

Gender, migration and labour market: the transnational redistribution of domestic work in Spain and the limits for social integration

Gènere, migració i mercat laboral: la redistribució transnacional del treball domèstic a Espanya i els límits de la integració social

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Article reception date: June 2012

Article acceptance date: July 2013

Abstract

This article analyses the complex interrelation between the discriminatory situation of women in the labour market, the increasing demand for domestic work for households, and the integration process of migrant women in Spain. In relative terms, Spain is one of the European countries with the highest percentage of domestic workers and the rise in the demand for household services in the last decade has been stimulated in part by the migration policies. The profile of workers is characterised by highly feminised rates, which are over 90%, as well as by the rise of foreign workers, who represent almost 60% of the declared domestic workers. Moreover, this sector is characterised by traditional and servility-related features like tolerance of undeclared work, a high proportion of live-in domestic workers and the absence of written contracts. In addition, domestic workers' rights and basic welfare benefits are inferior to those of other categories of wage-earning workers. This study explores the way in which the structural patterns of the labour market in Spain have an impact on migrant women's economic integration.

Keywords: migration, gender, domestic work.

1. This article presents some preliminary results of my ongoing doctoral research at the Complutense University of Madrid, funded by the FPI-UCM Programme and developed under the supervision of Professor Juan José Castillo. My PhD research, including this paper, is inspired by the work that I have developed in the Research Group Charles Babbage in Social Sciences of Work. This article has also been developed within the frame of the project "Women in Transit" (n. 06/10) funded by the Spanish Women's Institute and ESF.

Resum

L'objectiu d'aquest treball és analitzar la interrelació complexa entre la situació de discriminació de la dona al mercat de treball, la demanda creixent de serveis domèstics, i el procés d'integració de les dones migrants a Espanya. En termes relatius, Espanya és un dels països europeus amb un percentatge més alt de treballadors domèstics i en part l'augment de la demanda de serveis domèstics en l'última dècada ha estat estimulat per les polítiques migratòries. El perfil dels treballadors es caracteritza per les altes taxes feminitzades, que són més del 90 %, i també per l'augment de treballadors estrangers, que representa gairebé el 60 % dels treballadors domèstics declarats. Aquest sector es caracteritza per trets tradicionals i de servilisme com la tolerància al treball no declarat, l'alta proporció de treballadores domèstiques internes o l'absència de contractes escrits. A més, els drets dels treballadors domèstics i els beneficis bàsics de benestar són inferiors als d'altres categories de treballadors assalariats. Aquest estudi explora la manera com els patrons estructurals del mercat laboral a Espanya afecten la integració econòmica de les dones migrants.

Paraules clau: migració, gènere, servei domèstic.

1. Introduction

The rupture with the male “breadwinner” model of gender division of work by the incorporation of women into the labour market is a recent process that remains unfinished in Spain. Spanish women still have a subordinated position in the labour market structure and they are still bearing most of the weight of domestic work in households. Although the continued and sustained growth of women's employment rates is one of the most important transformations of the Spanish labour market in recent decades, the response of the State in terms of public care policies with respect to the absence of women in households has been minimal. The implementation of the public provisioning of care for children and the elderly has been insufficient to meet the increasing demand for this kind of services. Under these circumstances, the externalisation of care and reproductive work towards migrant women has been the “low-cost” and most flexible strategy which Spanish women have used in order to recede from domestic work.

This situation has consequences for foreign women who want to begin a professional career in Spain. With gender discrimination and the segmentation of the occupational structure, their opportunities to find a job are more restricted than for migrant men. The labour market is a key element of the “context of reception” (Portes & Böröcz, 1998) that migrants encounter when they reach the host society and so it defines the boundaries and the possibilities of socio-economic integration. Over the last decade in Spain, migrant women were restricted to a few “female” professions, like domestic and care work. This incorporation into the labour world by the “servants entrance”, which has been worsening with the economic crisis, has serious implications for the integration process of migrant women in its broadest sense and also establishes the limits for occupational mobility to other sectors.

