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► **To cite this version:**

Blandine Destremau. The dynamics of the globalised migrant domestic labour market in the Mediterranean countries. *Mobilities*, Amsterdam School for Social-science Research (ASSR), Jan 2007, Amsterdam, Netherlands. hal-00637705

HAL Id: hal-00637705

<https://hal.science/hal-00637705>

Submitted on 7 Nov 2011

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Mobilities

**A Conference Organized by the Amsterdam School for Social-science
Research (ASSR), 25th and 26th of January 2007.**

The dynamics of the globalised migrant domestic labour market in the Mediterranean countries

Unpublished document

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Abstract

In most Mediterranean countries¹, domestic employment is on the rise, and domestic workers in this area are migrants originating increasingly from developing countries, often illegal residents, who reach their destination by means of intermediaries or traffickers. Studies stress a growing internationalisation of domestic labour markets, in parallel with a growing feminisation of migrations, where domestic workers are coming from further and further away, and with an emerging of national specialisations. Migration in unprotected conditions, especially when leading to employment in a branch having acquired a strong “migrant” marker, bears many vulnerability factors that affect migrant women differently according to their country of origin and their country of destination.

My paper is based on a vast bibliography. It is organised in two parts. *First*, I will illustrate the relevance and magnitude of the relationship between migrations and paid domestic labour markets, focussing on data from the Mediterranean area. *Then*, I will analyse specific characteristics of this type of employment that tend to reinforce workers’ vulnerability ; mainly the nature and framework of domestic employment and its specific status regarding labour and social protection regulations. I will then conclude by some reflections on the dynamics of the domestic labour market at global level.

¹ The Mediterranean area has no specific relevance for this topic. However, as it presents an interesting sample of cases, it will be considered *stricto sensu*. The paper will be mainly founded on some Mediterranean countries only, those on which studies exist and circulate (Italy, France, Spain, Turkey, Lebanon, Israel and Morocco). I found very little information only on Syria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Algeria, Cyprus, Portugal and Malta, which are thus virtually absent from this study.

Introduction

Although the ILO formally includes it in its definition, domestic employment² is seldom considered as part of the informal economy, which is usually administratively defined as covering small enterprises, self-employment and street vendors. Domestic employment is, however, the first sector of employment for women worldwide, and represents hundreds of thousands of workers in the Mediterranean area. It is an expanding part of the informal economy.

The first point I wish to make in this paper is that the structural dynamics of the domestic labour markets in the Mediterranean area contribute to reinforce workers' vulnerability almost everywhere. In a context of global markets' liberalisation and welfare State retrenchment, domestic workers' vulnerability cumulates dimensions related to gender, race and ethnicity, to migrant and social status, as well as to their labour position and circumstances.

In most Mediterranean countries, domestic employment is on the rise, and domestic workers in this area are migrants originating increasingly from developing countries, often illegal residents, who reach their country of destination by means of intermediaries or traffickers. Studies stress a growing internationalisation of domestic labour markets, in parallel with a growing feminisation of migrations where domestic workers are coming from further and further away, and with an emerging of national specialisations. Migration in unprotected conditions, especially when leading to employment in a branch having acquired a strong "migrant" marker, bears many vulnerability factors that affect migrant women differently according to their country of origin and their country of destination. Only Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Turkey and Egypt continue to hire local women or girls, rather than migrants.

The second key issue I will raise is that social protection devices, mechanisms and systems have not compensated this reinforced vulnerability. On the contrary, they fail to provide domestic workers adequate protection. Paid domestic labour is generally not considered as a "real" profession, with a recognised status. As performed by women essentially, it is often not even considered as a proper branch of employment. Although the fact that it is taking place inside homes exposes the workers to a highly personalised relationship with their

² The ILO 1996 homework convention defines domestic work as one « branch » of a wider type of activity :

« For the purposes of this Convention:

- a. the term *home work* means work carried out by a person, to be referred to as a home worker,
 - i. in his or her home or in other premises of his or her choice, other than the workplace of the employer;
 - ii. for remuneration;
 - iii. which results in a product or service as specified by the employer, irrespective of who provides the equipment, materials or other inputs used, unless this person has the degree of autonomy and of economic independence necessary to be considered an independent worker under national laws, regulations or court decisions;
 - b. persons with employee status do not become home workers within the meaning of this Convention simply by occasionally performing their work as employees at home, rather than at their usual workplaces;
 - c. the term *employer* means a person, natural or legal, who, either directly or through an intermediary, whether or not intermediaries are provided for in national legislation, gives out home work in pursuance of his or her business activity. »
- (http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/skills/recomm/instr/c_177.htm). But in reality, countries use different definitions according to their national laws (see Ramirez-Machado 2003). In this paper I will use indifferently domestic labour, work, or service.

employer and to specific risks, domestic labour is either excluded from the scope of basic labour standards applicable to other categories of workers, or covered by specific laws granting it a lower protection (Ramirez-Machado 2003). In addition to this “legal stigmatisation”, which leads to lower protection, bypassing the law and evading social contributions is everywhere quite common. Being considered a very low skill activity, deserving little consideration, domestic labour has always been reserved to lower status women and dominated social groups. The fact that today some segments of the domestic labour markets are almost exclusively occupied by migrant workers – such as live-in servants– breeds labour relationships based on domination and exploitation, hard labour conditions and minimal wages. These conditions amplify factors of vulnerability linked to the migratory fact, and reduce chances and efficiency of legal and social protection.

Both these structural dimensions of domestic workers’ vulnerability articulate with elements of history, social and migration policies, legal framework and cultural values of sending and host countries to combine into a gendered, class and racial hierarchy of the domestic labour market. On this basis, the paper will substantiate the following categorisation, resulting from comparisons between Mediterranean countries³. Roughly three blocks of countries can be differentiated in the area:

- a) Countries where the rate of women participation in the labour force has been relatively high for many years and where both family arrangements and Social Welfare have been organised to support women’s activity. In those countries, a part of domestic chores and care work (household, care for the children and elderly family members) that working women do not perform themselves anymore is externalised towards public services and institutions, while another part is taken on by husbands and fathers, and the rest by domestic employees. Domestic employment is on the rise as a result of shrinking public care services due to budget restrictions, of demographic changes, but also because social policies encourage employment in this sector as a means to fight unemployment of low skill persons. Paid domestic employment is mainly performed as a live-out occupation, on an hourly basis by non specialised migrant women originating from the successive waves of migration and having integrated into society and labour market. Only to a limited extent is it performed by unemployed national (young) women, and by new migrants having intended to work as domestics or doing it as a transitory integration activity. Live-in arrangements are relatively marginal. Besides Northern European countries, which do not belong to our study area, France is the most typical example of this situation. Israel and Turkey are on the fringe of this category.
- b) Countries where women economic activity rates are still relatively low, although women are not willing to perform all domestic chores alone anymore. Family patterns and the domestic division of house labour however resist change: men’s participation remains very low, State structures are not very supportive of women economic activity and local supply of domestic workers is drying up. Live-in domestic labourers are becoming the rule for upper and middle classes, allowing most of the work load housewives do not perform themselves anymore to be given out to maids. Various sub-types can be outlined: in countries such as Egypt and Turkey, the market is still supplied to a large extent by recently urbanised migrants and, in case of Egypt by

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children and so migrant live-in employees, either resulting from a purposeful specialised migration or from a transitory integration stage, are still not very frequent. In the case of Israel and Lebanon, part of the supply is still provided by dominated settled populations, in both cases Palestinians. In Israel, however, domestic employment used to be a sector of integration for newly arrived Jewish migrants, then as the market suffered some shortage resulting from closing the Palestinian territories, it became a sector of specialisation for migrants who came purposely to that end. In Lebanon, the domestic labour market has boomed rather for a reason of status than because of an increase in women labour market participation and it is now almost entirely provided with live-in specialised migrants originating from a few countries (mainly Sri Lanka and the Philippines). Southern Europe countries also belong to this category : increasing women labour force participation and demographic changes (ageing population), but also rising standards of living requiring status signs and low supply of public services, are favouring the demand for domestic services, while local supply is scarce because of rising standards of living and education. Migrant live-in maids have become a widespread phenomenon.

- c) Countries still practicing an old system of semi-family fostering servitude, bringing in girls from the hinterland and the countryside, the village or other poor family branches, to spend most of their childhood doing household chores at other people's homes. In these countries, child labour remains a problem, women status as a whole as well, and rising impoverishment and inequalities support the supply of cheap labour for domestic services. On the whole, local supply is sufficient for the domestic service demand, and labour relationships in this sector still rely on a traditional social (class, urban/rural, religious, ethnic...) domination structures. Morocco is the most typical country in this category. In Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Child domestic labour persists mainly in rural areas and secondary cities, while free-lance cleaning ladies are becoming the rule in main towns. Only marginally are migrant live-in maids employed by upper classes. To a large extent, domestic labour relationships are depicted or "said" in the words of family relationships: "little sister, niece/aunt, child".

This paper is organised in two parts. *First*, I will illustrate the relevance and magnitude of the relationship between migrations and paid domestic labour markets, focussing on data from the Mediterranean area. I will show that the migration process provides women with opportunities to implement a personal project but exposes them to specific forms of vulnerability, particularly since it pushes them into low value labour niches, and in particular towards domestic employment. *Then*, I will analyse specific characteristics of this type of employment that tend to reinforce workers' vulnerability ; mainly the nature and framework of domestic employment and its specific status regarding labour and social protection regulations. I will then conclude by some reflections on the dynamics of the domestic labour market at global level, which tend to hinder the strengthening of social protection and reproduce both informality and vulnerability.

