

Chapter 3

Migration



3.1 Domestic Workers and Migration Policies

State policies may strongly influence the employment of migrants for care and domestic work (Ruhs & Anderson, 2010). Both sending and receiving countries have adopted mechanisms to channel migrants (especially women) into this specific occupation. The care market-oriented scenario described in the previous pages creates a growing demand for a (female) migrant labour force employed to work for longer hours and at lower wages than local workers (Anderson & Shutes, 2014; Cangiano & Shutes, 2010). These migrant care workers are generally disadvantaged by policies privileging skilled over unskilled migration, as well as by legislation denying (long-term) residence permits to people employed in the care sector. Policies that make the regular employment of migrants very difficult contribute to the under-valuation of these jobs, which are generally assigned to the most vulnerable and stigmatized subjects in each national context (Lan, 2006). Women migrating to work in the domestic and private care sector face a complex landscape of migration and labour regulations that is extremely difficult to navigate. The situation is also problematic for households that cannot find appropriate or affordable care within declining welfare states and among fellow nationals reluctant to take these jobs, but are forbidden or discouraged from directly hiring a domestic worker who is a third-country national. As a consequence, irregular migration and informal work are expanding within the realm of private homes.

We have already seen that the composition of the labour force in each country also depends on the features of bilateral agreements between countries of origin and destination. Among those open to migrants in domestic and care work, we find countries that set quotas for the number of migrants accepted from specific nationalities and specific occupations. In Italy, for example, there is a specific quota for domestic and care workers. Also, migrant domestic workers may or may not be part of regularization procedures for undocumented migrants. Other countries strongly contrast with this tendency. They are reluctant to welcome foreigners in this sector

and it is therefore almost impossible to receive a residence permit if you are a migrant doing domestic and care work (Triandafyllidou, 2013). In some of these countries, however, the demand for full-time paid domestic work has been channelled into au pair schemes, which are increasingly popular among families with young children that do not have other resources for the employment of foreign workers (see Cox, 2007; Isaksen, 2010).

In relation to these different settings, it is important to question how gender, race and migration play a role in the management and organization of the workforce in these services, and in paid domestic and care work more generally. Migrant women are disadvantaged by policies privileging skilled migration as well as by legislation denying work permits to those who have migrated to reunite with their families. At the same time, xenophobic discourses and gendered representations have developed in European societies, distinguishing between ‘good’ migrants and those whose integration is deemed impossible on the basis of ideas of the migrants’ ‘cultural proximity’ or ‘distance’ (Spijkerboer & Van Walsum, 2007). The ways in which these racialized and gendered representations inform the organization of domestic and care labour have attracted considerable scholarly attention. Ethnographic studies of domestic service show that, due to the specific nature of care work, ‘naturalization’ – meaning the normalization of gendered and of racialized difference between people – serves to make the emotional labour and skills of migrant domestic workers invisible, on the basis of the idea of a ‘cultural’ predisposition for care among women of certain nationalities (Marchetti & Scrinzi, 2011; Scrinzi, 2013).

Less is known, on the other hand, about the role played by racism and ethnicity in the organization of work in what I called, in the previous chapter, bureaucratized care jobs. Black workers report experiences of racism from care recipients as well as from managers and co-workers (Timonen & Doyle, 2010). Care workers tend to enact ideas of cultural difference in their relationships with their co-workers, attributing positive qualities to their national group (Timonen & Doyle, 2010). Further, intermediaries between care recipients and caregivers, such as recruitment agencies, can play an important role in reproducing or challenging sexist and racializing ideas as well as the gendered and racialized division of work in the sector (Bakan & Stasiulis, 1994; Lendaro & Imdorf, 2012; Scrinzi, 2013) (Box 3.1).

3.2 Irregular Migration in Europe

The number of households employing a domestic worker is increasing across the European Union in response to the widespread privatization of the childcare and elder care sectors. Since public nurseries, homes for the elderly and hospitals can no longer satisfy their needs, European families have shifted to purchasing market-based care and cleaning services. Hiring a migrant domestic worker meets the demand for affordable yet high quality personal care, while offering a solution to native women who struggle to combine expectations about care commitments with

Box 3.1: Is Migration Good for Women?

Transposing Susan Moller Okin's (1999) famous question, 'Is multiculturalism good for women?', one could equally wonder 'Is migration good for women?'