2. Theoretical discussion of migrants' social integration

Among sociologists, assimilation theory has been one of the most influential explanations for migrant integration and upward mobility. This approach assumes, in an evolutionist and normative perspective, that assimilation is a natural, desirable and almost unavoidable consequence of migration. According to this theory, the labour market is a single hierarchy in which most migrants enter at the bottom and slowly move upward as they become acculturated (Powers & Seltzer, 1998). This perspective argues that the assimilation process urges diverse ethnic groups to acquire a common culture, traditions and values, to gain equal access to the opportunity structure of society.

Linked with this approach, economists have explained integration into mobility within the labour market with the theory of human capital, which has focused on individual human characteristics such as education, language skills, length of residence and previous professional experience to understand career paths, salaries and upward mobility (Chiswick, 1978; Borjas, 1985).

Although the assimilation paradigm has dominated literature on migrant adaptation, especially in the USA, alternative theoretical frameworks have emerged to give more attention to structural conditions which also affect the migrant's ability to become integrated into a broader society. The incorporation of structural features of the host society into the analysis is an important insight into the definition of the research object and introduces less ideology into the concept.

The dual labour market theory (Piore, 1979) focused on macrostructural factors to explain the professional trajectories of migrants. It argues that labour markets are not monolithic structures but rather they are divided into at least two qualitatively differentiated segments: the "internal labour market", which involves a lot of learning, capital and technology and offers steady, well paid work with possibilities of job promotion; and the "external labour market", which is intensive in work force and provides unsteady, low-paid jobs in poor working conditions. This approach considers that the fact that migrants find jobs in the external labour market is the consequence of structural factors which systematically limit their access to social resources (such as job opportunities), more than of their individual skills.

With the aim of clarifying aspects of both perspectives, it could be useful to consider the frame that Portes and Böröcz (1998) introduce to explain the different modes of migrant incorporation. These authors argue that integration processes are defined by a combination of different elements: starting conditions of migrants, class origin and the context of reception in the receiving society. According to this explanation, there is not a single path of integration, with upward mobility or marginality, but rather plural and diverse modes of incorporation. In this sense, the integration process can be considered the result of the interaction between structural opportunities offered by the institutional framework, individual strategies developed by migrants (Freeman, 2004), sociodemographic features of migrants and their biographical history before migration.

From this point of view, a double entrance framework for attempting integration can be observed. On the one hand, structural factors provide a framework of action and, on the other, human agency can act with the contextual structures developing complex strategies. To sum up, social integration is a highly complex process, neither unidirectional nor homogeneous but rather diverse, which has different spheres (political-legal, socio-economic and cultural-religious) and levels (Peninx & Martiniello, 2006).

According to this analytical scheme of interaction between structures and human agency, it is possible to study gender relations, their influence on migration processes and the way in which these processes can transform gender paths. A research line aiming to investigate the effects of international migration on women's empowerment has recently been opened.

Mobility can alter gender norms and hierarchical relations internalised prior to migration, but not only in a more egalitarian way. The research evidence shows that the potential social impact of mobility achieving gains of freedom will be different for men and women, because gender adscription can limit the access to certain resources and opportunities and it is also a discriminatory factor. Apart from that, gender orders define an implicit or explicit framework of action that people use in daily life. Crossing borders for work purposes can be empowering, opening up opportunities for challenging the established gender norms, but it can also lead to new dependencies and reinforce existing gender boundaries and hierarchies (Morokvasic, 2007).

From a structural point of view, the sexual division of work and the gender segmentation of the labour market operate in such a way that migrant women are more likely to find jobs in the service sector, especially in care services for people like cleaning, serving or caring for children and the elderly. These kinds of jobs are especially important in global cities, which are, as Sassen points out, key locations for the empirical study of international migration and survival strategies of migrants and their households (Sassen, 2007). Some structural factors linked with the process of

globalisation, as proliferation of support services to strategic sectors, increase of female participation in labour markets, deregulation of employment, as well as international migration, are interconnected in the phenomenon of reproductive and care work transfer from the North to the South and from the West to the East. The research challenge is to analyse this phenomenon from a feminist perspective in order to consider different positions that men and women have in gender relations and not only to describe women's situation as victims of a system.

