

# **A Question of Gendered Inequality: Transnational Labour Relations in Private Homes**

(DRAFT VERSION) by Bettina Haidinger

*Remarks: the empirical material used for this paper is limited but I hope it is sufficient to underline the arguments elaborated. Unfortunately there was not enough time to work out all material collected for my dissertation.*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The contribution will explore the hierarchical structure of transnational labour relations in private homes. The argumentation of this paper is based on my previous research on migrant domestic work in Austria (Caixeta et.al. 2004; Haidinger, Gendera 2007), on findings about undocumented migrant work within seven countries of the European Union (Undocumented Workers' Transition-UWT- not yet published) and on results from my PHD thesis on transnational household organisation and the gendered division of labour in the case of Ukrainian domestic workers in Austria. In all three projects the main methodology applied were in-depth interviews with migrant (domestic) workers, furthermore I carried out some field research in Ukraine and derived information from interviews with relevant stakeholders, activists and experts on Ukrainian migration to the European Union.

Facing the rise and the increasing importance of migrant domestic work for the maintenance of European households, the article will discuss the significance of hierarchies arising from the informal, international and gendered nature of labour relations in private homes. Since my main sources of information come from migrant workers employed in private homes it is the perspective of migrant women – however through my interpretation – that sheds light on hierarchies at the workplace experienced and described by them.

Theoretically, I am referring to theories of transnational migration for which the process of migration, the maintenance of social ties between the place of destination and the place of origin are central. Transmigrants are acting, deciding, caring and are identifying themselves in networks tying them to two or more societies at the same time. From this standpoint it is important to consider both the condition of work, life and migration in the country of origin – in my case Ukraine – and the country of migrant women's preliminary or stable destination.

The paper is divided into four sections, each of them of course entangled to the other ones. The first section will analyse the gendered division of labour in private homes and its impact on the commodification of domestic work. In the second section I will describe the predominant form of employment, namely informal work of migrant women, in private households and its characteristics. The third section will give an insight into labour and living conditions in Ukraine, in women's motivations to migrate under often weird circumstances and the structural exclusion of migrant women in Austria due to restrictive migration policies. Finally, the fourth section will analyse which impact the migration of women has at their places of origin.

## **2. GENDERED DIVISION OF LABOUR BETWEEN WOMEN OF DIFFERENT CLASS AND ORIGIN IN PRIVATE HOMES**

The organization of housework is a broadly experienced social problem, which receives very little public attention. Although Austrian women's participation in paid labour has increased steadily over the past decades, they continue to bear the primary responsibility for childcare and housework. Moreover, they continue to perform this work free of charge, regardless of whether they have a paid job or not. (Federal Ministry of Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection 2003: 21)

Solutions for the regulation of housework are sought on an individual, household-internal basis, not through radical redistribution of tasks between women and men: the employment of a

domestic worker allows the circumvention of possible conflicts concerning the "fifty / fifty" division of domestic work which – moreover - is often described from the perspective of the employer as tedious, frustrating and senseless. Tensions surrounding the performance of housework are thus resolved by outsourcing the work involved from the nuclear family to someone from outside. The requisite skills and responsibilities however remain with women: women act both as employers and as employees in this sector. To that extent, the chosen strategy for reconciling paid work with family responsibilities has left the gendered division of labour intact. Female employers may have won quality time for their families and/or their careers; the task of running the household remains in the hands of women.

The transfer however of annoying, monotonous household work strengthens boundary demarcation on the grounds of ethnicity. The "modern woman of the house" stands in opposition to the migrant domestic worker. The former passes on her dirty work to the latter, so that she can spend time on tasks for the home and family that are ostensibly of higher quality, without compromising her own image as a self-confident, emancipated, wage-earning (career) woman. Migrant women also reflect upon the hierarchies and are very well aware of their role as "second-class persons" within a structure that excludes them from all rights. Their reflections express ambivalence to their own feelings, and they develop a strong tendency to be considerate and understanding towards the employers. As one interviewee puts it: "It's like it used to be: kings and their servants. You can tell, when I come she feels like a princess. (...) But I also understand her. Somehow they believe they want to do something good for themselves. Not clean up at home, cook for the child and husband. Just have a little time to themselves..." (Anna, in Caixeta et.al. 2004)

Employing domestic workers can only work as a viable option as long as the workers' earnings remain considerably lower than those of their employers. The purchasing power of (dual-earner) families in the higher income bracket meets the supply of low-cost labour in the service sector. Such a supply exists thanks to the emergence of a specific class of women with no access to alternative sources of income. This development in the labour market has been the result of both structural forms of exclusion and sexist and racist discrimination in the labour market (Ehrenreich 2003: 95).

