hand, and shared parental leave on the other.

The opposite scenario is found in families in Southern and Eastern Europe where people living alone are predominantly the elderly. Fewer young people live alone and more live with their parents. A significant percentage of people over the age of 30 are still living in the home of their family of origin. This trend is found in Portugal, though the figures are not so high as for Spain, Italy and Greece, or Slovenia and Latvia. Hungary and Slovakia, Poland and Ireland are similar to Portugal. The number of young people living away from their families of origin grows from South and East to the North.

In turn, complex families tend to expand from North to South and East where the largest proportion of complex families are found in countries like Lithuania and Slovakia (over 22%). Along with possible cultural factors that may be used to explain more numerous family households, economic and housing problems could be at the root of this family complexity. Fertility rates are lower in the countries of the South and East and the figures for cohabitation are also modest.

However, some behaviours in Portugal diverge from the countries of the south, such as the higher levels of working women. Various factors combine to explain the specificity of Portugal which has been manifesting itself since the 1970s. Not only are the population's socio-economic conditions and the low salaries of men important but consideration must also be given to the colonial war (1961-1974), the emigration processes and the fact that after there was a period when equal rights were strongly defended in the policies following the 1974 Revolution.

In the more disadvantaged social sectors, one of the indirect effects of the emigration phenomenon was a certain female protagonism. The women who remained were obliged to make decisions alone, they came up against new situations, assumed positions, organised and managed family life and they experienced some freedom. Those who left with their husbands came across new realities. The albeit forced development of women's protagonism

and the knowledge of other worlds contributed to a new reality and a new image of women's skills outside of the home; this has been demonstrated in a number of qualitative studies in which professional work appears as an important means of personal affirmation (Torres, 2004; Monteiro, 2005).

In other more educated social sectors, the thirteen years of the colonial war brought some changes. The burst of relative economic growth at the end of the 1950s had created work posts for middle and senior managers, but the civil war and mandatory military service delayed the entry of young men in working life by four years, and sometimes meant leaving the country or other changes. On the other hand, the potential husbands of young women studying at university students and those with secondary school education could marry either when they had finished their studies and then go to war, or when already in the war with or without their studies completed. The market gave these women compatible job opportunities — civil service, teaching, companies. The wait for the men to return home seemed far too long and the women had the opportunity not only to occupy their time but to earn some money. These opportunities were seized with both hands. Once they had entered the labour market, few of them left. In these social sectors, the compatibility of family and working life was eased at the time by an abundant supply of cheap domestic help.[2] This was soon followed by the 25th April Revolution which reinforced this protagonism as people at this time were open to the ideas of equality between men and women and obsolete and patriarchal laws were reformed. The specific history of this generation of working and more educated women[3] had a number of consequences.

The conclusions of various studies suggest the transmission from one generation to another had a significant effect on behaviours, and show that the entry of daughters into the labour market was undoubtedly affected by the working lives of their mothers. There were specific socialisation effects and the higher the mother's level of schooling the greater these effects were.[4]

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2   In the 1960s the decline in agriculture and migratory movements of the population abroad and to the big cities led to a large rise in the unskilled female work force that had been employed in domestic service.

3   The women in this group are probably the explanation for the very high number of women in relation to men who completed their PhD in the 1980s in Portugal in areas where men tend to predominate in other countries such as mathematics (49%), physics (44%), chemistry (63%) and biology 61%. Portugal also has a higher percentage of female full professors than other countries: the figures for this category in 2001 are 14% in France, 12% in Italy, 10% in the United Kingdom, 10% in Germany, and 19% in Portugal. Nevertheless, it should be noted that there is still a gap between men and women in Portugal, just as in other countries and men are much more strongly represented in management and/or highly qualified positions in university and scientific institutions (Amâncio, 2003: 189, 191).

4   Authors such as Louis André Vallet, Claude Thélot, and François de Singly, cited by Martine Segalen (1993: 194), considered that professionalisation models are hereditary. According to Vallet, the daughters' futures depend more on the mother's position than

From this perspective, the participation of the young women with secondary and university education in the 1960s and 1970s could in part explain the high levels of young Portuguese women currently found in higher education, some of them being their daughters (Guerreiro and Romão, 1995), even in traditionally male sectors.[5] It also partly explains their propensity for wishing to balance their working and family lives.[6]

Returning to the overall data, some deep-seated trends should now be highlighted. In short, families in North Europe are smaller and this is where more young people live alone, there are fewer couples with children and fewer young adults living in their parent's home. These indicators all reveal a greater affirmation of autonomy.

In the enlargement countries and in the south, families tend to be slightly bigger, there are fewer people living alone, most of whom are elderly. These countries are also characterised by having more respondents living with their parents, particularly in the case of young adults. Differences in Europe therefore remain just as Roussel (1992) and Therborn (2004) have already shown us. But the range of these differences has been diminishing over recent years and there are therefore signs of convergence. This can be seen more clearly below.

Family, friends, leisure and work: key commitments in the life of Europeans

The great transformation processes in the family witnessed throughout Europe under analysis are sometimes accompanied by reactions that tend to interpret these changes as meaning Europeans are becoming less interested in family life. However, the systematic analysis of the surveys focusing on these issues leads us to other conclusions.