1- The globalisation and ethnicisation of domestic labour markets

There is evidence of an expansion of paid domestic labour in various parts of the world, linked to a series of sociological, demographic and economic factors. And there is also evidence that migrants are increasingly women and that domestic work is their first form of employment worldwide, especially for undocumented women. Some countries have even specialised in domestic workers export. The internationalisation of domestic labour markets is the result of structural factors at global level – poverty, inequalities, opportunities, vested interests of intermediaries and countries...- combined with individual strategies and resource mobilisation.

1.1- The growing cohorts of migrant domestic workers; a trend towards a racialisation of domestic service

Four main trends are noted, wherever data allows it : A change in migration patterns towards countries previously known as sending countries ; a feminisation of migration ; a growth of domestic employment in various countries of the world (and in most of the Mediterranean countries) ; and a growing rate of migrants employed in domestic labour.

New patterns of migration: Since the 1970's, after the end of the golden age of migration to Northern European countries which started to impose restrictions on immigration, Southern Europe, but also many non-European Mediterranean countries (such as Turkey, Lebanon...) have become destinations for « post Fordist » migration flows implying tertiarisation, flexibility and deregulation of employment. The migratory pattern is based on the demand for cheap and flexible labour force answering the needs of a strong underground economy (Oso Casas 2001; Righi & Tronti 1996)

Feminisation of migration: International sources estimate that women migration nowadays represents over half of the overall international migration ; over 52% of all migrants in Europe in 2000 are women – 25 millions out of 48 millions migrants - , against 48.5 % in 1960. In 1999, the share of women in the overall immigration flow (foreigners and returning nationals to European countries) ranged between 41.3 % for Germany, 48,6% for Portugal, 50.1% for Spain, 52.8% for France, and 56.8 per cent for Greece. The proportion of women in migration inflows in some OECD countries has risen by over 1% per year since 1990. This trend was particularly marked in Portugal⁴. Feminisation affects some nationalities in particular, who are mostly composed of migrant women (Central Europe, Africa, Asia), when others remain more masculine (Muslim countries mainly; Oso Casas 2001). In Lebanon, the stock of women migrants grew eightfold between 1965 and 1990, and their share in total has increased from 28.2% to 57.5%. In Tunisia their number has decreased but their share remains of around 50%. In Turkey, their number has grown by 50% and their share has gone from 48.1% to 52.1% (Moreno Fontes Chammartin 2004, quoting United Nations Population Division statistics). Women migrate increasingly in search for employment; they form an increasing proportion of employment-related migration in Europe. Around a third of migrant women in EU countries are single and have migrated in search for employment opportunities. In Portugal the share of single women is over 50 per cent⁵. The first waves of women migrations to Europe were motivated for a large part by family reunification. Nowadays on the contrary, labour force participation rates of migrant women exceed those of national

⁴ OECD and United Nations Population Division figures, quoted by Steinhilber 2003.

⁵ ILO data quoted by Steinhilber 2003.

women in a number of countries and not surprisingly the Southern Europe Mediterranean countries (Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain). The same is certainly true for Lebanon and Turkey, and perhaps even for Israel.

The increase in domestic employment is not easy to evaluate. In the 1950's, it was believed that paid domestic labour would tend to disappear progressively, thanks to mechanisation, women labour force absorption in other branches and changes in lifestyles (Sarti 2005). This decline, and that of live-ins among domestic workers, was effective until the 1980's. Since then, several scholars argue that there has been a revival of domestic service in various European countries (Sarti 2001, 2005). Live-in arrangements are developing. The upsurge in demand is caused by a conjunction of factors, such as increase of female labour participation rates; ageing population; rising standards of living and education levels, which give to women access to more qualified employment, thus decreasing inequalities between men and women and/or encouraging status display, which forbids women to perform the dirtiest housework tasks; and a rising inadequacy of public social services. In most Mediterranean countries, for similar reasons although not at equal paces, local supply of feminine cheap labour ready to accept hard conditions of work is decreasing: cleaning is no longer seen as suitable for professional middle class women (Miranda 2003, Oso 2000, Ozyegin 2001 & 2002, Jureidini 2004, Mundlack 2005, Sarti 2001 & 2005...). And as more and more women in society do not consider domestic work suitable, at least not at any condition, status of these domestic workers may rise to a protected waged worker. Because in Europe, Turkey, Israel, and even Egypt, domestic labour has undergone a process of professionalisation, by which local women tend to refuse live-in arrangements but wish to work on an hourly basis, they have come to request decent wages, working conditions and social protection incompatible with what a family is ready to pay for.

Immigrants fill low jobs and allow native women to move to better-paid and more skilled jobs; this is the rationale and justification (Venturini and Villosio 2004). But it cannot account for the whole dynamics, since women employing domestics often do not work, as in Lebanon, Turkey, and Southern Europe, where feminine activity rates are relatively low⁶. For Anderson (2001), the need for *cheap* reproductive labour arises from the fact that, once care and household tasks become commodified, their economic cost is extremely high, usually unaffordable at normal wage labour rates for a middle-class family. But she also points out the fact that having domestics allows a family to have a lifestyle resting on unnecessary forms of consumption and services which generate a social status and demonstrate its position within wider social relations. The relationship between social status, class belonging, and domestic labour may explain why there are virtually no limits to what can be required of a domestic worker: what is at stake is not a *need*, but rather a social visibility (*signs*).

However, on the basis of European data, Sarti (2005) notes that a high women labour participation rate does not automatically imply a high rate of paid domestic labour, and that a delegation of house chores and care work to servants is not the only solution for housewives working outside their home. Welfare systems play an essential role in the way change takes place: either towards more collective and de-commodified solutions or towards more individualistic, private and market alternatives. In a few countries only, can public services fulfil most *needs* for out-of-home reproductive services, let alone required social visibility (*signs*). Thus, to demographic and social factors generating a booming demand in the past twenty years, global trends have responded: migrant women fill this gap, fulfil this demand,

⁶ In France, to the contrary, among regular domestic workers' employers, 93.5% are double-career couples (IRCEM 2003).

generate more demand, and affect the nature of the response given to women's "objective" need for household help.

A growing rate of migrants in domestic labour: The fact that an increase of domestic employment has responded to a growing demand in the past twenty-five years is mainly due to the availability of abundant and cheap women labour supply, which is the product of transformation of the global scene. Migrants come in who are ready to work at any condition, because of their poverty and lack of choice, and new arrangements are invented or re-invented for them, which had virtually disappeared: new practices of live-in and new residential arrangements for maids to live in the house; new provisions in labour laws; special visa, etc. i.e. a process of adaptation of overall conditions to the supply of maids ready to be live-ins. It is as though domestic labour is back to being a condition – that of a servant – rather than a profession – a status gained through decades of social transformation⁷.

Most of the migrant women all over the world do not particularly wish to end up as domestic workers. They generally have other hopes, and often other qualifications. The dominant profile of the new migrant to Europe is a well-educated young middle class person with job skills (Reyneri 2001). "Socio-professional downgrading is the norm for migrants [...] and there is no link between educational background and the jobs held in Spain", further writes the author. The fact is that the configuration of the receiving countries' labour market often forces migrant women into domestic labour niches, either because of explicit discrimination against foreigners, difficulty to have a foreign diploma validated, protection of certain branches of employment, ethnicisation of some segments of the labour market; or "just" because of the "game" of social and community networks and support (Oso Casas 2001, Danis 2005). For women, these employment niches typically rely on a "natural" asset: their body. In fact, domestic labour and prostitution are the two main employment sectors for migrant women. Most often, they find themselves either in a branch totally reserved to foreign women, or in a less protected and less advantageous position than national women working in the same branch.

Domestic employment thus ends up being the main sector of employment for migrant women, because of the way migration regulations – i.e. residency and employment laws – articulate with the way the labour market function:

« differences between women's and men's participation rates and employment trends indicate different migration motivations of men and women, and are shaped by the differential impact of the legal regulations for residence and labour force participation. [...] [The legal status of women who enter a country as dependents of a male migrant worker] and resulting restrictions against the employment of accompanying family members of a migrant worker may relegate them to informal employment, for example domestic services or home working. These informal employment relations, however, are outside the coverage of labour legislation and employment-related social protection – and beyond the reach of official labour market information systems. [...] Foreign employment is on the whole more concentrated than native employment in the lowest socio-occupational categories, in terms of pay, working conditions. Legal as well as irregular migrants in these jobs suffer from a lack interest representation, as well as security of employment and legal protection. The working conditions, and often the wages, of migrants have been described as being inferior to those of national workers, especially in agriculture and in a number of service jobs, for example in cleaning/maintenance and domestic employment, where high numbers of women work » (Steinhilber 2003).

⁷ Helma Lutz (2001) denounces the « paradox of the informal, archaic labour market that has arisen amid today's revolution of information technology »

Everywhere unemployment rates are higher among foreigners (Reyneri 2001). Discrimination combines with institutional regulations to channel migrant women to occupational branches that are complementary rather than competitive with local labour power employment patterns (Oso 2000 & 2001, Chaib 2003). Unsurprisingly, then, foreigners end up being over-represented in certain sectors of the economy. Domestic labour is one of them. "The percentage of foreigners who are employed in household services is highest in Greece (18.1 per cent), followed by Spain (15.7 per cent), Italy (10.8 per cent) and France (6.5 per cent)" (Steinhilber 2003). All studies show that domestic work and child care, and to a certain extent, prostitution, are the main occupations of migrant women working illegally.

