Women at home, at school and in the factory. The particular discourse of domesticity done by the Spanish Escuela Economista (1861-1909)\textsuperscript{1}

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Susana Martínez Rodríguez
Economic History Unit. Economics and Economic History Department
Edificio B, Campus UAB E-08193, Bellaterra-Barcelona-Spain
e-mail: Susana.Martinez@uab.cat

Summary:
The texts by the Spanish Economist School (second half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century) contain an assessment of the role of women in the economy and society that is transgressor in front of the prevailing discourse that defended a unique and exclusive role for all women: being at home and a mother. Most members of that economic trend defended female work in the factories, basing themselves on wage arguments and even asked for a professional training for those who in many cases could not even write and read for the fact of being a woman. The texts of those economists give new ideas about the economic and social role of women in a Spain dominated by a discourse that denied the necessity of female work for the working families.

Key words: discourse of the domesticity, role of women in the contemporary societies, Escuela Economista, Spain, 19\textsuperscript{th} century

JEL Codes: B540, B290, Z190

1.- Introduction

The discourse of the social sciences can hardly detach itself from the ideology of the context and from the beliefs of the scientist who make them up. When the object of the study is the economic and social function of the women of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century societies, the previous task turns out to be nearly impossible. Different scholars (Groenwegen, 1

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have pointed out that the classic British economy assumed the moral determinants of the confined Victorian society in which it flourished, and among which there was a very limited vision of women’s economic and social role (Lyndon Shanley, 1993) and that this one was the main cause of the rare female presence in the books of Economy (Pujol, 1992). The same hypothesis has been contrasted with the French context (Forget, 1997, 95-111). Other works have shown that the Political Economy, generally during the second half of the 19th century, was one of the grounds where the discourse concerning the sexual division of work got strength (Le Bouteillec, 2007). Did the same happen among the contemporary Spanish liberal economists? There have been very few studies based on gender in the context of the Spanish liberal economy from the perspective of the analysis of the economic thought; the most known one may have been the participation of different economists in the Conferencias Dominicales—the Sunday Conferences—(1869) that took place in Madrid, with a discourse in favor of the increase of the education for the female middle-class, limited to their maternal function (Flecha, 1996, 52-62; Martínez-Rodríguez, 2006). That selection of texts offers a very sparing result to represent the vision of the Spanish liberal economists about the issues related to women.

This article precisely argues that the contribution has been so limited. A significant part of the research has been the searching of new texts. The Political Economy of the 19th century combines political and sociological aspects in its configuration and consequently, how could it ignore the novelties that occurred about women? Concerning, the female workers, because they were one of the epicenters of the debate about proletarianizing; concerning the middle-class women, because they were leading a protest movement that demanded more political rights and above all, greater education. Consequently, my starting hypothesis was that primary sources did have to exist to allow a more complete study.

Among all the Spanish economists of the 19th century, I have focused my attention on the liberal group called Escuela Economista because—as I will comment further on— they show a set of characteristics that made their involvement with the female issue more than probable. Concerning the selection of works made up by those economists, I position myself around the debate of the Sociedad Libre de Economía Política (Free Society of Political Economy) about working women, published in *La
Eight associates debated along three well-attended sessions (April 10th, May 14th and May 27th 1861) the following question: “Is the influence that the modern industry practices to drag women away from home fair and legitimate?” (La Gaceta Economista, 1861, 2, 124). Its opinions reflected a refreshing diversity in front of the dominant discourse denying female work that was visible in the market. The key issue which was to know if women had to work or not in the factory runs counter to the discourse of domesticity and to the fact that there did not exist any replacement to make the domestic tasks they carried out.

There are more references to female work, to the working training of the female workers but none can be found in books, conferences or discussions intended for university graduates except in dissertations, studies… that is to say texts that, generally speaking, analysed a new subject, causing controversy but which were not relevant enough to include it within a university treaty.

The debate on the role of women in the contemporary societies has different origins. At first sight, it is a discussion the Spanish economists had reproduced from other latitudes; more particularly the debate of the Escuela Economista has great similarities to the one carried out by the French liberal economists who, twenty years earlier, discussed upon the role of women. Between the years 1850-1860, a set of publications about the working women’s condition shook the French public opinion; those debates reached the Société d’Économie Politique, which had already treated the subject earlier on within wider discussions but never as a central element of the debate. It could also be found in some pages (not many) of the most prestigious economic newspaper of the time, Le journal des Économistes. There is another origin, although it mainly has to do with the women of the privileged classes, which is older; it includes the intellectual tradition of the learned Spain, and more particularly of the “female learned”, a small group of privileged women who claimed more rights –more especially educative ones– and also working opportunities (Lange, 2004, 15). During the 19th century, feminism will see its followers go up, always conditional on the moderation of