The *European Social Survey* data provide an overall picture of the dimensions of life which Europeans make a priority. This picture, shown in figure 1.1, answers the two questions that refer directly to transformations in the family domain. Firstly, do social processes, e.g. greater autonomy of the members of

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the father's, i.e. when daughters are more likely to work if their mothers do so. Similarly, Thélot and Singly show that the higher the level of the mother's schooling, the more likely it is that her offspring will attain a better position in the profession.

5   Still on participation in university life, it is worth stressing that at the start of the 1990s Portuguese women were more represented in the so called traditionally male courses. In the 1992/93 academic year, 28% of the students in Engineering and Architecture were women (European average: 18%), 61% in Natural Sciences (European average: 44%) and 45% in Mathematics (European average: 28%) (Torres, 2002).

6   In a survey of young people in the Loures municipality, nearly 90% of women defend total symmetry between men and women with regard both professional performance and the sharing of household chores (Torres, 1996b).
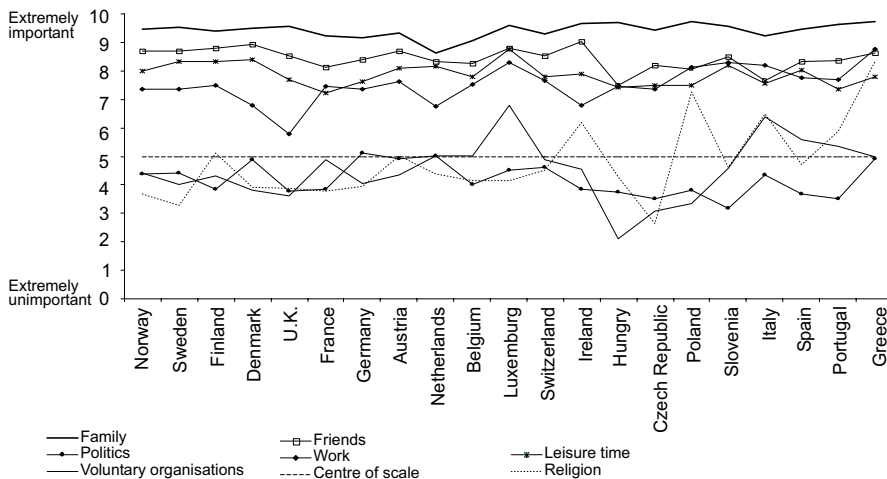
Figure 1.1   Importance of each aspect in life (average)

Importance attributed to family	Variance: F=64,764 p=0.000; Eta^2=0.035
Importance attributed to friends	Variance: F=60,408; p=0.000; Eta^2=0.033
Importance attributed to free time	Variance: F=35,43; p=0.000; Eta^2=0.020
Importance attributed to politics	Variance: F= 87,289; p=0.000; Eta^2=0.047
Importance attributed to work	Variance: F= 136,920; p=0.000; Eta^2=0.072
Importance attributed to religion	Variance: F= 336,823; p=0.000; Eta^2=0.159
Importance of volunteer organization	Variance: F= 245,970; p=0.000; Eta^2=0.122

Source: *European Social Survey*, 2002; Torres, Mendes, and Lapa (2006).

the couple and individualisation of the living possibilities, mean a break in the importance of the family in relation to other spheres of life? Secondly, do European countries differ from each other according to the arrangements between the principles of autonomy and the organisation of life together? Figure 1.1 allows us to answer these two questions with a resounding "no".

As for the first question, the affective dimensions (family, friends) in fact appear in key positions whereas religion and politics are generally at the bottom of the hierarchy. It is also found that family value is autonomous from the others and is not linked for example to religion. With regard to the second question, family is not more important in some European countries than in others. It is a value held by all the ESS countries and the figures for the importance of the family in Scandinavian countries are very similar to those of Spain and higher than those of Italy.

The family is not therefore in crisis. On the contrary, it is the main sphere of personal investment. It is the family models and representations and the ways of investing in the family that seem to have changed. Phenomena such as low fertility, together with divorce and cohabitation becoming trivial and acceptable should not be understood however as symptoms of the decline of the family, but as symptoms of new investments and meanings given to it, e.g.

doing away with the idea that the family is essentially defined by the formal tie. The construction of the family is maintained as the most important dimension in the lives of Europeans with the affirmation of autonomy and the devalorisation of the institutional component of marriage, as well as the rigid differentiation of the gender roles. The family is now defined as a place where the affirmation and maintenance of individual freedom is sought and a space for complete affective fulfilment.

Despite the priorities people give to family and work as spheres of life that can reflect differences of personality and socialisation, living or cultural experiences (Prince-Gibson and Schwartz, 1998), it is found that both men and women have very similar priorities in relation to the family and work. Both evaluate the family as the most important dimension of their lives (with figures over 9 on a 0 to 10 scale), while work is put in third or fourth place, as we saw above, but with very similar figures for both sexes. The existence of greater intra-sex than inter-sex differences is in line with the conclusions of other studies conducted in the scope of gender sociology: there is less diversity between the sexes than between the group of women or the group of men (Amâncio, 1994; Kimmel, 2000; Connell, 2002; Torres and Brites, 2006); this is illustrated more fully in another chapter of this volume.