In Austria, restrictive immigration laws (Law on Aliens) and the Austrian Alien Employment Law impose important limits on migrant women's options, which I shall elaborate on in chapter four. These laws, which regulate access to the labour market according to nationality, resonate with a parallel development towards the segmentation of the labour market along the lines of ethnicity, thus helping to reshape the hierarchy on the labour market.<sup>1</sup> It is – as the research on migrant domestic work shows – not only because of their low wages that these women are hired as domestic workers. In Austria, migrant women are often perceived of as representing underdeveloped societies and traditional ways of life (see Caixeta et al. 2004). As such, they represent attributes that their employers wish to dissociate from their own emancipated lifestyle, and which they project onto their 'exotic' employees: caring, self-sacrificing, motherly, submissive, tidy. The conjunction of nationality (ethnicity, culture, race) with gender has thus generated a new category of women that can be subordinated to the category of emancipated Austrian women (Anderson 2000: 152; Cruz Roja 2004). The thirdworldist interpretations of the role of these women naturalizes their 'traditional dispositions' and hides the class asymmetry

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<sup>1</sup> In the cleaning and housekeeping sector, as well as in health and related services, jobs continue to be occupied by migrant women and not by Austrians, regardless of fluctuations in the general labour market. Austrian women, it would appear, are definitively distancing themselves from (paid) domestic work.

which situates women in particular social or labour niches according to their sex, origin, legal status, living situation or ethnicity. Brigitte Young (2000) has compared the relationship between employers and employees in the private household to the feudal relations between a lady and her maid. In such relations, formal individual rights do not play a significant role. Rather, these relations are characterized by a highly personalized and hierarchical bond between employer and employee. (for details see next section) The husband/male partner remains distant from this constellation. He continues to leave the organization of his private life to women. In the private sphere he only consumes without having to participate in domestic work, thus remaining free to deploy all his energy in the public sphere.

One very important feature underlying the process of (re)valuing paid reproductive work has to do with some immaterial aspects of the relation: trust, intimacy, feelings, attention, affection, etc. is key when accepting an unknown person into the home. Aspects of the affective relationship include on the one hand the employer's dependency on migrant domestic work necessary for the household's social reproduction and for tasks employers are reluctant to complete; in social care (child care, elderly care) the emotional dependence on the employee is even stronger. On the other hand prevails the employee's dependency on the employer in terms of her material and legal status. Despite these mutual dependencies a hierarchical relation due to class and ethnic differences exists, a vertical social inequality between women from different countries and social milieus. Differentiated participation and access to material resources force migrant women to enter into employment relationships in private households. At the same time, these relationships contribute to the solidification of social inequalities. Thus, the employment of a domestic worker has proven to be advantageous for the employer, while, for the domestic worker, it ensures that they can (partially) make ends meet and cover subsistence, it is also accompanied by a number of risks as well as greater dependence.

### **3. *INTERNATIONAL DIVISION OF LABOUR: INFORMAL AND AFFECTIVE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMPLOYEES AND EMPLOYERS IN PRIVATE HOMES, "FRIENDLY" POWER RELATIONS OR JUST ANOTHER JOB?***

A key debate that has emerged in recent years is around whether paid domestic work is “just another job” requiring recognition and professionalisation or if payment for domestic work necessarily furthers inequality, particularly between women? (Anderson 2006: 7) Anderson (2000) has argued that the logic of social reproduction is such that the employment of a domestic worker reinscribes gendered, classed and racialised roles, and that what is being purchased is not simply labour power but “personhood”.

