GENDER ON THE MOVE – LITHUANIAN WOMEN (ILLEGALLY) WORKING IN GERMAN HOUSEHOLDS – CONSEQUENCES ON THE FAMILIES HERE AND THERE

ELEONORE OJA PLOIL
RHEINMAIN UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

The purpose of this article is to present some results of a qualitative research regarding the globalization of Care Work. The research was focused on the work of Lithuanian women who care for elderly people in German families. As part of the process of globalization, the traditionally feminine activities of care and reproduction are being further devalued and marginalized as unpaid, illegal and highly exploited work. The presented text is based on a presentation held on Vytauto Didziojo Universitetas in Kaunas Lithuania.

INTRODUCTION

“An ever-widening two-lane global highway connects poor nations in the Southern Hemisphere to rich nations in the Northern Hemisphere, and poorer countries of Eastern Europe to richer ones in the West. A Filipina nanny heads north to care for an American child. A Sri Lankan cares for an elderly man in Singapore. A Ukrainian nurse’s aide carries lunch trays in a Swedish hospital. Going in the other direction, an elderly Canadian migrates to a retirement home in Mexico. A British infertile couple travels to India to receive fertility treatment and hire a surrogate there. In both cases, Marx’s iconic male, stationary industrial worker has been replaced by a new icon: the mobile and stationary female service worker.” (Hochschild 2010; p. 23)
Migration appears to make sense for a migrant, if it allows her to earn more money that way than she would otherwise have. It makes sense for her if it allows her to earn the money she urgently needs to pay for the food, shelter and education of her children. Frequently, children, parents or life partners of migrants benefit if their mother, wife or daughter migrates to take on a job in the care sector.

Even the migrant’s home country profits. “The remittances of all migrant workers in 2008 were almost three times higher than all of the world’s foreign aid.” (Hochschild 2010; p. 24)

Lithuanian care migrants working in Germany send at least € 15 million to Lithuania and thus into the Lithuanian economy.

In the destination country, on the other hand, many employers prefer low-cost migrant care workers.

While the migrants of the past were mostly young men, the number of female migrants has continuously risen over the last 40 years.

“Today’s female migrants travel in their late twenties, thirties or forties, leaving children behind in the care of grandmothers, aunts, fathers, nannies, and others. This creates very different emotional problems” (ibid. p. 25).

While many benefit financially from the migration of care workers, the question is: who tallies and pays the resulting emotional costs?

CARE AND THE FAMILY

“From the care perspective, we are all in need of care, for the fact of human neediness, vulnerability and finitude entails that all human beings need to be cared for at the beginning of their lives, some temporarily in between and many at the end of their lives. Just as universally, all human beings have the fundamental ability for caring and are thus potential carers” (Brückner 2009; p. 1, quoted in: Jurcyk 2010, p. 61).

The term care is associated with femininity. “Care comprises the entire area of feminine-connoted personal care, that is familial and institutionalized tasks of providing sustenance and accommodation, education and support . . .” (Brückner 2010; p. 45).
Conceptually “caring about,” to feel strongly about something, has been differentiated from “taking care of,” to actively care for someone, and “taking care of oneself,” self-directed care. (Cf. Brückner 2010; p. 44 and Jurcyk 2010, p. 61). In the context of globalization, care, too, is being globalized. As part of the process of globalization, the traditionally feminine activities of care and reproduction are being further devalued and marginalized as unpaid, illegal and highly exploited work. Women who refuse to be victimized and refuse unpaid reproductive work find themselves as employer perfidiously being accused of having become perpetrators.

LITHUANIAN CARE WORKERS IN GERMANY

My research was focused on the work of Lithuanian women who care for elderly people in German families.

How do the two parties come together?

This example will illustrate a possible scenario. The elderly Maria Müller is no longer able to live on her own. Maria Müller’s children neither want their parents to live in a home for the elderly nor are they able to care for their parents themselves.

About 60 percent of caring relatives are older than 55 years. Many try to reconcile their care of a relative with their jobs.

Ideally, the Müller family would like to hire a care worker legally.