It is worth looking now in more detail at the changes in conjugality and at their different forms as this is one of the dimensions of family life which has seen significant transformations in Europe and specifically in Portugal particularly in recent years.

Marriage: the main form of conjugal life throughout Europe

Taking the picture of Europe with regard marital status along with cohabitation, it is interesting to discuss social factors and processes that might explain the patterns found.

What stands out from table 1.4 is that we still live in the "Europe of the married couples", as this is undoubtedly the predominant civil status in almost all the countries. Sweden is the only country with less than 50% of married people even though this is still the modal group. Some differences can in fact be seen between the countries.

Scandinavian countries have the smallest number of married people in Europe. The percentages for the countries in the south are around 60%.

The figures for cohabitation show that Scandinavian countries have more informal relations (more than 30% cohabit) along with some Northern and Central European countries (over 20% in United Kingdom, Germany, Austria and Switzerland). In contrast, southern countries have the lowest figures in Europe; Italy, where less than 8% of the population cohabit, has the highest figure in this group. Greece is the country where fewest people cohabit (3%), followed by Portugal (4%).

Table 1.4   Marital status and cohabitation (%)

	Married	Separated	Divorced	Widowed	Single	Cohabiting
Norway	51.3	1.2	7.2	7.1	33.2	36.9
Sweden	46.1	0.8	8.9	5.4	38.8	36.9
Finland	50.2	0.7	9.3	6.4	33.4	24.5
Denmark	55.0	0.8	7.6	5.7	30.9	35.5
United Kingdom	55.7	2.4	7.1	6.9	27.9	21.8
France	58.3	1.3	5.7	5.7	29.0	28.6
Germany	56.2	1.9	7.5	8.2	26.2	20.9
Austria	58.4	1.1	6.4	5.8	28.3	24.4
Netherlands	63.2	0.4	4.9	5.9	25.6	—
Belgium	53.5	2.5	8.2	6.4	29.4	19.1
Luxembourg	54.4	1.4	4.7	5.3	34.2	15.6
Switzerland	58.9	1.5	7.4	4.3	27.9	22.1
Ireland	55.3	3.3	1.1	7.4	32.9	8.0
Hungary	55.3	0.8	8.5	12.3	23.1	15.1
Czech Rep.	64.4	1.8	8.3	10.6	14.9	13.3
Poland	57.6	0.5	3.2	9.8	28.9	3.6
Slovenia	53.9	0.7	3.7	9.0	32.7	14.4
Italy	60.5	2.2	1.8	6.7	28.8	7.6
Spain	58.5	1.7	1.2	7.5	31.1	4.9
Portugal	64.8	0.7	2.2	7.5	24.8	4.0
Greece	66.6	0.6	1.6	7.6	23.6	3.0
Average	57.8	1.6	5.2	7.4	28.0	20.4

Source: *European Social Survey*, 2002; Torres, Mendes, and Lapa, 2006.

Figure 1.2 shows that the percentages of married people rise, albeit only slightly, when we move from Scandinavia to the countries in the south of Europe. The line of cohabitations is particularly conspicuous as there is a dramatic drop between the Scandinavian countries and those in the south of Europe. The impression given by the direction of the evolution of the two lines is that the marriage numbers are correlated with the cohabitation numbers, though the correlation (r=0.32) suggests there are other pertinent factors in the explanation of the percentages of marriages and cohabitation in the different countries.

As for the younger generations, figure 1.3 presents an interesting inversion in the lines referring to marriage and cohabitation when we go from the Scandinavian and Nordic countries to the enlargement and southern countries. In fact, there is a significant correlation between the two situations for the youngest group (r=0.55). However, Figure 1.3 suggests a trend towards conjugalisation and, despite the high percentages for cohabitation among the young in certain countries, a large majority end up in marriage as can be seen from the above mentioned total figures for married people.

In the Scandinavian and northern and central Europe countries, cohabitation is therefore the most common trend and there is a clear separation between leaving the parents' home and marriage. In contrast, the percentages of young people cohabiting in countries in the south are the lowest in Europe
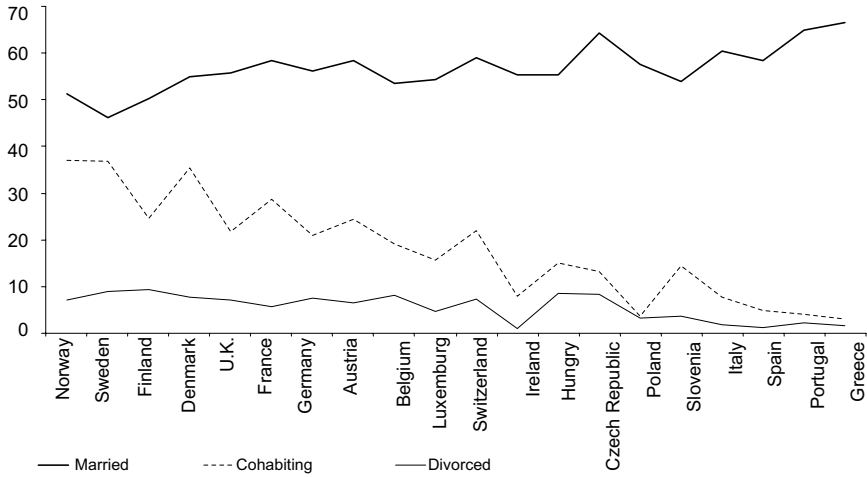
Figure 1.2   Married, divorced and living together (%)

Note: the data for the Netherlands were not included since they are not reliable with regard to the question on living with a partner (possible mixture of cohabitation and marriage).