Domestic work in form of cleaning and caring in private households is a typically female dominated sector of the informal economy. Laura Agustin (2005: 108) speaks about the gender of ‘a certain kind of labour’. What is meant is working in the wide reach of the service sector performing in particular ‘affective labour’ (Mezzadra 2005). The production of affects must be conceived in terms of the production of a relation (to a customer or a patient or the employer), subjectivity itself – with its most intimate qualities: language, affects, desires, and so on – is “put to value”. Providing care and services requires interpersonal competence, capability to feel empathy, getting to know your counterpart, building up a relation: the commodity exchanged is

the relation itself between customer and vendor, between employer and employee. One of the main difficulties arising in this kind of labour is the problem of delimitation. Where are the limits of working time (in 24 hour care), of the tasks to be completed, and of your bodily integrity (when working in animation)?

The position of the employer can be perceived as privileged. Hierarchies between employers and employees are not only visible when shedding light on the often abusive way in which employees are treated but hierarchies are created because such kind of migrant labour simply exists: 'Perhaps we have now this moment historically and socially that there are these different kind of groups: people who are in need for a domestic worker, and people who need a job. And the two things go together, they are complementary. I do not accuse people who hire a domestic worker. But I would want them [employers] to reflect, also to question their positions as Austrian majority', says a Bulgarian student (UWT). On the other hand 'very correct' employers reflecting their privileged position turn out to be ridiculous when 'over-appreciating' a domestic worker's status in Austria which she in fact does not have: 'she does not say that I am a 'cleaning lady/Putzfrau'... thanks thanks. I don't care if she calls me 'putzfrau' or not. Household cleaning – no problem. I do not feel these words, this is not my language. But I thought about hundreds of times. If I was a man I could easily work on a construction site and earning 'normally' like the other people too. But my documents and my curriculum say: I am a woman.' In this quote by a young woman from CIS the allotment of domestic work to 'women', the deeply inscribed gendered division of labour is emphasised.

As mentioned in the previous sections the employer–employee relationship in private households is characterized by its personal nature and the emotions associated with such an arrangement (see Cruz Roja 2004). A trustful relation between employers and employees is very decisive in this branch since the workers enter the core private sphere of their employers. In the UWT project, the example of a cleaning job for two years in a flat of a woman whom the interviewee never met because she was never present when coming to clean on weekends was mentioned: 'I cleaned her house for two years without knowing her and without ever having seen her from face to face.' A high level of trust is required to let any unknown person enter and clean (=very intimate form of moving in a flat) your private house. Therefore, changing domestic worker is not very welcome. This example also sheds light on the nature of domestic work as 'invisible work': in general, the employers usually prefer not to be present when their employees are working. Notes (salaries are left with) and brief telephone calls are, in many cases, the only source of contact. The employee turns into an invisible person and the work is considered as self-evident, which is found done when the employer arrives home. Another feature of the invisibility of undocumented domestic workers is that the private household is place of 'protected work': far from police, governmental control or prosecution, from labour inspection, in privacy, calm, and mostly regularly performed. On the other hand there is – precisely because of its invisibility- a greater vulnerability of being exploited, discriminated: because nobody knows and nobody looks at industrial relations in private households. Conflicts are only infrequently articulated, which definitively has to do with the fact that the domestic worker is dependent upon her employer and is in a difficult position to voice a demand or wish. Aside from their residency and legal employment status other factors play a decisive role, such as the amount of time the migrant domestic worker has spent in the target country, her experiences there, her social interconnectedness, and level of self-confidence.

Enter one's privacy also means to adapt to a private household's particularities: which polish to use, where to clean first, which method of cleaning to use. Sometimes these requests are easily to fulfil and employer and employee go together without problems. Sometimes insisting on these

particularities from employer's side also means degradation of domestic worker's skills and the simple will to exercise power over a servant. An interviewee (UWT) brings an example of how an employer talked about domestic workers: 'They [the domestic workers] are all like dogs. You always should change them, one after the other.' DW have to be 'educated' like dogs, how to clean the windows, which polish to take; learning the particularities of every employer's household; they want you to apply 'their' methods of cleaning and doing the household. Some employers are not looking at the result of work, but want to exercise power over their employees. At the same time you can be sacked every time (chased like a dog).

