

# PAID DOMESTIC WORK IN POSTSOCIALIST CONTEXTS: REGIONAL TRAITS OF A GLOBAL PHENOMENON

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It has been a long-standing tradition of European studies of paid domestic labor to consider the former socialist countries as a source of cheap, predominantly female, domestic labor for the countries of Western Europe. As an allusion to the Iron Curtain, which separated two different worlds, the concept of the Care Curtain of Europe has been actively developed.<sup>1</sup> This curtain draws an imaginary boundary or global division of labor between the postsocialist and the rest of Europe, where the former donates care and the latter receives it. For many, this model of movement of care from East to West has been the only possible research subject in the realm of paid domestic labor.

This special issue of the journal aims to broaden the knowledge about paid domestic labor by researching how this globally significant phenomenon has been arranged in some countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the former Soviet Union. The issue has been inspired by the International Conference “Domestic Workers in the Countries of Central Eastern Europe and Former Soviet Union: Postsocialist Migrations and Inequalities,” which was held on April 24–26, 2015, at the Centre for Independent Social Research (CISR) in cooperation with the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung. It was a pioneering event that brought together more than 20 participants

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<sup>1</sup> This concept has been introduced and actively elaborated by the German scholar Helma Lutz in her forthcoming book titled *The Care Curtain of Europe* that looks at the globalization of care work in its specific European manifestation. In Europe, migrant women from former socialist countries of the East work as care providers in the South, West, and North of Europe. Lutz investigates the features of this European divide—coinciding with the former Iron Curtain—by exploring the “care curtain” as an expression of a new geopolitical pattern. See more at: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/person/helma-lutz#sthash.PZgVBdcn.dpuf>.

from 15 countries who study issues of paid domestic labor in the former Soviet Union and postsocialist Europe.<sup>2</sup> The conference and, consequently, this special issue look beyond the care curtain of Europe, from the perspective of the countries of Central Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Many of these countries have been going through similar processes reflecting global trends. Among these are the dissolution of the welfare state and the formation of neoliberal systems for distributing social benefits, transformation of class and age structures, actualization of the deficit of care and its marketization, and the emergence of new related service occupations.

Despite obvious differences in the development of societies that once were part of the socialist system, they share some structural characteristics that generate specific issues related to paid domestic labor, different from those in Western European contexts. Firstly, in recent decades most of these countries experienced dramatic changes of the socialist welfare state and rapid commercialization of care. Secondly, in this region local labor markets and local care chains of domestic workers prevail over international ones. Thirdly, paid domestic labor in postsocialist contexts has been weakly supported by legislation and official regulations. In what follows, we would like to consider these issues one by one.

If immediately after the Second World War the employment of paid cleaners, childminders, and caregivers in private households almost completely disappeared in Western Europe, in the 1970s it experienced a revival (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Sarti 2008). While in the CEE and the countries of the former Soviet Union, despite having the highest rates of female employment in the world (Saxonberg and Sirovátka 2006), it only saw an expansion during the transition period in the late 1990s and particularly at the beginning of the new millennium. This can be explained by the priority given to social rights in the socialist system (despite some differences between the CEE countries and those of the former Soviet Union), with special emphasis on enabling women to equally and fully participate in paid work, and, hence, in economic and social citizenship. Since the 1950s these countries have established the “adult worker” citizenship model or the “dual-breadwinner” family model (Lister et al. 2007) that in capitalist Europe still seems only a partly achievable goal, despite great effort put into working out policies of reconciling work and family. In keeping with the socialist politics that encouraged universal employment for all, putting special emphasis on women’s emancipation, women were given the opportunity for permanent full-time employment, which resulted in the important individual rights to social, healthcare, and pension insurance. As full-time workers and mothers, or working mothers (Temkina and Rotkirch 1997), women became eligible for diverse social transfers, types of assistance, and benefits as individuals rather than as dependents of their employed partners. Full-time employment brought women basic economic independence and, in turn, contributed to their changed role and improved position both in the family and in broader society. Apart from institut-

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<sup>2</sup> Almost all the papers presented were published as the bilingual conference proceedings (Tkach 2015). This issue is composed of the reworked versions of some of the conference contributions and also includes an author who was not a conference participant.

