

“Geographies of Power”: Gender Role in Migration from Perspective of Care Work: The Case Study of Poland-Ukraine Border

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Abstract

Within the theoretical framework proposed by Pessar and Mahler (2003) on the impact of the “geography of power” on gender relations in the processes of migration, the paper wants to highlight the importance of the process of negotiation of the gender relationships across national borders and how the interaction of this issue with other factors can contribute to shape migrants’ identities – especially of migrant women- as well as their living conditions.

At the base there is the finding that, although –generally speaking- globalization means freedom to cross borders for capital and goods, the freedom of movement for people still depends on their place of birth and on their economic condition (Anderson 2000; Ehrenreich, Hochschild 2002). In this scenario, the research takes into consideration the case of Poland in relationship with Ukraine. As a former country of emigration, Poland is part of the global system but, starting from its entrance in the Schengen area, it is possible to observe how the rules of the “hierarchies of migration” are now working: Poland, in the last decades, instead of being a country of emigration, has started to become a country of immigration, capturing migrants from the other side of the border, particularly from those countries, like Ukraine, where the gap between the income level and the cost of living has become too huge to afford decent life conditions (Lutz 2008). The stereotyped figure of the woman seen as just a mother and as the only caretaker of the household and the family in catholic and traditionalist countries like Poland, is one of the central elements around which the research is built, revealing both the asymmetry between migrants and native women inside the “new” families and the problem of connection of the migrants women with their own “old” families abroad (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2001). In this sense, starting from the historical framework of traditional roles in the Catholic family, the research will examine the relationship between native women and migrant women in the framework of the “geography of power”, in which the elements that make up the border within and through which the analysis develops are represented by the legal / illegal dichotomies, Shengen / non-Shengen, and old / new migrations.

Introduction

After the integration in the European Union (2004), Polish labor market has changed its main features in function of the opening up for foreigners, decided by the government, in 2006. The decision to facilitate the access to the Polish job market was mainly taken because of the shortage of local labor force, resulting from the huge wave of Poles’ emigration in 2004 and the consequent desire to plan and pursue a sustained and remarkable economic development. To the

purpose of this research, the effects of the liberation of such incoming migrations fluxes have been taken into consideration, especially with regards to the care and household sector that has undergone evident changings with the arrival of a consistent number of women migrants who have replaced Polish women in those tasks previously considered traditional for the *Matka Polka*'s role: children care, elder people assistance, house-keeping *et similia* (Aziz 2015).

In this scenario, it is important not to underestimate that fact that, in so doing, Polish women have been given the opportunity to pursue better career aspirations and advancements that in past times were not even considered as an option (Blair-Loy and Jacobs 2013).

The methodological approach adopted in this research includes a wide literature review combined with an ethnographic research on the field, using semi-structured interviews with a group of migrant women from Ukraine, in order to gather, as far as possible, the most realistic and updated profile of what is the current situation of the labor care sector in Poland scanned through the lens of a gender perspective.

The Feminization of migration and the role of women in the family

The division by sex significantly determines many areas of social life, such as sexuality, family, education and the economy. It also sets the social roles, status and prestige as well as it is deeply involved in the social division of labor and in the establishing of hierarchies. Feminist researchers and activists believe that the low prestige of the work related to care and to social reproduction is the result of unjust social order, which in times of global economy and migration also manifests itself on such a scale. In the gendered approach to migration it is important to question how gender roles and relations are negotiated across national borders and how the interaction with other factors may shape the identity and the living conditions of the people involved. Patricia Pessar and Sarah Mahler (2003) proposed a theoretical framework called *Gender Geographies of Power*, which consists in dividing into three basic building blocks the impact of gender relations in the processes of migration: the geographical scale, the social location and the geometry of power. The authors point out the large role of the State in shaping gender relations in the transnational space. Other researchers and scholars (for example Lutz 2008) have pointed out that a very important factor involved in the shaping of the life condition of migrants is the issue of *legality*, which basically can be translated into an enforcement of the human rights. The status of being *illegal* enhances susceptibility to abuse by others; fear of immigrants caused by this situation forces them to live outside the law and exposes them to the danger of oppression and violence. With regard to migrant women, illegality increases the risk of sexual harassment, rape, and forced prostitution. In many countries the status of illegality is associated with the lack of access to basic health care, to education and to the difficulty in finding an accommodation (Święćkowska 2008). Migrants – mostly women- who leave their countries to work in private homes or are employed in other services related to care marked by strong gendered hierarchies, are rarely in the position of challenging the dominant order of power. The observations made by Mirjana Morokvasic show that migrants, both women and men, rely on traditional relationships and hierarchies between the sexes and preferably try to use them for their own purposes than to

challenge or deny them (Morokvasic 2007).