In **Spain**, migrant women are increasingly replacing national women as domestic workers. Local women, mainly not very young and with a very low education level, perform only cleaning work on an hourly basis, while the figure of the "countryside maid" almost disappeared in the capital city. Migrant women fill this gap, often as live-ins since their salary is the same than if they reside outside their employers' home. Live-in arrangements allow them to fulfil three types of need: those of double career couples with young children, those of families who always had domestics; and the elderly care (Oso Casas 2001). An ILO study (Weinert 1991) reports that already at the beginning of the 1990's, an estimated 394 000 houses employed a domestic worker in Spain, mostly women, and that domestic work was the first form of employment for women, and the main form of integration into the labour market for female immigrants. 64% of all migrant women are employed in domestic labour in 1995 (Oso 2000). Some foreign national groups are composed of a majority of women: people from the Philippines, the Dominican Republic and Cape Verde⁸. Nearly all Filipina women, many with high credentials and academic degrees, and around 50% of Cap Verdeans are employed in the domestic labour sector. The Filipinas, who were the first to migrate to Spain (since the 1970-80's) occupy the highest position in terms of wages and labour conditions; below them, the Dominicans also managed to secure a favourable position; but the latest to have come, Columbian and Equatorian women, are located at the bottom levels of the market, especially since they are mostly irregular migrants (Oso Casas 2001).

In **Italy**, as in many other countries, the recent rise of the demand in domestic labour responds to the emancipation of Italian women from certain domestic chores, their increased activity rate, the rising number of elderly, the weaknesses of the Italian social state⁹, as well as men's reluctance to a more equitable participation to household and care work (Andall 2000). On the other hand, since the 1960's, Italian women have become more reluctant to work as live-in domestic workers and prefer hourly-based employment (Miranda 2003). This has "left a specific gap in the market for live-in domestic work which migrant women would be forced (institutionally) and encouraged (informally) to fill", mainly because the Italian government confined migrants to full-time work (Anderson 2000 quoting Andall 1996). There would be more than 1.2 million female domestic workers in Italy, only 18% legally employed¹⁰. When foreigners only represented 16.48% of regularly declared domestic workers in 1991, they were 49.79% in 1996 (Sarti 2001). There were 36 000 non-EU legally employed domestic workers in Italy in 1991, and 114 000 in 2000 (Allasino and alii, 2004). They are concentrated among certain nationalities: there are more female than male immigrants from the Philippines, Cape Verde, Mauritius, Sri Lanka and Eritrea (Campani

⁸ OECD figures quoted by Gaspard 1996.

⁹ Nouveaux citoyens, futurs citoyens ? Les migrants à Rome et à Naples, Camille Schmoll et Serge Weber, http://www.cafe-geo.net/cafes2/article.php3?id_article=708

¹⁰ "Golf: Audizione Parlamento Europeo", Federazione Italiana Lavoratori Commercio Turismo e Servizi (FILCAMS) – 19/09/2000, Risoluzione del Parlamento europeo sulla normalizzazione del lavoro domestico nell'economia informale (2000/2001), <http://www.filcams.cgil.it/Info.nsf/ee2302fc5ceb4eafc1256903007013fb/7f92fdceaeab64ecc125696600329802!OpenDocument>

1989). For undocumented non-national women, particularly Filipina and Sri Lankan women, it is the main area of employment. In 1991, a circular created special provision for new entries to Italy, exclusively for live-in domestic workers, some time after two legislative acts (in 1986 and 1990) had restricted immigration (Andall 2000). Allasino and alii (2004) note that:

« the frequency of amnesties may contribute to the perception that unauthorized entry by the back door is more effective than *via* the front door of programmed flows and family reunions. These numerous amnesties are not able to drain the pool of unauthorized migrants, which constantly refills. This situation confronts the Italian Government with the dilemma of bringing migrants within its legal and tax infrastructure, or leaving things as they are and dealing with the challenges of immigration enforcement. Italian Governments up to now have opted for the first solution. Even the centre-right Berlusconi Government allowed its reform law (Law. No.189 of 30 July 2002) to include the possibility of regularizing one domestic helper per family and an unlimited number of care-givers for persons who are not self-sufficient. In another decree (No. 195, 9 September 2002), regularization was also extended to other employees. »

Many women from Morocco, the Philippines and Sri Lanka took advantage of the chance to regularize their situation although many others abstained, for fear of losing their jobs. Employers often prefer undocumented women, as they can then avoid having to pay social charges (Gaspard 1996).

Studies for **France** indicate that more than half the undocumented women work as domestic employees. The Employer's Federation claims that 900,000 of their members engage domestic workers¹¹. As in other countries, the older generations of domestic workers, first provincial girls until the Second world war, then Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and North Africans in the 1960's and 1970's, have progressively integrated other branches, or have converted into hourly paid cleaner (Oso Casas 2001, Miranda 2003, IRCCEM 2002). Today domestic labour is a sector of integration for new migrants, and the most important sector of employment for undocumented women. However, "in France domestic work is more regulated by the State than in any other European country, perhaps because the sector was organised in the early part of the twentieth century through the socialist union. [...] Although there is some recognition of the need for live-in domestic workers, particularly because of the ageing population, there has been little comment on the racialisation of domestic work". Live-out work is predominant; the only group among whom live-in full-time work is relatively common is the Filipino community; apparently, as in other countries, there exists a correlation between immigration status and live-in work (Anderson 2000).

There were always "cleaning-ladies" and care workers in **Israel** (Mundlack 2005). They just changed over time. Israel was established by consecutive immigration waves. Some have become employers, others their employees. This has become most evident upon the foundation of the state, as the "old" migrants from Europe employed the new Jewish immigrants from the Arab states (among others - Morocco, Yemen and Iraq), constructing one of Israel's many social cleavages. Employment opportunities were scarce and the new migrants came with skills that did not match the needs of the labour market. The conditions for outsourcing cleaning and care from the "household", in what was allegedly a social-democratic community, were set in motion. After the removal of institutional and military barriers in the mid 1950s, Arab women residing in Israel joined this labour market niche as well. Several years after the 1967 occupation, women from East Jerusalem joined the domestic taskforce. The last stage of the development in the area of care giving started in

¹¹ "Migrant Domestic Workers in Europe: A case for action" - RESPECT, European Network of Migrant Domestic Workers.

1993 with the massive admission of migrant workers into Israel, of which a considerable segment is employed in care-work. The major states of origin are the Philippines, Eastern Europe and, to a lesser extent, Africa and South America. These flows matched two trends that affected the sector: on the one hand, a welfare State retrenchment started in the early 1980's which reached full fledged force in 2002, i.e. the « transformation in the nature of the Israeli welfare State and its withdrawal, which has “implications for the familial sources of welfare support”; on the other hand, frequent closures imposed to the occupied territories because of the rising threat to security implied by the entry of Palestinian workers on Israeli territory, owed to the intifada in the occupied territories and the growing occurrence of suicidal bombings. A heterogeneous migrant workforce filled the gap, which entailed the emergence of new patterns of employment, with distinctions based on the type of work and the type of workers, some documented, others not : “the documented were employed only in care of the elderly and the disabled. The undocumented were employed in all type of care – whether personal care for children and elderly, or simply housework. Part of the workers were hourly workers, while others were live-ins. [...] The number of domestic workers from the Jewish population declined over the years, and temporary workers (e.g. students) have moved to other jobs. [...] The domestic relationship is now like an old tree, in which the trunk records sequences of social stratification (Mundlak, 2005)”. In recent years, however, the issue of foreign migration became more and more problematic: “Public debate continued regarding the role in the workplace and society of non-Palestinian foreign workers, whom the Government estimated as approximately 189,000 at the end of 2003. According to the Government, most of these workers entered the country illegally or overstayed their visas, with illegal migrant workers reaching 104,000. (...) The majority of such workers came from Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia and worked in the construction and agricultural sectors, and as domestic help”¹². The analysis Mundlak (2005) makes of the Israeli case is particularly interesting. He argues that “the availability of domestic workers is the buffer and support that makes the rest of the pieces of the transition to liberalism fit together. This is why recent efforts of deportation of migrant workers have been met by the affluent middle class with much dismay”.

The **Turkish** case is quite typical of transformations generated on the domestic labour market by supply factors, which responded in a specific way to social transformations resulting in increasing demand. Very interestingly, Gul Ozyegin (2001 & 2002) shows how restrictions on rural-urban migrant women's labour, imposed by men and their cultural values, made domestic labour comparatively scarce and expensive, unlike the situation of other industrialising countries where young women migrating to the cities constituted abundant and cheap supply. Thus, by controlling women's labour, Turkish patriarchy contributed to ban live-in arrangements, to modernize domestic service and to the development of more contractual employer/employee relationships. In her study, the domestic workers are wives of building janitors or proletarianised women living in squatter areas. They live out of the employers' house and often work for several of them, which results in an increased salary. They are autonomous and have some negotiation power. As long as labour supply is restrained to local women, middle class access to cheap and readily available domestic wage labour is limited and it is almost impossible to find live-in domestics (Unal Arzu, personal communication). Didem Danis (2005) analyses the recent transformation of this domestic labour market partly as a result of internal sociological and demographic dynamics which boosted demand, as in other Mediterranean countries: increased participation of middle class women in the labour force, transformation of household structures due to declining fertility

¹² US Department of State Human Rights Report, 2004
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41723.htm>

and mortality rates, and increased proportion of elderly population, along with a desire for social prestige marked by a liberation from household chores. This demand could not be met by inadequate public services, especially at times of budget restrictions and liberalisation. Thus the role played by the recent feminisation of international migration. “The increasing demand in the domestic service sphere which has been abandoned by internal migrants has been filled by foreigners”, relatively emancipated, often more skilled and educated than Turkish working-class women, and ready to work for less pay because of their need for money to send back to their family. Migrant domestic workers, mainly illegal transit migrants with no legal perspective of permanent residence, display a hierarchy based on ethnicity and migrant status, as well as qualifications and linguistic skills, which matches a segmentation of care work: English nannies and Filipinas are employed by the upper classes and command the highest salaries; Moldavian women are the largest group (Unal Arzu, personal communication) and come in next, followed by Bulgarians, while Caucasians still have difficulties integrating the labour market and find less favourable employment conditions. Iraqi Christians, who urgently need money for the duration of their uncertain waiting for further mobility, have been creating a domestic employment niche for themselves as well. They are ready to work for highly demanding low status jobs - live-in domestic worker if they are unmarried, and house cleaning jobs when married- , “their vulnerability to over-exploitation and misery being further intensified by a high unemployment rate in the country” (Danis 2005).