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2 “(Section) Sociedades Económicas: Sociedad Libre de Economía Política de Madrid (5th year). Sesión séptima, celebrada el 10 de abril de 1861”, La Gaceta Economista, 2, 1862, pp. 123-130.
3 For further elaboration on the women question and the Ecole Economiste, see J. Scott (1987, 139 and next)
the movement and on the political and social circumstances. Emilia Pardo Bazán and Concepción Arenal stood out in the second half of the 19th century; both wrote about the situation and the social and economic role of women, and will be the visible head of a movement with a minimum presence in the academic world.⁴

With this particular choice of authors and texts I cover the period that goes from 1861 to 1909 and I focus on the particular debate about women in the work market. At the end of the century, a lot of intellectuals showed their opinion about that very issue in Información Oral de la Comisión de Reformas Sociales.⁵ I have to insist on the fact that this is an article in which no attention have been paid to the female voices who defended the women’s rights, because it is a work done adopting from the perspective of the History of the Economic Thought, which consequently centered its ideas around the economists I study. My goal is the analysis of texts by (male) economists and I have considered that no Spanish woman of the time who defended female work could be seen as such.⁶

The article is organized as follows. First I will present the members of the Escuela Economista and then focus on the debate and the impressions these economists had about working women. The Spanish economists, generally speaking, did not see maternity as something incompatible with industrial work, although they did point out elements aimed at solving the shortages of women employed in factories and workshops. The professional training was a solution to reach better wages and less laborious tasks and, in a general way, they did not agree with the fact that the government legislated on this facet. Some people, however, claimed the manufacturing occupations were not convenient, agreeing with the dominant discourse, seeing in the female working people a danger for the social reproduction. I close the work with some brief conclusions where I defend the originality of the debate of these economists in a context dominated by women’s alienation, denying them any individual right and reducing them to the role of mothers, wives and pious women.

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⁴ Several studies have stressed the economic contribution of Concepcion Arenal, for example, by Inés Pérez-Soba Aguilar (2007), and Emilia Pardo Bazán, by Elena Márquez de la Cruz and Ana Martínez Cañete (2007).

⁵ For further elaboration on this topic, see, for example, Arbaiza (2003) and Espuny et al (2006)

⁶ There are relevant scholars that have studied the market labour and the women question in Spain, an interesting collective work is Carmen Sarasúa and Cristina Borderías (2003).
2.- The Escuela Economista: its members and the debate on women in the contemporary society.

The group of liberal economists called Escuela Economista lived its intellectual stage of splendor between 1850 and 1870. We can stand out names like Figuerola, Echegaray, Moret, Colmeiro, Rodríguez, Pastor, Sanromá, Carballo, Carreras and González, and Madrazo (Román, 2003: 43-44) (Almenar, 2000, xxvi). The list is even wider because together with the academician mentioned, there were educated men who, without being experts in Political Economy, were self-educated persons and enthusiasts in the discussions about free trade which monopolized the debates of the group.

Chronologically speaking, some were born in the early Nineteen Century (Bona, Pastor) and the youngest ones in the late 1830s (Echegaray, Moret). Many of them were professors of Political Economy or related subjects in the Spanish universities. Some of them held a key role making policies and being in charge of top positions in the different governments along the second half of the 19th Century - between the Sexenio (1868) and the First Restoration (1875-1902) -. Their most important contribution was in the spreading of the free trade and the popularization of liberalism; and in the confirmation, with the political practice, that the starting of such programs forced to unthinkable sacrifices in the discursive field. The interest to participate in and contribute to politics made them neglect the analytic argument of their contribution; it is a stage where the Spanish economic thought was falling behind regarding the European vanguards, more particularly regarding marginalism, keeping the old taste for the French liberalism, the faded German historicism, or the French solidarism. Of the influences the members of the School receive, and insisting on those which will have more repercussion for the subject that interests us, we have to highlight krausism, a German philosophical current spread in Spain from its main representatives, Krause and Ahrens (Ureña, 1991). In fact, some of the members of the Escuela Economista were, in turn, representatives of the economic krausism (Malo; Blanco, 2006, xv), and the vast majority participated in the educative krausism.

The intellectual and progressive elite to which belonged the group I am studying moved in a context concerned by the modernization of the country (Jiménez – Landi, 1996: 100), by the spread of education and, above all, of the idea of political freedom. Those who actively took part in the achievement of these objectives were: MPs, teachers, professors, publicists and lecturers in centres created deliberately to defend such ideas: the Conferencias Librecambistas, the Asociación Librecambista, the Ateneo
of Madrid, the *Real Academia de Ciencias Políticas y Morales*, the *Sociedad Abolicionista*, etc… Furthermore they are present in the *Conferencias Dominicales*, about which I will talk later on, in the foundation of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza and in many activities related to education. In all those actions, its participation is more linked to the profile of the progressive intellectuals than to the one of the economists.