Globalization and new division of labor

If we take a look at migration statistics in general, we can notice that most of the migrants are men. So here we have a question: why the topic about feminization of migration has started to become more and more popular? Until the Sixties, women constituted 47% population of migrants on the world and to the end of XX century their participation in migration increased at 49 %. In Poland the difference is even clearer: men – 72% women – 28%. The growing phenomenon of female migration in recent decades arises in the context of global economic and political changes. Generally speaking, these changes have brought widening economic inequality between countries as well as inside them (Castells 2007).

The reduction of family income due to the economic crisis has been depleting entire social groups, especially in the middle and lower classes. The repercussions of this situation, combined with the consequences and neoliberal reforms imposed by the Union on countries already in crisis (Social Watch 2009), appear more serious on women, since they are traditionally responsible for the family well-being: according to some analysts, in the economy Polish crisis the sector of illegally paid labor has boosted, as many entrepreneurs, especially the small ones, try to minimize labor costs and avoid taxation and other costs related to formal hiring. This phenomenon affects women more than men, since women are most often hired for low-paid jobs, particularly in the private services sector (e.g. retail). Other problems of gender equality are the contraction of the clothing sector, with a high female concentration, and the low mobility in the labor market caused by the high cost of rents, especially in small towns in economically depressed areas (Sperl 2009). Financial management and related cuts in education, health and social services affected especially women, because if on one hand this has meant losing their jobs or part of the income, on the other hand, a low level of welfare has meant the withdrawal of the State from promoting social reproduction, pushing these responsibilities back on the families' shoulders, especially on women (Brodie 2009; Ewig 2009).

However, while globalization means freedom to cross borders for capital and goods, the freedom of movement for people depends on their place of birth and on their economic status. The migration policy of the European Union, the United States and other countries belonging to the so-called "first world" determines the hierarchies in the world of migrants, as well as the shape of sexual relationships (Anderson 2000; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002).

Poland, as a former country of emigration, is a part of this global system, and at the same time it is an example of the shifts in the hierarchies, following inter alia as a result of geopolitical changes and border policies of the European Union.

The changing of the political system in 1989, with the incorporation of Poland into the global capitalist economy and the partial opening of the borders, has enabled women and men to migrate in order to find a job, possibly in Western Europe, undoubtedly one of the ways to survive during the transformation process, and according to the worldwide trend, it was characterized by a high degree of feminization. Women in Poland, as in other countries undergoing the same process

of structural adjustment, were strongly hit by the change due to high and long-term unemployment as well as lower wages than men in a general situation of deterioration of the economy in the country before 1989 (Święćkowska 2007). So, one way to deal with this critical situation was the seasonal migration, made possible by the opening of the borders in Western European countries for tourism which, for many emigrants from Poland, meant a partially legal status. In this way, during the Nineties, women from Eastern European countries, significantly replenished the market of domestic work and care in Western Europe, joining a global army of housekeepers and nannies. Due to their partial status of legality, to a relatively small cultural and physical distance from their country and due ability to quickly learn foreign languages and with no problem of discrimination due to the color of the skin, they were in a better position than immigrants from Africa or Asia (Rosińska-Kordasiewicz 2005).

What is more, a characteristic feature of Polish migration for employment in the nineties, especially in the first half, was that the people who were leaving came from small towns with primary and vocational education, without the knowledge of foreign languages, and without previous experience of migration, which increased their vulnerability to negative exploitation and other forms of use and injuries. A lot of women decided to leave and to work as permanent household, mostly in southern Italy or Greece, which is a type of employment characterized by a high risk of abuses by employers (Anderson 2000; Rosińska-Kordasiewicz 2005; Święćkowska 2007). The situation changed after Poland's access to the European Union, joining the Schengen zone, in terms of legality, but not in terms of type of job: like for other immigrant from Eastern European countries, Polish women are employed, mostly, in the area of the social reproduction, especially in private houses since, in order to take care of elders and of children, there is currently no other solutions than hiring immigrant women, putting into operation all those informal migration networks already active in that type of economic sector (Federici 2009).