On the one hand, the *positive* elements of migration for women can be summarized as follows:

- it presents an opportunity for women to escape oppressive marriages.
- women can gain economic independence by becoming self-sufficient.
- women can improve their social position in their community of origin thanks to remittances and donations.

For Parreñas (2001), such improvements could justify the decision to migrate even with the prospect of strong downgrading, in low-skilled and stigmatized jobs in the country of destination, as experienced by many migrants.

On the other hand, migration is seen as a source of vulnerability and danger in view of the following **negative** elements:

- the perilous journeys at the hands of smugglers.
- being exposed to the risk of sexual violence and unwanted pregnancies.
- the risk of being trafficked into slavery-like work in different labour sectors.
- the risk (for cleaners and carers) of isolation and abuse in employers' private homes.
- self-deprivation to satisfy commitments to financially support their communities in the country of origin.

For these reasons, migrant women and girls are considered to be at greater risk of physical and psychological suffering than men, especially when migration is for the purposes of an arranged marriage or when they flee their countries as refugees.

expectations from their workplace, and who would otherwise have to step out of the labour market.

Despite this expansion, in many EU countries it is still difficult, if at all possible, to legally hire a migrant domestic worker. An initial obstacle stems from the fact that the sector itself is often poorly regulated (see Table 3.1). Domestic workers lack specific legal protection in countries such as Greece, the UK, Denmark, Spain and the Netherlands. Poland does not actually recognize this work as proper work, relegating it to a 'personal service'. On the other hand, Italy, Austria, Belgium, France, Portugal and Sweden are positive examples of countries where the employment of domestic workers is regulated by a specific collective agreement. Table 3.1 summarizes the latest reports from the Bureau of Workers' Activities of the ILO (ACTRAV, 2013) and the European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA,

Table 3.1 Legal framework for the private employment of domestic workers

Country	Specific legislation for domestic work	Specific collective agreement	Application of collective agreements on agency recruitment	No specific law (application of general labour law)	Domestic work is <i>not</i> considered employment
Austria	x	x			
Belgium	x	x			
Denmark				x	
Finland	x				
France	x	x			
Germany		x			
Greece				x	
Hungary	x				
Ireland	x				
Italy	x	x			
Netherlands	x		x		
Poland					x
Portugal	x	x			
Spain	x		x		
Sweden		x			
UK				x	

Source: Compiled by the authors using data from ACTRAV/ILO and FRA, cit

2011) in order to show the variety of legal arrangements that frame the employment of domestic workers.

The second obstacle to the hiring of a migrant domestic worker comes from national policies on labour migration. Table 3.2 provides an overview of the migration policy frameworks that apply to migrant domestic workers. In countries like Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Germany, it is not possible for households to hire a foreigner in a legal way. In Belgium, France and Spain, by contrast, although this is possible in principle, it is made unfeasible in practice by a strict application of regulations against the employment of foreigners in low-skilled labour markets.

In countries like Italy and Greece, a quota system fixes the maximum number of people that can apply for a residence permit for employment as domestic workers or carers each year. However, these quotas are usually set on the basis of a regional estimate of demand for workers in this sector that does not reflect true demand. Indeed, household needs for care or cleaning tasks cannot be planned by families as employers-to-be in the same way that a private firm would do in the industrial or agricultural sectors. Care needs often arise unexpectedly (somebody falls ill, a child is born). So the whole system of annual quotas of labour demand in the domestic work sector is ill-equipped to respond to the needs of households.

Countries where hiring is possible may still have very different regulations concerning the recruitment system: in Italy, Belgium and the UK, the employer has to

Table 3.2 Legal framework for the employment of migrant domestic workers (Main countries)

Country	Possible to hire non-EU domestic workers	Market-test as barrier to hiring non-EU domestic workers	Quota limitations	Self-employment	Sponsor system	Au pairs as substitute channel
Austria	Yes			x		
Belgium	Yes	x		x	x	x
Denmark	No					x
Finland	No					x
France	Yes	x				
Germany	No					
Ireland	Yes					
Italy	Yes		x		x	
Netherlands	No					x
Poland	Yes					
Portugal	Yes					
Spain	Yes	x				
Sweden	Yes					x
UK	Yes				x	x
Hungary	Yes					
Greece	Yes		x			

Source: Compiled by Triandafyllidou and Marchetti (2014) using data from ACTRAV/ILO and FRA, cit

formally sponsor the trip and the stay of the worker, including financial support. Meanwhile in Austria, care workers are self-employed, which releases the households from any responsibility. Finally, it is also worth noting that in several countries where hiring a migrant for domestic work is not allowed, the au pair placement scheme has increasingly been abused by families as an opportunity to find affordable childcare and cleaning help, rather than as a cultural exchange experience for a young person as it is intended to be.