In **Lebanon**, the process of substitution of local domestic workers by migrants has been eased by the outbreak of the war. Sri Lankans have become the main source of domestic labour¹³. Until the civil war, Lebanese households hired mainly Kurdish and Palestinian women from nearby refugee camps, women from the Eastern rural area, as well as Egyptian and Syrian migrants. Young girls were also “fostered” in families until their marriage, their wages collected by their parents upon an annual visit. The war generated political tensions which made it very difficult for communities to mingle. Egypt forbade women emigration to Lebanon as domestic workers, and “fostered servitude” fell out of use: local supply of domestic workers was almost dried up. At this time, some of the hundreds of thousands of Asian workers working in the Gulf oil states were brought back home by Lebanese migrants¹⁴. They were much cheaper than Arab women, they accepted to live-in with the employer, which the Arab women did not, their governments were pushing them to migrate, they could be easily replaced or exchanged by the agency during the first three months of contract and they were free from any kind of social ties and allegiance. “Since the influx of foreign women from Africa and Asia, the position of domestic maids has become one which carries with it a particularly low status, not only because of the servile nature of the tasks, the conditions of work and low wages, but also because there is now a racial element to domestic service” (Jureidini 2002 & 2004, Jureidini and Moukarbel 2000 & 2004). These authors estimate that in 2002, there were approximately 160 000 Sri Lankan in Lebanon, 30 000 Filipinas and 20 000 Ethiopians, almost exclusively women engaged in domestic labour¹⁵, for a total population of 4 million and a workforce of around 1.2 million. Only about one in 3.5 domestic workers would be granted a work permit.

Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria are countries where local supply still satisfies a large share of the demand. However, there exists a trend of upper class demand for live-in maids to

¹³ And Lebanon ranks third to sixth as a destination for Sri Lankan housemaids according to Sri Lanka national statistics.

¹⁴ Hana Jaber (personal communication) argues that the first waves of migrant live-ins occurred when Lebanese diaspora in Africa came back with their colonial pattern of domestic service.

¹⁵ Figures based on official records either from sending countries, or in Lebanon, such as work permits registration, would be widely under-estimated.

be satisfied through migrants. In Egypt, four sources of domestic labour, representing four segments of the market, can be identified: fostered girls (a regressing phenomenon); local hourly paid or daily live-out cleaning work provided by Egyptian women; East African refugees and migrants (Erythreans and Ethiopians having a better reputation and being more expensive than Somalis and Sudanese, who are said to be lazy and not quite honest); and finally Asian live-ins especially from Sri Lanka and the Philippines (François Ireton, personal communication).

What can be noted from the above descriptions is that wherever domestic labour markets are being globalised, domestic service is increasingly becoming racialised. In some countries, migrant domestic labour supply is concentrated on a small number of nationalities or origins. In others, it is more diversified. Filipina women form the main group of live-ins, particularly in countries like Great Britain, the Netherlands, Spain and Italy (where their number has been multiplied tenfold between 1985 and 1998; Albuero and Abella 2002 quoting official statistics). Articulated with the specific risk exposure of migrating women from poor countries in areas where they are not legally protected, this racial marker can only bear the construction of a particularly strong vulnerability niche.

1.2- A growing international specialisation for some domestic labour exporting countries

There are three dominant profiles of active migrant women: (1) long-term settled spouses who came to join their husband through family reunification after the post-war migration waves, and started to work subsequently, without possessing any qualification (e.g. North African, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese women in France). Today, they are often free-lancer domestic workers, working on an hourly basis for several families, benefiting from social security. Often, their daughters fare better and leave the field of domestic service, thus reducing local supply¹⁶. Then, mainly in the seventies women started to migrate more and more massively alone. On the one hand (2), some women migrate for economic and other reasons (e.g. as refugees) with the intention to settle in their host country, and engage in domestic employment on a transitory basis, to pay off debts, to work through a labour market integration, for lack of choice etc. (e.g. Eastern European women, or originating from Latin America). Their strategies are most often directed towards the exit from domestic employment, even though for many it ends up as a trap. For some, a missed “career” as a domestic worker leads to prostitution, networks of international passers often exploiting their ignorance to channel them where they will make most profit. On the other hand (3), some women are migrating knowingly for domestic employment (for lack of other opportunity), for a limited time with the intention to go back home to their family. They contribute to build a pattern of international specialisation, in which a lot of different institutions and intermediaries (ministries, public and private agencies, catholic churches and organisations, banks, transportation companies...) are involved. Often, their niche is live-in employment, and their level of vulnerability particularly high. Their strategies are aimed mainly at improving their condition within the branch, until they decide, for positive or negative reasons, to go home.

These “specialised domestic workers” originate mainly from a small number of Asian countries, mainly the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Thailand. Through a “gendered migration process” (Asis 2003), they are progressively supplying a growing share of the world market demand for domestic labour. The past thirty years have been marked by a

¹⁶ Glenn (1992) interestingly writes: « Perhaps the most universal theme in domestic workers’ statements is that they are working so that their own daughters will not have to go into domestic service ».

formidable increase in overall numbers of migrants from Asia¹⁷; a relative shift of destination from the Middle East – where they had heavily concentrated in the 1970's and 1980's - to other countries, mainly Asia (mainly Hong Kong and Singapore; Wickramasekera 2002, Asis 2003) but also Europe; and a growing feminisation of migration flows, where women represent over two thirds of total outflows except in Thailand¹⁸. There are approximately 1.5 million legal and illegal Asian women working abroad, the majority in Asian countries; the number of unskilled workers among them shows a tremendous growth since the 1980's. Increasingly, these women migrate for low wage occupations such as domestic work. Sri Lankans are probably the most specialised: in 1995, an estimated 70% of total migrants out of Sri Lanka were women domestic workers (88.6% of migrating women), against 40% only in 1988 (72.9% of migrating women then) (Dias & Jelasundere 2001 on the basis of national statistics). Domestic work absorbed 81% of Sri Lankan new hires overall in 2000 and, “although the demand for other types of migrant work was somewhat slack after 1990, there were no changes in demand for domestic workers” (Moreno Fontes Chammartin 2004, on the basis on national migration administration statistics). This specialisation is even narrower when considering Arabic Middle Eastern countries, where they occupy domestic positions *exclusively*, to the point where, in Lebanon, «*Srilankiyeh*» has become a generic word for “maid”. Among Filipino migrants, although the share of women is similar and has grown much more rapidly than among other nationalities, the weight of domestic labour is “only” 38.6% in 2000, lower than in 1992. This is because a large number of women are employed in service jobs, or in professional and technical occupations, such as nurses (idem).

These five countries specifically, have set up real international specialisations¹⁹, administered by governments and private agencies. The process of specialisation of Filipino emigration is rather well documented. It partly results from an “institutional management” of a real outmigration industry of all skill categories by the Filipino government, namely the Overseas Employment Administration (e.g. Jaber 2005); similarly, in 1986 Sri Lanka founded a Bureau of Foreign Employment supposed to regulate and encourage migrations.

As a result, “labour-sending countries in Asia are generally confronted with the dilemma between “promotion” and “protection”. In the face of bleak employment prospects at home and the economic gains from foreign exchange remittances, countries would like to see an

¹⁷ Between 1976 and 1998, official figures report a multiplication of the number of migrants by 85 for India, by 216 for Indonesia, by 11 for the Philippines, by 135 for Thailand, by 44 for Bangladesh and by 316 for Sri Lanka (Wickramasekera 2002).

¹⁸ The share of women among total number of migrants increased by 50% between the mid-eighties and the late 1990's for Indonesian, was multiplied by four between 1980 and 2000 for Filipinos, doubled for Sri Lankans between 1986 and 2001, and was multiplied by two and a half for Thais over ten years 1986-1996. The men to women ratio among Sri Lankan migrants has gone from 1/1,22 in 1988 to 1/3,98 in 1995 alone (Moreno Fontes Chammartin 2004, on the basis on national migration administration statistics). Among Sri Lankan migrant women represent 96% of migrants to Lebanon in 1996, and 66.7% of migrants to Italy, showing various profiles according to destination and local labour demand (Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment quoted by Dias and Jayasundere 2001).

¹⁹ Remittances to the Philippines have been multiplied twenty-five folds over the twenty years 1975-79 and 1995-98 (Albuero and Abella 2002). Exporting so many women for domestic service has profound implications on the sending country at the level of family structure, on gender roles, on the economy, etc... Studies have shown the distress of children left behind in this “global care chain”, that of husbands challenged in their male identity, transformations caused by remittances, etc. Some of these effects apparently have dramatic consequences, e.g. in Sri Lanka, where UNICEF writes that the very large number of child domestic workers can be partly explained by the fact that « Migration of large numbers of women and adolescents as domestic workers (approximately 300,000 to the Middle East alone) has created a demand for younger children to work in their place ». On the other hand, « Ethnic conflicts have left many children displaced and abandoned and consequently easy prey for 'job placement agents' who pick them up on the streets in villages or even from within the refugee camps and then sell them into employment, most commonly for domestic work (UNICEF Innocenti Digest on Child Domestic Work, May 1999, citing P. Stalker, "Refugees and migration: the impact of emigration", www.oneworld.org/guides/migration/stalker_emigration.html).

increase in overseas migration of national workers. At the same time, they cannot turn a blind eye to the rampant abuses of basic human rights suffered by their nationals abroad” (ILO 2002). The groups among which domestic workers are recruited, live-ins in particular, are some of the most vulnerable categories of migrants. Specialisation in this branch, as a matter of fact, goes along with a reputation of submissiveness and obedience that lends itself to abuse. Mistreatment of migrant domestic workers can be seen as a structural product of globalisation *cum* impoverishment.