However, the perspective of agency offers the opportunity to go beyond structural determinism and to take into account the different motivations that encourage women to participate in alternative circuits (Gil & Vega, 2003). The concept of "agency" is necessary to highlight the positive aspect of migrant workers' experiences and to avoid victimisation. Agency-centred studies underscore the individual migrant's decision to pursue livelihood opportunities in the global labour market and foreground the migrant's social and financial gains from international labour migration (Briones, 2009).

The aim of this paper is to make a gender analysis of the socio-economic integration of migrant domestic workers in Spain. For this purpose, the Portes and Böröcz (1998) framework is useful but it should be complemented with a gender perspective. According to them, the integration processes are defined by the interaction of three elements: starting conditions of migrants, class origin and the context of reception in the receiving country. In this document I would like to carry out the analysis of the Spanish labour market assuming that it is a central element of the context of reception that migrants find when they arrive in Spain, and so it has important consequences for the socio-economic integration for migrant women.

3. Methodology

The arguments and considerations reflected in this theoretical article are part of a doctoral research that I have been developing in the Complutense University of Madrid. This research focuses on a comparative analysis of the labour trajectories and experiences of domestic and care workers in two European "global cities", Madrid and Paris. The goal of this article is double: on the one hand it is an attempt to define, from a theoretical perspective, the domestic work in Spain. For this purpose I base myself on a wide range of literature related to international migration, labour market, women's work and domestic work both in Spain and abroad. On the other hand, the aim is to analyse the current situation of domestic work in Spain through a qualitative fieldwork which is still unfinished and under analysis but which could be useful to point out some new trends of domestic work in Spain. The fieldwork on which my arguments are based was conducted in 2012 and the beginning of 2013 in Madrid and consists of 25 in-depth interviews with domestic and care workers and key informants of the sector; two focus groups with domestic and care workers; three collective interviews with unemployed women and men conducted in job agencies and charities specialised in domestic work, and a large amount of observation and informal chats in agencies, charities and the meetings of an association of migrant women specialised in care work.

4. Spain as a "context of reception" - a view from the labour market

As Portes and Böröcz (1998) have shown, the starting conditions and class origin of migrants are important factors in the integration processes, although these are elements linked to their background prior to migration. However, these authors don't take into account gender as a structural factor shaping the trajectories of migrants, although gender division of work is evident regarding the migrants' access to the labour market in the receiving societies. The unequal access to economic resources usually designated as the "gender gap" is related to the position that women have and the roles they play in the family. Indeed, access to education, experience in formal labour markets

and ownership of real estate are different for women and men in most countries and are often at the origin of the unequal trajectories in the formal labour market. The consequence is that women have a more limited management of resources than men from the same class.

In this paper I will focus the analysis on some of the consequences that the reception context that migrant women find when they arrive in Spain has for their integration processes. The labour market is a central element amidst other factors that shape the integration process. This is because the position that one has in this structure defines the living conditions and access to different kinds of goods, but also because control policies and the social context relating to migration tolerance or rejection are articulated around the expanding or shrinking of the labour market structure. Southern Europe is in this realm an example of the importance of the labour market in the integration analysis. From the mid-1990s, countries like Italy, Greece or Spain have received a large number of migrants who were motivated by the possibilities of employment in a positive economic context; however, after the start of the economic crisis the access to a regular migration status in these countries has become very restrictive.

Migration flows into Spain have been particularly work-oriented (Cachón, 2009), with especially high activity rates compared to the indigenous population, as we can see in [Figure 1](#). Encouraged by the booming economic cycle, migrants have sought in Spain better work opportunities than in their own countries of origin; until the economic crisis in 2008, the Spanish economy was growing above the European Union average and in the period 1996-2006 it created almost seven million jobs (Rocha *et al.*, 2008). According to EUROSTAT, in the EU realm, Spain has been the foremost receiver of migrants since the year 2000, doubling the figures for Italy, the second in this list.