Bridget Anderson (2006: 16) labels 'the power exercised over a domestic work [...] very direct, and "personalistic" as well as "materialistic".' Since the private household forms a very intimate environment, labour inspection authorities have no legal access. As a result, they are unable to control labour conditions. Symptomatic of this type of employment is the total lack of enforceable employee rights and the resultant insecurity regarding the duration and regularity of work, as well as the lack of insurance in the event of accident or illness. Only in very few instances is a contract drawn up. In the majority of cases, informal employment is the dominant form. Therefore, Anderson concludes, 'the freedom to retract from an employment relation is one of the only means that workers have of limiting employers' powers over them, being not subject to statutory legislation and having limited opportunities to organise.' To come back to the 'mutual dependency' between employees and employers in private homes, the menace to leave can become problematic for employers, because an employee who knows how the household "works", or who has established a relationship with a child or elderly person in the home is can be extremely difficult to replace. In Anderson's research with employers in private households it was found 'that retention was an extremely important reason for their choosing migrant workers over citizens: employers believe that migrant workers are less likely to quit without notice.' Additionally, employers repeatedly emphasize that they have a particularly warm and friendship-like relationship to their domestic worker even if they previously disclosed that they are seldom in their homes at the same time as the domestic worker. The employers generally know little about the lives of their domestic workers; often they don't even know what sort of education "their" domestic workers have. This conclusion suggests that the employers relieve their consciousness through constructing friendship-like relationships. (Caixeta et.al. 2004) The emotional endeavour of domestic work is also highlighted by interviewees for my PHD research who prefer the work as cleaner to that of a baby sitter because 'it is better to work without feelings.' Due to the emotional relation built up to a child it is more difficult for them to distance from this kind of domestic work and rather accept worse working conditions and lower pay. When cleaning you complete your work – hard work and just demand the wage you earn.

Bridget Anderson concludes that 'the beastliness of power is clothed in the language of obligation, support and responsibility, rather than power and exploitation.' On the one hand there is the 'impoverished' domestic worker who needs money and work, on the other hand the employer needs a "flexible" worker. The relationship draws on notions of protection and responsibility and gratitude. The difficulty from the migrant domestic workers' point of view is that such relationships of kindness and gratitude have little space for rights. If domestic work is to be just another job it entails certain rights, that it seems that some employers are reluctant to give their workers like the right to a contract, right to join a trade union, a right to the minimum wage, a right to fixed hours of employment. (Anderson 2006: 19)

The Vienna Chamber of Labour consultation services report that the most frequently registered complaints concern wages that have been withheld, working conditions that fail to meet legally

prescribed standards, irregular employment of workers via the employer's own company, and excessive working hours. Other complaints refer to employers taking advantage of their employees' lack of language skills or their social isolation (Arbeiterkammer Wien 2000). Full payment of salaries, payment of agreed bonuses, paid vacation, pay for overtime, supplementary payments, regular breaks during working hours, social insurance benefits and time off are the exception. The reality is that employers can and do take advantage of the fact that their domestic workers lack a residence permit. In the worst-case scenario, these workers may be deported, but there are no legal repercussions, as a rule, for their employers. Although legal minimum standards like the Austrian Law on Domestic Help and Domestic Workers (*Hausgehilfen- und Hausangestelltengesetz*) or the minimum wage tariff (in 2008 between 8,35 and 9,96 Euro depending on the county) agreed upon by the social partners can, in theory, be applied and sued for in these cases, standing up for their rights involves a high risk for the women involved. Moreover, it is often impossible to supply the evidence required, given the reluctance of witnesses (employer, neighbours, other domestic workers) to co-operate.

From a migrant's perspective the occupation as a domestic worker is by no means the "ideal job" for most migrant women but a possible strategy of integration and the solidification of their residency status in the face of disadvantages and of exclusions in the Austrian employment system. At the same time international inequality provokes differences between nations in prosperity, income, resources, capital etc., and causes migration movements. The various motivations for the decision to migrate can not exclusively be attributed to economic factors and not solely be explained by economic constraints. The decision for migration is a balancing act between necessity and strategy. It also implies the individual will and power to dare fundamental changes with uncertain turns and the hope for the improvement of the own and immediate life situation. Facing their responsibility for children and family women leave their places of origin in hope for better living and working conditions. They often have to carry this burden alone, since all the other family members are affected by unemployment, underemployment or poorly paid employment as well. This brings us to the analysis of further forms of inequalities which can be tracked within labour relations in private homes. They will be elaborated with the example of Ukrainian domestic workers in Austria.