In many EU countries, legal migrant domestic work coexists with irregular stay and employment, with important repercussions on the fundamental rights of migrant domestic workers. A study by the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA, 2011) and Anna Triandafyllidou (2013) on irregular migration in domestic work has shown how the specificities of domestic work (taking place inside the home, often with non-fixed hours and tasks) when intertwined with undocumented migration status and informal work arrangements can lead to particularly exploitative conditions of work and situations of extreme vulnerability.

The paid domestic work sector is exemplary of the labour market demand and supply dynamics in low-skilled sectors. Greece, Italy and Spain have met their demand in these sectors through repeated mass regularizations of undocumented migrants, many of whom, particularly women, are employed in care and cleaning jobs. Italy in particular implemented two large regularization programmes in 2002

and in 2009 especially targeting people in this sector. After the 2008 crisis, despite rising unemployment in these three countries that were in the eye of the Eurozone storm (with average unemployment at nearly 25 per cent in Greece and Spain in 2013 and 12 per cent and rising in Italy the same year), native women appeared reluctant to find employment in this sector. Even if the demand for cleaning and care services by middle class families – hit by recession and unemployment – had fallen, the domestic work sector was less influenced by the crisis than for instance, the construction industry, or agriculture (Bonifazi & Marini, 2013; Di Bartolomeo & Marchetti, 2016; Gonzalez-Enriquez, 2013; Maroukis, 2013).

In Triandafyllidou and Marchetti (2014), we argue that the EU needs a comprehensive, albeit differentiated, approach that takes into account the complexity of labour force supply and demand and the different economic cycles of individual member states. We also point to the need to acknowledge that there is a structural demand for a migrant labour force in certain occupations, which is related to long-term demographic processes such as the ageing of European societies; the configuration of nuclear families without extended support networks to cover the need to care for children, elderly or disabled people; and the participation of women in paid work outside the home. These processes are irreversible and persist even in periods of acute economic downturn.

In Triandafyllidou and Marchetti (2015) we proposed the creation of a proactive regulatory framework that would be adaptable to territorial and sectorial difference, but would also usefully provide a management framework for current and future flows in low-skill sectors. Such a sectorial approach could be successfully tested in the case of the wider domestic sector encompassing both cleaning and care work. This approach would complement the existing directives on training, research, students, intra-company transferees, highly skilled migrants and seasonal employment, listed above.

3.3 The Importance of Networks

It is in the light of the informality of the sector and the vulnerability of domestic workers that the question of networks is especially important. This is so at different levels. First, given the highly informal character of job recruitment in domestic and care work, networks play a great role in causing people to enter the sector, spreading information about new places of employment, types of work, and so on. The use of networks is also favoured by employers who prefer to hire women in a personal relationship with someone they already know and trust. Huw Vasey (2015) discusses the impact of networks on migrants' labour integration, saying that, in particular in the case of people in low-skilled occupations, the labour mobility of migrant workers is often not about skills per se, but about the opportunities that they find in each social context, due to dynamics within the host society but also within migrants' networks. Migrant domestic workers profit definitively from the support of their networks for their labour integration in the new country (Parreñas, 2001).

Following the seminal work of Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994), social networks have been identified as an essential resource for domestic workers' empowerment. In their free time, when meeting with friends and colleagues outside the employers' houses, domestic workers can share contacts for better jobs, advice about mistreatment, and information about new legal and social services. They can learn about how to negotiate with employers concerning tasks and payment so that 'while the occupation remains largely unregulated by formal bureaucratic government agencies ..., an intensive and informal social regulation is created by the domestic workers themselves' (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994, p. 61). In other words, social networks are a strategy for these workers to compensate for their exclusion from the formal labour market. However, social networks can also serve to 'divide' the market of migrant care and domestic work on unequal terms, creating internal boundaries and overshadowing people's autonomy in their labour mobility. For example, Anna Gavanis (2012) emphasizes how networks can increase the segmentation that characterizes this sector. This is especially so when domestic workers act as brokers for new job recruitments and they can thus favour their acquaintances in order to increase their prestige within the community – or they can provide jobs in exchange for economic compensation, which is particularly common among Eastern European domestic workers (Mazzacurati, 2005). This can also explain the competition between domestic workers from different national groups, as in the cases I will discuss in the following pages.