One of the first references to that group, coining the name of Escuela Economista, was done by one of its contemporaries and members, Benigno Carballo, in *Cursdo de Economía Política* (1855-56). Between the years 1850 and 1870, the Escuela Economista spread its influence upon most of the chairs of the country and upon the handbooks of Political Economy and Treasure (Malo, 2000: 95). As much as the liberal paradigm, Carballodefined the school as the imitation of the behavior of the French liberal economists of the École Economiste or École Optimiste, whose main purpose was the systematization, spreading and practical application of the accepted liberal doctrines (Almenar, 2000, xxii-xviii). Following their example, the Spanish group periodically discussed about economic subjects and current events, informing of literary novelties, conferences, anniversaries and obituaries through its reviews *La Tribuna de los Economistas* (1857-8) and *La Gaceta Economista* (1860-1868), meanwhile the French society published in the prestigious *Journal des Économistes*. Another feature of most of these economists was the political posts they carried out during the second half of the 19th century. They lived the 1854 Revolution, the Bienio Liberal (1854-56) (liberal two-year period) and with the 1868 Revolution they saw an opportunity to apply their ideas and to transform the Spanish reality. That active participation in the course of the nation was without any doubts an incentive for their social interests to expand.

The links that came out between Krause’s philosophy and the Escuela Economista were a determinant element in their social vision. Krause’s philosophy developed itself in Spain based upon the concepts of liberalism and rationalism, with a message stressing the need for education for humanity, emphasizing illiteracy and the national intellectual scarcity on the one hand and the inheritance he received by learning on the other hand. Together with the “ideological relations” (Malo, 2000, 95) between liberalism and Krause’s doctrine, there was a set of personal affinities between its members which could explain such a cooperation. That collaboration reached its highest achievements in the defense of the individuals’ rights, and more particularly speaking in the spreading of the right of compulsory instruction. Many of the Escuela Economista’s members were linked to that facet: Echegaray was the Minister of Public Works and
Buildings during the Sexenio (from July 1869 until the end of 1870); Madrazo, the Director of Public Education in the Provisional Government and the Minister of Public Works and Buildings during the Sexenio (July – November 1871); Sanromá, an Adviser in Public Education during the Restoration (1886-7). There were also a great number of ministers of the Treasury, the most famous one being Figuerola (1869), but we have to add Pastor in 1853 with the Lersundi government (April – September 1853); Echegaray in the Conciliation Office (1871); Moret during the Savoy Monarchy (July 1871); and high ranking positions in the same ministry, for example, Sanromá as the Assistant Secretary in the Treasury under Figuerola (1869). About other Ministries, Moret dealt with Overseas during the provisional government of General Serrano (1868-9) and during the Restoration, he dealt with Overseas again (1897), and the Home Office Department (1883). It was a unique generation of economists regarding political participation, which resulted in an exceptional influence in contemporary Spain.

2.1.- Authors and texts.

In the debates of the Free Society of Political Economy, there exists a clear predominance of the discussions related to free trade. They consequently developed other relevant subjects on the State agenda: making primary education compulsory, freedom of industry and its limitations, the policy of communications and of public works, the freedom to issue money and to banking set up (Almenar, 2000, 63). I have to add to the previous items an interesting discussion on the economic and social function of the female workers, their alternatives and their limitations… it was a question that arrived in Spain impregnated of French taste, with direct references to Jules Simon’s L’Ouvrière; and more international echoes such as the spreading of the individual’s rights which had taken shape in the Sociedad Abolicionista (Abolitionist Society), also attended by women (Sanromá, 1869: 6). In Spain, the spreading of the individual’s rights did not give place to a suffragist defense – saving individualities and the episodes of the Cadiz Regional Assemblies (Perdices, 2007) –but it resulted in a vague feminist movement that defended major social rights and more education and access to some professions.

In the debate of the Free Society of Political Economy, the following persons participated: Bona (Juan Eloy), Pastor, Figuerola, Carballo, Rodríguez Sampedro, Segovia, Moret i Prendergast, Giráldez, Solernou i Castellanos, and Escosura. That heterogeneous group reflected the variety of people who attended the meetings of the
society. In front of the senior members of the association, Bona or Pastor, there were young professors like Moret, or not so young ones like Figuerola. The surname Segovia probably corresponded to the author and politician Antonio María Segovia (1808-1874). Rodríguez Sampedro may have been Faustino Rodríguez San Pedro díaz-Argüelles, a lawyer, a businessman and a politician from Asturias, more linked to the intellectual environment of Madrid. I am ignorant of the personality and origin of the other polemicists who took part: Giráldez, Solernou i Castellanos, and Escosura. I will now make a short presentation of the economists about whom I do have information.

Carballo is circumstantially a key person for this article, first of all because he coined the term “Escuela Economista” and second, because he put to debate the issue about women in the factories. He owes part of his importance in the Spanish economic thought to the fact that he revealed in his Curso de Economía Política (1856-7) – a translation that was quite accurate of the Dictionnaire d’Économie Politique (1854) by Coquelin and Guillaumen – the key points of the French Escuela Optimista (Optimistic School) (Román, 2003: 121; Almenar, 2000: xxiv). His position in the debate about the female workers showed a clear influence of L’Ouvrière (1860) by Jules Simon.