#### **4. INTERNATIONAL INEQUALITY BETWEEN RICH AND POOR NATIONS – BETWEEN COUNTRIES OF IMMIGRATION AND COUNTRIES OF EMIGRATION**

##### **4.1. Ukraine's times of change and the gendered structure of zarobitchanstvo**

Transition has been exceptionally distressing in Ukraine. Under the cover of free market ideology a model of transition since the early 90ies was formed, the essence of which is the privatisation of the state in absence of effective institutions of a market economy. The transformation process from a command economy to a market economy was accompanied by price liberalisation, trade liberalisation, currency convertibility and in regard to public expenditures by a tightening of monetary and fiscal stabilisation policy. Mass privatisation and hard budget constraints become the norms of firms, leading to cut in social benefits and fringe benefits for the employees. This era is characterized by growing insecurity, growing inequality and increasingly flexible labour markets and a massive decline in employment while the statutory minimum wage dropped to incredibly low levels. Additionally, according to IMF during the first years of transition Ukraine

registered the highest increase in income inequality in the region combined with a GDP falling 11% per year and an inflation devaluating savings of most families. Permanent delays in payment of salaries, pensions and social benefits became normal practice in the 90s: only in 2002 an increase in real income due to an economic recovery has been reported including normalisation of electricity supplies and gradual liquidation of debts in salaries and social payments.

(Zhurzhenko 2004: 188) Domestic purchasing power has gradually increased under Yushchenko's presidency due to some social reforms like the introduction of a childbirth bonus, the raise of pensions and wages in the public sector. (Akimova 2006:15) However, rural areas particularly in Western Ukraine continue to show a relatively high incidence of poverty. The emergence of a large underground economy has acted as a social buffer. Thus, the increasing number of officially unemployed women has not meant a reduction in their workload: women move from officially paid jobs to domestic and subsistence activities and the shadow economy.

The effects of social cut-backs in public expenditures were partly compensated by private initiatives and forced women to accept the burden of additional social responsibilities which had been managed by the state earlier (e.g. child care facilities): families are expected to take full responsibility for the well being of its members, ensure the development of children and also support of elderly. (Zhurzhenko 2004: 190)

In situations of rapid social and economic transformation a changing environmental framework challenges the economy of the household. One coping strategy with the problem of decreasing household income in Ukraine is the economic activity in the informal sector and/or the (temporary) migration into a country with better employment and income possibilities, like for example Austria.

*Zarobitchanstvo* is the Ukrainian expression for going abroad as 'guestworker'/'Gastarbeiter' In the early 1990s emerged another round of *Zarobitchanstvo* especially of seasonal labour. Estimations reach from 1 to 10 million Ukrainians working abroad; Ombudswoman Nina Karpachova reported to the Ukrainian Upper Parliament that between 2 and 7 million Ukrainians are working irregularly abroad owing to poverty and unemployment in Ukraine. The Ukrainian government estimates that 20 % of employable Ukrainians works seasonally abroad. (Uehling 2004: 85) Most of the Ukrainians working in the European Union come from the Western part of the country. Women make up a significant proportion of irregular migrants from Ukraine since they face additional barriers to employment in the Ukraine. During perestroika women were laid off disproportionately and preference was given to men as the ostensible bread winners. One strategy to escape unemployment resp. to gain an adequate salary was to go abroad. As an indication: 79% of all Ukrainians who applied under the Spanish regularization programme were women. (Uehling 2004: 85) The western Ukrainian centre 'Women's perspectives' conducted in 2002-2003 a survey among *Zarobitchany* in Italy. This study showed that the majority of labour migrants in Italy were women (375 of 441 respondents), mostly from Western Ukraine. The majority of them are between 36 and 45 years old, married and had to leave their children at home. 75% of them were highly educated or had a specialized profession. 95% worked as caretakers of home, elderly persons or children. 10 % send between 100 and 200 US\$, 18% between 200 and 400 US\$, 40 % between 400 and 600 US\$ and 11% more than 600 US\$ a month home to Ukraine. (Keryk 2004)