This tendency to competition often relates to the functioning of social network dynamics between migrants from different nationalities, the principles that organize them, and the impact of the economic crisis on them. Looking at the case of Georgian, Ukrainian and Polish women working in the Italian province of Reggio Emilia (Marchetti, 2017), the interconnections between these difference issues emerged at the following levels:

1. At the cultural and linguistic level: the research respondents felt connected at this level in the aftermath of socialist rule. This made it possible to share information and participate in the same social activities using their native languages (Polish, Ukrainian and Russian) which they could all understand a little. It also gave them a general sense of solidarity and commonality vis-à-vis their integration in Italy. At this level all three groups stood together with no major differentiations between Georgians, Poles and Ukrainians.
2. In relation to their migration trajectories in Italy: at this level, one could see the emulation of Polish migration patterns on the part of Ukrainians. This relationship built on previous historical cross-border connections between Ukraine and Poland which influenced Ukrainians' trajectories towards and within Italy. Georgians, by contrast, took a separate path.
3. Regarding free mobility and irregular migration: at this level, there was more similarity and interconnection between Georgians and Ukrainians, while Poles remaining separate. The need to obtain a residence permit to be in Italy placed Georgians and Ukrainians in similar conditions so that they tended to seek more long-term employment with regular contracts, often approaching local non-profit

services for support. Poles, conversely, tended to take more flexible and temporary jobs, since they could travel freely within the EU.

4. In relation to the impact of the economic crisis on the labour market of elder care: at this level the three groups entered into competition with each other. Their differences in legal status and economic need (depending on variations in the cost of living in their countries of origin) gave them different leverages to negotiate salaries and labour conditions with prospective employers. This upended the relationships between the groups, with Georgians having more opportunities to work than Poles, and Ukrainians in the middle. The crisis and the general impoverishment of employers' households had meant that the group that could sell itself the most cheaply for intensive labour had more opportunities to find work.

We see here the importance of looking at social network dynamics as processes that go beyond nationality. On the one hand, this is so because some of the characteristics that are associated with particular national groups may also be found among migrants from other national groups. This is demonstrated by the importance of the socialist legacy, in cultural and linguistic terms, in shaping sentiments of solidarity and support between women from different Eastern European countries. However, the networks between national groups can function on the basis of interconnections between some of these countries, but not all of them. On some issues, Poles and Ukrainians are connected, while on some others the network is between Ukrainians and Georgians. These contingent interconnections are explained, in my view, by contextual factors: migration regulations, labour market dynamics, salaries, the cost of living in the home country, the availability of specific knowledge, and so on. In this perspective, the constitution and functioning of migrants' networks are not (or not only) grounded on shared identities or cultural legacies, but more on contingent external factors that push several groups to interact and support each other, though they may be divided on other issues. The economic recession, in this sense, can be seen as the external factor that breaks all possible supportive interactions between the groups, increasing their competition, and inaugurating a dynamic in which everyone is trying to take advantage of the market by exploiting the unique features of their group (Box 3.2).

3.4 Care and Circular Migration

The European Commission's 'global approach to migration' promotes circular migration as an 'efficient' way to manage labour migration within and from outside the EU member states (see COM, 2007 and Council of Europe, 2009). In these documents, workers' circular migration, meaning the going back and forth between the country of origin and destination every few months, is portrayed as a profitable tool to maximize the positive outcome of labour mobility in EU countries, while reducing the possible negative impact of long-term migration, from the point of view of the countries of settlement and of those of origin alike. When we examine the case of circular migrant women in the Italian care sector, quite a different picture

Box 3.2: Migrants' Networks

Social networks are of great interest in migration studies to understand diasporas and transnationalism. In the classic definition by Douglas Massey, migrants' social networks are ties based on 'kinship, friendship, and shared community of origin', which can favourably influence an individual or household's decision to migrate (Massey et al., 1993, p. 448). The existence of networks represents a form of social capital for people who want to migrate: it provides them with possibilities of shelter and financial support upon arrival, directs them towards labour opportunities, and connects them to personal relationships and social activities with others belonging to the same community (Marin and Wellman 2011; Massey and Espinosa 1997). Networks are seen as something that 'reduces the costs and risks of movement', increasing the likelihood of migration. In some situations, social networks can determine the destination, and the social and economic activities in which migrants will engage after their arrival (Brezzi et al., 2010; Novotny and Hasman, 2015).