Pastor wrote some of the best contributions of the time about credit and finances – Filosofía del crédito (1850), Lecciones de Economía Política - (Almenar, 2000: xxvii). He was seen as a staunch liberal economist; he was a co-founder of the Association for the Reform of the Tariffs and Customs Duties, the Free Society of Political Economy and the Abolitionist Association.

The Bona brothers, both financiers, were related to Pastor in the Free Society of Political Economy and professionally in the important insurance company La Española. Furthermore, Francisco Bona took part in some conferences in the Association for the Reform of the Tariffs and Customs Duties and the Free Trade Conferences. They were both present in the discussion of the Free Society of Political Economy, Juan Eloy Bona as a polemicist and Francisco Bona as the president of the three sessions.

Figuerola was one of the most famous economists of the time, for the fiscal reform he promoted from the Ministry of Finance during the Sexenio (1869). He developed a wide spreading activity, as the head of many associations (Real Academy of Political and Moral Sciences or the Madrid Cultural Centre – Ateneo – among others), in a way or other, he always tried to spread the idea of liberty; he participated in

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7 He also published “Socialismo por ignorancia” in the same Journal (Segovia, 1861, 561-579).
the foundation of the Free Society of Political Economy and the Association for the Reform of the Tariffs and Customs Duties. He was a civil engineer and a professor in the same school in Madrid.

Moret was one of the youngest members of the Escuela Economista; chosen as an independent MP for Almadén (Ciudad Real) when he was 25, he dealt with different ministries during the Governments of the Sexenio, the Savoy Monarchy and the Restoration. He published different works regarding the female issue. He carried out a review of *L’Ouvrière* in an article entitled “Of the future of the working classes of women” (Moret, 1861, 179-189), published in *La Gaceta Economista*. He was the head of the organization committee of the inauguration of the course of the Association of the Woman in 1879, with a conference entitled “The education of women”. He extended the *Ensayo de una filosofía feminita. Refutación a Moebius* by Romero navarro (1909), with a text where he praised the achievements of the female doctrines, being the Minister of the Interior.

Sanromá also carried out political responsibilities and posts but never got any ministerial chairs. He was the one who spent in most of his work a special attention to female training and to female workers. When he was lecturing Political, Administrative and Economic Law at Santiago University (1854-8), he made some comments on the improvement of women’s legal conditions which were later used by his students. In his book *Política de Taller* (1876), he devoted a chapter out of the six ones that make up the volume to explain that the lack of training was one of the causes for the women to be exploited at work, to give economic reasons for a lower female wage and ways to improve it. *Memoria sobre las Escuelas de Artes y Oficios en Inglaterra, Italia, Francia, Bélgica* (1886) is an analysis about the most important schools of arts and crafts in Europe on which was based and established the restructuring of vocational training in Spain (1887) (Martínez-Rodríguez, 2006b), and where he inserted a good number of comments devoted to women’s vocational training schools.

There was a second collective moment where different members of the Escuela Economista worked together on the women question. They were the *Conferencias Dominicales* in which Sanromá, Rodríguez, Echegaray, Moret and Canalejas

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8 In 1859, a young graduate, Díaz de Rábago, presented his dissertation in the Law Faculty at the University of Santiago about “Patria Potestae widow rights”, a discourse inspired by his former professor Sanromá. Joaquin Díaz de Rábago became in the most relevant and international economist of Galicia during the second half of 19th Century. His liberal ideology was limited for his Christian beliefs (Martínez-Rodríguez, 2006, 275).
participated. In a circumstantial way, we could add the names of Labra and Segovia, this latter being likely to be the same character as the one I mentioned earlier on in the dissertations of the Free Society of Political Economy. It is the collective book with a major spreading in the Spain of the time about female education, and extended to the international context as the representative of the progressive trend of the time experienced by the country (Offen, 2000: 121-123). The participants made very different contributions in their lectures, focus on the necessity to improve the education of the Spanish middle-class women; some insisted on the virtues of being a mother, providing her with a nearly mystical halo (Moret); others pointed out that women should have a more active role in society, a major influence in the still vague social sector that was monopolized by the charitable activities of the Catholic Church (Sanromá); some even saw the conferences as the most suitable platform to inform of the new civil marriage (Rodríguez, Labra). They represent the intellectual ideology of the middle-class they belonged to, tinged with a high interest for education, but in reality unable to break with the argument of the domesticity they linked their members to. In the 1869 Spain, the female work of the middle-class was still seen as something rate.