FIGURE I. Employment rates by sex and nationality (2006-2011)

	Men			Women		
	Spanish	Double nationality	Foreign	Spanish	Double nationality	Foreign
2011	65.16	81.14	82.42	49.9	71.57	69.76
2010	65.46	79.64	84.08	49.25	72.41	70.38
2009	66.51	80.62	86.25	48.66	75.23	69.77
2008	67.04	78.3	85.33	47.11	70.72	67.84
2007	66.8	80.69	85.49	46.3	67.17	67.03
2006	67.11	80.66	85.63	45.32	63.12	67.17

SOURCE: Active Population Survey (EPA), 2011.

Some key features that have described the reception context relating to the labour market in Spain during the expansive period have been the dynamic role of the informal economy, the large concentration of migrant employment in the tertiary sector and the highly segmented structure of labour demand in which different ethnic and gender groups find niche opportunities (King & Zontini, 2000).

Two other key tendencies that we can add to the Spanish context are the flexibility and the deregulation of the labour market, which were not only significant since the early 1990s but even increased since 2010. One of the most evident features of the Spanish labour market is gender segregation, because women are concentrated in the tertiary sector and in jobs with the worst working conditions (Rocha *et al.*, 2008). So when migrant women enter Spain they find themselves in a sharply gendered labour market and in a still-patriarchal society which forces them to take on “female” jobs as domestic workers, nurses or care givers, entertainers, prostitutes, etc. (King & Zontini, 2000).

I will analyse more carefully the unequal position that women have in the Spanish labour market below, seeking to relate it to the work integration of migrant women.

5. Integration in a gendered segmented structure - female employment in Spain

Some features associated with job insecurity like unemployment, part time jobs, temporary contracts, salary discrimination, as well as sexual harassment affect women more than men, being the most visible sign of their disadvantageous situation in the labour market.

This subordinate position could be explained because they were the last to meet a growing demand in various branches of the tertiary sector where females can most easily find jobs, both as highly qualified personnel and as less skilled casual workers. However, it can also be explained by the fact that women still have to carry the whole weight of domestic and reproductive work in their households at the same time that they have extensively acquired paid jobs. The sexual division of work (Hirata & Kergoat, 2000) is the framework that maintains and justifies asymmetric gender relations in relation to work and which still drifts men to employment and women to the family, even if nowadays it has been somewhat rejected and partially broken.

Women of all ages, as well as young people, suffer unemployment more harshly than adult men, but the “gender gap” is amplified after marriage, as is shown by a higher unemployment rate for married women in comparison to single or divorced women. On the contrary, married men have the lowest rate of all.

In addition to the importance of the relation between marital status and employment to gender analysis, we should consider that rarely do surveys include questions about domestic work and that is why it is difficult to see the “hidden unemployment” (Carrasco & Mayordomo, 1999), that which is hidden under inactivity in the case of women who carry out the domestic work. The border between inactivity for “*labores del hogar*” (domestic work as it appears in the EPA) and long-term unemployment is extremely foggy for women who are in both cases, employed or not, responsible for domestic tasks.

Additionally, in order to consider the unequal presence in employment rates we must specify the different ways and degrees of job insecurity related to gender. The totality of the jobs that stand apart from the standard of the indefinite contract and full-time work are usually called “atypical employment”. Bringing gender into the matter, we see that women are more likely to perform this kind of jobs and especially those which imply fewer working hours and lower salaries, such as part-time jobs, while men are over-represented in atypical jobs with higher wages, like night shifts.