However, networks are not only a positive resource. They can represent an oppressive condition for many, in the form of ghettoization and isolation from other migrants and non-migrants, financial and material dependency on other group members, and the consolidation of hierarchies within a group. Network dynamics are not only based on unity and solidarity, but also reveal conflicts and divisions between members. As in the dynamic analyzed in this chapter, networks can convey knowledge sharing through the emulation of migratory paths, but they can also cause competition in the labour market and other spheres of migrants' social lives in host societies.

A crucial element in the making of social networks is the participation of members in specific economic activities. Networks can in fact be decisive in the formation of what are called 'ethnic labour niches', that is, when a single ethnic group occupies a predominant role in one employment sector or entrepreneurial activity. In the case of paid care givers and domestic workers, the same phenomenon can be observed in the early period of migrants' employment in the sector (Schrover et al., 2007).

appears. There one can find the practice of dividing a single job (i.e. caring for the same elderly person) between two or more women during the year, alternating for 2–3 months each. Interestingly, this 'job-sharing' is not portrayed by migrants as a limitation to their mobility. It is rather seen an *opportunity* that some migrants may opt for (cf. Mai, 2011). Entering this transnational form of 'job-sharing' emerges from an individual process of transformation, usually played out over several years. Becoming a circular migrant may be an important step in processes of migrants' subjectification, with a different meaning depending on their specific characteristics in terms of nationality, age and role in the household of origin. Circularity may be experienced in very different ways: its definition is stretched and adapted to each

subject's needs and desires in relation to their work, and in the process, it may change its meaning.

Scholars have attempted to find a specific explanation for the fact that in some contexts more women than men engage in circular migration. Authors have referred to the unequal distribution of care commitments in the household of origin, which requires women to regularly go back home to accomplish their 'domestic obligations' more often than men (Ellis et al., 1996, p. 41). Cinzia Solari (2010) shows that in the context of Ukrainian migrant workers, the dominant gendered ideology favours the emigration of mature women rather than youngsters, and on a temporary basis rather than permanently, in order to preserve newly-formed young families and discourage the mass emigration of the new generation. As a consequence, mature mothers or grandmothers who otherwise have difficulty finding well-paid jobs in their home country, are the members of the household who can temporarily emigrate most profitably. Solari shows that the gender and age profile of the Ukrainians coming to Italy as home care workers is in line with a post-Soviet gendered ideology that prioritizes keeping young families together. The migratory decisions of mature Eastern European women are further determined by the negative transformations taking place – in Western as in Eastern countries – concerning the provision of welfare and the protection of social security rights for workers, children, sick and elderly people. We see that health and care services are increasingly being privatized across Europe with a strong emphasis on individual family strategies to find low-cost and yet high-quality solutions. Inequalities based on class and income thus become decisive for access to sanitary and medical care. Pension rights are seriously under threat, especially for those who have migrated or worked informally for some part of their career. At the same time, in Eastern Europe workers are induced to prolong their stay in the labour market in order to support both their children's access to an increasingly expensive education and costly medical care for ageing or sick relatives.

In fact, such circular East to West movements have thus far involved many Polish women going to Germany (Lutz, 2011; Morokvasic, 1994) and the Netherlands (Pool, 2003); as well as many Ukrainians going to Poland (Igllicka et al., 2011; Kindler, 2008) and Hungary (Caglar et al., 2011). In Italy one can also find circular migrants among Ukrainians, Poles, Georgians and other groups from the former Soviet bloc (Boccagni & Ambrosini, 2012; Marchetti & Venturini, 2014; Solari, 2010; Vianello, 2009; Vietti, 2010).

Circular migration in the home care sector typically consists of a rotation between two workers on a 3 or 4-month basis, and is portrayed in positive terms by many of the employers and workers I interviewed in the context of my 'Circular Care' research project. During this project, I found that circularity may also begin after years of steady work in the same place and labour sector. During this time, prospective circular carers build up the required social network among Italians and foreign colleagues and accumulate economic capital. This is in line with the argument made by Rhacel Parreñas for Filipinas in Japan, where she found that circularity is not to be understood only as a prelude to stable settlement (Parreñas, 2010). Moreover, my argument extended the conclusions of the *Metoikos* research project to the case of

Eastern European care workers. The *Metoikos* project on circular migration patterns in Southern and Central Eastern Europe observed that male migrants from Morocco and Albania start to rotate after several years of permanent emigration (Triandafyllidou, 2011); the same can be observed among Eastern European women care workers.