In 2002, 1.4 million people in Germany were in need of care, and 3 million people needed support with daily household activities (Schupp/Künemund 2004). Only 435,000 individuals use ambulant (or home) care services.

Care by ambulant care services means that the parents will be alone during nights and during many hours of the day, and the costs of daily care range from € 2,000 to 10,000.

At the same time, 69.5 % of German earners have a monthly net income of below € 2,000.
Net income and disposable net income of private households by social background, students, unemployed, retirees, workers, employees, pensioner, self-employed, civil servants, average Amounts in euro Net income / Disposable net income

The Müllers are acquainted with another family that has hired a woman from Lithuania to care for their parents. They talk to each other. The care worker, who does nursing and domestic work (whom we will call Sigute), says that she has a friend (whom we will call Janina) who might be able to help. Her friend would charge €1,000 per month.

The Müller family is still looking for a legal way of hiring a care worker. They find an agency that places care workers in families and guarantees that the workers have a work permit. Including taxes and insurance, the monthly costs amount to €2,000.

Then another family they know tells them that these women too work illegally in Germany. As a result, they decide to hire Janina.

Subsequently, Janina works in the Müller parents’ home for two months and then finds a former colleague who alternates with her in her care of Maria Müller. The family’s problem has apparently been solved.
Janina had worked as an engineer, but has been out of work for 6 months. She is now looking for other ways of earning money to support her family. She is 40 years old and has a 14-year-old daughter and a 16-year-old son. Her friend Sigute has worked in Germany for two years now. She wants to do the same thing. So she contacts an agency. The agency charges an initial commission of € 700 and then € 100 of the 1,000 she would be paid by the family. This is a lot of money. She thus calls Sigute and offers to work with the Müller family. Sigute asks her to pay a commission of € 200. Janina then also charges her former colleague a commission of € 200.

When she does not live at home, her two children live with their dad from whom Janina is divorced.

A transport company sends a small bus to pick her up at home and bring her directly to family Müller’s place. For this, the company is paid about €150. The six-passenger bus carries 8 women and their luggage. For Janina this is the beginning of a long, uncomfortable trip into an uncertain future. She has little knowledge of German and hopes to be able to learn German with the Müllers. In the Müller parents’ house, she is given a small room and must adapt to Maria Müller’s habitual ways of eating and living right away. Officially, she is just a tourist in Germany.

Estimates speak of 200,000 women from Eastern Europe and 30,000 women from Lithuania who work in Germany in this way. Many of them experience their work as a dequalification.

For the Müllers as well as for Janina M. a difficult time begins. The Müllers do not know how to best treat Janina. They have difficulties communicating, and Maria Müller does not really want a stranger in her home. Lithuanian women tell many stories about families with whom they lead very unhappy lives. Here are a few examples:

- They do not get enough food because elderly people eat little and believe that others do not need more food either.
- They encounter residual racism from the National Socialist period.
- They are virtually imprisoned for two months as they are not allowed to leave the elderly people in their care unattended.
- They are treated like a daughter and entangled in family relations.
Even the Müller children are unsure how to treat Janina. They have never had a domestic employee before. They have a bad conscience about not caring for their parents themselves and are worried because they are now illegally hiring a care worker without a work permit.

Their mixed emotions might lead them to place especially high demands on Janina’s work to acquiesce their bad conscience regarding their parents. Or the Müller children might try to establish a disingenuous friendship in order to veil the existing power relations between themselves and their employee. Anderson characterizes this as “complicity with abusive power structures” and points out that “even under the best circumstances, the employer has power over the worker, and this power is greatly increased when the worker is an undocumented migrant. How the employer chooses to exercise that power is up to her” (Anderson 2003; p. 110).

Janina might spend several years with Maria Müller. She has found a way to deal with the family and to carve out a space for herself. A close emotional bond has evolved between her and Ms. Müller. Now Ms. Müller dies. While the children are mourning, Janina needs to go back home, and only with some luck will she be able to say good bye as well. Suddenly it is all over. It is as if the relationship had never existed. Once again, she is now only the employee whose labor is no longer needed. She is “lucky” and finds a new job with a family in Switzerland.