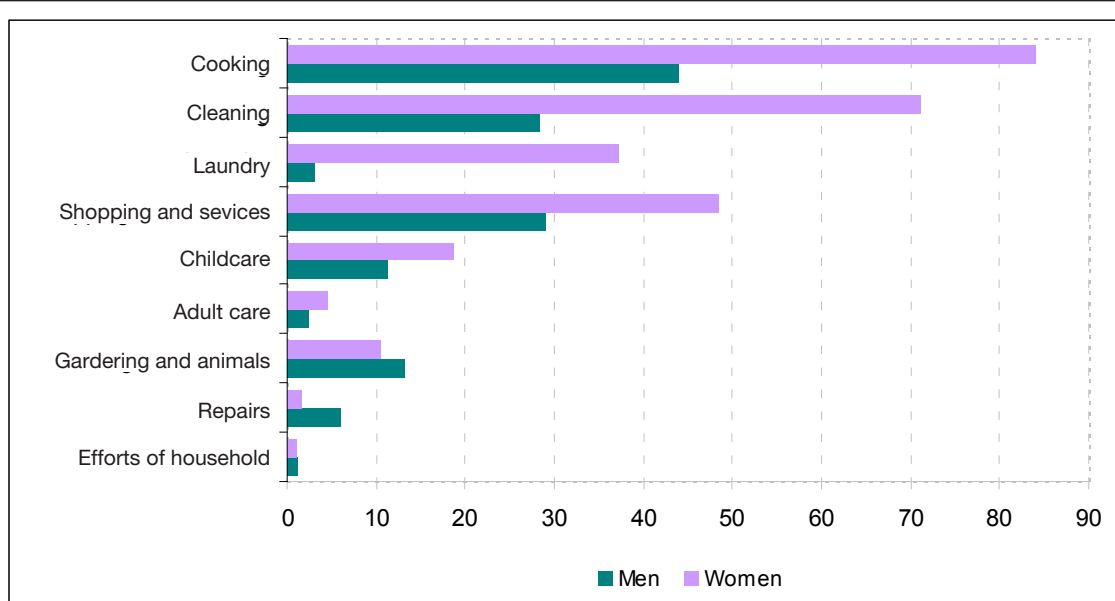
The standard observed is that male jobs, both full-time and atypical, tend to reinforce the role of the “male breadwinner”, while female jobs are more likely to be complemented with household and family tasks at the expense of lower economic gains as well as hindering women’s career paths (Drew *et al.*, 1998).

The sexual division of work has been pre-eminent for centuries and even if today it is partially dismantled, it is still a mechanism operating in day-to-day life, as the employment of time survey carried out by EUROSTAT shows ([Graph 1](#)). A gender-equal distribution of domestic work is already a utopia in Spanish society, despite the massive incorporation of women into working life.

The main reason explaining the contradiction that women are extensively present in employment while men don’t touch domestic tasks is that, although patriarchal ideology and structure have been questioned, the same is not true of the rest of the economic and social system in which the family is inserted (Rivas & Rodríguez, 2008).

In sum, the gendered inequality of the labour market structure has its background in the historical sexual division of work inside the family as well as its reinforcement by global trends of economy like the growing amount of casual low-paid jobs in the tertiary sector.

GRAPH I. People who have carried out each activity during the current day, by sex



SOURCE: Use Time Survey (ETT), 2002-2003 (INE, 2010).

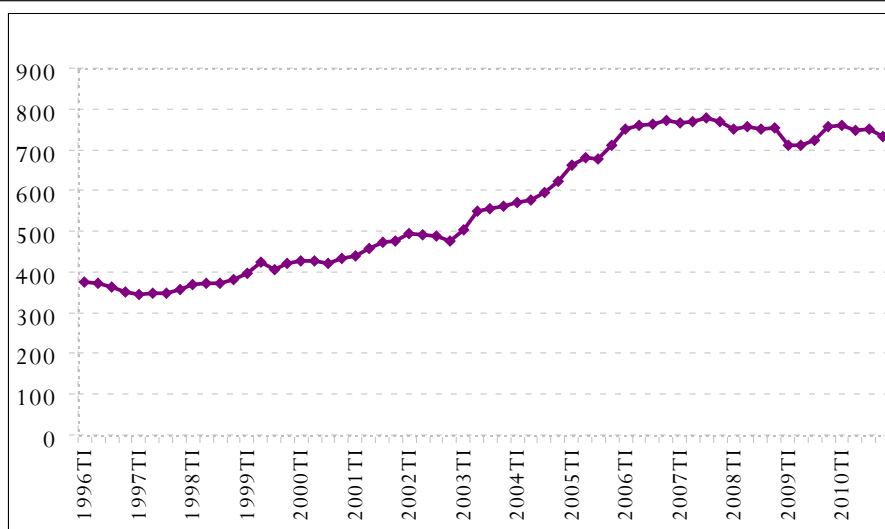
6. Linking migrant background to gender essentialism by domestic work – the unequal integration of migrant women workers