Table 1.- Sunday Conferences about the education of women (Madrid, 1869).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fecha</th>
<th>Autor</th>
<th>Título</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21.02.1869</td>
<td>D. Fernando de Castro</td>
<td>Discurso inaugural leído</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.02.1869</td>
<td>D. Joaquín María Sanromá</td>
<td>Primera conferencia sobre la educación social de la mujer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.02.1869</td>
<td>D. Juan de Dios de la Rada y Delgado</td>
<td>Segunda conferencia sobre la educación de la mujer por la historia de otras mujeres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07.03.1869</td>
<td>D. F de Paula Canalejas</td>
<td>Tercera conferencia sobre la educación literaria de la mujer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.03.1869</td>
<td>D. Fernando Corradi</td>
<td>Cuarta conferencia sobre la educación de la mujer por la historia de otras mujeres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.03.1869</td>
<td>D. Juan de Dios de la Rada y Delgado</td>
<td>Quinta conferencia sobre la mujer y la legislación castellana</td>
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<tr>
<td>07.03.1869</td>
<td>D. F de Paula Canalejas</td>
<td>Sexta conferencia sobre la higiene de la mujer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.03.1869</td>
<td>Antonio María Segovia</td>
<td>Del lujo: artículo leído en la conferencia dominical</td>
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<tr>
<td>21.03.1869</td>
<td>D. Rafael M. de Labra</td>
<td>Quinta conferencia sobre la mujer y la legislación castellana</td>
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<tr>
<td>28.03.1869</td>
<td>D. Santiago Casas</td>
<td>Sexta conferencia sobre la higiene de la mujer</td>
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<tr>
<td>04.04.1869</td>
<td>D. Segismundo Moret y Prendergast</td>
<td>Séptima conferencia sobre la vocación y profesión de los hijos</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.04.1869</td>
<td>D. José Echegaray</td>
<td>Octava conferencia del estudio de las ciencias físicas en la educación de la mujer</td>
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<td>18.04.1869</td>
<td>D. Gabriel Rodríguez</td>
<td>Novena conferencia de las ciencias económicas y sociales en la educación de la mujer</td>
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<tr>
<td>25.04.1869</td>
<td>D. Florencio Álvarez Ossorio</td>
<td>Décima conferencia algunas consideraciones generales sobre el matrimonio</td>
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<tr>
<td>25.04.1869</td>
<td>Francisco Asenjo Barberi</td>
<td>La música y la educación de la mujer. Conferencia leída</td>
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<td>04.04.1869</td>
<td>D. José Moreno Nieto</td>
<td>Onceava conferencia. Influencia de la mujer en la sociedad</td>
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<tr>
<td>09.05.1869</td>
<td>D. Tomás Tapia</td>
<td>Duodécima conferencia. La religión en la conciencia y en la vida</td>
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<td>16.05.1869</td>
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<td>Decimotercera conferencia. Educación conyugal de la mujer</td>
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<td>23.05.1869</td>
<td>D. Francisco Pi y Margal</td>
<td>Decimocuarta conferencia sobre la educación de la mujer en la sociedad</td>
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Source: Conferencias dominicales, in the version kept in the Biblioteca Pública Arus – Barcelona.  

The female middle-class, free of any economic shortages, had the responsibility to educate the future ruling classes; for that, they should have had better knowledge to carry out their social function as guides and teachers of their offspring better. The right for women to study and have a profession remained diluted in a role of transmitter. Working was a duty, motivated by women’s misery, and not the result of a personal decision. In the debate about female workers, the key question is what kind of work was

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9 In other catalogues there is a 15th conference: “Sobre la misión de la mujer” by Castelar, but I did not locate it.
the most suitable one, and the answer was subject to their civil status. For the young unmarried women, working in the factory seemed convenient as well as a social training to turn them into skilled workers. The place of work of married women did not seem to be so clear.

3.- Domestic jobs and market work, but at home or out?

Among the members of the Escuela Economista, there were two views regarding female work. A minority defended the exclusion of women from industrial work, resorting to her exclusive reproductive tasks. Whoever defended industrial work for women, which was the second option, did not find it incompatible with their mothering condition. What’s more, they appealed to the fact that industrial mechanization offered material benefits regarding to the traditional forms of occupation – particularly work at home – letting it to the own family’s material well-being. Within each of these two theories, the economists brought arguments which qualified their positions and that I will comment in the development of the epigraph.

“Is the influence that the modern industry exercises to drag women out of home fair and legitimate?” (La Gaceta Economista, 1861, 2, 124). With this question, Carballo opened the only debate on female workers in the Escuela Economista. The economist from the Canary Islands did not inquire into what the real contribution of women to modern industry was, in terms of occupation or wage, but did so into the negative moral effects of their presence in modern industry. Carballo took it for granted that each sex had a function of its own: women in the domestic environment and men in the public life. That so-called complementarity, supported by the fact that the spheres of activity of both genders were different, established an idyllic balance between a world of its own for women and another one for men (Knibiehler, 2001, 61), although a clear conviction of the female inferiority was deduced from the functions attributed to each sphere.