Hochschild coined the term “emotional surplus value”. Care workers, according to Hochschild, “create more emotional ‘value’ through their work than others see or reward” (Hochschild 2010; p. 37).

The outlined scenario indicates how much emotional labor needs to be performed by Janina and ideally also by the Müller family so that Maria Müller can remain living at home in dignity until the end.

Even though care work is categorized as “simple” work and is accordingly low paid, care work is not easy to do.

It “requires communicative competences, flexibility, stress-resistance, the ability to work well with others, experience, physical fitness and frequently also specialized knowledge” (Weinkopf 2006; p. 7).
However, this is not yet the end of the story. When Janina first arrived in Germany, her children were 14 and 16 years old. In the meantime, her son started studying in England. Her daughter has graduated from high school and will most likely also begin to study. This may sound like a success story. But by now mother and children have become estranged. The children first lived with their dad. Due to their father’s alcoholism, they then came to live with their grandmother. Their grandmother tried to deal with the problems of the adolescents with leniency and indulgence. The children are divided. On the one hand, they understand that their mother had to go away to earn money, but they feel abandoned nonetheless. Their experience while growing up is that parents are not there when they are needed. Weekly phone calls and “visits” at home do not suffice to maintain a strong bond between mother and children. Lithuanian researchers will know more about the effects of absent Lithuanian mothers on this generation than I do.

CONCLUSIONS AND CHALLENGENS FOR SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL POLICY

The situation of migrant care workers poses multiple new challenges for social work and social policy, both in Germany and in Lithuania. Let me present a few examples below:

The illegal status of women care workers being undocumented equals insecurity and fear. Migrants take one of four different paths to find a job as domestic care workers. I have described two of them above: illegal immigration and placing via an agency. In addition, there are also the options of a placement via the German federal employment agency (Agentur für Arbeit) or of registering a commercial enterprise as a free-lance care worker. Citizens of an EU member state: Within the EU member states, all EU citizens are entitled to freedom of movement and freedom to do business. EU citizens may thus start a business in all member states. Their only legal requirement is to register with the local residents’ registration office. (http://www.existenzgruener.de/selbständigkeit/entscheidung/branchen_zielgruppen/migranten/00495/index.php) Information in English can be found under (http://www.existenzgruender.de/englisch/self_employment/index.php)
Self-employment could somewhat change the power relations between care workers and their clients. It will therefore be one of our tasks to inform women care workers sufficiently early of the self-employment option and the associated access to a legal status and to offer them support when choosing this option. Ideally, the women would register their “one-woman enterprises” in Lithuania, so that all taxes and dues would benefit their own country and they would be insured in Lithuania as well.

Preparation and Support Both the care workers and the client families would have to be prepared for the new situation and offered expert support at different junctures. Support would not only include nursing issues, but also psycho-social issues as well as problems with family dynamics. The Müller family would have to learn how to become good employers. Janina would have to learn to find her place in the new social context and receive support that would allow her to maintain the bonds to her own family.

Support for the Left-Behind Families Janina and her children, her parents and her partner need support to negotiate the time of Janina’s separation from her children. How will it be possible for Janina to maintain intensive relationships to her children and remain involved in raising them? One type of support some women find helpful is to have a small 200-euro laptop at their disposal that allows them to have daily contact with their children via Skype. Other potentially helpful support could include: supporting Janina and her family in using the money she earns in a meaningful way;

Establishing low-cost home-care and domestic help services through German social policy measures; easing the burden of caring relatives by offering legal care services;

Active labor market policies by the Lithuanian government that aim at legalizing and professionalizing care workers as well as at the breaking up of existing mafia-like, criminal recruitment structures.
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SANTRAUKA

MIGRACIJA LYČIŲ ASPEKTU – LIETUVĖS MOTERYS, (NELEGALIAI) DIRBANČIOS VOKIEČIŲ NAMŲ ŪKIUOSE: PASEKMĖS ŠEIMOMS ČIA IR TEN