But, over time, even in Poland, with the born of a new middle class, the phenomenon of hiring migrant women for care duties has become a crucial issue, involving in this case women from Ukraine. So, in the last decades, Poland, instead of being a country of emigration has started to become a country of immigration able to capture migrants from the other side of the border, particularly from those countries, like Ukraine, where the gap between income level and cost of living is too huge to afford decent life conditions.

Home and family in terms of Gender approach

In the Polish social imagination, and also among some feminist researcher, the image of the house and the housework seen from the perspective of middle-class family is still dominating, whose model took shape in the nineteenth century with the development of the towns and the industrial trade. Still nowadays, one of the most incisive reason for Polish women's professional inactivity is the influence of family duties on making decision regarding disengaging from professional activity, permanently or temporarily, influence which is – according to the literature – higher than in other EU countries (Męcina 2018).

Nineteenth-century capitalism and political relations have shaped specific pattern of family, characterized by the typical division of responsibilities, functions and social roles between sexes. This division is presented as the distinction between the public sphere and the private sphere, where home, family and women found themselves on the side of what is private, while professional work, political activities and the men found themselves on the side of what is public. In the classical model of nineteenth-century bourgeois, a man has a recognizable profession, while his wife deals with the organization of the household and of the growing of the children, often with the aid of servants, housekeepers, or nannies. In the twentieth century, especially after the World War II with the automatization of household tasks and other politico-economic changes, the number of hired household helpers generally dropped, while the number of male breadwinners' families increased. It is in this context that women fully experience the contradiction of a growing individualization of society. Although this phenomenon now represents the cornerstone of relational dynamics, some points of friction can be traced on which it has not yet fully taken hold, and in which therefore there are elements of contradiction between models and expectations on the one hand and daily practices from 'other. An exemplary case is represented by family life: although the drive towards individualization has also emerged in this area, traditional forms of organization still remain. On the one hand, a "rhetoric of equality" has spread that produces new bases for gender socialization, whereby women make new self-images and life plans their own: the family continues to be considered a value, but the emphasis is placed on autonomy, independence and personal space. On the other hand, however, the routines of daily life do not always follow this rhetoric: this contrast becomes explosive when men and women live together, making women experience a fracture between myths and practices of modernity (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Inside this framework of general contradictions, risks and instability, the Polish case can be outlined: during the time of the People Republic (1947-1989), in conjunction with the State encouraging women to enter the labor market, a system of so-called women's double burden of professional work and care work was developed, in which the socialist State, in large part, supported the families by the elaboration of a network of nurseries and kindergartens and after-school activities for children.

Starting from the Nineteenth Century, the bourgeois family model was widespread and applicable also among the proletarian peasant families where women, besides the care duties, were compelled to find a paid job outside the family, due to the impossibility to cope with just one earning. They were employed in factories, farms and in the typical tasks of the country work, and for them, a family model in which women were not compelled to work, was perceived as a clear synonym of social advancement. Even today, the frame of the "bourgeois family", with its characteristic division of responsibilities and functions, still dominates the social norms and expectations, although in the last decades there have been large changes both in the labor market and in the family structure. The most evident consequences of this obstinate focus on the "bourgeois model" are – first- to ignore other family forms (e.g. mothers who raise children alone or mixed families) and – second- to put women in a contradictory position and in the impossibility to meet the social expectations (Żarnowska 2006).