1.3- The vulnerability of migrant women

The ILO considers female domestic workers and entertainers two of the most vulnerable categories of migrants, along with “trafficked persons and irregular migrant workers. These categories may not be always mutually exclusive since some of the first two may also be in irregular status” (ILO 1999). Many studies point to the articulation – or the cumulation – between various dimensions of vulnerability and domination in the case of migrant domestic workers: class, origin, and race, migrant and legal status... They are migrant *and* women, they generally come from poor countries, they often have a coloured skin; most have a low level of education, or are not able to validate diplomas; a large share are undocumented, and many owe money to a host of creditors. Their vulnerability can be analysed in two related folds: what happens before the migration trip and what happens upon arrival in the country in terms of personal status.

Getting there: migrant women’s vulnerability takes roots in the motivation to migrate, the decision making process within the family, their level of skills and education, their rural origin perhaps, the moral debt they may have towards their family. Increased poverty, often caused by structural adjustment measures, desire to provide the children a good education, the need to get rid of indebtedness, natural disasters and armed conflicts are factors encouraging out migration of men and women alike. A number of surveys and field studies nevertheless show that, if economic motivation is generally the strongest, a personal motivation often plays a role as well, if only the will to escape problems at home. “Although motivated by a myriad reasons, mostly arising out of poverty and the inability to earn a similar income at home, [...] the decision by women to migrate for employment to foreign countries is very much an individual and personal one” (Dias & Jayasundere 2001). Reyneri (2001) recalls that the largest migrations to Europe are from countries with an intermediary level of development, and that those who migrate are not the poorest but people who possess enough cultural and material resources to do so. Migrants are not “escaping to survive”, but “in search for better opportunities and new dreams”. However, as Spalthof (2001) notes, “Filipino migrants are operating in a cultural context where strong obligations to one’s immediate family are expected and internalized. Hence, the son or daughter who migrates is expected to assist his or her parents or family members... (...) Of course there are migrants in the Philippines who cut off ties with home completely. Nevertheless, the majority of migrants keeps strong ties with the family and fulfils their reciprocal obligations”. Oso Casas (2001) finds that bachelor women from Columbia and Equator into Spain are more liable to have individual projects such as “independency”, autonomy, new adventures ... than married women, more preoccupied by maintenance of the transnational family unit.

Vulnerability consolidates in the preparatory phases: contacting an agent, finding a country of destination and a potential employer, gathering the money for the ticket and the various documents, obtaining a passport and a visa, invent strategies to fill this time and space of waiting: all require exceptional capacities to adjust (Mozère 2002). Decisions that will heavily weigh on the following steps are then taken and choices made: whether he/she will be

illegal or not, whether he/she will end up in the hands of traffickers, to which degree he/she will be indebted, the degree of coercion he/she will be submitted to, etc.

Particularly in the countries that are highly specialised in domestic labour export, a profitable sector of service providers of all kind has flourished at the heart of, and in articulation with, the official institutions. Their record is often appalling: candidates to migration are being duped, lent money at outrageous rates, led to illegal transactions, sold forged passports sometimes under false names²⁰, charged exorbitant fees, lied to about their destination, exploited and often left unprotected at some European border. In Sri Lanka it is estimated that between two thirds and one half of migrants travel through unofficial channels (see for example Dias & Jayasundere 2001, Far Eastern Economic Review 2000). For the women entering Lebanon to work as domestics, “the employment contract for a foreign worker is signed by a recruitment agency and the employer; workers rarely are a party to the contract or, if they are a party, do not know what the contract stipulates because it is written in Arabic. The passports of foreign domestic workers are confiscated by the recruitment agency or their employer when the workers arrive at the airport” (US Department of State 1999). In 1999, “300 Sri Lankan workers were held in police custody in Lebanon. Many of these workers had been duped by recruitment agents to travel to Lebanon without valid documents, especially contracts. [...] Human smuggling is an extension of this private recruitment mechanism whereby unscrupulous job agents have transported men and women workers to countries such as Italy and Australia in fishing boats from the shores of Sri Lanka [...]. Another dimension of exploitation faced by migrant workers in the home country is, at departure, when financial demands for registration fees, agents’ fees and departure preparations exceed the financial abilities of the prospective migrant. To overcome the exploitative practices of private moneylenders, State banks and financial institutions have initiated schemes to grant credit” (Dias and Jayasundere 2001). The Filipino, Indonesian and Sri Lankan governments have been trying to “clean up the recruiting scene” and regulate this wildly growing sector of agents and intermediaries, by imposing rules of registration and control and taking sanctions against illegal practices. They also have developed training courses and information campaigns addressing future migrants, but their efforts have yet to prove efficient. In particular, they are helpless against village recruiters and peddlers, organised as mafias or boasting proximity with the migrant’s family, mainly because they provide services that migrants need to solve their many problems and to face their constraints.

Human trafficking has been reported in Israel as well: “NGOs alleged that foreign workers were being lured to the country with the promise of jobs that did not exist. Some foreign workers reportedly paid up to \$10,000 (45,000 NIS) to employment agencies to obtain work permits. According to NGOs, in a significant number of cases workers were dismissed shortly after arriving. Allegedly, the manpower companies worked with deportation authorities to deport the newly arrived workers, who were then replaced by others, earning the companies more fees. NGOs argued that most workers expected to work for some time in the country to recoup their initial payments; those dismissed often sought illegal employment and some committed suicide” (US Department of State Human Rights Report, 2004)²¹.

Being an immigrant: Once arrived in her host country, transitory or definitive, other risks await the migrant woman: to have her passport confiscated by employers or intermediaries; or to overstay her visa without anyone to care to renew it; to be caught if she has become an illegal resident; to which may be added risks linked to employment itself. Sometimes migrant

²⁰ Sinhala and Tamil women would prefer to go as Muslim women to be ensured better airline ticket fares to the Middle East, better work conditions, better salaries and easier access to employment opportunities (Dias & Jayasundere 2001).

²¹ <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41723.htm>

women form tight communities, that provide information and support to their members; in that regard, the case of Filipinas communities was abundantly studied (e.g. Mozère 2002, Jaber 2005, Albuero & Abella 2002, etc.).

Illegality reinforces vulnerability in the sense that a migrant who has become liable to be arrested tends to be dependent upon a “protector”, often a person or an organisation that also exploits her: agency or employer. For Anderson (2000), dependency is the main factor of vulnerability. Amnesties or regularisation campaigns have taken place in several countries of the Mediterranean, such as Italy, Spain, Lebanon, France, Greece²², and domestic workers have formed an important proportion of the target group. However, as Anderson (2000 and undated) and Reyneri (2001) show, there are particular difficulties for domestic workers to take advantage of these regularisation exercises, such as overcoming the fear of being deported, obtaining information, a valid passport, a proof of current employment and of one’s capacity to maintain oneself without recourse to public fund, and proof of entry in the country as domestic workers.

In **Greece**, a 1991 law ruled that demand for labour should be filled as a priority by national labour force, and only if an employer can prove he is not able to find a Greek worker can he obtain a work permit for a foreigner. This law has failed to act as a protection for the Greek labour market; rather, it has paved the way for massive undocumented migration. At the end of the 1990’s, the majority of migrant workers are undocumented (nine out of ten according to estimates; Reyneri 2001), half of them come from Albania, then from Poland, and thirdly from the Philippines. Many domestic workers have never had legal status in Greece other than a tourist visa, although they entered to work for specific employers. Once they are overstaying their visa or if they have entered illegally, migrants find it excessively difficult and expensive to leave Greece, and thus remain trapped. Very long hours of work, very low salaries, total lack of responsibility of employers in case of accidents, absence of any health insurance, widespread occurrence of non-payment, severance without any justification, in particular for falling pregnant, sick or having an accident, are the general problems of migrant domestic workers in Greece. They show to which extent an illegal migrant status can go along with an absence of social and legal protection (Anderson 2000; Reyneri 2001). In **Spain**, changes in the visa legislation in the mid 1980’s imposed restrictions and conditions most migrants were unable to match, resulting in the fact that, from then on, migration to Spain was predominantly undocumented. Successful regularisation campaigns have contributed to regularise large shares of them (idem). **Lebanon** is well known for its widespread abuse towards migrant domestic servants. According to the 2004 Human Rights report of the US Department of State²³, “Foreign domestic servants often were mistreated, abused, and in some cases, raped or placed in slavery-like conditions. Asian and African female workers had no practical legal recourse available to them because of their low status, isolation from society, and because the labour laws did not protect them. Because of such abuse, the Government prohibited foreign women from working if they were from countries that did not have diplomatic representation in the country. (...) There was credible evidence that foreign domestic servants suffered physical abuse, had pay withheld or unfairly reduced, or were forced to remain locked within their employer's home for the duration of their contracts”. In **Egypt**, in recent years as well, “there were occasional reports of employer abuse of undocumented workers, especially domestic workers. A few employers were prosecuted during the year for abuse of domestic workers, but many claims of abuse were

²² Not mentioning others having occurred outside the Mediterranean zone, such as in 1998 in the UK (Anderson undated). In Lebanon, the amnesty mainly « released » stranded run away domestic workers, once they had paid back taxes and fines they were mostly not responsible for (Jureidini 2002 & 2004).