## 4.2. *Restricted migration*

Austria as well has become a country of destination for Ukrainian migrants. However, due to the very restrictive migration policies in Austria and the limited possibilities to enter the country legally, the number of Ukrainian migrants in Austria is not as high as for example in Italy, Spain, Greece or Portugal. In fact, the only possibilities for third-country-nationals to receive a work permit and a long-term residency-status are 1) to be accepted as a 'key skilled and professional workers' if they possess a certain qualification or occupational experience that is high in demand on the Austrian labor market and can secure an income that guarantees 60% of the maximum amount calculated for social insurance tax revenue, 2) to be employed as a seasonal worker in the tourist or agricultural sector, 3) to be accepted as a refugee, 4) to work as a student in minor employment, i.e. earning less than 333.16 Euro monthly and being employed without obligatory social insurance or 5) to marry an Austrian or an EU-citizen. Another important pathway for third country nationals to enter Austria legally is the acceptance as an au-pair in an Austrian family. On 1 April 2001, an amendment to the Austrian Law on Alien Employment came into effect, exempting au-pairs from non-EEA countries from the strict quota for workers from non-EEA countries. Au-pairs however are not registered as workers, so their contracts are not subject to industrial law. Since these new policies were introduced until January 2007, the Austrian Labour Market Service (AMS) has reported 14.593 registered au-pairs, of whom approximately 80 per cent originate from Eastern Europe. The most important country of origin is Ukraine.

There are no explicit possibilities for domestic workers from third countries to be employed legally. Consequently, Ukrainian domestic workers mostly live without residency permit and work without working permit in the informal economy of care. Asking interviewees for my PHD research about their impression of the gendered structure of Ukrainian migrants in Austria, they asserted that most of Ukrainian migrants living and working in Austria were women. The overall argument for women's dominance was that they can find jobs more easily than men since there is a huge demand for migrant domestic labour. Oksana, whose husband tried to accommodate in Vienna but did not succeed, told me: 'More women find jobs in Vienna (...) Men cannot perform housework like we do. (...) It is really difficult to find jobs for men. He can work in the construction industry, as mechanic, in the farming industry. But there are so many controls.' Also Kristina has the impression that more women than men from Ukraine live and work in Austria. She argues: 'I think for women it is easier to find a job. I mean, you can not say it's easy but you can find regular work. For example a cleaning lady is working on Monday in one household and this for years. But if a man is renovating a house or is gardening, it's only possible in summer for a short period. Not so easy. For men.'

All interviewed women have experiences in remunerated housework in private homes. In Ukraine, they all completed high school, most of them also hold a university degree. None of the interviewed women wants to be perceived as a domestic worker, they suffer from the dequalification they experienced when migrating from Ukraine to Austria. The work is seen as a necessary job to earn money for the family left in the Ukraine. Domestic work is perceived as an unqualified, serving, inferior occupation without career opportunities. Ljuba even mentions that she 'hates' cleaning other people's homes and also for Olga dequalification was hard to accept: 'You stand beside this toilet cleaning it. You don't exactly feel disgusted but degraded. You were a teacher, you were working with pens and exercise books, and now you have to clean toilets. You become angry and keep on cleaning. It was hard for me to get used to this.' On the other hand the necessity of remunerated domestic work to earn money and the pragmatic choice of this occupation are recognised, moreover the continuity of domestic work is appreciated. Irina

describes the discrepancy between pragmatic choice of and contempt for this job: 'A friend of mine also is teacher, but she had problems with cleaning. She didn't want to clean the toilet. ,I am a teacher! Why should I clean other people's toilets?' I said to her: 'Vera, I need many toilets!' With this job I can do everything. I don't have complexes.'