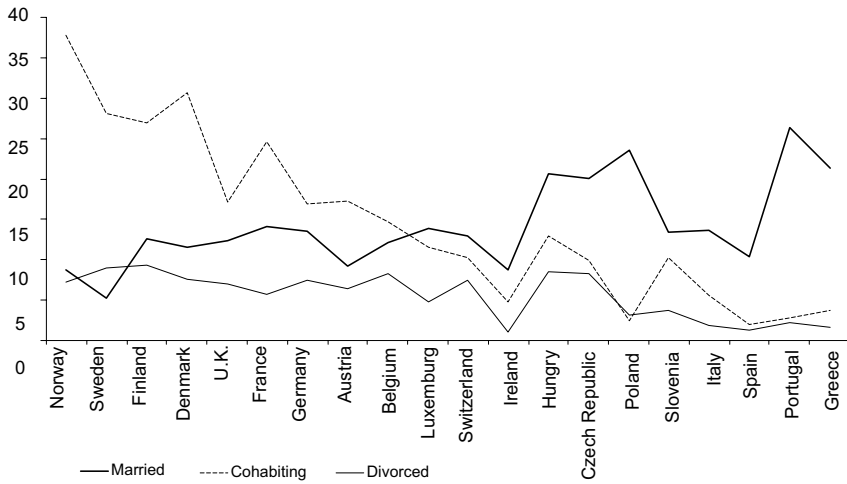Source: *European Social Survey*, 2002; Torres, Mendes, and Lapa (2006).

Figure 1.3   People aged 15 to 29 married or living together (%)

Source: *European Social Survey*, 2002; Torres, Mendes, and Lapa (2006).

from which it can therefore be surmised that conjugalisation and leaving the parents' home is essentially a result of marriage and starting a family.

The choice of marriage may, in part, indicate that people draw away from the less formalised and less legally protected cohabitation (Torres, 2002). On the other hand, cohabitation is not an option instead of or against marriage. As Kaufmann (1993) suggested, it is often a stage in the couples' selection process that is followed up by marriage when stability has been guaranteed and the decision is taken to have children or where there are already children as noted by Oinonen (2004). Equally, Bozon (1992: 445) shows for France that not only do the majority of those cohabiting end up getting married but they have a Catholic wedding. These cases do not reveal the "de-institutionalisation" of marriage as some propose but rather a delay and a more pragmatic attitude towards life choices and institutions (Torres, 2002: 67).

Spain and Italy differ here from Portugal as they have fewer young married adults but not because they establish informal relationships like the Scandinavians. These two countries have few young people who marry, cohabit and live alone because they remain in their parents' home as mentioned above and confirmed in other studies (Saraceno, Olagnero and Torrioni, 2005).

On analysing the figures for the percentages of divorcees (table 1.4 and figure 1.3), the most interesting factor to note and as already observed for single parent families, is that the figures are in fact low (average of 5.2%). This clearly reveals the transitory nature of these situations as previous studies on stepfamilies have shown (Lobo and Conceição, 2003). The comparison between countries takes us again to the already familiar pattern of differences between the Scandinavians, the north and centre and the south; the higher percentages of divorcees are found in the former countries and the southern countries are accompanied by Ireland and Poland.

It is worth observing figure 1.4 to confirm what has been said about the transitory situation of the divorcee as it compares the percentage of divorcees with the percentage of married respondents who have already been divorced. In most countries, the figures for those who have already been divorced are higher than those who were divorced at the time of the survey.

It is noted that in general the countries that have the highest divorce rates i.e. where it can be assumed that stepfamilies or the return to marriage are more established patterns, also have far more people who have already been divorced than those who are currently divorced.

In addition to cultural and religious factors which will be discussed below, a link can be established between the greater insertion of women in the labour market and thus less financial dependence of both women and men[7] on marriage, and the highest percentage of divorcees.