²³ <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41726.htm>

unsubstantiated because undocumented workers were reluctant to make their identities public” (US Department of State Human Rights report 2004)²⁴. And even in **Algeria**, “according to media reports and a local NGO, forced prostitution and domestic servitude of illegal immigrants from West Africa occurred as immigrants transited through the country seeking economic opportunity in Europe. Official statistical estimates of the severity of trafficking do not exist. Since the Government did not acknowledge trafficking to be a problem, there were no government assistance programs for victims or any information campaigns about trafficking” (idem). In Israel, non-Jewish migrants suffer particular forms of discrimination and vulnerability as they are forbidden to acquire residency.

If being a migrant woman leads to specific forms of exposure and vulnerability, a majority of migrant women are – also- workers. Their migrants’ status intersects with their workers’ status, and with their conditions as domestics (or prostitutes) and this will generate specific forms of vulnerability:

“The expression "feminisation" of labour migration has also been used to describe the over-representation of female migrants in extremely vulnerable positions on the labour market. A large group of female migrants have been found to work in jobs which are characterized by a particularly strong bond of subordination between the employer and the employee. There are disturbing reports of the resulting exploitative employment relations, especially of migrant women in domestic service” (Steinhilber 2003).

Illegal migrants, being more vulnerable, are even more liable to suffer as workers:

“There are numerous reports about poor working conditions in all the occupations described as frequently held illegally by female migrants. Excess working time and tempo, insufficient resting time, low pay and frequent harassment by employers are among the most important problems mentioned. Weak employment protection and low levels of organization among illegal workers create additional obstacles to the improvement of working conditions in these jobs. Reports show that all these problems are even more acute when the illegal workers do not have a legal residence permit in the country and are therefore particularly vulnerable” (Steinhilber 2003).

2- Domestic labour as a vulnerable informal activity

The ILO includes domestic paid employment in its definition of informal activities. In the 2002 report on “Decent Work and the Informal Economy” are considered informal -among others- “employees who have informal jobs, whether employed by formal sector enterprises, informal sector enterprises, or as paid domestic workers by households” (ILO 2002b). The Office states that:

“Employees are considered to have informal jobs if their employment relationship is not subject to standard labour legislation, taxation, social protection or entitlement to certain employment benefits for reasons such as: non-declaration of the jobs or the employees[...]; casual jobs or jobs of a limited short duration; jobs with hours of work or wages below a specific threshold; employment by unregistered enterprises or by persons in households; or jobs where the employee’s place of work is outside the premises of the employer’s or customer’s enterprise” (ILO 2002a).

However, many countries continue to exclude paid domestic employees of private household, an activity where women prevail, from statistics on informal employment” (ILO 2002b).

What we will try to show in the following section is that informality is substantially linked to the way domestic service is socially, legally and politically constructed: when segments of

²⁴ <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41720.htm>

the market become formal, others are generated to maintain its intrinsic characteristics, those which allow it to fulfil its social function. In a single country, domestic work may be performed by legal residents as a regular activity, with social contributions being paid; while others will do it informally, but as legal residents; and yet others will be illegal residents, and engage in domestic service totally irregularly. Migration restrictions – which produce irregular migrant status - combine with labour markets conditions and regulations to push migrants into informal occupations, or rather occupations performed in informal conditions:

“Irregular migrants have few alternatives to working illegally, while regular migrants may be found in regular employment as well as in illegal employment, depending on the regulations for labour market access. [...]. Employment-based and universal benefits can be legally accessible for irregular and regular migrants (but *de facto* irregular migrants may not be able to take advantage to the same degree as regular migrants) or can be restricted to legal residents. Obviously, benefits that are residence-based are only accessible to legal migrants.” (Steinhilber 2003)

2.1- An informal, illegal or derogatory labour and social protection status

The integration of domestic labour within the realm of labour and social protection laws and regulations has faced two main types of obstacles: one rather functional, the other more political.

Domestic labour is not real work: Domestic labour suffers a very low level of professionalisation, partly due to the fact it is usually considered as « natural », not incorporating qualifications or specific know-how; and to the fact that it produces non market services, used for domestic consumption of a household, which means it has no economic value. It is thus not measurable and to a large extent invisible. Additionally, there is no clear boarder between domestic labour and care performed at home by the housewife out of love and responsibility, and that performed as a paid activity by a worker²⁵. The confusion is all the more salient when the worker lives in her employers' house, which thus also becomes hers. This confusion acts as a necessary veil: every society is reluctant to accept a total commodification of care work, especially when it concerns care for the children and the elderly. Thus, even when these tasks are externalised for money, a social form has to be maintained that allows pretending there is no difference of *nature* between loving care and paid care work. This moral requirement contributes to the preference for live-ins: their status is ambiguous; their working hours undefined, private and labour spaces and times weakly differentiated. As Mundlak (2005) puts it, « internalizing the live-in 'into the family' removes her from the legalistic sphere that governs employment relationship. It takes her from the public marketplace of labour exchange into the private household ». And all this results in a difficulty, and a reluctance, to consider that care work, especially when performed in live-in arrangements, should be governed by labour market rules²⁶.

Domestic labour is a stake for many stakeholders, who tend to defend their vested interest. In different places and at different historical times, upper classes have feared a scarcity of domestic services and complained of workers' bad manners, demands and lack of flexibility (Sommerfelt 2001, Sarti 2001 & 2005, Jureidini 2002...). In their quality of employers, of legislators and of producers of moral norms, upper classes have tended to oppose a loosening

²⁵ A lot of debate has taken place around domestic and care work. Among others, see Anderson 2000 and Augustin 2003 around the issues of migration, care and domestic employment.

²⁶ In Italy, Andall (2000) recalls that one of the arguments of the Christian workers' organisation to be cautious concerning the establishment of a contract for domestic workers was that it may « take away or endanger the collaboration between domestic workers and families » [that it may] obscure other possibility of experiencing the human and cordial aspects that this type of work allows, demands and develops ».

of personal dependency relationships, an improvement of legal and social protection of domestic workers and, more generally, a stronger involvement of the state. Political opposition translates into a lack of legislative initiatives, but also in a resistance to legal obligations, a laxity of sanctions, a continuous tolerance to evasion, etc... And it is all the easier to create, and maintain a derogatory status for domestic labour when it is performed by « a-typical » workers, such as children, or by migrants whose rights are less well defended than those of nationals, particularly if their conditions of labour and residency are not regular. These political attitudes may explain that only two countries ratified the 1996 ILO Homework Convention. Legislating domestic labour, however, has often generated biases on the market, that both employers and employees try to escape: for example, field studies show that migrant domestic workers in Europe may prefer to receive a higher salary instead of their employer paying social contributions; while employers have no objective incentive to pay contributions as long as the risk to get caught and fined is close to nil.

Compared to other categories, domestic workers suffer **legal discrimination and stigmatisation** with regards to both labour laws and regulations, and social security. Two types of situations occur:

Either legal stigmatisation occurs *passively*: domestic workers “are then excluded from the scope of basic labour standards applicable to other categories of workers and thus deprived of the basic protection affordable to those other categories (Reyneri 2001); among the countries considered in the study, it is the case for Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey and Tunisia.

Or it takes place *actively*: “special laws or rules in the basic labour legislation are specifically enacted given that those laws, on the ground of the particular nature of domestic work, in general terms, grant to domestic workers a lower protection that other categories are offered by general labour laws” (idem); it is the case for Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain and France.

The issue of discrimination applies also to social security entitlement:

« Migrant workers’ access to social security obviously depends on the overall design of a country’s social security system, particularly the criteria for benefit entitlements. Depending on their legal status, it is of great importance for migrant workers and their families if access to social security benefits is universal, based on residence (permanent or temporary), contributions from legal employment and/ or self-employment. Furthermore, it is crucial if a minimum contribution or residence requirement applies, if qualifying periods apply, if benefits are income-tested, and if derived rights to social security benefits exist. In addition, at least in a number of countries, access to social security differs according to the nationality of a migrant worker. [...] Access might also be based on reciprocity between partners which have signed bilateral social security coordination agreements. In some responding countries, the legal residence of a migrant is linked to an employment contract, so that residence-based benefits are de-facto only accessible through an employment relationship. [...] Migrant workers may not be able to benefit, or not in the short run at least, from those elements of social security where minimum contribution requirements, waiting periods or other restrictions apply. This seems to be the case relatively often for those benefits which are of particular importance for female migrant workers » such as maternity and family benefits. [...] domestic workers in a number of countries are not as well covered by social security as most other workers. Social security coverage is a problem especially for those domestic employees who work less than full-time or on an irregular basis – a very common practice in domestic employment. In Turkey, invalidity and old-age insurance is only accessible upon request for non-permanent domestic workers. [...] Portugal and Spain have introduced measures to extend social security to domestic workers by lowering the qualifying period for sickness insurance, and by introducing a fixed amount of contributions (Spain). [...] A number of countries (e.g. Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Norway and Spain), make medical treatment available to

irregular migrants, but typically only in cases of emergency. In Portugal, foreigners without a stay or residence permit or work visa may access the health services if local authorities certify that they have been in the country for more than 90 days. [...] Turkey reports that irregular migrant workers can be registered with social security schemes and qualify for benefits. Basic social assistance is available to irregular migrants in a few countries, notably Finland, Spain and Switzerland. [...] However, there is a concern that social rights for irregular migrants would be a potential incentive to illegal immigration. While not mentioned in the responses, this concern may be influencing policymaking in other countries as well: there is evidence that the social rights of irregular migrants in Europe have undergone a process of restrictions over the last decade». (Steinhilber 2003)

Two sets of countries can be distinguished in the Mediterranean area, although the border between them is not always very clear.

