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# Anna Triandafyllidou (ed.): Irregular Migrant Domestic Workers in Europe: Who Cares?

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Hired domestic and care migrant workers, the form of employment which seemed to be on the verge of disappearance in modern societies, provide today to an increasing degree a private solution to a public problem. Thus social organization of care in late capitalist societies is systematically connected to structures of global economy and social inequalities. Changing family relations, increasing women's participation in the labour market, and changing patterns of family lifestyle meet with demographic trends of ageing of the European population and simultaneously with institutional trends of weakening of the Western model of the welfare state and rising neo-liberal globalisation.

The new book *Irregular Migrant Domestic Workers in Europe* focuses on the wide area of research on immigrant domestic workers in an irregular situation: immigrant domestic workers who have no legal residency permits in the countries in which they work and who thus have no proper work contracts or welfare benefits. The chapters cover eight European countries: Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Ireland and Spain and cover both genders and all types of domestic work (live-in, live-out, with one or many employers). It is a pity that the book does not cover new EU countries with transforming democracies like the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, etc., where an interesting increase in employing migrant domestic workers is being noticed.

The authors looked on the three main aspects of irregular immigrant domestic work: employment conditions, health issues and family life. I believe that the last two topics are the ones that separate this book from others about domestic work. As Triandafyllidou argues: "Domestic work is a heavy job both physically and emotionally and entails particular health hazards. Access to health services is at best limited when immigrant workers are undocumented and the fact that they work in the home makes it even more difficult to access information and/or to refer to NGOs or a trade union that could assist them" (2013: 3). The book shows the specific tension between the absence of rights to a family life for domestic workers themselves while at the same time incorporating into the surrogate family environment of their employers.

The book editor Anna Triandafyllidou chooses three conceptual advancements: "1.) the notion of a 'career' for irregular immigrant domestic workers - a concept that has to date only been discussed for legal immigrant domestic workers, 2.) the notion of legality and irregularity highlighting the fuzzy borders between them in immigrant domestic work, 3.) the gender and (transnational) family issues -the right of irregular immigrant domestic workers to have a family life and the difficulty of combining this especially with live-in employment" (2013: 3). I have to maintain that the book works sensitively with multiple dimensions of legality/illegality in the specific situation of irregular domestic workers.

The editor's introduction chapter *Irregular Migration and Domestic Work in Europe: Who Cares?* aims "to place a book in the wider literature on global migration and the 'global care chain' (Hochschild 2000), looking at how domestic work fits the needs and dynamics of developer countries' labour market in the era of post-industrial capitalism and neoliberal globalization" (2013: 4). Triandafyllidou discusses specifics of the European context and its migration policies. For me, as a social anthropologist, the most interesting part of this chapter is its focus on special attributes of domestic work. She explains how care work transcends the distinction between private and public life: "While traditional paid work like any other it is inherent in the family life and not in the employment system. For instance, qualities that are highly valued in paid work such as speed, effectiveness and efficiency may not be appropriate for domestic work where caring for elderly, sick or children requires patience, flexibility, slowness" (2013: 10).

The second chapter, *Domestic work in Belgium: Crossing Boundaries between Informality and Formality* by Marie Godin, introduces how domestic work is organized in Belgium and it shows the heterogeneity of female migrant trajectories. She explains about the concrete example of migration policy - the 'cheque service system' which "helps many migrant women who used to work irregularly in the domestic work often find, after having been regularized, a first formal job opportunity" (2013: 37). She speaks about positive aspects of the system which has reduced some parts of the informal economy in the domestic sector allowing new regular migrants to enter the formal labour market in Belgium. The system has its weaknesses as well, as Godin writes: "The choice of shifting the work relationship from a classic type ('worker-

employer') to a more complex one including a third party ('worker-client-employer') is not always an easy one to make for any parties ('new clients' workers) .....As a result, the affective and symbolic component of such an exploitative relationship between 'master' and 'servant' is 'naturally' being reproduced from the informal to the formal sector" (2013: 38).

Chapter 3, Migration Careers and Professional Trajectories of Irregular Domestic Workers in France by Karn Sohler and Florence Lévy, is based on field research and focuses on the female migration trajectories into domestic work. They reflect constant legal and economic insecurity of female migrants: "As long as they have only one employer or have a weak social network that impedes them from finding quickly another job, they remain very dependent and vulnerable to abusive and exploitative employment relationship. One of the successful career strategies used by the women interviewed was to extend and diversify their employers' networks, thus reducing their dependence" (2013: 64).

In Chapter 4, Three different Things: Having, Knowing and Claiming Rights: Undocumented Immigrant Domestic Workers in Germany, Lisa-Marie Heimeshoff and Helen Schwenken argue that "...our research indicates that domestic workers are conscious that by entering into an employment relationship, they are trading rights for employment, because undocumented domestic workers in the situation are not able to claim the rights that they have according to German law" (2013: 90). They specifically explain examples of migrants' exploitation and in founding new family and family reunification and they are not able to defend themselves in this case "and claim their right to physical integrity, because an independent right to residency only manifests itself after three years" (2013: 90).

