

Chapter 6

Conclusion



I hope that readers of this book will have found in it a complete and inspiring overview of the many issues at stake around the topic of domestic work, from a migratory perspective. Some of the issues discussed in this volume actually go beyond the experience of migrants, in as far as they may concern the non-migrants among domestic workers. But they also concern workers in the care sectors more generally, as well as the households, companies or institutions for which they work.

In order to introduce readers to these topics, I have taken them on a journey, reviewing existing studies, summarizing the relevant developments of the scholarship, and identifying the main issues and interpretations as they have taken shape from the 1990s until the present. Along the way, readers can find examples of the conditions of domestic workers in some countries, and a discussion of the main actors and policy interventions that have characterized this field in recent years. Indeed, my aim was for the book to merge the presentation of research results and discussion of case studies with more theoretical insights surrounding the feminization of migration and the specific issue of migrant domestic work.

In the first chapters I provided a systematic overview of the most pertinent concepts and interpretations elaborated within the different streams of the scholarship on gender and migration studies. For instance, in Chap. 1, I provided a general definition of what ‘domestic work’ is, based in the main on the definition provided by the International Labour Organization in its Convention no. 189 on the rights of domestic workers. I also discussed the difference between the notions of the international division of reproductive labour and global care chains, which are at the heart of the relationship between gender and migration in a globalized perspective. I argued for the necessity of a multi-layered approach to the issue of migrant domestic workers, namely combining the analysis of three political regimes that act simultaneously in this field: the gender regime, the welfare regime and the migratory regime.

A major topic in this scholarship has been the question of reproductive labour, and the way it is commodified and marketized in a transnational dimension. In

Chap. 2, I discussed the uniqueness of all work relating to the sphere of care, and the relevance of imagination and cultural realms in this respect. I thus illustrate the feminist debate on the care economy, a theme that has become increasingly influential in migration studies, when looking at the political economy of transnational migrations. Indeed, care issues emerge as a political matter, object of state policies and social tensions which change from place to place.

The role of states became central in Chap. 3. Drawing attention to the particular conditions of the many undocumented and irregular workers in this sector, I discussed the failure of European policies concerning migrant domestic work. We have seen how, at the global level, state policies tend to create ties between labour conditions and migratory status. Although the details of such regulations may be different in the various countries, in all cases subjects are kept in a situation of permanent precarity. In this regard, it is important to look at the role of private actors such as recruitment and employment agencies – or intermediaries more generally – that work transnationally, sometimes across borders. The marketization of domestic work is accompanied by the diffusion of neoliberal attitudes toward labour, which emphasize the importance of skills, personal profiles, individual mobility patterns and so forth. In this chapter I discussed the case of circular migrants, which is particularly telling not only as a mobility pattern and policy issue, but also in relation to the way care is organized and experienced in contemporary societies, both by caregivers and care receivers. I discussed the importance of social and national networks between migrant domestic workers.

To talk about all these issues ultimately leads us to talk about the inequality that affects migrant domestic workers (Chap. 4) and the struggles to improve their rights (Chap. 5). In order to understand the multiple levels of inequality that affect domestic workers, and the way these different inequalities may be intertwined, it is essential that we adopt an intersectional perspective. An intersectional view applies both to differences within the category of domestic workers, and to differences between domestic workers and other subjects. On the latter, Chap. 4 discussed the relationship between domestic workers and their (women) employers. On the former, it looks at the hierarchies at play in the ‘care market’ and how they apply to different groups of migrant workers depending on their age, nationality, education, and so on. In Chap. 4, I broached wider processes such as colonial legacies, citizenship entitlements, sentiments of belonging and the inheritance of past slavery, and how they have shaped and reproduced these inequalities through time. Speaking of inequality, I thought it was also important to address how two specific contextual developments may affect domestic workers: first, an economic crisis (examples are discussed from the 2008 crisis in Italy), and secondly, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, about which I provide statistical data and examples of policy interventions.

Finally, in Chap. 5 the focus was on the mobilizations for the labour rights of domestic workers that have taken place at the international level over the last couple of decades. Building on the results of the DomEQUAL project, the chapter described

the development of the movements for domestic workers' rights in several countries. It looked at the role of NGOs, governments, trade unions, domestic workers' groups and migrant activism. It delved into the relationship between international and local actors. I discussed these campaigns' allies and opponents by recounting the role of traditional women's and workers' movements specifically as they relate to domestic workers. Lastly, this chapter also offered an overview of the many insights from the studies of legal and social movements towards understanding domestic workers' rights and their violations, which represent the most recent developments in the scholarship.

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