✠ **The first set** is made of countries where wage labour is the dominant pattern of employment, where employment is relatively strictly regulated and the coverage of social protection extended to a majority of workers. Most of these countries are European, but Israel and Turkey may also belong to this category. These have on the whole striven to incorporate domestic labour in their labour and social legislation for some years, promulgated specific labour codes and included it in social security coverage. Domestic labour has undergone a process of professionalisation which is, however, uneven, slow and not completely accomplished (Sarti 2001). Some countries have succeeded in turning domestic employment to an almost « normal » regular wage activity (e.g. France), others have left it widely unregulated (e.g. Greece).

Whatever the theoretical access of migrant workers and domestic workers in particular, to social security coverage, « it appears to be a widespread practice that employers evade social insurance payments for irregular migrants, where such obligations exist. Thus, even where migrants would legally have access to social security schemes, their social rights do not become a reality, so that “advantages of irregular migration tend to be mostly on the side of the employer”²⁷. In France in the mid 1990’s, two employers out of three and three workers out of four were not regularly declared; the same was the case for at least four fifth of Italian domestic employees (Sarti 2001). These migrants, whether regular or not, remain illegal and unprotected workers. In some countries, such as Spain and Portugal, medical and sometimes social assistance schemes, not employment-based, are accessible for persons without any entitlement to social security. They are always linked to conditions and restrictions (such as age, income, residency and migrant status regularity), which make it more difficult, if not impossible, for illegal migrants to access those schemes. Furthermore, « there is a concern that improving the social situation of workers in the informal economy might be seen as a way of encouraging those activities » (Steinhilber 2003). Charity and non-governmental organisations are often the last institutions willing to provide assistance to migrant workers.

In **France**, paid domestic labour had been progressively included in labour laws and social protection starting at the beginning of the 20th century. Domestics then began to enjoy some social rights: for pregnant women in 1909, pensions in 1910, extension of the protection in case of accident in 1923, social insurance from the 1920’s on, paid holidays in 1936... But they remained excluded from laws regarding working time, weekly rest and were included in collective bargaining only in the 1950’s. Only in 1982, however, was the first collective agreement signed (enacted in 1986), « which allowed to overcome the numerous gaps existing in labour law with respect to domestics » (Sarti 2001). In 1999, a national collective agreement regarding domestic workers was enacted and amended in 2000. There is no work

²⁷ Tapinos 2000 quoted by Steinhilber 2003.

permit for foreigners in this branch, however the Ministry of Foreign Affairs grants special visas for diplomats willing to import domestic workers who will not be covered by labour laws, but will hold the special identity cards reserved for domestic workers employed by diplomats²⁸. All that is required is that the employer allows his employee free access to the identity card and sign a declaration stating that he/she will respect the local labour laws. These requirements are not strictly enforced (Council of Europe, 2001). It remains that France is the only European country that has fully reorganised domestic service in a perspective of employment creation and normalisation of the sector (Scrinzi 2003).

In **Italy**, domestic work is legally categorised as *atypical* work. It remained excluded from almost all legal provisions regulating employment until the 1940's, with the exception of compulsory insurance against invalidity, old age and tuberculosis: « paid domestic work continued to be dominated by old traditions of subordination ». The 1942 Civil code, and the 1958 related law only extended restricted rights to the branch; domestic workers started to have the right to rest periods, holidays and sick benefits (Sarti 2001). The 1991 circular, which re-opens immigration for live-in domestic workers only, regulates that domestic workers should not be employed for *less* than 40 hours a week and that the employer is under an obligation to provide appropriate accommodation. The provision further ties the employer and the employee for a period of two years, and makes the employer responsible to ensure that the domestic worker does not engage in employment other than that for which he/she has a permit. This partially explains why live-in domestic workers continue to prevail in Italy, and why migrant domestic workers are totally dependent upon their employer. The employer being the one who can decide the renewal of the work *cum* residence permit, workers are disincented to report abuse²⁹. Collectively bargained national contracts have validity if employers adopt a formal contract with their employee, and are therefore meaningless for undocumented workers. Some migrant women are governed by contracts which have been specifically drawn up for overseas domestic workers, following the 1991 circular. Wage minimum was fixed below actual wages; maximum working hours were reduced from 66 in 1974 to 56 in 1988, and 52 in 1992. Guarantees in case of illness were extended in 1992, but no protection of pregnancy and maternity could be obtained (Andall 2000). Evasion and bad treatments, non-payment of wages and contributions are commonplace. The reluctance for employers to pay appropriate social contributions contributes to domestic workers' undocumented status in Italy (idem).

In 2002, **Spanish** trade unions have been raising the issue of the problems faced by domestic workers. Domestic work is regarded in Spain as a special employment relationship, governed by a separate set of employment and social security regulations, dating from 1985, which is inferior in many respects to that enjoyed by other workers. The special system for domestic workers totally excludes unemployment benefit, provides a low pension, offers little compensation for dismissal, and the contracts are almost always verbal. There is much informal and irregular employment, and pay and conditions are reported to be deteriorating. The recent phenomenon of increasing immigration from abroad (replacing the former migration from the country to the city that characterised Spain) has led to an escalation of the problem. Some immigrants are illegal, and have to accept poor conditions in order to obtain legal employment that will allow them to obtain a residence permit: legal residency depends

²⁸ Under the international customs, States have a mutual duty to deliver a residence permit (« special card ») to the domestic workers who are still under contract with their diplomatic employees, which implies that the worker will have to leave the country upon termination of the contract (Vaz Cabral 1998).

²⁹ "Colf: Audizione Parlamento Europeo", Federazione Italiana Lavoratori Commercio Turismo e Servizi (FILCAMS) – 19/09/2000

on legal employment³⁰. The unions believe that the low level of regulation and the lack of social protection of domestic workers is one of the main reasons for their informal and irregular situation. It provides little incentive for registration, offers few benefits and social rights, reduces the already low wages, and forces the workers (who are often not well-informed) to register for social security themselves. Because the special social security system offers few benefits to these workers, they often think that it is not worth paying contributions, especially if they do not work full time. Their employment is thus often concealed by both employers and employees. The unions claim that many employers offer different rates of pay for workers who wish to be covered by social security, and workers accepting informal employment without such cover may earn about EUR 90 more per month.³¹

In **Greece**, as in other European States, domestic work was said to be the only occupation available for migrant women (apart from prostitution), to the point where it is totally assimilated in representations. Anderson (2000) found that « the extent to which domestic service in Athens is dominated by non-citizens is striking, and there was a wide range of nationalities working in the sector. Many had not intended to stay in Greece, but to use it as a stepping-off point for Canada, the USA or Northern Europe. They had found that it was impossible to get a visa for the country they wanted to enter, so remained in Greece by default ». Most of the workers are live-ins, with responsibilities for children and elderly.

In **Israel**, as long as domestic service was supplied principally by an Israeli workforce mainly on an hourly basis, « there were no special statutory provisions on domestic work »: domestic labour was covered by statutory labour law, collective agreements applied to private employers and their domestic workers, who were insured in the National Insurance by their employers. Domestic workers' problems were those of low-waged workers working outside the sphere of collective bargaining, i.e. securing their employment rights (Mundlak 2005). With the influx of migrant workers, however, domestic work regulation has become a complex issue that the author highlights through three stories. First, the specific situation of live-in arrangements, which developed with the entry of migrant workers, challenged legal regulations concerning working time; second, as social security and health care rights are associated with residency in Israel, and that residency is allowed only to Jewish immigrants, migrant workers will never have access to these rights, but are restricted to the coverage of private insurance schemes their employers must purchase for them; third, the compulsory binding arrangement « that links the employment permit given to the employer with the employee's visa that requires her to work for a designed employer » has for a consequence « to tie immigration and work practices in a manner that makes the migrant worker vulnerable in both spheres », and impedes her to negotiate a better contract and to change employer (Mundlak 2005). Thus, with domestic labour market transformations, discriminatory provisions that secure segregation and alienage in the labour and social security legislations had to be made more explicit than when cheap workers coming in from the Palestinian occupied territories could be controlled physically upon entry on the Israeli territory.

☒ **The second set** is made up with countries where labour and social security legislation are very liberal and leave labour market widely unregulated (e.g. Lebanon, Morocco); or countries where a relatively strict labour and social protection legislation concerns only a

³⁰ According to a Spanish Survey of the Active Population, it is estimated that 60% domestic workers in Spain are unregistered underground economy. Half of the rest are registered with the social security but not in their own name (as family dependent) (<http://www.eiro.eurofound.eu.int/2002/05/feature/es0205206f.html>).

³¹ Daniel Albarracàn, CIREM Foundation, European industrial relations observatory on-line, Spain : Domestic work examined, <http://www.eiro.eurofound.eu.int/2002/05/feature/es0205206f.html>

relatively limited share of the active population, while a majority (or at least a numerous minority) is left uncovered and unprotected (e.g. Egypt, Tunisia, Turkey). The so-called « informal sector » is widespread, and is the rule rather than the exception, with a large dominance of self-employment. Many of these informal activities are hardly considered as « work » *per se*, and their level of professionalisation is low, especially since women's activities suffer some social and economic devalorisation. To a large extent, domestic labour is left unregulated.