Chapter 5, With All the Cares in the World: Irregular Migrant Domestic Workers in Greece by Michaela Marouf, examines the Greek policy framework on domestic work and the experience of irregular domestic workers and civil society actors. When you conduct your work in the same place as your job and that space is not your own personal space, it is difficult to maintain a boundary between work time and private time. The lack of personal space and private and personal life can lead to feelings of social isolation, frustration and feelings of loneliness. Marouf writes about health related issues - especially mental challenges of domestic care work: "These problems are mainly connected to the long hours of work, the lack of sleep and rest and the fact that they feel 'detached' from the 'outside world'" (2013: 105).

The Irish situation is explored by Sally Daly in Chapter 6, The Home as a Site of Work. Her article based on surveys involving 40 domestic workers provided some important indicative data from female migrant domestic workers in Ireland. Her respondents maintained the importance of new technologies for 'up-dating' their transnational parenting. She reflects on the use of mobile phones to help them to manage the notion of everyday parenting, including micro-management of their children's meals. Daly argues that: "This communication allows them to reconstitute their role as effective parents, but there can be more ambivalence in the child's experience of such distance parenting" (2013: 130).

Paola Bonizzoni explains the Italian situation in Chapter 7, Undocumented Domestic Workers in Italy: Surviving and Regularizing Strategies. The chapter builds on 11 interviews of female undocumented domestic workers and on five interviews with civil actors that were conducted in Milan. The interviews focused on general conditions of undocumented domestic workers in Italy as well as on the limits and opportunities of the current Italian immigration law and the specific forms of support organization offered. Her informants actively spoke about seeking regularization to improve not just their working conditions, but also their family conditions. But, on the other hand, regularization channels provided by Italian immigration policies can lead to deeper dependency of the worker on the employer. As Bonizzoni writes, "The (not always realized) prospects of regularization have led several women to accept a worsening of their working condition, as well as bearing the costs associated with the regularizing process... Regularization is seen not as a right, but as an indulgent concession of often reluctant employers, who clearly do not value regularization because they want to avoid the penalties of using undocumented workers" (2013: 156).

Sarah van Walsum in Chapter 8, Regulating Migrant Domestic Work in the Netherlands: Opportunities and Pitfalls, maps diverging interests and possibilities for collaboration and political constraints that mark the current situation of domestic workers in the Netherlands. She introduces a so-called subsidized sphere which refers "to those forms of childcare and home-based care for elderly and the infirm that are either provided via state-financed health care or by independent service providers, and are often mediated through agencies, with the possibility of state funded compensation of costs or tax exemption. In all cases, workers must declare their income in the Dutch tax department and hence must have residence papers" (2013: 162). Sarah van Walsum asks important questions with which immigrant domestic workers will have to contend: "What conditions will have to be met to ensure that they can successfully compete with workers still operating in the shadow economy? To what degree will they, as employees, be able to maintain the degree of autonomy that some at least have attained, as quasi self-employed, in determining whom they will work for, what tasks they will perform, during which hours, under which conditions, for what price, and for how long? And, once admitted as domestic workers with formal employment rights, will they be able to further their careers or will they be racially marked as suited to this form employment and none other?" (2013: 180).

The Spanish situation is presented by Tania González Fernández in Chapter 9, Globally Interdependent Households: Irregular Migrant Employed in Domestic and Care Work in Spain. She critically pointed out that: "The irregular migration of women is not only a response to the gender segregation of the labour markets in the countries of origin, nor just the demand for the labour in the destination countries. It is more complex process, multifactorial, and if indeed the

feminization of wage labour in the central economies is an important part, we cannot ignore the power relations articulated within the migratory processes, given that capitalism does not just respond to a logic of class, but rather to a system of interconnected cultural, gender, ethnic hierarchies (among others)" (2013: 205).

Books that include a collection of research by different authors from different academic fields may be considered by readers as chaotic and losing their comparative perspective. But Anna Triandafyllidou has done a good editing job keeping articles theoretically and methodologically homogeneous. The final concluding chapter extends a helping hand in this regard by giving a comprehensive comparative analysis of the final results of particular research results. In concluding (Chapter 10 Irregular Migrant Domestic Workers in Europe) Anna Triandafyllidou and Thanos Maroukis argue: "Policies need to render the domestic services industry viable as regards the sustenance of its labour force and growing social expectations that surround it. The current economic crisis and the overall restructuring of welfare systems both in southern and northern Europe make the need for an affordable and sustainable domestic care labour force all the more necessary and sought after, especially as life expectancy is prolonged and the European population is increasingly ageing. Restructuring this occupation's architecture might eventually lead to the reconstruction of its profile. However, this requires careful interventions that would reverse the social process of reproducing unequal labour relations. And time. Policy changes need time in order to transform to social changes" (2013: 230).

The problems and risks of domestic work are already reflected on the international policy level. In June 2011 the International Work Organisation (ILO) adopted the Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers, where for the first time it even applies its rules in the sector of informal economy. Particular attention here is paid to female migrants, because their increased vulnerability and inequality leads to further abuses of rights. Even though states have obligations under international agreements, for example the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to adopt procedures in order to ensure the same protection rights for these groups also. In reality the question of the position of female workers in domestic work remains the interest of many developed countries, including some of those mentioned in the book. I suggest that books like the reviewed Irregular Migrant Domestic Workers in Europe may help to deeply analyse the social situation of those who care about our elderly, ill and children. Now comes the time to start to care about domestic workers themselves.

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