Migration and employment in private houses from a historical perspective

Working in other people's houses is a phenomenon as old as civilization. It took different forms depending on the historical period and the prevailing power relations and property. However, fundamental changes in the dynamics of the social relations, associated with hiring work at home occurred in the last two centuries, in accordance with the development of Capitalism in its various stages. During the pre-capitalism, work as domestic servants in large part was exercised by men. Hiring them was often connected with social status of the employer. Men worked more often in aristocratic families, while the bourgeoisie hired mostly women. The increase in employment of women as domestic servants in the nineteenth century was associated primarily with the growth in demand for this type of work in the homes of enriching bourgeoisie, but also with greater availability of other activities for men. The II Industrial Revolution brought as a consequence not only a strong urbanization, but also the feminization of the domestic servants. This process was associated first with an increase in the number of poor people, especially young women excluded from the market of gainful employments, and second with the increasing number of wealthy families in the cities who started hiring domestic help (Moya 2007). These changes have weakened the earlier paternalistic tradition because servants gradually began to be perceived as workers and not as members of the patriarchal household and both the feudal work and the natural exchange were replaced by periodically paid jobs.

Helma Lutz points out that in Germany the huge number of young women immigrated in the cities induced public interest and there were public talks about the civilizing mission and re-education of girls from rural areas (Lutz 2002). At the end of the XIX Century it seemed necessary to give them a specialization and a lot of training institutions were created. Lutz underlines the continuity as well as the discontinuity in the development of paid domestic work: while at that time the scenario was dominated by internal migration from the countryside to the city, in the XX and in the XXI Century the migration takes place on an international scale. But there are also other differences: while formerly migrations were dominated by young women, and the period of service was sometimes between youth and early marriage, now among the household help is much popular to hire older and married women who have children and a family at home to maintain. This means that today the domestic help is supposed to have a better education than before and, in some cases, the reason why they accept to work as domestic helpers, is that as migrant women, although holding a study degree, they are unable to use their titles in the new country due to validation/correspondence problems (Marchetti 2016).

Deficit of housework and global labor market

The problem of household tasks becomes evident in the XX Century, especially in its second half, thanks to feminist movements for housework wages (Del Re, at alii, 1979). Ironically, as a result of the XXI Century globalization, homework and caring has become a cheap product, that can be purchased and the global market for migrant labor has large resources of these services. In this new scenario, many other feminist requests related to the socialization of care duties and to

the sharing of the domestic work suffered a big defeat. However, with the increase in employment of women in many countries the question of reconciling work, family responsibilities, and especially motherhood started to be popular topic of public debate, although not always talking the problem in a proper way. This is the case of Poland, that, in recent years has seen several campaigns promoting work-life balance for women only, combining paid work and unpaid domestic labor, which many of them do not want to agree or are not able to cope with, due to the double responsibilities (Blair-Loy, Jacobs 2003). As a result, women's relatively high professional activities in presence of familiar burdens are now limited by the decreasing protection of their jobs, not only cutting the number of child-care subsidies but also by lowering or eliminating other form of support such as, for example, maternity leaves and working time demands (Męcina 2018). The situation is aggravated by the inadequacy of the support from the public institutions in the education of children and by the lack of sufficient institutional care for the elderly in aging societies. All of this together adds up to more and more noticeable deficit of domestic and care work. In wealthy families is solved by hiring household help, recruited mainly among immigrant women whose participation in migration has increased significantly in recent decades. The dynamically growing market for services, domestic work and care in the countries of the rich North corresponds with the increasing feminization of migration from the poor South (Yeates 2005). Zlotnik (2003) notes that in the 1960s women constituted 47 per cent of all international migrants; by 1990 that number had increased to 48 per cent and in 2000 to almost 49 per cent. Nevertheless, when taking Europe into account, in 1990 female migrants constituted almost 52 per cent of all migrants and by 2000 the figure had reached 52.4 per cent (Duda-Mikulín 2013). Characteristic for the contemporary migration is also a high proportion of migrant women who are deciding to migrate alone. This is partly due to the fact that their children and other family members do not receive permission to leave their country. This, in turn, is the result of the immigration policy in most developed countries, which is programmed to accept temporary and seasonal migrant workers and reduce or prevent accepting permanent families. Another factor that may be inclined to single emigration are economic conditions. Emigration pays off only because there is a significant difference in wages and cost of living in the country of origin and the country of destination. The money earned and saved (often at the expense of quality of life) on emigration have greater purchasing power in the country of origin, allowing migrants to maintain the family, build a house or pay for children's education, which would be difficult in the country of destination. What is called "circular migration" is established: women work for few months at destination and then find a replacement (a relative, a friend or simply a co-national) and go back home to take care of their own families (children, elderly parents) and then they leave again. The circulation of migrant domestic and care workers goes against their settling down and thus avoids the related integration challenges that European societies would face if migrant domestic carers would bring their families over. However, at the same time, circular domestic work poses important integration challenges for the people involved as they somehow belong nowhere, they hang in-between the two countries (Marchetti and Triandafyllidou 2013).