ing high-quality schemes offering neither too-long nor too-short paid maternity and parental leave, socialist states (through their publicly owned companies) enabled women to enter paid employment by establishing a public network of universally accessible social services, such as nursery schools and preschools, afternoon childcare in elementary schools, organized holidays for children, and school nutrition programs, along with organized meals and canteens for workers, which aimed to relieve women from domestic work (Burcar 2009). In practice, there were some paternalist elements present in the socialist welfare system, and the quality and standards of these services were sometimes problematic. Health and other social services, institutions of preschool child education, daycare centers, and the rest of the social infrastructure did not meet families' demands and required them to develop personal strategies to overcome structural restrictions. In this regard, a widespread practice of relying upon social networks and kin—predominantly multigenerational—bonds and solidarities allowed households to compensate for insufficient public institutions and mistrust towards them in the late Soviet period (Zdravomyslova and Temkina 2007:130, 135; Rotkirch, Tkach, and Zdravomyslova 2012:133). The role pattern of a “grandmother raising a grandson” (Zdravomyslova 2009:101) became almost mandatory for generations of retired Soviet women. A solid socialization and defamilization of childcare, along with the commitment to economic/class equality and women's emancipation, were the key factors involved in making the employment of domestic and care workers in private households during the period of socialism both unnecessary and unpopular. The labor market of domestic and care workers existed only to a limited extent and mainly for political and cultural elites.<sup>3</sup> Overall, the institute of paid domestic labor in late socialism was fragmented and hidden (98).

During transition, numerous, although not all, CEE and former Soviet countries (under the influence of international actors such as the World Bank and other promoters of the “lean” welfare state) have gradually and in different ways deconstructed their socialist welfare systems and turned to capitalism, thus establishing structural conditions for an expansion of paid domestic and care work in private households. Policies abolishing public childcare systems and enforcing parental leaves—which often are either too long or too short, partly unpaid, underpaid, or paid at a flat rate—along with offering tax relief and pension bonuses that encourage women to stay at home after they finish their maternity leave, as well as providing cash-for-care benefits to individually hire private childminders through the market, make women's reintegration into the labor market more difficult (Morel 2015). Women are thus forced to take precarious part-time employment and, as a result, join a secondary, marginal workforce that is economically dependent on their male partners (Teplova 2007). To avoid this, those women who can afford it use the strategy of outsourcing domestic and care work to hired (migrant) women, in most cases without

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<sup>3</sup> In Bolshevik and Soviet Russia, the prerevolutionary institution of domestic servants was inscribed as a new segment of the working class: female domestic laborers. Historical studies demonstrate that the formation of the market for domestic labor in the first third of the twentieth century was based on the geographical and social mobility of women moving from rural to urban areas (see Izmozik and Lebina 2001; Lebina 2006; Klots 2012).

formal contracts. These changes are interrogated in the articles included in this thematic issue. For example, in the Czech Republic childcare was reformed in the direction of the corporative-conservative model by extending parental leaves and radically reducing the system of state nursery schools. While in 1990 this system still provided childcare for approximately 40,000 children, by 2011 its capacity was reduced to 1,425 children, creating a large demand for individual childminders at home (Souralová 2015). Beyond the political and economic basis of such transformations, changes to the gender order have also influenced the development of the private services sector in postsocialism, in Russia for example. The nuclearization of middle-class urban families, emancipation of younger generations from extended families, and a crisis surrounding the role of grandmothers, who now prefer paid employment to looking after grandchildren, facilitated the rapid development of a market for domestic workers. The free labor of a grandmother has been replaced by a nanny's paid labor (Zdravomyslova 2009:100–101).

The specific migration context in the CEE and former Soviet countries is also worth considering. Much more than immigration, these countries experienced mass emigration, in particular after 2004 when the European Union enlargement made it easier for Eastern Europeans to migrate to the West. Not only men but also women, both young and old, emigrated to the "global metropolises" to be recruited into the informal sector of migrant domestic and care work in private households where they, under unfavorable conditions produced by the combined effects of immigration, care, and employment, enact pluri-local care strategies (Bonizzoni 2014). The feminization of emigration, together with the dismantling of public social security, created a large care deficit in care both for children and for the elderly and established the structural conditions for the emergence of local and global care chains in post-socialist countries. Migration flows within and outside Europe have been changing since the Central Eastern European countries joined the EU in 2004 and 2007 and also due to the global economic crisis of 2008–2009 and the current geopolitical situation—in particular, the refugee crisis. Many states have switched from being exclusively sending countries on the global labor market and started to accept international migrants who also work as nannies, nurses, and cleaners in middle-class households.