As Roussel (1992) and Therborn (2004) note, the secularisation process, i.e. the declining importance of religion in the daily habits and decisions to
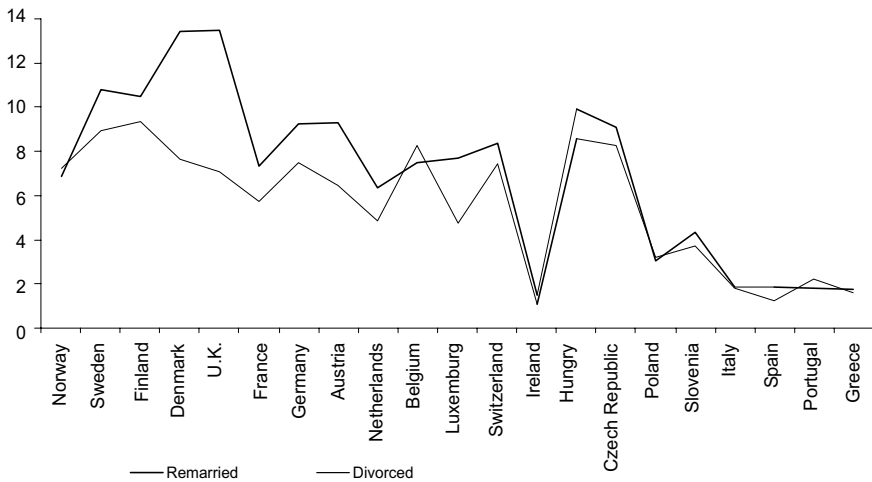
Figure 1.4   Divorced respondents and respondents who have divorced and remarried (%)
Source: *European Social Survey*, 2002; Torres, Mendes, and Lapa (2006).

marry, cohabit or divorce, is another pertinent factor contributing to the rise
in the number of divorces in Europe.

The upward trend in divorce witnessed throughout Europe is constant, re-
gardless of the level at which it started. It is set against the backcloth of changes in
the family and the so called effects of the greater sentimentalisation of relation-
ships and where the valorising of the perspective that love and understanding
should be lasting in a relationship and it is acceptable to end the relationship if
this no longer exists, is increasingly hegemonic (Torres, 1996, 2002).

Moving to a summary of the key aspects, the ESS show that the numbers
of divorcees and single parents are low which indicates they are transitory
situations; marriage therefore remains the main form of conjugalisation and
Europeans have a strong desire to live in a conjugal relationship, be it for-
mally or informally. As we shall see below, the central role of family and con-
jugal life in a person's happiness is of such importance that most divorcees
tend to remarry.

A synchronic cross-section shows differences between the ESS coun-
tries. On one hand, we have countries like those of Scandinavia, the northern
and central Europe with more divorces and cohabitations and fewer religious
belonging. On the other, religion plays a more important role in the countries

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7   Various studies show that the fact that women work may facilitate the men's taking the
      initiative to get divorced as they have fewer financial responsibilities, notably in alimony,
      after the separation (Torres, 1996).

in the south, Poland and Ireland and there are more formal marriages, fewer divorces and less cohabitation.

Nevertheless, any diachronic analysis shows that transformation processes are taking place all over Europe and all of them evolving in the same direction: greater focus on individual interests, added value of the family as well as privacy and personal satisfaction, demands for symmetric positions between men and women[8] and the devalorisation or resistance to external forms of imposition and constraint. The traditional idea of a formal conjugal relationship with unequal or differentiated and insoluble roles is questioned (Roussel, 1992; Giddens, 1991). And while these global trends are recognised by the population as a whole, it is young people and women in particular who tend to follow this line most closely as we have already seen, and as concluded in other studies (Torres, 1996a).

It therefore seems that the change in the meaning given to marriage, even when marriage takes place in a Catholic ceremony, is what must be underlined. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that in addition to the above mentioned distinctions between European countries, different perspectives also coexist within each country. When speaking of values, we find that while the large majority are distancing themselves from a traditionalist vision of marriage and family, in fact there are still more or less minority groups that adhere to these positions. On the other hand, realities resulting from the rise in divorces such as the social recomposition processes are also becoming more frequent. This is what we will now address in more detail for the Portuguese case.

Remarriage and stepfamilies: dynamics of a process

Remarriage is a demographic phenomenon linked to the changes in family practices that has gained visibility in the scenario of changes intersecting the various sectors of Portuguese society.

A quantitative analysis of remarriage (Ferreira *et al.*, in the press) not only strengthens the affirmation of this "kind of marriage" (Bernard, 1971 [1956]) as a conjugal practice of the Portuguese, but it also allows the identification of a structured set of sociographic characteristics of its protagonists.

Accordingly, there was a steady rise in remarriages in Portugal between 2001 and 2005 from 11,357 to 12,450, or in relative terms from 14.4% to 18.8%[9]. This increase is due mainly to the marriage of divorced men;[10] among

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8   Note the role of the feminist movement (differentially effective and present in varying degrees depending on the country) in the overall change of image of women and the couple.

9   In 2000, there were 8,428 weddings in which at least one of the couple was single, i.e. 13% of the total registered weddings in Portugal (Lobo and Conceição, 2003).

women, the practice went from 7.5%, in 2001, to 10.7% in 2005, and among men, from 9.3% to 12.5%. The average age of remarriage is 43 years for men and 38 years for women.

In 2005, more than half the couples (roughly 58%) where at least one member was not single had cohabited before marrying; the figure for couples where both were single did not exceed 17.1%. Although the majority of re-married couples had cohabited before marrying, only 23% had children to-gether before the marriage. The children from previous relationships (about 70% in 2005) clearly represent the majority in the universe of remarriages.