Agency seems to be very deeply constrained by circumstances. Labour migration is not the result of free choice but a strategy for surviving, for a better life, and provision for the future. Since the social system in the Ukraine collapsed. Kristina names the motives of her decision to work abroad: 'It was desperation, yes desperation. I was simply desperate. Mhm ... decision. Nobody wants to leave children and home for going anywhere. But I am a mother. I have to care for my children. I couldn't buy anything, no apples, no chocolate, nothing. My children don't have any new clothes, they can't go to school. How can this work? But now my children are studying. And they are a hope for my people. '

## **5. HOUSEHOLDS OF REMITTERS AND NON-MIGRANT HOUSEHOLDS IN THE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS**

The debate about *zarobitchany* began with the presentation of labour migrants as victims of trafficking and socio-economic circumstances and macroeconomic processes. Especially women were affected by the victimization and objectivation discourse about trafficked women: 400.000 women from Ukraine were trafficked annually into the sex and domestic slave industries worldwide since the early 90ies. But women were also accused as betraying and abandoning the nation through selling their bodies and their labour. Stories and reports about women's experiences of human trafficking, warnings of deteriorating institutions of marriage and parenthood and suffering from splits due to spouses' several years long absences from marital and parental duties, or the emergence of a new generation of children growing up without parents are told. Locals and newspapers are speaking about these children as "orphans of living parents". Leonid Kuchma, former president of Ukraine, said in an interview with Italian journalists in 2002 that Ukrainian women working in Italy were prostitutes and did not want to work in the Ukraine. One outraged reaction of a young woman's mother working Italy, published in 'Silski Visti', the newspaper of the Socialist Party of Ukraine was: "If our daughters are prostitutes than you are an international pimp!" (Keryk: 2004)

Inequality not only may be discussed in terms of an international one between Austrian employers and Ukrainian employees but also arising from the 'absent agency' of Ukrainian women in their countries of origin: On the one hand, remittances form a substantial contribution to the households' budget and material wellbeing and make it possible for the receivers to invest compared to non-migrant households more in short-term (consumption) or long-term (e.g. education) goods. On the other hand the migrant women's absence leads to a lack in important affective relationships in their 'home', an imaginary place of privacy in the country of origin where migrant women interfere though being hundreds or thousand of miles far away, and also to an 'an inconsistent social status in the labour market'. Parreñas (2001) labels these experiences of partial integration in the two living contexts dislocation: due to the huge spatial distance between the place of origin and the place of labour a fragile belonging to the family living in the country of origin and a fragmentary knowledge about (employment) opportunities there arise. At the same time they are as informal workers neither fully integrated into the Austrian labour market

nor do they have the opportunity due to their non-compliant or semi-compliant residence status to settle down and the right to a family life.

The strength and accomplishment to maintain households as living arrangements and partnerships increases when taking into consideration that migrant women have to keep together various households distanced in time and space. Especially migrant women working in the domestic service sector have to cope with stigmatisations, guilt and critique. They are accused of being separated from their communities, their homes, children and husbands on purpose and performing those tasks ascribed to mothers and wives outside their own homes, even outside their home-countries. (Hondagneu-Sotelo/Avila 1997 in Pessar 2000: 64)

The social, emotional and material ties to the household(s) in the context of origin are the engine of the women's presence in Vienna I interviewed for my PHD research. Here it is important to note that I exclusively was talking to women who had children to care for in Ukraine. Without the necessity of gaining money abroad to support the family and household system in Ukraine women would not have moved. Monetary remittances, transfers of things as well as social remittances are important resources of influence for sustaining and organising the Ukrainian household. The sending of goods in particular has a certain function for the sustenance of personal relations between people living here and there.

Incomes from temporary work abroad make a noticeable contribution to the households' budget. Households of migrants are relatively better equipped with modern household goods, furniture, cars, etc.; they are more often provided with warm water, sewage system, gas and electric stoves, noticeably more often they could install a telephone, and their total floor space is larger and far fewer suffer from lack of basic consumer goods. For instance on average there are 12 cars per 100 Ukrainian households compared with 36 per 100 migratory households. Labour migrants mention more often an improvement in their families' material living conditions, while households of non-migrant families witness deterioration in material welfare. Labour migrants own real estate more often: three fourths of them could privatise their dwellings, as compared to only two thirds of the rest of the citizens. (Malynovska 2004: 15) According to some estimates, the average income of migratory households approaches 4 000 – 6 000 US\$ per annum, mostly transmitted via banks or personal networks. If we multiply this figure even by the minimum estimated number of labour migrants, the amount of total remittances would be 5 billion US\$. According to the estimates of local authorities, only in Ternopil oblast (Western Ukraine) annual transfers from labour migrants constitute about 100 million US\$. In contrast, the oblast investment program for 2002-2005 aims to attract 13.4 million from foreign investors, i.e. only about 2% of the remitted sum. (Malynovska 2004: 26) Data from the national bank show that during the year 2000 40 billion US\$ were transferred to the Ukraine. That sum is six times bigger than the Ukrainian budget in 2000. Real incomes of labour migrants may be even higher because not more than one third of money is transferred through banks.<sup>2</sup> (Keryk 2004)