Taking into consideration the female shares of migrants, it is not to be forgotten that there is also a huge part of women who migrate simply because they see no other motivation than following their husbands or partners, having like this to reinvent themselves in a new country basically starting from zero. Some put great effort to learn the local language as a first big step to integrate into the new society and culture, while others simply adapt to the situation accepting low paid jobs and limiting their social relations to the ring of fellow nationals mostly met thanks to the activity of those sub-communities mentioned before (Askola 2012). So it is evident that the global market for domestic work and care is characterized by high complexity and high segregation: household and caring consist of many different activities, arranged in a kind of hierarchy, which corresponds to the specializations and divisions of gender and ethnicity of employees. At the top of the hierarchy are located butlers and nannies, who are educated in special institutes, e.g. in the UK. As graduates of these reputable schools they can expect to work on the exclusive employment market. Butlers, mostly men, have salaries that are among the highest in the area of domestic work, while nannies and babysitters with a diploma after reputable institute obtain better jobs than other types of nannies. The choice of a nanny and a babysitter is usually made considering the nationality and the language of the candidate: In the UK, nannies and babysitters are traditionally recruited from English-speaking, local women or originating in Australia and New Zealand (Cox 2007). In Germany, in addition to the German language, for childcare other languages are also chosen, for example Spanish, the knowledge of which may be beneficial in the future (Lutz 2008). Ethnic assignment of roles and specialization varies depending on changes in social, economic, geopolitical and immigration policy and border and / or the specific nature of migration networks. Countries that until recently were primarily countries of emigration, like the Mediterranean countries (Greece, Italy and Turkey) have become, in the last few decades, countries of immigration. Since the mid-nineties, women from Eastern Europe and former Soviet Republic (Bulgaria, Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia) began to be employed in the homes of the middle class in Turkey, which has been and still is a country of exile. Hiring women from these countries is considered easier and more practical than finding suitable local babysitters. Women who come from other countries are more involved in the care, besides they are better educated than the locally available workforce (Akalın 2007).

The working conditions of immigrants in private homes and relationships with employers

Working in private houses for the most part is informal and takes place in the gray economic zone, which means that it cannot be adjusted for a range of duties, standards, safety and health at work. The informal nature of the work means no social protection such as health insurance and pensions, vacations, sick leave or hedge against job loss. Moreover, the house as a private sphere, where there are not agreed labor standards and where female employees are themselves too employers, is a place loaded with a higher risk of abuse by the latter. Relationships both sides, employees and employers, are based on mutual trust. Employers allow female employees to their own privacy, often by giving them the keys to the apartments, while employed persons must

believe the word that they fulfill their promise to pay. However, the trust relationship is asymmetrical to the disadvantage of the employed.

The size of asymmetry and its consequences for immigrant vary depending on a number of factors. The situation of women working hours is different according to people they are working for. In worse situation they are usually permanent workers who are living together with family of employers.

Anderson (2000) distinguishes four basic factors determining the situation of permanent home help: legal or illegal residence, and legal or illegal employment. In the worst position are usually immigrants who have no right of residence in the host country and are employed illegally. Based on research conducted in several European cities during the second half of the nineties, Anderson noted that in the worst situation are women working as domestic servants in Greece, where there is a very restrictive immigration laws and where there is a large number of illegal immigrant women. Deprived of all rights, women are treated as slaves. Are loaded with excessive obligations and poorly paid, they do not receive support in times of illness. There are frequent cases of humiliation and sexual violence.

Domestic help is permanently connected not only with the performance of certain obligations, but also determines the whole area of personal life. Working and living with family isolates and deprives social contacts and limited private life. Many studies show that immigrant women complain that employers are trying to define their roles in terms of continuous availability for work.