The connection between care deficit, the feminization of migration, and global structural inequalities was articulated by Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (2001) through the concept of the "international division of reproductive work," developed in her doctoral study of Filipino care workers in Rome and Los Angeles, and by Arlie Russell Hochschild (2000) who developed the concept of a global care chain. These authors showed that the international division of reproductive work is shaped by global capitalism and systems of gender inequality, in both countries of origin and destination (Parreñas 2001:72). These patterns in the global transfer of care work are not random. They are often influenced by proximity (for instance, Ukrainians work in middle-class Polish families while Polish women work in Germany) (Kindler 2008), as well as by similarities of language, culture, religion, and other cultural factors. Migration is also facilitated by bilateral visa-free agreements between some countries that

once belonged to the Soviet Union and are now members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). For example, recent research revealed that female migrants from Belarus, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Moldova, and Tajikistan work as domestics in Russia, and from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan—in Kazakhstan (Tiuriukanova 2011:101; Karachurina et al. 2014:31).

Yet, in postsocialist contexts service occupations have been shaped by both internal and external labor markets, and migrant and local job seekers compete for better positions. In comparison with Western Europe, where, due to the lack of public-care capacity, women hire domestic and care workers in order to be able to participate in the formal labor market, numerous women in the CEE and former Soviet countries use the help of relatives, neighbors, and colleagues (and, rarely, migrant care providers) in order to be able to work as temporary migrant care workers abroad.

While most Western scholarship on domestic work is focused on the situation of migrant care workers, the situation of local care workers remains underresearched. All the articles in this thematic issue underline the large share—in some countries even the dominance—of local domestic and care workers in the CEE and former Soviet countries. Deep structural changes during the transition to the new economic system, such as the polarization of the well-off and the poor, high unemployment, the intensification of working conditions, and reductions to the welfare system, influenced the recruiting of local women into informal paid domestic and care work. Unemployment during the transition period especially affected older women with low education levels in urban areas. In response to this, many of them took on informal in-house help jobs as a strategy to escape poverty.<sup>4</sup> In the 1990s early retirement was a means of decreasing structural unemployment caused by the transition-period economic crisis that brought about the downfall of many feminized industries (such as the textile industry in Slovenia). This scheme dragged numerous early female retirees into poverty, thus making them available for the informal sector of care work, where they discovered a (traditional) niche in which to make supplemental earnings. Similarly, the collapse of the USSR triggered downward class mobility for many social groups, including preretirement women who were involved in the shadow segment of domestic services, ending up as cleaners in their acquaintances' and former coworkers' households. Specialized recruitment agencies and cleaning companies that appeared in the 1990s also gave them opportunities for employment, although personal networks have been a major mechanism for the development of this labor market (see Tartakovskaia 2001; Kozina 2002; Evdokimova 2004; Tkach 2009). In Russia this market has been also filled by coresidents—internal migrants who move to megapolises from the countryside and smaller towns and are employed as live-out

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<sup>4</sup> The private character of domestic labor can make it a refuge for various vulnerable groups, depending on the historical period and political situation. In the Soviet Union paid domestic labor served as a job opportunity for female members of politically repressed families who could not be officially employed (Rotkirch et al. 2012:133). In the course of sociopolitical transformations resulting from the collapse of the socialist bloc, citizens who lost their jobs or became victims of ethnic conflicts entered the market for paid domestic labor. For them this niche became an asylum and increased chances of survival for their families (see, e.g., Perkučín and Radulović 2015).

domestics (see Savoskul 2013 on the case of paid nurses). Similar trends in development of the labor market for domestic work are also relevant to other post-Soviet states, such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Latvia, and Ukraine, where local domestics dominate the labor market (see Karachurina et al. 2014; Tkach 2015). While informal paid care work represents a survival strategy for many women, this field also includes social groups for whom this work represents the possibility for moonlighting and additional earnings (Jensen, Pfau-Effinger, and Flaquer 2009). These are mostly students who are supported by their parents but use domestic work to earn pocket money.