Some of the regular features identified in our study of reference should be highlighted as they help define the behaviour of the remarriage phenome-non in Portugal as well as the profile of its protagonists: divorcees of both sexes and regardless of age remarry much more frequently than widow(er)s; men of all ages remarry more often than women despite the beginnings of clear signs in recent years of a slowing of this trend. Age is a determinant vari-able in the probability of remarriage and the younger the person, the more likely he/she is to enter into a new conjugal relationship. On the other hand, older women and with less schooling are less likely to remarry after divorcing or becoming a widow. It is stressed that unlike in first marriages, the protago-nists of remarriage tend to be older as most have gone through a situation of cohabitation before formalising the marriage. The large majority has children from previous relationships and fewer children in common (children of the recomposition); a Catholic wedding tends to be less common and their quali-fications are generally lower than couples marrying for the first time. This is because the male and female divorcees from intellectual and scientific profes-sions, that is, with higher education qualifications, tend to regulate their sec-ond conjugal relationships themselves. At present, the decline in marriage is seen particularly in remarriages. And, equally, the very marked increase in cohabitation as well as in non officially registered births out of wedlock seen in recent years in Portuguese society can be said to be due largely to the rela-tionships after a divorce or separation that are not legitimated and the births of children of family recompositions.

Dynamics of a family recomposition process

The sociological study of family recompositions involves analysing them as a process and not a static and isolated moment in a life path (Bohannan, 1970; Duberman, 1975; Furstenberg *et al.*, 1987). Like the first marriage, divorce or sin-gle parenthood, recomposition is a time of transition, sometimes fleeting, that in-herits the consequences of previous transitions and conditions what follows.

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10   Note that the term remarriage means when at least one of the couple is not single.

The research strategy adopted previously that contemplates the time dimension not only allows the transitions to be highlighted but also captures the dynamics involved in a recomposition process (Le Gall and Martin, 1991).[11]

After examining various moments in the conjugal trajectories of the mothers with custody and the stepfathers interviewed for the research,[12] it was possible to identify the two kinds of dynamics — integration and exclusion — involved in the two structuring axes of the family recomposition process — conjugality and parenthood — in accordance with the objective living conditions, paths taken, practices and representations of the protagonists of these processes and their most relevant characteristics described below and then summarised in table 1.5.

The main hypothesis guiding the research was the confirmation of the interdependence between social classes and the dynamics of family recomposition. Indeed, the integration dynamics were associated to the more educated sectors i.e. intellectual and scientific professions, middle level technicians, and exclusion dynamics to employed workers, independent workers and skilled workers.

In fact, the more educated mothers with custody and stepfathers configured in the integration dynamics by means of the tendency to self-regulate their recomposed conjugality; in other words, the majority opted in favour of cohabitation even when children were born into the stepfamily. This relationship of the recomposed couple favours the autonomy of each; these women prefer to have a romantic or conjugal partner insofar as they maintain close relations with the biological father of their children and the recomposed couple is therefore centred more on conjugality than parenthood. Moreover, all the transitions whether past or present are integrated in the conjugal history of these women; the first conjugal breakups are not always finalised legally, that is, they are separations and not divorces. Divorces are nearly always quick and by mutual consent; the tendency to self regulation also extends to child custody and the biological fathers tend to comply more closely with what was agreed between the former couple. Although the bonds with their children are weakened, many of these fathers participate in their upbringing and sometimes in their daily lives. The stepfathers therefore have a more restricted field of action and there is more ambiguity in the role as the co-parenting relations are strong. The recomposed family live in the same house as the first family of the mother with child custody and her children and it is adapted to the family recomposition; the children circulate freely between the various households but they do not always adopt the parents of their

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11   See Lobo (2007).
12   For this research were interviewd 24 mothers with custody and 21 stepfathers. The analysed recomposed familiar configurations presented a similar structure: mother with custody, children and stepfather (single, separated or divorced) with or without children from the first marriage.

Table 1.5   Types of dynamics of family recomposition

	Integration dynamics of economic and school capital (+)	Exclusion dynamics of economic and school capital (-)
Recomposed conjugality	– self-regulation (cohabitation) – choice of marriage – women want conjugal partner – centring on conjugality – orientation to the past, present and future	– regulation through law (remarriage) – women's resistance to this legitimisation – women want father for their children – centring on parenthood – orientation to the present (+)
Divorce and parental powers	– quick divorce and by mutual consent – separations (self-regulation) – self-regulation of parental powers – fathers' compliance of arrangements set by couple – amicable relations between the former couple	– long and contentious divorces – regulation of parental powers by law – fathers' non-compliance of legally fixed arrangements – continuation of conflicts between former couple or breach or relations after divorce
Biological parenthood	– continuity of relations between fathers and children after separation – tendency for mothers to include biological fathers in children's education – biological father more present in the daily lives of children's education	– weakening of bond between fathers and children after divorce – tendency for mothers to exclude biological fathers in children's education – biological father much less present in the daily lives of children's education
Social parenthood	– greater ambiguity of stepfather's role – stepfather almost familiar (or friend)	– increased authority of the stepfathers legitimated by mothers – stepfather-father
Co-parenthood	– (sometimes strong) co-parenting relations	– no co-parenting relations
Recomposition home	– mother with custody and her children in home of first family, adapted to the recomposition	– new home for the family of remarriage or recomposition
Recomposition network	– extension of children's circulation area – parents of stepfather not always parents in law and grandparents	– more restricted extension of the children's circulation area – parents of stepfather adopted as parents in law and grandparents
Social representations	– nostalgia in relation to nuclear family – stepfamily with specificities and constraints	– identification with the ideology of the nuclear family – tendency to consider stepfamily as "the family"

stepfather as their grandparents. Although some mothers with custody and stepfathers feel a certain nostalgia about their first family, they do not fail to recognise the specificities of the stepfamilies.