Pastor accused the female proletarianization of provoking the moral deterioration of the working classes. Bona responded that it was the capitalist himself who was the first one interested in dignifying his work centre (La Gaceta Economista, 1861, 4, 292), avoiding this way all kind of licentious behavior among men and women workers. For Sanromá, claiming that the female virtue was even more protected inside the workshop than in the factory was an assessment that was completely without foundation, hiding economic motives; in an explicit way, he quoted the campaigns by
the workers’ movement to expel women from the factories and eliminate this way their 
competition (Sanromá, 1876, 70). In the late century, from the reviews linked to the 
workers’ associations, arguments such as the one that follows were forcefully repeated: 
“It is a proved fact that in the jobs where women can be some kind of competition for 
men, men earn a wage that is lower than in those jobs where that competition is not 
possible; thus, even if it were out of pure selfishness, the male worker should try to get 
women out of the workshop or factory for her to be able to devote her time to only and 
exclusively domestic tasks”.10 Sanromá emphasized that the female workers were not 
more of a competition to men than any other men. The wage did not go down if the 
worker who was hired was a woman; women were hired because their wage was lower 
(Sanromá, 1876, 72).

In front of the proposal, supported by Carballo and Pastor, stipulating that work 
in the factory degraded women compared to other occupations, Sanromá found solid 
economic reasons that infringed the previous statement: if a law in favor of the 
expulsion of the female workers was passed in order to avoid the competition with men,
a huge number of unemployed women would sweep over the (few) jobs that were 
socially accepted for women (Sanromá, 1876, 75-76). Sanromá’s statements gave away 
an acute observer of reality. Actually, the first legislative measures concerning female 
work were interpreted as an action that was not aimed right from the beginning at 
improving the workers’ conditions, but to introduce in the market certain ideas about 
what the role each of the sexes had to carry out (Nielfa, 2003, 40).

When Figuerola and Giráldez talked about the benefits of the industrial work for women 
they hesitated when they pointed out that the factory was the best option for the married 
woman too, since the proposal was opposed to the prevailing opinion about the wife’s 
exclusive maternal function. The construction of manliness in the Spanish workers’ 
scopes was also based on a definition of the worker’s respectability and dignity based 
on the exclusive responsibility of the man as the guardian of the morality and decency 
of the women of his class, in such a way that a working wife would humiliate her 
husband first and foremost (M. Nash, 1993, p. 617-621). The adoption of the discourse 
on domesticity first aimed at the middle-classes made by the working-classes denied the 
evidence that the wage of the wife was vital for the family maintenance.

10 Quoted by M. Nash (2001 [1993], 619) from Revista Anarquista Acracia.
Figuerola vaguely suggested that the mechanization and the technical changes would allow to re-devise a new version of the mechanized domestic factory, letting people – particularly women - enjoy at home the advantages of a job free of industrial complexity (La Gaceta Economista, 1861, 2, 130). But, farther away from being convincing, it was a mere justification not to deal with a problem that lacked answers. (La Gaceta Economista, 1861, nº 2, 130): Who would look after the children and the elderly if the mother was in the factory? Defending the discourse on domesticity could also be interpreted as a solution to achieve other goals related to carrying on maintaining a liberal state in front of the new social necessities, at the expense of sacrificing the personal and professional development of women. Pastor clearly suggests that however high the wage from the factory was, society was losing more than what it could win with the female industrial work: “Just put breast-feeding places and nursery schools, to compensate the absence of the family mother. Would you manage to fill in the emptiness left by the important duties of the motherhood and the home education with that?” (La Gaceta Economista, 1861, 2, 129). Even if the State had the capacity to make a social investment in institutions and centers that would try to palliate the health and educative cares supplied freely by mothers, the contemporaries predicted a failure in trying it. At least it was easier to keep oneself at this level of the discourse than to analyze the objective causes of the lack of public institutions those social services could provide. One of the pillars of the Escuela Economista was the theoretical defense of the Liberal State, a State that did not intervene in the economy, in front of the analysis of the new social demands (J.M. Serrano, 2003, p. 176-180). Studying thoroughly the position of the Liberal State, Rodríguez Sampedro pointed out that the solution would not be in providing a subsidy to those families whose incomes would force the mothers to work outside the house either, “because it would encourage the lack of foresight and would open up to thousands of imprudent links” (La Gaceta Economista, 1861, 2, 129). The gap in the debate about who would do the housework if women worked outside home exposed the true motivations of the prevailing discourse about the female function.

Since the Liberal State did not have to intervene directly, turning to long term solutions was what remained, like education. For Giráldez, a training would allow women to develop skilled works, always provided that it was about a temporary occupation while they were not forming a family of their own. Education would also keep them away from the bad companies, since a solid morality was the best guarantee
that they would not fall into actions that would make them lose their reputation and would wreck their future (La Gaceta Economista, 1861, 4, 294-5). Sanromá and Figuerola insisted on the benefits of professional training for a humble young girl to be able to become a skilled worker (La Gaceta Economista, 1861, 4, 292). Sanromá, as the Public Education Adviser in 1886, made up a study to reorganize the vocational schools in Spain using the European models;\(^{11}\) in it, he pointed out that in the developed countries there were vocational schools for girls. He picked up information about the education of the young girls in different cities in Italy; he even reproduced in the pages of his book pages the table of the subjects taught in the Elementary School and the Superior School in Milan and Genoa (Sanromá, 1886, 58-59). He emphasized the benefits of working training, without worrying to know if it was or not an act of emancipation, or without trying to develop the dichotomy between home and workshop (Martínez, 2006b and 2002). But Sanromá insisted on the fact that there existed more elements for women to have lower wages. Even if those positions were the most advanced one of the debate, they contained a clear underestimation of the female working skills. First of all, supposing that they worked temporarily, before getting married, they assumed that women lacked work vocation. Regarding the work of the young girls, Moret introduced a nuance he considered to be worrying: in the large cities, the group of those girls who went to the factory, not to form a family or to help in the economy of the house, but to keep their independence, grew up. Moret literally described this trend as a clear result of the “denial of the psychological qualities that constitute the diversity of trends in women and in men” (La Gaceta Economista, 1861, 4, 291) and uses the expression “moral perversion” when he refers to those young girls.