The concept of “double presence” developed by Laura Balbo (1979) in the seventies is still up to date for many women in Spain as domestic work continues to be an obstacle to the development of their professional careers. While the arrangements between sexes are far from those of equality in this sense, many middle class women in Spain – as well as in other countries – find in migrant domestic workers a cheap and flexible solution (Pla *et al.*, 2004) to resolve their overload, combining domestic and care work with employment.

Far from disappearing, we are witnessing the resurgence of a domestic workforce in Spain as we can see in [Graph II](#). Between 1996 and 2006, the number of domestic workers doubled, increasing the weight of this sector in percentage terms in the total volume of employment (Rocha *et al.*, 2008). According to the National Employment Survey (EPA), in 2007 the number of domestic workers reached almost 800,000, more than 90% women, but after that year the amount of workers has been decreasing as a consequence of the economic crisis. In relative terms, Spain is the European country where the most people perform domestic work, as [Figure II](#) shows. In 2009 this sector represented 3.7% of the people employed and almost 8% of the working women, while in many European countries this figure is no more than 1% (two exceptions are Italy with 1.9% and France with 2.3%).

The transnational redistribution of domestic work is not a new phenomenon, but as Sarti (2008) states, some novel features appear from the 1980s, shifting the historical tendencies. This new tendency is shaped by two major features: while migrant Spanish women from rural areas were the traditional domestic workers (Sallé, 1985), today international migrant women have replaced them (Oso, 1998; Colectivo Ioé, 2001; Pla *et al.*, 2004; Oso & Ribas, 2012); and while until the 1980s the domestic workforce was a sign of status for bourgeois families, today it is closely related to the “care crisis” motivated by the combination of the increase in female employment rates, the paternalist welfare state and the traditional gender patterns of family roles (Williams & Gavanas, 2008; Williams *et al.*, 2009).

GRAPH II. Number of domestic workers in Spain (1996-2010)



SOURCE: Active Population Survey (EPA), 2011.

FIGURE II. Domestic workers in the European Union countries in 2009.
Thousands of people and proportions

EU Countries	Both sexes - 2009		Women - 2009	
	thousands	%	thousands	%
Austria	10.7	0.3%	10.2	0.5%
Belgium	35.6	0.8%	33.2	1.7%
Germany	208.1	0.5%	194.5	1.1%
Denmark	3	0.2%	4.3	0.3%
Spain	711.6	3.7%	653.5	7.9%
Finland	8	0.3%	4.5	0.4%
France	592.3	2.3%	500.9	4.1%
Ireland	7.4	0.4%	7	0.8%
Italy	432.4	1.9%	396.8	4.3%
Holland	6.3	0.1%	6	0.2%
United Kingdom	64.4	0.2%	42.2	0.3%

SOURCE: Economic and Social Council (CES), 2009.

The transnational redistribution of care or, according to Hochschild (2001), the “global care chains”, implies personal links between people across the globe based on paid or unpaid care. This concept points out the unequal social relations based on hierarchy and dependency established to transfer care from the Global South to solve the “care deficit” of the richest countries (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002) through international migration and domestic work networks. A common pattern of these chains is gender inequality, because men rarely hold an active position in them. When Spanish women externalise the domestic and care tasks to give them to a migrant woman, also as employers, native women tend to maintain the responsibility for the hiring and supervision of workers (Oso, 1998; Pla *et al.*, 2004). As Parella (2003) states, the externalisation of domestic and

care tasks could be an easy way to avoid gender conflicts in nuclear families. In consequence, the gender orders and the sexual division of work are far from being questioned.