In 'Circular Care', I demonstrated that circularity in care work is not strongly characterized by unregulated employment and residency. Rather than misusing a tourist visa for labour purposes, the Ukrainian and Russian women I met start rotating only after having regularized their legal position and after having found regular employment. None of the Georgians that I interviewed was yet able to achieve a circular migration pattern, but several have it as a goal for the future. Poles, on the other hand, are generally working without a labour contract, but they are regular from the point of view of their residence status. I also showed that circular care cannot be equated with other forms of temporary work, especially seasonal work in agriculture. Unlike other sectors, it is important for these types of circular migrants to fulfil their tasks without interruption and without causing any distress to the care receiver. A reliable co-worker is thus essential to the performance of this job. For this reason, I argued, circular care can rather be seen as a transnational form of job sharing that has all the typical features of this employment modality in relation to the distribution of tasks, commitment towards the co-worker, and so on. Furthermore, circular migration in care work is not demand driven, nor is it produced by state programmes. On the contrary, it is actively sought out by workers who are causing this form of employment to spread in the sector. One could criticize this tendency by saying that they are contributing to the precarization of their own working conditions.

Going back to the *Metoikos* project, it is important to note that Ukrainian domestic and care workers circulating in Poland make use of tourist visas in order to enter and work irregularly. Iglicka et al., (2011) argue that in Poland this pattern usually precedes a more permanent migration. The cases I analyzed however were substantially different. I showed that women with regular working contracts sometimes decided to change to this form of employment after having worked permanently in Italy for several years. Moreover, they were not simply coming and going, but literally *organizing* a transnational rotation of workers. This tendency shows some novelty in comparison to informal and spontaneous types of circular migration, but also in comparison to more state-sponsored modalities, as in the case of mobility partnerships for the seasonal employment of Moroccan women in Spain's agriculture industry. In other words, while the circular migration of Ukrainians towards Poland could be framed as an example of an 'incomplete migration', as in Marek Okólski's view (Okólski, 2004), for the non-EU Eastern Europeans in Italy this is, on the contrary, a very elaborate modality of employment and mobility.

It is important here to mention that Italian policy actors are today, for the first time, confronting the issue of what I call circular care. This corresponds to the principle of job-sharing (*lavoro ripartito*). Yet the implementation of this hiring system still lacks useful and shared assessments based on an adequate number of cases. As a consequence, local welfare agencies, charity organizations and

municipal or provincial offices are keen to acquire more knowledge on this topic in order to become able to orient employers and employees towards the most suitable arrangement. I should emphasize that circular care emerged as an important opportunity for the agency of a specific kind of working migrants, who seem to actively seek out this migratory pattern, as is evident in their request for support from their employers. In fact, circular care is the option often sought by migrant women to balance their personal desire to return home, the persistent financial dependency of their families, and the cutbacks on social security in post-Soviet countries. It is for women in these very specific circumstances that circularity has become a 'dream'.

3.5 Employability in Migrant Domestic Work

Employability is the key to understanding why and how each individual worker is able to step into a specific sector and subsequently move within it (Hillage & Pollard, 1999). McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) expand on this idea and show how being more employable means being able to put forward certain personal attributes together with some specific personal circumstances that can represent added value, enhancing one's labour opportunities. Workers have incorporated this urge to 'increase their employability' in their understanding of their own entry into and mobility within a specific labour sector. These transformations correspond to the fact that, since the EU Luxembourg Summit of 1997, the European labour market has changed substantially, not only in terms of new regulations that have been implemented but also – and this is what is of interest for the purposes of this chapter – with the emergence of new approaches to the meaning of work and to the experience of labourers. These new paradigms have rapidly become hegemonic in the way we understand the reasons behind employment versus unemployment, labour mobility and different forms of labour participation. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the workforce is required to be 'competitive' in order for individual workers to have better chances of selling themselves on the labour market. Being more competitive means being more flexible in terms of the time and location of the job, more adaptable to taking up different tasks, and offering a better price than others. Put differently, in this labour market with shrinking opportunities and almost no certainties, it is ultimately up to the worker to 'be more employable' (see Burroni et al., 2011; Crouch, 2008).