Various studies showed that funds in the hand of women flow back into the pools of resources and into network structures for organising food, improving the housing situation or children's education possibilities more often than money administrated by men. (See Mackintosh 2000: 139) In a like manner there are gender-specific differences in the amount and use of migrant incomes. (See Sørensen 2005) Most of the interviewed women by Women's Perspectives want to return to Ukraine and invest money into the education of children, purchase apartments and use their earning to build homes. (Keryk: 2004) Money is transferred in varying amounts and via

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<sup>2</sup> In comparison the average monthly wage in Ukraine was \$111 in 2004. (Aslund 2005: 345)

different channels. The women interviewed stated they send between 300 and 700 Euros a month, dependent from their present working and income situation in Vienna. The most important factor in regard to monetary remittances is the regularity of sending money in order to make a reasonable and foresighted economizing in the Ukrainian household possible. Huge amounts of money are transferred via banks like Western Union, smaller amounts via private bus lines or via personal contacts.

Women working abroad in order to subsidise the household budget and to maintain the Ukrainian household take over full responsibility for the financial support of the family. They become the main breadwinners for the household left in the Ukraine. The high rate of unemployment or casualty of employment as well as the – compared to income possibilities in the domestic service sector in Austria – low earnings of men in Ukraine make women the dominant financiers of the Ukrainian household. Irina's statement is typical for the interviewees' perception of (migrant) women's roles in contemporary Ukrainian society: 'I am the only breadwinner in the family. I had to decide what to do. In Ukraine I cannot earn enough money though working from dawn till dusk. So I decided to come here.' The constellation of transnational household organisation has an impact on the gendered division and structure of *labour* but less effects on the gendered division of *unremunerated housework* in Austria as well as in Ukraine. Primarily, Austrian women – due to the fact that predominantly they are performing household tasks – can invest formerly unremunerated time and work into gainful employment when they hire a migrant domestic worker. At the same time they remain responsible for the *organisation* of housework: housework is outsourced and commodified but the gendered division of labour within the household remains, comprising now the female employer and female migrant employee.

At the same time migrant women's absence and their (though informal) increased labour market participation leads – in case of available husbands and fathers – to a shift in the performance of household tasks. What was done entirely by wives/mothers when they were still living in their country of origin, is now newly divided among husbands/fathers, children and other female relatives or acquaintances. Husbands/fathers take over responsibility for childcare and household tasks, although they accomplish their duties – according to the statements of the female breadwinners in Austria – in a different and less careful manner. Children, especially daughters, and female relatives replenish the fathers'/husbands' roles as household keepers.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

As I tried to show in this paper the circumstances under which remunerated domestic work is performed nowadays do not promote its notion as 'just another job'. Inequality is experienced by migrant domestic workers both on a structural as well as on a personal level. In the context of destination they are structurally excluded from formal employment and have to earn their and their families' living in fragile labour arrangements. Their status is often taken advantage of the employers. As informal workers who even do not hold a residence permit in many cases their strategies to resist exploitative labour conditions are limited. However, it is decisive not to perceive migrant domestic workers as victims but to acknowledge their agency in a context of structural disadvantages and contradictory dislocation. To conclude, a win-win situation for migrant domestic workers is –from my point of view not visible. Employers can take advantage of migrant domestic workers' flexibility to solve their problems of household organisation but employees, especially if they themselves have a household to arrange in their countries of origin, have to choose: between the risk of relative poverty and the risk of organising their livelihood in

precarious surroundings 'regulated' by personal networks, confidence and reciprocity – an area free of social rights but full of social duties.

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