



COFACE European Conference

FAMILIES BEYOND BORDERS
The impact of migration on families

Workshop 'Migrant carers'

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**Vulnerable reconciliators. Female
migrant domestic workers and global
care chain**

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WALK ON BY



Female migration as a history of silence, amnesia and invisibility

Critiques of androcentric approaches: beyond the *malestream* and against *masculinist hypermobility*

Women on the move: *Dependants* and *Forerunners*

More than half of migration flows all over the world regards women.
Different priorities/different impact on gender roles

Underemployment and deskilling

Ethnic niches

THE WINDOWS OF THE WORLD



...Is employment in domestic sector typical for women?

Table 1. Global and regional estimates on the incidence of domestic workers

Region	All domestic workers		Female domestic workers	
	Number	In % of total employment	Number (% of all domestic workers)	In % of female employment
Advanced Countries	3 555 000	0.8 %	2 597 000 (73%)	1.3%
Eastern Europe+CIS	595 000	0.3%	396 000 (67%)	0.4%
Asia	21 467 000	1.2%	17 464 000 (81%)	2.5%
LatinAmerica+Caribbean	19 593 000	7.6%	18 005 000 (92%)	17.4%
Africa	5 236 000	1.4%	3 835 000 (73%)	2.5%
Middle East	2 107 000	5.6%	1 329 000 (63%)	20.5%
Total	52 553 000	1.7%	43 628 000 (83%)	3.5%

Source: Adapted from ILO, 2011

WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS NOW



Household labour: the principal door to enter the workforce for migrant women but also a trap. Demand in North/Western countries strongly related to the level of economic inequality within nations, and lowly related to economic cycles

Growing care shortages resulting especially from ageing process, push for emancipation of women in affluent regions and inadequate social assistance services (cuts in public welfare provisions)

Southern European (or Mediterranean?) model of *care regime*: unequal/disproportionate division of gender roles; feminization of labour forces; high offer of low-cost work from backward nations; attractiveness of remittances.

REACH OUT FOR ME



International heart transfert; Globalization of mothering; New domestic order; Neo-colonial servitude...

What's in a name: Care chain image brings to mind the idea of *motion* (the movement of people enabled by a system in which everything is connected and therefore affected by the action of its parts). But **care chain** can also be regarded as a *constrainer*, a contextual factor for limiting women's experiences and aspirations. From a feminist perspective the **chain** is interpreted as a *heavy burden*, recalling the dominant discourse that "care work" is women's work and their highest priority (no matter how far they move away from their dependants). Trade-off between emotional and economic wellness..... LOVE AND GOLD

FMDW as *reconciliators* → main pillars of hidden welfare

CLOSE TO YOU



In Italy 1million of migrant workers in domestic services (according to official data 2012, but total number is higher because of irregular presences: 1,65mln for Ministry of Welfare estimates): almost 90% are *women*. A flow that started in the beginning of the Seventies (especially from Catholic nations like Philippines), but raised faster and huger during *last ten years*

Composition of sending countries has continuously changed. Today 6 out of 10 FMCW come from Eastern Europe: Romania, Ukraine, Moldavia....They often migrate alone and leave their relatives back. Even during the recession years this type of migrant presence hasn't decreased

Ethnic stereotypes: the role of recruitment agencies and non-formal mediators in strengthening racial generalizations

THE LOOK OF LOVE



2,4 mln of households are actually employers of domestic/care workers

3C-Cleaning, Caring, Cooking: but migrant women provide also medicine administration and personal hygiene of the dependents, transportation and shopping, and above all *company and emotional support*. Integration or replacement of families' role

Not paid to deliver specific tasks? What is bought is their personhood and time. "*Italian families buy work but they actually demand affection*" (Ambrosini 2010): and the mistresses don't describe themselves as private employers but as women who want to be helped by other women

A case of mutual aid? Creating hybrids of contract and affects

A HOUSE IS NOT A HOME



Unspoken parts of the 'agreement'. *Boundary work* in language practices, spatial deference, domestic politics of food and privacy

Control over the life of the maid goes on increasing. Live-in carers and forms of exploitation: no limit for working time. Invisibility of private households, difficulties for trade unions organization, lack of effectiveness of the repressive apparatus

A claustrophobic relationship without any right for her family life?

For each documented case of abuse there are at least 5 undocumented cases. A dead-end job

GOD GIVE ME STRENGTH



Suffering emotionally from prolonged separation and contradictory conditions. “A foot here, a foot there, and a foot nowhere”: disruption, emotional displacement, and the pain of ambiguous loss (and a gender division again)

Depressive symptoms and indefinite time. Managing longing and missing

“The good provider is the one who leaves”: but who cares for children left behind

Ambivalence of remittances: do monetary transfers and material gifts act as depersonalization factors?

Significance of the visits as a kind of secular pilgrimage to acquire shared knowledge

ALWAYS SOMETHING THERE TO REMIND ME

Relevant issues to debate and reconsider

Re-evaluating ‘unskilled’ and low prestige jobs: doesn’t bodywork of migrant women require to be considered precious for elderly and dependants? Need to tell stories of empathy

A theoretical question: does the concept of “economic migrant” tend to displace the significance of diasporic affective ties? More research and policy analysis

Lack of investigations on wellness of left-behind: are social norms and cultural factors in sending countries relevant in modifying understanding of parent/child separation? Need for reconfiguration of migratory experience of mothers.....



Dedicated to Nenita M. and all the strong and kind women who came from distant lands to help us to make our homes comfortable, especially for the most vulnerable among our relatives.

Thanks for your attention.

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