In Poland, there are no established standards regarding hours of work, rest or days off, so this is a matter of individual contracts between employer and employee. Interviews with immigrant from Ukraine who work in Polish houses show similar trends as elsewhere: lengthening and thickening of working time (Kindler 2008; Lasota, 2008). Working and living with the family basically means a direct relationship with the employer and a lack of physical and mental distance. Thus, in the eyes of Ukrainian migrant women, for instance, this is still a better condition than the one they previously had in their home country; not to mention the fact that, thanks to the relatively cheap average cost of living in Poland, they are also able to guarantee their family better living standards. Many migrants come following their husbands, who move to Poland to work as manuals or drivers for private companies and accept job position in those sectors where there is no higher interest and request from the side of Polish women. This transformation has been going almost uncontrolled and migrants' displacement where there is a need of caregivers came as a natural solution in the eye of the "hierarchies of migrations": Poland is now an enriching country which means, among all things, that a huger number of women can afford hiring, legally or illegally, foreigners who can take care of the household and perform duties on their behalf, giving them the freedom of pursuing the career path.

Transnational families and transnational maternity

Today's migrants operating in the global market of domestic work and care have often their own homes, families and children who remained in the country of origin. By taking care of other

people's houses and /or children they create transnational motherhood and family. The shape of these families and motherhood varies depending on how the family structure is in the country of origin, as well as distances and regimes of migration (Lutz 2008). In countries dominated by small family model and by the traditional patriarchal division of responsibilities, like Poland, it is more difficult to find substitute care for children. It usually falls on women from the close family: the mother, the mother in law or the older daughter; less frequently, the sisters as it is more common in South America and the Caribbean, where families are much larger, and women support each other in raising children. Despite the differences in ways of shaping transnational families, what is familiar to most migrant women is the suffering associated with the separation from family, and especially from children (Lutz 2008).

Motherhood is a central category around which migrants build their identity. How they see themselves in the role of mothers, is, however, often determined by what is the social image of motherhood and what are the standards and the obligations imposed on the figure of the mother by the habits in the country of origin. Expectations in conjunction with the suffering due to the separation from children often cause migrant women feelings of guilt. Requirements and standards of good motherhood are often socially constructed around an imaginary child's needs and ignore the needs and opportunities of women. This picture of mother, strongly marked by morality, dominates in Poland. Part of that is total condemnation of abortion, even in cases where the pregnancy originates from rape or it is dangerous for the health and life of mothers.

It is believed that women, for the sake of the child, should give up their own ambitions, pleasure, or even needs. To meet the pattern of good motherhood women often face conflicting requirements, e.g. to be at work and to be with their child, because how else the child can be provided with good food, clothing, housing, and at the same time physical and emotional closeness. Adopting this perspective, recent studies (for example Alizade 2006), focus on the identity aspects of motherhood in the 21st century, highlighting how women's entry into the world of work has changed the way of living the experience of motherhood - intended as maternity - determining a clear ambivalence between the two "careers" of women - working and private - which see their crucial phases unfolding simultaneously (Bianco 1997). Brown and Roberts (2014) describe this ambivalence of modern female identity as a social phenomenon that derives from the relationship that mothers have with the social institution of motherhood and the social expectations associated with this role, in relation to which the representation of the working mother receives a negative treatment, within a cultural model that idealizes sacrificial motherhood instead (O'Reilly, 2010). An example is the Polish discussion about the problem of "euro-orphans"-children left by parents during the last wave of Polish emigration after joining the European Union. This phenomenon is exemplified by the above-described health deficits as a result of emigration of one or both parents. Media are dominated by a tendency to saddle the responsibility for the care and deficit problems with the same parents, and especially with the mothers. An example of that approach is even findable in an article from "Gazeta Wyborcza" (12 May 2008), a major national daily, considered progressive on moral issues. The article describes the story of a teenage boy whose mother left for work abroad, leaving him in the care of grandparents and father. The reason