From the point of view of migrant domestic workers, the access to the Spanish labour market is defined by gender and ethnic barriers (King & Zontini, 2000) as they have to face the discriminatory framework (Cachón, 2009) which usually defines the access for the set of migrants and the gender essentialisation of their capacities, working experience and trajectories. More than interns of their real competences, migrant women are considered in terms of their supposed female qualities and their migrant background as mothers and wives in “traditional” countries, at least in the beginning of their insertion into the labour market: As the National Immigrant Survey (2007) shows, 34% of the migrant women of all nationalities found their first job in domestic service and 27% were still in this sector at the moment of the interview. This proportion is higher for some migrant nationalities, such as Bolivians (73%), Ecuadorians and Peruvians (55%) or Colombians (48%) and also for Paraguayans, Romanians, Moroccans or Portuguese (Colectivo Ioé & Fernández, 2010).

The position of migrant women in Spanish society has been very closely related to their experiences in domestic work, as many scholars pointed out from the 1990s and during the decade of the year 2000 (Oso, 1998, Colectivo Ioé, 2001; Escrivá, 2003; Parella, 2003; Marcu, 2009). As domestic work is usually not recognised as a real job (Colectivo Ioé, 1990) and it is set within a discriminatory juridical framework which does not allow domestic workers to have the same benefits as other employees, we can assume that migrant women stand in the lowest position in the labour market. This may have an impact in terms of their economic and social possibilities and on their well-being in Spanish society.

With respect to the differences between the modalities of jobs, as live-in or live-out (Oso, 1998; Colectivo Ioé, 2001; Martínez Veiga, 2004; Marcu, 2009), all domestic workers share a wide range of characteristics that place them at the intersection of interlocking systems of oppression (Collins, 1989). They are exposed to a gendered and racialised essentialisation that in some cases assimilates them to some skills like affection, patience and a loving character, or in other cases to a suspicious attitude, generally depending on their geographical and cultural origin: a loving Latina migrant woman and a suspicious veiled Muslim woman are the most common stereotypes (Pla *et al.*, 2004). Since, from the point of view of employers, domestic work is regarded as non-qualified, even when it implies caring for the elderly, the dependent or the ill, these kinds of essentialisations are put forward to negotiate the working conditions between employers and employees. Previous academic training and job experience in the country of origin are rarely taken into account to negotiate a job in Spain and migrant women don't expect a continuation of their previous professions and careers (Escrivá, 2003). The informal social networks are extremely important to find jobs in this sector (Oso, 1998; Pla *et al.*, 2004) but rarely do these networks allow migrant women to advance beyond domestic or care jobs.

Informality and precarity are essential features of this kind of jobs. An archaic number of measures in the Special Regime of the Social Security (1969) and in the Royal Decree 1424/1985 imposed an abusive framework for working conditions and a narrow set of social benefits for domestic workers. In 2012 the Royal Decree 1620/2011 modified this regulation, giving more rights to domestic workers, although unemployment benefits are still a claim for them. The aim of this new legislation was to reduce the number of undeclared jobs, forcing employers to register their domestic workers. However, as I see in my fieldwork conducted in 2012-2013, the real application of this set of measures is still very limited. As I see in many interviews and chats, employees claim that working conditions have not improved after the new law. Even worse, salaries are going down because employers tend to include their part of the Social Security in wages. As a result of low salaries, scant benefits, verbal agreements and their activity inside the households of employers, domestic workers are used to precarious and difficult working experiences, especially when they are undocumented migrants and/or live-in domestic workers.