The exclusion dynamics that are found in the recomposition processes of the less educated mothers with custody and stepfathers are identified with a greater tendency for the legal regulation of the recomposed conjugality. However, it is the women who put up most resistance to remarriage despite wanting to erase the history of the first family. On the other hand, and because they almost exclude the ex-husband from their lives and those of their children, they want their present husband to assume the role of father. Hence the recomposed couple is centred more on parenthood than on conjugality. The divorces are typically the source of great conflict (there are rarely separations) and take a long time to finalise. Child custody is also regulated by law but, even so, the biological fathers do not comply with what has been established, i.e. they rarely make the monthly child support payment and cut ties with their children. This situation of the biological father's systematic non-compliance with his obligations prolongs the conflict and leads to the break of relations between the former couple. In light of the absence of a co-parenting relationship, mothers exclude the biological fathers from their children's upbringing and thus legitimate the stepfathers' authority. The stepfamily have a new house so that the family of the first marriage can be forgotten and the lives of the domestic group are more closed to the outside, i.e. the space in which the children circulate is not extended much because the relations with the family of the first husband have also been cut and, the stepfather's parents quickly take the place of parents-in-law and grandparents to their son's step-children. In this kind of recomposition, the family project is centred on the family nucleus; the couple reproduces the nuclear family model and considers their recomposed family to be "the family". As one might expect, the hypothesis on the overlapping of the family recomposition dynamics determined by the two axes, i.e. conjugality and parenthood, is also confirmed.

In addition to the systematising of the main characteristics for the two kinds of dynamics involved in the recomposition processes i.e. integration and exclusion, mention should also be made to other questions that are related with the characteristics incorporated in a family transition even though they have "escaped" this dichotomy. Notably, the relation between the first marriages and the recomposition process, the centrality of the mothers with child custody in the recomposed configurations and the influence of the experience prior to recomposition of the biological parenthood on the relations between the stepfathers and stepchildren should also be addressed.

First, the importance of the occurrence and duration of the first marriages in the family recomposition. This variable hinges on the confirmation of the hypothesis about the repercussions of the past in the regulation of the recomposed family configuration. When the first marriages of

the protagonists of the recomposition were short, it means that the ex-partners are still very young after the break up when they return to the matrimonial market which makes it easier to find a romantic partner. Furthermore, the recomposed families of these young ex-partners are fertile, in other words, they have at least one child by the second relationship or marriage. As it happens, it was the younger women in our study who formed new relationships with men of the same ages, but single and without children from previous relationship; as these stepfathers entered a single parent family with a small child, it was easier to establish a close bond with the stepson or daughter. This is the most invisible kind of recomposition as this family structure is easily confused with the nuclear family, especially if the children's biological father is absent.

The interviewees in our study who had had long marriages were not so young and many of them were over the age of 40. Some of the mothers with child custody lived as single parents a little longer, and the conjugal partners they chose were also nearly always divorced or separated and on the whole did not have custody of their children. As they had not lived with their stepchildren when they were very young, these stepfathers had a more distant and less affectionate relationship with their wife's children. The specificities and differences in relation to nuclear family structures of these recomposed family configurations are more difficult to hide because the geometrics are variable and therefore have a more complex structure.

Accordingly, the mothers' centrality is also clear in these configurations. This is not to say however that this centrality represents any more than the continuity of the importance of these women in the upbringing, care and daily supervision of their children, irrespective of the kind of family structure in which they live. Nevertheless, in the recomposed family configurations, the places and roles of all the members of the domestic group are largely determined by these mothers with child custody. In other words, it is they who manage the co-existence between the social and biological parenting relations in these families.

With regard social parenting, some emphasis must also be given to the fact that, together with social class, the previous experience of biological parenting is a variable that conditions the kind of relationships that will be established over time between the stepfathers and the stepchildren. Even though some stepfathers are better able to deal with their wife's children because they had gained experience as fathers before the recomposition, for others being a father who did not accompany the day to day lives of his children may trigger a sense of frustration and a withdrawal from the stepchildren. On the other hand, the stepfathers who only became fathers after the recomposition feel "obliged" to suppress some of the expectations typical at the start of a romance due to the constant presence of children in this relationship.

Conclusion

The analysis made here allows us to paint a picture of the family and its various contours. It reveals that, contrary to recurrent assertions, the family remains a robust institution even though it has been going through a constant process of change accompanied by other social dynamics. Along people's trajectory, the multiple forms and new configurations of the family continue to be the important anchor in people's lives and it is one of the most lasting social groups to which the biographical experiences of each person are linked. The various social mutations are therefore accompanied by and reflect on the different coexisting family models; both the effects of the new behaviours and values in relation to gender roles and the significance of a person's autonomy and fulfilment have been of particular importance in recent decades.