for media interest in the history was that the boy was missing and for several days he did not return home. Although the father was in place, the main responsibility for the child's emotional problems was blamed to the mother. Also, the fact that her departure was dictated by economic difficulties, did not affect the accusations. The author condemns morally the woman as a bad mother who does not love her child. Admission to the article begins as follows: "15-year-old Maciek for three days wandering the streets. He was searched by the police, teachers and father but not by the mother - because she went abroad to work." (Kozerawska 2008). The article is also confirmation of conflicting expectations of the parents of migrant workers. The author cites statistics saying that euro-orphans phenomenon concerns the poorest regions of the country, affected by unemployment, but in the last sentence of the text again blames parents for emotional problems of children. There are quoted words of the director of a secondary school in Lodz, who says, "I know pursuit of money, it will not change. But parents should be aware that love and a sense of security - so important for child - is not available to buy for a bag of Euro." (Kozerawska 2008). This sentence is an example of the falsification of reality, because Lodz and precincts are characterized by a high percentage of unemployment among women, and so emigration is not likely to be "chasing money", rather an economic necessity.

In addition, in Poland there is still existing legacy of the stereotyped *Matka Polka* (Polish Mother), which means being the perfect role-model mother at home, cooking, cleaning and taking care of children. However, the logic that is constructed and experienced by migrant mothers builds addictive relationships which have negative consequences for their lives, as well as for their children, leading to burdensome mutual obligations, disappointment, frustration and nervous breakdowns.

Temporary migration and the question of emancipation

In studies based on interviews, there are numerous examples of the fact that migration is an experience which makes women stronger, gives them a sense of efficiency, financial independence and it is a way to free themselves from patriarchal and repressive compounds community. Migration also affects family relationships change and transformation of social roles. A phenomenon, well recognized in the literature, is to change the role of women in the family due to her gainful employment. However, as indicated by several studies, although women are the main breadwinners, generally does not mean the reversal of roles between men and women. Rarely observed phenomenon is taking over the roles of women by men.

In modern circular migration gains related to migration apply only to temporary transnational household, so a woman can maintain her position as a family feeder just continuing to work in exile. Return often means addiction again on the income of the husband or reducing the level of consumption. It is a cause of falling into the trap of temporary migrants that extends to infinity (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2001). Another problem is the subordination of the growing financial demands of children, or in their own fantasies about the need to support them, even if they are already adults. By contrast, migrants who break up with their husbands or partners, usually face many new difficulties in positioning themselves independent while living in exile. Majority

of problems affect migrants without residence permits in the destination country. Lack of legality means living in constant fear of deportation, deprives them of basic rights and exposes to violence. The situation of women who have semi-legal status is neither so easy and good, they can live in the house but without rights. Their status is very uncertain even if they are not exposed to deportation. They have no health insurance or pension, and their experience and expertise gained during many years of work in private homes is not recognized. If they break up with partners or family in the country, it generally means a loss of social security, such as health insurance and pensions. For many immigrant women the only way to legalize marriage is, unfortunately, a new relationship, which is already at the beginning marked with the asymmetry.

Breaking the asymmetry: migrant women's road to independence

Only recently, the female perspective of migration has been included within the range of general migration theories. Before, as probably already well-known, migrants were often assumed to be gender-neutral and the reasons behind their migration movements gender-blind (Morokvasic, 1983). Having accepted that, it goes without saying that women's independent choice to migrate does not contradict their key role in the household. On the contrary, it can be better assumed as an extension of their maternal or filial duties since a consistent amount of them move with the main intention to provide their families with better living standards also by sending home remittances. To this extent, it is important to underline the importance of breaking the still on-going power asymmetry that keeps many women prisoners among the boundaries defined by their role as migrants. As Tienda and Booth (1991) pointed out, women's migration can be described as both a cause and a consequence of the restructuring gender asymmetries.

Generally speaking, if compared to the male counterparts, migrant women have less control over their own lives thus, spatial distance and financial independence in some cases can be strategically used to resist gender constraints and patriarchal authority. This is not to say that women are still that much reliant on their male counterpart as they were in past times; specifically referring to Poland some positive changings have recently been noted. For instance, while conducting semi-structured interviews with a group of migrant women, based in the city of Wroclaw, it was possible to evict how nowadays possibilities for women to build up their own future are constantly increasing, especially for those cases of high skilled labor migration.