When it comes to flexible forms of employment, which started to be incorporated in EU labour legislation in 1997, the subjective acceptance of the need to take on (more) precarious work is crucial. People have resisted the risk of unemployment and consequent impoverishment by putting forward those capacities that make them fit for precarious work opportunities. They develop a 'proactive' attitude to engaging in temporary, long-distance, low-paid jobs. In this context, temporary precarious work is not only something that is imposed on workers by force, but (also)

something that workers – given the scarcity of other, better employment opportunities – may actively seek. In this dynamic, personal factors act as stimuli for workers to make themselves available for flexible work. What interests me is the way these incentives are grounded in workers' personally constructed social characteristics in relation to how their gender, age, class and nationality simultaneously determine their opportunities in the labour market.

It is important to emphasize how this view runs counter to the perspective of previous studies on the impact of gender, age, nationality and ethnicity on labour market participation. For example, while dominant views on migrant worker participation focus on obstacles that they encounter due to their ethnicized background, migrants of specific nationalities can 'use' the ethnicization attached to their profiles in order to gain easier entry into some labour sectors (see Marchetti, 2014). In other words, some groups of workers may be more employable than others because of the expectations that relate to their constructed social identities. It is important to also consider the impact of gendered expectations on people's work trajectories, within the context of employability. Here again, scholars have tended to consider gendered features as a *burden* for the labour market participation of women, often excluding them from the job market and relegating them to part-time, low-paid jobs (Fredman, 2004; Jepsen, 2004). Without undermining the general argument concerning the gendered segregation in the labour market, my aim here is to shift the view by suggesting that gender could actually be seen as a *asset* for women to actively seek precarious and temporary jobs. Delving into the debate on employability shows how the 'language of employability' can describe the attitudes and the decisions taken by migrant women who step into home care work on temporary rather than permanent contracts.

Employability has been variously discussed and defined. One of the classic definitions is that by Jim Hillage and Emma Pollard, who understand employability as 'the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realize potential through sustainable employment' (Hillage & Pollard, 1999, p. 12). They add:

For the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers and the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek work (ibid.).

According to this view, when a person is not able – for various possible reasons – to take a job and remains unemployed, it is said that this person 'is not employable' for that specific role. In other words, given a specific field of employment, employability relates to the ability of individuals to step into it or to change their role within it. As a consequence, policies on employability focus on the 'factors that allow or prevent' people from moving into suitable work.

Here we find that workers can use their personal skills and attitudes as assets in order to gain employment. Indeed, migrant women of specific nationalities can use the gendered and ethnicized attitudes about them (and their skills) to give them easier access to this labour sector (see Marchetti 2010). In other words,

some groups of workers are more employable than others for certain jobs because of the social constructions that relate to their identities. This argument finds better support in another, more expanded, view of employability, namely the ‘holistic approach to employability’ of Ronald McQuaid and Colin Lindsay (2005). Such a holistic approach is vital, in my view, to making sense of the specific form of temporary circular labour migration that takes place in the Italian home care sector.

This combination of labour and migration patterns is the solution through which two (or more) women working in shifts are able to balance their emotional attachment to their families back home, their care commitments towards them, and the persistent financial dependency of these same women on their work abroad. By alternating at the workplace in Italy for periods of 3–4 months each, they are able to earn enough to financially support their households without having to be separated from them on a permanent basis. However, during this period they do not pay full taxes and social security contributions either in Italy or in their countries of origin, thus they end up being a full citizen ‘neither here nor there’, which is typical of circular migrants (Abrantes, 2013). In Marchetti (2013) I offer concrete examples of how workers organize their rotation in a way that resembles a job sharing arrangement at the international level.

Taking an employability perspective, we could say that it is only possible to ‘become employable’ as a circular carer when one possesses certain personal attributes. First of all, one needs to be proactive: to have a strong sense of initiative both in searching out a co-worker and an employer who will accept this arrangement. The ability to successfully couple with another woman is especially crucial. In the language of employability, circular carers have to be able to manage possible tensions with their co-workers, meet shared commitments, keep track of the calendar of arrivals and departures, teach tasks to the worker replacing them, and so on.

Secondly, they will have an advantage in this labour market if they are able to organize all of this, even from a distance, in the smoothest possible way for their employers and the care receiver. They must be able to use the telephone and internet in order to keep in touch with employers and co-workers during their absence, and also to solve unexpected problems and adapt to sudden needs. Fundamentally, they must have ‘enhanced geographical mobility’, that is, to be at ease with travelling long distances and crossing international borders (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005).

