Maria Angeles Duran Heras


Maria Angeles Duran Heras’ *Unpaid Work in the Global Economy* explores a very interesting and important dimension of women’s work, i.e., unpaid work that is often ignored in National Accounting Statistics. The book is an interesting work contributing to wide-ranging debates on women’s work participation, unpaid work and care work. The book is a reflection of an in-depth study on the conceptual and empirical aspects of unpaid work. The book provides an understanding of non-remunerated work from a multi-disciplinary perspective deriving a large source of information from sociological observations. Though the author has written from a micro perspective within the social context of Spain, her comparisons with other countries makes the book interesting for scholars across the globe. In fact, the strength of the book lies in the rich source of information provided by the author throughout the analysis of various cross-country perspectives on women’s unpaid work.

Non-remunerated work has received attention after the World Conferences on women and recognition by the international community about the need for recognising the oft-ignored concept of non-remunerated work mostly carried out by women. The book is divided into eight chapters revolving around the nuances of remunerated and non-remunerated work. The chapters of the book are based on three important objectives. Firstly, to offer an innovative view of the role played by non-remunerated work in the production of the wealth and welfare of all countries, and also the international nexus between remunerated work and non-remunerated work through migration and remittances. Secondly, to compare the concepts discussed in the first objective with available empirical sources. Thirdly, to create awareness of some sources that have yet to be published or which have not been widely circulated, such as research studies carried out on Time and Society and research based on the care economy.

In the first chapter, conceptual limits between work and employment are established. The chapter discusses the differences between employment, unemployment, not being in employment and hidden or informal work. The introduction seems interesting and the definition of work, as mentioned in the Spanish Language Academy, is informative for people who are not familiar with the society in Spain. But an internationally-recognised definition would have enabled the readers to understand the concept of work in a better way. Since the author has borrowed and referred to a lot of United Nations Statistics, a similar comparative definition of work as followed by United Nations could
have been more interesting for readers. The employment figures discussed in the chapter mask profound differences between regions and countries, as well as across social groups. Regions like South Asia, North Africa and West Asia have recorded very low female work participation rates, which are a concern not only among feminist economists and policy makers, but also many scholars interested in women's work. The chapter also highlights the importance of unpaid work and time-use statistics. There is also a comparison of remunerated and non-remunerated work and, lastly, there is discussion about women's representation in trade unions.

The second chapter focuses on organisational units in which a greater proportion of non-remunerated work takes place in the world. The chapter also discusses the emotional and social support networks that underpin households, together with the material conditions under which the occupants live together. The chapter discusses how the household serves as a workshop to produce services. There is also an analysis of different types of households and the workloads prevalent in them. Here, she highlights on an interesting debate about whether “single parent households” can be considered as family and provides examples of countries like Germany, United Kingdom and France where there is a considerable percentage of single parent households. However, while such trends are interesting to explore the gendered division of household labour that might reflect that the reduction of the number of persons in the household affords relief from the load of domestic work, such an affect can be neutralised and even counteracted by the loss of co-operation or the division of work within the remaining members of the household, the loss of economies of scale and the parallel raising of standards demanded or of the quality of services produced for the most part of self-consumption.

The third chapter on a critical review of the System of National Accounts and especially of GDP provides an overview of how in order to achieve GDP growth targets that many countries set themselves; the easiest and only way to this is to incorporate into the market a portion of the potential female labour force that was formerly involved in unpaid work in their homes.

The next chapter tries to address a very important debate about work and leisure and tries to analyse the degree of freedom, necessity and coercion in non-remunerated work. The analysis of Spanish society on non-remunerated work and its interpretations uncover dynamics of household division of labour. Given that time is a limited resource, the use of time in self-maintenance and care for others reduces the opportunity to take on employment, education and other activities. The chapter also highlights the contribution of Time Use Surveys to enhance an understanding about basic tasks at home and time allocated for those tasks.