Our analysis of some temporal sets of indicators sheds light on the reconfiguration of family lifestyles that are embodied in the delay in the transition to conjugality and parenthood, the decline in the birth rate and the average family size, the rise in divorce rates and children born out of wedlock, among others. It provides evidence that Portuguese society is steadily approaching the social processes of advanced modernity.

The strong participation of Portuguese women in the labour market is another of the outstanding indicators worthy of note, though this is very specific due to the political democratisation process in Portugal and the period which preceded it.

Using Eurostat data, the comparison with other European countries shows that Portugal is closest to Southern and Eastern European countries with more extended families, more adult children remaining in their parent's home and residential units with just one person that are mainly the elderly. This situation is becoming less apparent in Central and above all Northern Europe.

However, these differences are steadily diminishing, and there is a particularly strong trend towards families of couples, with or without children, in all countries. We therefore have a Europe of couples as this is the predominant familial situation either through marriage or cohabitation. Indeed, formal marriage is the most common civil status (58%), followed by being single 28%; separation (2%), divorce (5%) and widow/widower (7%) have little expression. In addition, 20% of Europeans cohabit. As the figures for single parents and divorcees are low, this undoubtedly indicates they are transitory situations and supports the idea of a Europe of couples. Those who divorce or separate return to conjugality either through marriage or cohabitation.

The great changes witnessed in recent years have given rise to the generic picture that is now clear to see: the prevalence of various form of family life, e.g. as a couple with or without children, or living with parents, clearly overlaps the situation of being alone, with or without children. This variety in

the modes of family life, consisting of formal marriage or cohabitation result-ing from a first or second marriage or civil union, is what prevails in Europe.

Indeed, the so-called sentimentalisation, privatisation, secularisation and individualisation of modern families and late modernity do not have a splintering effect; on the contrary, they produce recompositions and lead to multiple and more diverse forms of living as a family. And clearly, when we look at the comparison of the different countries more closely, the diversity is broadened.

The valorisation of the family as the absolute priority in the personal life of Europeans is another very marked result. It can also be concluded from the analysis of the sequential importance given to values that there is a modern and not a traditional vision of the family. In most countries, friends are valued after family. Leisure is in third place and then work in fourth, though the posi-tion of the last two is exchanged in some countries. There is absolutely no as-sociation made between the valorisation of the family and religion. Affection and the time to enjoy it, closely followed by work are undoubtedly the dimen-sions of life to which Europeans attach most importance.

Still in relation to values, it was extremely interesting to find that there was almost no difference between men and women in the valorisation of work demonstrating that this is as much of a reference for women as it is for men. This helps break down the essentialist visions on the differences be-tween men and women.

A key factor of change in most European countries has also been the growing integration of women in the labour market, both in terms of propor-tions and the actual hours of work. However, the effects of this reorganisation on the gender roles in the family and at work are highly differentiated; they depend on structural factors such as income, youth unemployment rates and social security systems and above all on the existence of policies that allow the harmonization of the two spheres. Without this support, either women are overburdened or there is an undesirable fall in the birth rate.

Family life unfolds in a specific framework of constraints that, obvi-ously without hindering individual actions and strategies, imposes limits that often give rise to contradictions between what is really wanted and what can be achieved. The difficulties young people, and particularly young women, encounter in becoming autonomous, having their own life and space and even making the desire to start a family compatible with professional ful-filment exemplify this well.

Ultimately, we can conclude that a variety of modern and more plural ways of life and valorising the family prevails in Europe and that the tradi-tionalist vision that emphasised the authoritarian, patriarchal and institu-tional features of family relations has been set aside. Growing importance is attached to the affective dimension, fulfilment and personal well-being in the family context, as well as to equality between the sexes without

abdicating the idea of having children. Nevertheless, within this general framework, differences are revealed between the countries not only in the way in which this general model is applied but also the emphasis given to the abovementioned values.

Lastly, some of these modern and plural patterns and the ways in which the family recomposition process is started and consolidated gave rise to the last point in this chapter. A study is made of couples where at least the woman with children had already lived in a conjugal situation before the family recomposition. The analysis of the various decisive moments in their conjugal trajectories (dating, first marriage, divorce, single parenthood and recomposition) led to the identification of two kinds of dynamics i.e. integration and exclusion, on the two structuring axes of the family recomposition process i.e. conjugality and parenthood, in accordance with the objective living conditions, paths taken, practices and representations of the protagonists of these process.

As we have seen, the recomposition process means both the construction of a new conjugality and a relationship of social (and perhaps biological) parenthood, insofar as this conjugal couple does not correspond to the biological parental couple for each of the children of stepfamily configurations. The marked valorisation of the biological connections between the parents and children in contemporary societies weaves a web of relational ambiguities in which stepfamilies typically find themselves involved. This ambiguity is undoubtedly strengthened by the figure of the stepfather who is seen by all as the main intruder in the filial blood ties.

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