As mentioned, in addition to such ‘personal attributes’, McQuaid and Lindsay also consider it important to focus on personal circumstances to assess whether a worker is suitable for a specific job. Personal circumstances may be aspects of workers’ (typically women’s) personal lives that reduce their capacity to work, such as care and family commitments. Conversely, a personal circumstance that increases the employability of workers is related to their specific cultural background and the value of work within it.

3.6 The Role of Agencies and Intermediaries

The question of temporary migration in the provision of long-term care services, mainly for elderly and disabled people, is located at the meeting point between debates on the care and welfare regime and those on the migratory regime. In other words, to talk about the situation of temporary migrant care workers we need to look simultaneously at the regime that regulates the distribution of care provision between households, markets and states, and the regime concerning migrants' mobility and their conditions in the countries of arrival (Lutz & Palenga-Möllenberg, 2011). The scholarly debate on these two different yet converging regimes has been vivid in recent years, focusing on the role of the different actors in this field and on the tendencies at play, so as to grasp different intersections of migratory and care regimes depending on the national setting, as Giulia Garofalo Geymonat, Anna Di Bartolomeo and myself have tried to do by comparing the role of agencies for migrant domestic workers in Germany and Taiwan (Marchetti et al., 2022).

It has been observed how in industrialized societies with ageing populations, a market logic in the field of long-term care provision is increasingly pervasive. As discussed in the previous chapter, companies are expanding their scope towards care provision, with goals more concerned with making profit and cutting costs, especially labour costs, than with the quality of the care provided (Farris & Marchetti, 2017). For Piper and Withers (2018), it is important to note how the commodification of care today clearly concerns not only the provision of care services as such, but all other elements of the process, such as the commercialization of the recruitment of care workers. Indeed, as we have seen, these steps of the process – usually performed by intermediaries and brokers – are a matter of monetary transaction and influenced by competitive market logic.

This market-oriented scenario creates a growing demand on a migrant labour force – women especially – employed at low wages and in precarious conditions (Ruhs and Anderson, 2010; Cangiano & Shutes, 2010). In this setting, transnational employment agencies support migrant women in the difficult goal of meeting the narrow requirements set by the labour and migration legislation of destination countries. Piper and Withers (2018) suggest the use of the term 'forced transnationalism' to express 'how the political and economic interests of sending and receiving countries coalesce to undermine migrants' rights to work (at home) and rights at work (abroad)' (p. 563). In their view, temporary care workers are forced transnational migrants for whom 'transnationalism is an involuntary experience defined by economic and social hardships that are endured in the absence of meaningful alternatives' (ibid.).

When it comes to the role of states, scholars argue that there is an increasing tendency by states to support the individual purchase of services from the care marketplace, rather than to provide them directly. This parallels the neoliberal reconfiguration of the role of the state as that of ensuring the functioning of markets, and the transformation of citizens into consumers individually responsible for their care needs (Anderson, 2012; Glendinning & Moran, 2009; Pavolini & Ranci, 2008).

Yet it is important to emphasize that if states have increasingly withdrawn from their role of direct care providers, they have strongly maintained the controlling one. First of all, states have an important (direct or indirect) regulatory function over these markets, since they provide the normative framework and the work regulations that allow private companies or individuals to offer their services to households. They can also determine the skills and profiles of migrants that can be recruited. Finally, the composition of the labour force will have a different character depending on the existing bilateral agreements – including pre-departure training programmes and quota-based policies – with workers' countries of origin, which are organized at the policy level (Kofman & Raghuram, 2015).

Against this background, as Tseng and Wang (2013) argue, states have been able to progressively delegate to employers (that is, care receivers) a series of important commitments and responsibilities that are vital to the functioning of the system. For this reason, resorting to agencies and brokers has become a pragmatic necessity for employers in order to overcome the practical and bureaucratic difficulties involved in the international recruitment of private care workers. This explains the booming number of agencies, brokers and intermediaries of various kinds who – legally or not – intervene in the recruitment of transnational care workers (Leiber et al., 2019; Schwiter et al., 2018). There is a growing debate among scholars whether these intermediaries are a good or a bad thing. Authors like Coe et al. 2010 see agencies as promoting further neoliberal deregulation of the care market and the precarization of work. Others like Lindquist et al. (2012) do not condemn these intermediaries and actually stress their importance in supporting and guiding workers who travel to a new country and enter this job market. Either way, the precarity of migrant care workers and their poor working conditions, especially in the case of temporary migrants, is at the centre of this discussion (Fudge & Strauss, 2013; McDowell et al., 2008).

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