The presence of local domestic workers muddles the argument, prevalent in Western scholarship on domestic work, that in modern times the question of female domestic workers evolves from one of class to one of ethnicity (Ozyegin and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2008:204). With local care workers class/poverty remains an important factor in sustaining informal domestic and care work markets. This aspect of inequality conceals numerous processes of internal exclusion that are based on personal circumstances, such as long-term unemployment, precarious employment, or employment in a badly paid sector, age, disability, being a single mother, poor education, and so on. On the other hand, “local care chains” can also be ethnicized to a great extent, including significant numbers of ethnic minorities and internal migrants from the former common country (for instance, the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia), who are now more or less assimilated citizens but nevertheless experience discrimination and “othering” in the formal labor market.

In turn, the demand for paid domestic labor has come from the middle and upper classes developing and maintaining their positions in postsocialist societies over the last almost three decades. These new consumer groups demonstrate increasing expectations and demands for social services, the economic power to choose childcare and education services, and aspirations to distinguish themselves from the masses through buying expensive and exclusive services, including paid domestic labor (Zdravomyslova 2009:102). The function of paid domestic workers varies by social group. For the very wealthy or new rich, hiring a cleaner or nanny is mainly a status symbol, for it enables the employers to exhibit the standard of living similar to their class peers. For the middle classes, reasons for hiring paid domestic helpers include the need to maintain work-life balance in a competitive labor market with scarce and insufficient public services, especially childcare. Hiring domestic labor, sometimes with the assistance of spouses, friends, and kin, enables employed women to manage daily logistics (Rotkirch et al. 2012:134).

Last but not least, this “new” professional field of work remains largely unregulated in CEE and former Soviet Union countries. It is significant that so far none of the postsocialist countries have ratified International Labor Organization’s (ILO) Convention 189 “Decent Work for Domestic Workers,” which promotes the protection of domestic workers. The growing informalization and marketization of care and domestic work, however, create several core problems, such as a lack of control over the quality and accessibility of services as well as poor working conditions for domestic workers. Market agencies facilitating the placement of care and domestic workers are

on the rise in some countries (e.g., Czech Republic), although working conditions for workers promoted by these agencies have not yet been studied. Many domestic and care workers are self-employed, with unstable working relationships due to lack labor contracts, with low wages and high job insecurity. The same situation has been observed in Russian cities, where female migrants prefer to avoid agencies and look for private employment via social networks; as a result they, especially live-in workers, risk ending up totally dependent on their employers. In order to avoid this dependency, many migrant nannies and nurses reject offers to become live-in domestics. They prefer to pay rent in order to protect their privacy and manage their own free time without interference from employers (see Tiuriukanova 2011:101–105).

Surveys in Russia and Kazakhstan revealed issues that migrant domestic workers face, such as overwork (i.e., working long hours without weekends), underpayment, and sexual harassment. Still, recruitment agencies prioritize employers' interests and can replace workers in cases of employer dissatisfaction, regardless of the employee's opinion about it. Overall, domestic workers are not aware of their rights and are not eager to learn about them (Karachurina et al. 2014:65–70). We can assume that most domestic and care workers are confined to the gray economy that puts them in a particularly precarious situation. Their work is illegal and as such is not counted towards social security payments based on years of work and pension rights, increasing the risk of poverty and of economic dependency on family members in old age, as well as strengthening the pattern of feminization and individualization of domestic and care work. Such fragmentation and informalization of the domestic and care sector, along with the confinement of workers within the private sphere, result in a lack of capacities for self-organizing and unionizing.

In comparison to migrants, local care workers seem to be in a considerably better position: they mostly work in less oppressive arrangements as live-out domestic workers, which makes it easier for them to balance work and family; cultural and language proximity eases entry into households; they do not face problems of citizenship status or the need to have valid working and residence visas, as migrant workers do; their motive is often to earn extra money rather than to make a living; they perform occasional, not permanent work. All these circumstances empower local domestic workers and make them less vulnerable to exploitation in this unregulated field of work (Hrženjak 2011). However, both migrant and local domestic workers share the status of undocumented employment and, therefore, share the experience of living on the edges of legality because of the government's persecution of the gray economy (Lutz 2008:45).

The objective of this thematic issue is to broaden our knowledge of paid domestic work by researching it from the perspective of the countries that began their transition to capitalism not long ago and where employment in the private sphere has not yet been institutionalized. Our thematic issue comprises four articles and four book reviews. The first article, by Zuzana Sekeráková Búriková, demonstrates how middle-class families in Slovakia negotiate new structural conditions, such as extended parental leave and the elimination of public preschools, with pressures of parenthood and employment, by employing domestic workers or nannies. She uses

Helma Lutz's concept of a *gendered cultural script* (e.g., Lutz 2008) to reveal the logic behind the fact that domestic work is relocated—*why* there is demand and supply for such work. Sekeráková Búriková extends this concept to analyze the gendered cultural script on the example of particular arrangements and relationships between employers and providers of paid care and domestic work—*how* the work is relocated and *who* is seen as suitable for doing particular types of domestic work.