Apart from the previous considerations, the reasons provided to defend industrial work are about hygiene and wage. Even if the wage one earned working in the factory was higher than the one a worker could receive in other occupations, Sanromá tried to analyze the reason why female remuneration was lower the men’s while doing the same job. His answer refers to the concept of subsistence: the wage pays the individual according to his/her material necessities. That formulation is interesting for it saw both men and women as individuals having material necessities of their own, which have to be satisfied through a wage; he did not assess the fact that the man was the head of the family or if the woman was single, they were just individuals:

\(^{11}\) For further information regarding this study, see (Martínez 2006b)
“Let’s compare as a general rule the respective necessities of both sexes, and I am obviously talking of the working classes’ most urgent ones. In the craftswoman, there is usually a little more sobriety than in her male counterpart: what she wears is more simple; what she spends outside home is more reduced; without mentioning tobacco and other customs men are used to carrying out and which absorb a good deal of their wage, although they do not turn in real vices. From there, there turns out to be some kind of balance between the wages of both sexes: if women earn less, they also spend less.” (Sanromá, 1876, 66-7).

The assumption about more usual or frequent wages was that it included the subsistence and reproduction costs, but it followed a different criterion if it dealt with a male or female wage. The male remuneration includes both costs, being the one responsible of the effective reproduction of his family. The female salary was equal or lower than what she needed to survive because it was implied she depended on a man who could be either her husband or her father. Pastor pointed out that the most widespread idea was that men had to maintain their family (La Gaceta Economista, 1861, 2, 129), implicitly accepting the secondary function of the female wage, and as a matter of fact, her economic dependence. The idea of a family salary, that is, only one wage received by the head of the family, the one able to maintain and feed all his people, got more and more support as the century was passing, and it was one of the slogans used by the workers’ movement to expel women from the factories. (M. Nash, 1986, p.621)

Another interesting idea was the sanitary advantage of work in the factories. Sanromá insisted on that point, making it clear that the working conditions of the time were far from being like the unhealthy facilities from Manchester in the early century; the working efficiency itself had led to an improvement of the facilities and the capitalists saw it as something convenient to increase the investment in physical capital, which was impossible to carry out in the small workshops and even less possible in the home of the female pieceworkers. He attributed part of the material improvement in the
industrial places to the efficiency of the capital itself and to the demands of the working societies as well (Sanromá, 1876, 90).

“There is ventilation; there is light; there is space; there is inner regulation that puts a limit on time. It is not easy to calculate how much we have improved in that part, thanks to the simultaneous diligence of science and industry. All improved, they say, for the benefit of the female workers: looms, processes, wards, and stairs. What before was squalid and narrow, what suffocated is now comfortable, neat and nearly smart.”

So many domestic female workers would consider themselves as satisfied with half of these advantages! Look at them in their garret doing such unpleasant work: as if tied on a bank for twelve, fourteen and sometimes seventeen hours; if they are using a sewing machine, they are threatened by tuberculosis; if they are needle workers or lace makers, they may have eyesight problems or any other organic alterations; in summer, they have to put up with suffocating heat; in winter, with freezing cold; some sleepless nights because of urging work […]” (Sanromá, 1876, 85-86).

Among the Spanish economists we analyzed, the idea that women had always carried out a productive contribution to the industry prevailed, and furthermore they considered that it was their obligation to do so (La Gaceta Economista, 1861, 2, 125). For Figuerola, married women had to work, because in a family unit, the number of consumers overcame the number of producers (La Gaceta Economista, 1861, 2, 127). The development of the idea was not very solid, because it identified the producer with someone working for the market; Carballo rightly answered that women did not lose their positions as producers just because they worked from home, referring to a whole lot of works that could be done from home (La Gaceta Economista, 1861, 2, 127). But none of them both saw the housework, that was not paid, as productive, which was a clear sign of the values they shared; thus agreeing with their concrete position of middle-class men, ignorant of such tasks.