7. Domestic work, integration and upward mobility in times of crisis

Penninx and Martiniello (2006) have defined integration as the process through which migrants become an accepted part of society. This elementary definition is interesting because they consider the phenomenon to be a relational process in which various actors interact and can be transformed by each other. Accordingly, the receiving society is also transformed in a long process that can derive towards multiple forms of incorporation and adaptation between different groups, including asymmetric power relations. According to the definition of Penninx and Martiniello (2006), we could say that migrant women are perfectly integrated because, from the point of view of the Spanish society, they are not only accepted but widely desired as the low-cost flexible solution to the care crisis (Pla *et al.*, 2004; Oso & Ribas, 2012); but I suggest that, from the point of view of migrant women, the possibilities that the Spanish labour market offers for economic and social integration and upward mobility are extremely limited.

In a more normative direction, Escrivá (2003) defined labour integration as the positive process of insertion into the economic network which allows the further improvement or upward mobility of migrants. From this point of view, the worsening or stagnation of working conditions could be considered a sign of disintegration. As a result of my fieldwork conducted in 2012-2013, I suggest that today salaries and working conditions for domestic workers are worsening due to the general situation of crisis. In the months when I conducted my interviews, I also spent long hours in job agencies and charities where job offers for domestic work used to abound. However, at the present time the rule is a scarcity of jobs. When a vacancy finally reaches the floor, it is usually for live-in and the potential employers even explain their desires and preferences about the age, nationality, migrant status – often they prefer undocumented persons – and family situation of the candidates. As many women told me and as I also hear from informal chats, to be married and having children in Spain is one of the most serious handicaps for them. As a result, for those who find it possible, the strategy of denying their real situation is very common. For those who can't do this, the only solution is to send their children back to their countries (Juliano, 2012).

Regarding job trajectories, the situation is closer to stagnation than to upward mobility. In preceding studies about domestic work, scholars such as the Colectivo Ioé (2001) showed that a typical upward progression for domestic workers was from live-in to live-out jobs. Nowadays this trend is being reversed and many women are coming back to the live-in jobs as a result of the scarcity of other jobs. For many women from my fieldwork, a trajectory of upward mobility has been to continue their careers in the care sector in nursing homes for elderly people or working in private companies for household care services, leaving domestic status in this way. In many cases, these jobs need to be complemented with another one, sometimes in domestic work, because the salary² is not enough to cover all their necessities. Since the crisis began, the possibilities to find a job in any other sector than care or domestic work became even more restricted for migrant women, reducing their hopes of finding a job in line with their qualifications (Juliano, 2012) and reinforcing the fact that they rarely recover the status they had before migration.

8. Conclusions

The transnational redistribution of domestic work is a key phenomenon in Spain in terms of gender relations because it permits the continuity of a familialist welfare state and the sexual division of work according to family responsibilities. While Spanish women delegate and externalise their domestic and care tasks to migrant women under flexible and bad working conditions, the matters

2. The common salary in a nursing home for elderly people is around 850/900 euros.

underlying the care crisis still remain far from the centre of social debates (Gregorio, 2012). As a result, the gender order is not questioned but reinforced.

Migrant women hold an extremely difficult position in the Spanish labour market at the crossroads of different lines of oppression such as gender, class and race/ethnicity. As many scholars have shown, the history of migrant women in Spain is closely related to domestic work (Oso, 1998; Colectivo Ioé, 2001; Parella, 2003; Escrivá, 2003; Marcu, 2009; Oso & Ribas, 2012), among other subaltern occupations. Domestic work is characterised by the hyperflexibility of workers and the tolerance to undeclared work but also by precarity, low salaries and bad working conditions.

As a result, from a utilitarian perspective of the migrant workforce, we could argue that it does exist a process of integration of migrant women workers as they hold a “useful” position, carrying out necessary tasks to resolve the care crisis. However, from a normative point of view desiring the social mobility of migrant women, I suggest that domestic work is more a barrier than a first step to integration.

Gender and ethnic essentialisms as well as structural barriers provide for migrant women from the poorest countries a context of reception with limited opportunities for social integration and upward mobility, especially when they enter the networks of domestic work. Moreover, the current context of crisis is pushing this reality from bad to worse. While in past years domestic work could be considered as a first step to improve one’s economic and social position, today it is regarded as the only job opportunity for migrant woman from the Global South.

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