Conversely, Slovenia, one of the countries of the former Yugoslavia, during the transition preserved the socialist system of public childcare and a high-quality scheme of parental leave. As a consequence, in this country the number of people hiring private childminders has remained limited compared to elder care and cleaning, as well as when compared to other European countries. Živa Humer and Majda Hrženjak's article analyzes current Slovenian childcare policies from the perspective of (de)familization and socialization of childcare to explain the limited extent and specific characteristics of the informal childcare market in Slovenia. The authors argue that it is important not just to what extent the state takes over responsibility for care, but the way in which it carries out this responsibility. Favoring financial benefits over public services leads to the promotion of the gray economy and the care work of migrant women, while providing public and universally accessible care services, significantly decreases the extent of the gray economy and the influence of globalization on the care work sector. This can be clearly seen in Slovenia where, as the authors show based on interviews with parents and informal nannies, informal paid childcare occurs only sporadically, occasionally, on a short-term basis, and is provided exclusively by local retired women and students.

Elena Zdravomyslova and Olga Tkach analyze the formation of class inequality in the realm of paid domestic work in Russia. Focusing on employer-employee relationships, the authors distinguish two cultural patterns of class inequality reproduced in the course of employment: "masters" and their "servants," on the one hand, and professionals and their "domestic helpers," on the other. Applying the concept of the dialectics of control, the authors show the mechanisms of status construction of local domestics and their employers within both cultural patterns. Their article reveals that the first cultural pattern presumes hierarchical relationships that enable employers to maintain and demonstrate their superior status in relation to "servants." This pattern has been actively reproduced in the mass media, although criticized as illegitimate and not representative of contemporary labor culture. The second cultural pattern, which the authors describe as "egalitarian inequality," presumes that the employer reflects on employer-employee relationships and tries her best to decrease hierarchy and offset inequality with emotional work and moral support. This pattern has been observed among employed middle-class women who need helpers to manage their household, to sustain their family life and work-life balance. These two patterns coexist in contemporary Russian society, operating in different social, cultural, and conceptual realms.

Lisa-Marie Heimeshoff analyses how domestic workers in the Czech Republic are organizing to claim rights, fight exploitation, and empower themselves. The author provides insights into the domestic work sector in the Czech Republic, which, com-



pared to many Western countries, is characterized by a very heterogeneous workforce with different types of work relationships: there are migrant and nonmigrant domestic workers; self-employed, informal, and formal contractual work relationships; part-time and full-time domestic work arrangements. She argues that this heterogeneity makes organizing difficult. Based on Shireen Ally's (2005) model of domestic worker organizing, the article defines the case of the Czech Republic as following the associational model and explains the lack of trade union involvement in demanding negotiations for ratification of the ILO Convention 189 "Decent Work for Domestic Workers" by referring to the postsocialist legacies of trade union organizing.

The processes through which labor markets of domestic workers are formed in postsocialist contexts remain understudied and, unfortunately, barely visible in the background of the European research mainstream. The topic has just begun to draw researchers' attention, and the data collected still need new theoretical frameworks and interpretations. Unlike Western academic discourse about paid domestic labor, which seems quite coherent, these studies in postsocialist contexts lack internationalization, as only a few authors have managed to publish their research internationally. The studies remain fragmented and confined to the local academic space, so it is quite complicated to present the state of research in this area. One of the most significant research questions that remain is how the commercialization of care occurs in societies with a recent history of welfare state and official egalitarianism. We lack data on the formation of labor markets of domestic workers and on the status of local and migrant job seekers in postsocialist countries; on the specificity of domestic employment, which has been revived in many societies in the region, particularly employer-employee relationships, inequalities, exploitation, and rights in the weakly regulated sphere of private employment; and on the private lives of domestic workers, their professional identities and belonging.

The articles in this special issue seek to fill at least a few of the above-mentioned research gaps and shed some light on paid domestic labor outside of the usual context of the studies of East-West care drain. We consider it a work in progress and expect more comprehensive investigations and subsequent vibrant discussions in this area of study in the near future.

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