Praising the advantages of industrial work did not exempt from acknowledging that poverty was associated with proletarianization. According to Figuerola, the modern

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13 “Hay ventilación; hay luz; hay espacio; hay un reglamento interior que tiene tasado el tiempo. No es fácil calcular cuánto hemos mejorado en esta parte, gracias á la simultánea diligencia de la ciencia y de la industria. Todo se ha perfeccionado, dicen, en beneficio de las operarias: telares, procedimientos, cuadras, escaleras. Lo que antes era sórdido y estrecho, lo que asfixiaba, es ahora desahogado, pulcro y casi elegante.

¡Cuántas operarias domésticas se darían por satisfechas con la mitad de estas ventajas! Vedlas en su desván junto á una labor ingrata: atadas como en un potro durante doce, catorce y á veces diez y siete horas; si es con máquina de coser, amenazadas con tisis; si son bordados o encajeras, con peligro de la vista ó de otras alteraciones orgánicas; en verano con un calor sofocante; en invierno transidas de frío; algunas noches sin dormir porque apremia la tarea [...]”
industry had caused poverty among women, for the same reason it had caused poverty among men: the lack of a “correlative industrial training” (La Gaceta Economista, 1861, 4, 293); the machinery, the technical progress, permitted to involve women in more productive sectors, which would help normalize the figure of women in wage-earning jobs: “Not only did not the development of machinery, and of the big industry, result in a decrease of women’s wages but it provided them with quite a lot of means to make a living in a decent way” (La Gaceta Economista, 1861, nº2, 128). Bona was of the opinion that the industrial development itself made it possible to carry out a natural selection of tasks and that women little by little occupied “more delicate” branches of the industry (La Gaceta Economista, 1861, nº2, 125). Sanromá did not share the idea that the technical progress automatically gave rise to a selection of the most refined jobs for women, except if women had a training that would turn them into skilled labour. The lack of economic value, justified by the lack of training and an innate meekness, had made women as ideal machinists to carry out mechanical and repetitive jobs (Sanromá, 1876, 63), which did not mean – as was shown by experience – the carrying out of light or sedentary jobs (Sanromá, 1876, 58-59). The lack of skills and of basic training, according to Sanromá, hit women more strongly than men as the high figures of female illiteracy showed (Nuñez, 1993).

4.- Conclusions

This is a first approach to the Spanish liberal economists’ ideas, found in the Escuela Economista, about female workers and more concretely about the importance of the domesticity discourse; it is an interesting debate unnoticed among the Spanish scholars and shows transgressor ideas in front of the prevailing ideology. The international events related to the women’s situation, and more specifically to the proletarianization, which occured during the 1840s-1870s, indicate that the debate was socially relevant when the Escuela Economista was in its phase of splendor. The foreign influence may have helped with the fact that such ideas germinated among the Spanish economists, but besides, there were some factors which made them more capable of defending female emancipation: their liberal and progressive mind, being in favour of equality, and the conviction that education was necessary to transform society.

Most participants in the discussion about the female proletarianization stated that industrial work presented advantages regarding domestic factory and workshop jobs. They accepted the fact that industrialization was a new work phase, for both men and
women. Those features showed a partial rejection of the discourse about the ideal of domesticity applied to the popular classes, supported by an analysis that was more economic and the objective of the situation. But some more traditionalist aspects are present in the discourse, which cause hesitations when defending industrial work for married women for the reasons (of wage and hygiene) which made it suitable for the young girls in front of occupations in the domestic industry or at home. One interesting aspect that could be found behind that hesitation saying that the wives did not work out of the house, was the conviction that the State did not have to interfere in the private sphere of the social organization: if the workers’ wives put an end to her domestic obligations to go to their place of work every day, just like men, who was going to perform the tasks they exclusively carried out at home? If they did not, not only did the cost-free of their cares stop to exist, but private or state services were not even available to palliate their absence. The liberal dogma did not contemplate that fact that the State could assume all those functions and the social morality of the time found it unacceptable for women not to fulfill their natural duties.

This article may not exhaust the number of texts the liberal economists wrote about a previous occurrence directly linked to such a current subject such as the conciliation of the family and domestic work, of the family and work life, because it occupies an unheard-of place in the Spanish historiography. For the members of the Escuela Economista, motherhood and domesticity was a reality the reading of which had to be adapted to each social sector: difficult for the woman who had to contribute to the family maintenance; more feasible for the one who would only work in exceptional conditions, if a misfortune demanded it; and a joyful obligation for the little middle-class woman who only had to worry about her marriage. As training was spreading, the young middle-class girls started to have ambitions that went further than just the family ones and the defenders of the wife as “home angel” tried to spread her influence, even convincing the proletarian strata of the fact that women had to remain at home. It is a discourse that denied the rights for women to achieve intellectual and professional fulfillment; an ideology that tried to camouflage the limitations of the State regarding social security benefits and the rights of the individuals such as education, taking care of the children and of the elderly, but above all that denied the right of women to choose to guarantee the cost-free of those services. Towards the end of the century, the voice of women started to be heard, but the mother’s and the wife’s prevailed. They had to wait.
Work and home still went on without being harmonized, a debate that is still without being sorted out in 21st century Spain.

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