As a supportive example one of the informants, who came from Russia to Poland following the husband, stated that she decided to start looking for a job only after a while as she was very positive about it because it is really a wide sector and in Wroclaw many hiring companies are present. Furthermore, even when she divorced from her partner, losing like this the main motivation behind her choice to migrate, she resolved to still continue living her life in Poland independently instead of coming back home to her family.

While discussing about breaking asymmetry, it is important not to forget that it is true that some progresses have been made but still, in the preponderance of cases, social class of provenience and level of education play a key role. Saying it with other words, the higher skilled is the migrant the higher are the possibilities to gain independence, particularly in countries like

Poland where there is still an on-going process of labour market transformation, expansion and modernisation which includes incoming fluxes of foreign investors and capitals, from one side demanding huge number of skilled labour force while from the other creating the conditions for a crescent require of low skilled labour force to replace people in those less-paid job considered as “secondary” type, like in the household and constructor sectors. Pursuing this line of work, another aspect derivable from the observation on the field is that in Poland, as previously mention, there is a growing number of Ukrainian migrants that now represents the highest percentage of migrant community on the Polish soil. This statement is also reflected by the fact that they are issued the highest share of working permits, with a total amount of 192.547 permits released in 2017 by the government (statistics are available on the government official website); not to mention that slice of people who work without a legal contract hence they are not taken into consideration in the numbers presented before. For women belonging to this group the price at stake is totally different, whereas they generally come from disadvantageous situations and in the worse of cases, from zones mutilated by armed conflict. Often, migrate is not even their autonomous decisions they are fully in control of, rather it is seen as a part of family survival strategies. It is unnecessary to say that the living conditions they can afford in Poland, even at their lowest, are often better than the ones they have left in their home country, considering not only the relatively close geographical distance between the two countries but also the social advantages thanks to the cultural proximity with Poland, being both groups of Slavic origins.

Migrants from Ukraine usually find a job in Poland in five sectors: construction, agriculture, commerce, catering and services for household. They accept each kind of job making it difficult to break those boundaries we talk about before. As expected, women are still the most vulnerable and exposed to work-related abuses even though, it is notable in this case, to observe that a similar trapping mechanism works for the males as well, since majority of them are hired, for instance, as car drivers for private taxi companies or for other low paid jobs even when they are entitled with a higher educational degree. To sum up, not only the place of provenience and the social status but also the level of schooling play a key role for migrant women in the process of braking the asymmetry. For so, on one hand is doable to affirm some optimistic implementations have been done but, unfortunately, they applied mainly to those female migrants that belong to the most educated segment of the chain. Furthermore, age and ethnicity (Chant 2000, Tyner 1996) perform an extra role in determining relationship between the migrant worker and the wealthy employee. Migration of domestic workers is a form of demand-based migration founded on the gender division of labor in receiving countries (Lazaridis 2000).

This is not to say that this is a permanent condition: there are many cases where the initial situation of asymmetry ended up in gaining an improved status. The effects are contradictory: women might experience increased autonomy as independent migrants while at the same time being trapped in the new required standards dictated by their condition as subordinated helpers.

Conclusions

The intention of this work was not to provide an exhaustive picture of migration circumstances and figures rather to contribute in the shaping of it through the lens of a gender perspective by donating a different angle, the one of migrant women involved in the care work, also using Poland as a case study. Findings demonstrate that, despite the advancements, presently migrants are still trapped in the chains of the global market which, although differently from the past, is still shaping the roles and the figure required according to the labor market lacks, burdening above all women employed as household helpers with social expectation and duties. Women who come in a foreign country with lower educational level, and thus lower expectations, are the ones keener to be subjected to this kind of pressures and, for so, they also face the hardest path if they want to try to get out from the stigma imposed by the asymmetry caused by position as migrants and subordinated workers. On the contrary, higher educated migrants encounter more opportunities to improve their condition and acquire independence and self-control over their own life, not only related to work. This, in turns, applies peculiarly to those countries, like Poland, where there is ongoing economic transformation that shapes the market's requirements for labor force. To conclude, the fact that a consistent number of studies have been developed around the considered topics, and many more are still in progress, might be interpreted as a synonym that something is changing in the way we consider migration which means it is no more to be intended as mainly a male-centric phenomenon but rather a female one as well, also accounted the statistical data about women's involvement in migration fluxes, as this paper aimed at demonstrating.

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