In **Tunisia**, in its historical struggle to extend social security coverage to all categories of workers, the government has included domestic workers in the 2002 law, along with other categories of irregular and marginal workers. The results, however, are still not very conclusive, as enforcement and controls are not easy to implement. The authorities are relying on the workers' own motivation, at least as much as on their employers', by making them purchase contribution stamps (Cherif & Essoussi 2004). In contrast with an ongoing social protection extension process, and the modern image of a workforce composed mainly of wage labour, the field of domestic labour continues to host archaic practices: children domestics still exist in Tunisia, to an unknown extent (Dostie & Vencatachellum 2004). However:

« the UGTT (General Union of Tunisian Workers) has expressed concern that child labour continues to exist disguised as apprenticeship, particularly in the handicraft industry, and in the cases of teenage girls whose families place them as household domestics in order to collect their wages. There are no reliable statistics on the extent of this phenomenon; however, an independent lawyer who conducted a study of the practice concluded that hiring of underage girls as household domestics has declined with increased government enforcement of school attendance and minimum work age laws. The law prohibits forced and bonded child labour, and the Government enforces this prohibition effectively »³².

In **Egypt**, the Labour Law does not apply to domestic servants or employer's family members who are thus excluded, among others, from night work restrictions, maternity leaves, rest periods after delivery... As far as children domestics are concerned, « many of [them] are abused and overworked by their employers, and the restrictions in the Child Law have not improved conditions due to lax enforcement on the part of the Government. There are no records of cases in which an employer was fined or imprisoned. Although the law does not specifically prohibit forced and bonded labour by children, such practices are not known to occur»³³.

In **Lebanon**, migrant domestic workers cumulate the hardship of being foreigners with those associated with their branch of employment and what it entails in terms of working conditions. Domestic workers are in the custody (*kifâla*) of their employer, and have no rights for themselves; their passports are seized, and many do not succeed in having it back. The 1999 Human rights report of the US department of State on Lebanon reads: « Forced labour is not prohibited by law. In the absence of a prohibition against it, children, foreign domestic servants, and other foreign workers sometimes are forced to remain in situations amounting to coerced or bonded labour ». Unsurprisingly then, « foreign domestic servants are not protected by labour laws. Domestic servants work almost 18 hours per day³⁴ and, in most

³² US Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, Tunisia 1999 http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/1999_hrp_report/tunisia.html and 2004: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41733.htm>

³³ US Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, Egypt 2004, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41720.htm>

³⁴ In its Women Migrant Domestic Workers' Surveys, the ILO found that in Lebanon domestic workers were working on average 102 hours a week, had one average day off per month, earned 100 to 300 US dollars a month, that withholding of passport was common. 37% of them mentioned

cases, do not receive time off for vacations or holidays. There is no minimum wage for domestic servants; their average wage is about \$100 (150,000 Lebanese pounds) per month. They have no entitlement to government financial assistance. Many workers leave their jobs - which is not against the law--but their employers often report them as thieves to the police in order to locate them and force them to return.»³⁵ Domestic labour thus remains totally informal -only about one in 3.5 domestic workers would be granted a work permit-, in addition to violating other laws such as protection of children, prohibition of human traffic, etc. Facing widespread denunciations, Lebanon has recently taken several steps that may bring about positive change for domestic workers: in 1998, it banned the process of releasing workers for money from one sponsor to another – that is selling the contract. The same year, it created a computerised data bank that records the entries of all migrant workers with the names and addresses of their employers/sponsors, so that the latter can be traced in case of abuse. It established a complaint procedure, even though thousands of cases never reach the complaint stage. It has instituted a 1000-dollar bond on registration of sponsorship to be lodged by the employer at the Central Housing Bank, to cover airplane ticket expenses of the workers in case she runs away³⁶. Thousands of run-away maids were caught in Lebanon, unable to leave the country so long as release documents were not obtained from the employer, and back taxes not paid, until an amnesty was decreed in 2000-2001 (Jureidini 2004; Jureidini and Moukarbel 2004). During 2003, the Ministry of Labour enacted regulations defining employment agencies and household employers' responsibilities with regards to the treatment of domestics. In January, the government prohibited advertisements offering the services of foreign maids. However, this regulation is not uniformly applied³⁷.

In **Morocco**, domestic labour is not covered by protective legislation. It is a large informal and irregular sector of activities where it is tolerated that employers routinely ignore labour laws and regulations, and where labour legislation is enforced only in larger companies and in the public sector. Child labour is widespread; girls are preferred to adults because of “socially and culturally defined notions of how a home should and could best be maintained” (Sommerfelt 2001). Sources assert that: « In Morocco (...) in 1999, an estimated 88 thousands girls of 5 to 14 years of age were « adopted » or « fostered » in homes other than theirs, which, in most cases, means they were used as maids « petites bonnes »³⁸. Sample surveys have shown that three quarters of the girls are under 12 years of age, and one quarter under 10 years³⁹. A survey found that 72% of child domestic workers began their day before 7am and went to bed after 11pm⁴⁰. The issue of child labour “entered the political agenda in Morocco in the 1980’s. Especially since the beginning of the 1990’s, Moroccan authorities have discussed the issue within the framework of human rights, and the protection of children rights” (Sommerfelt 2001). But little progress has been made, and child domestic labour continues to violate both child labour and forced labour prohibition:

«Abuse of the child labour laws is common. The law prohibits the employment of any child under 12 years of age. Education is compulsory for children between the ages of 7 and 13 years, although not all children attend school. [...] In practice

occurrence of physical, verbal or sexual abuse, 19% non-payment of wages, and all of them said their freedom of movement was controlled (Moreno Fontes Sammartin 2004).

³⁵ U.S. Department of State Country Report on Human Rights Practices, Lebanon 1999, http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/1999_hrp_report/lebanon.html

³⁶ Jordan, where domestic workers situation is very similar, faced with rising denunciations and condemnation for its terrible practices against domestic workers, has recently taken steps to delineate a legal status for these particularly vulnerable women.

³⁷ <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41726.htm>

³⁸ Jon Pedersen, « The demography of Petites Bonnes in Morocco », in Sommerfelt 2001, chapter 2

³⁹ (ILO, Child Labour: What Is To Be Done?, June 1996, citing Moroccan League for the Protection of Children in collaboration with the Ministry of Health).

⁴⁰ ILO, Targeting the Intolerable, November 1996

children often are apprentices before age 12, particularly in the informal handicraft industry. [...] Children, particularly rural girls, also are employed informally as domestics and usually receive little or no wages. Safety and health conditions, as well as wages in businesses that employ children often are substandard.[...]. Forced or compulsory labour is prohibited by royal decree, and when authorities become aware of instances of forced labour, courts enforce the decree; however, in practice the Government lacks the resources to inspect all places of employment to ensure that forced labour is not being used, and the practice persists. The Government prohibits forced and bonded labour by children, but does not enforce this prohibition effectively. The practice of adoptive servitude, in which families adopt young girls and use them as indentured domestic servants, is socially accepted, and the Government does not regulate it »⁴¹.

2.2- A labour relationship and framework open to ambiguity and abuse

All the structural circumstances analysed above, converge to produce labour relationships dominated by ambiguity and abuse, especially in the case of migrant live-ins. A study on Asian labour migration notes: « The problems faced by domestic workers are well known. Being confined to private homes as the work place, they have to work long hours for low pay and are quite often subject to abuse and exploitation. Confiscation of passports is a common practice. Sexual harassment is a common complaint by domestic workers. They enjoy hardly any protection and the national laws invariably favour employers » (Wickramasekara, 1995).

In general, abuse may be of four interrelated and cumulative types: abuse linked to labour exploitation, itself connected to the unclear status of the activity and the relation of subordination generated by employment and status conditions; relatedly, abuse linked to the nature and amount of remuneration; abuse referring to the use of children labour, which is still relatively widespread; and abuse related to bondage, caused by debt or any other means of coercion and subordination, leading to situations of « modern slavery » of migrant and non migrant domestic workers alike.

Subordination and labour exploitation: Paid domestic labour consists of the tasks a woman is supposed to perform « naturally », as a social role, out of love and responsibility. Its professional status is very weak; it has no technical definition, no precise contents, no qualification standard, etc. It is not considered as « true work ». In addition, it takes place within the home and is hidden from controls and inspections. The confusion between private and working spaces tends to lead to confusions regarding time (personal versus working) and relationships (family versus professional). One of the consequences is that domestic labour may easily be extended to a wide range of tasks to the point where one may talk of abuse. Bridget Anderson proposes « to see domestic work in terms of two types of work: caring work (children, the elderly, disabled) and domestic chores (cleaning the house, cooking etc) ». However,

« domestic workers do a lot more than these, because actually what is commonly asked is not that the worker do a series of set tasks (though some live-out workers do have that), but rather that they do whatever is required about the house by the employer. This means that there is a great deal of latitude and very easy to make unreasonable demands [which commonly] include: looking after pets and all the work associated with that (walking the dog, feeding, cleaning up the hairs etc.); cleaning the homes of friends and families of the employer with no extra money; cleaning offices, cars, garages; chopping firewood; 'heavy cleaning' (carpets, blinds,

⁴¹ U.S. Department of State Country Report on Human Rights Practices 1999 - Morocco
<http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/tehis/vtx/home/pendoc.htm?tbl=RSDCOI&page=home&id=3ae6aa720>

etc); gardening; going on holiday with the employers and counting as 'holiday' » (Anderson 1998).

Some of these tasks may be very personal or even taboo, and involve sharing the intimacy and the bodily privacy of some members of the family, including sex. The emotional contents of these personal services may also be high, and they may require a strong level of commitment that goes beyond mere wage labour (Augustin 2003).

The lack of boundaries applies also to working time. Live-in domestic workers are supposed to do whatever is required in the house for 24 hours a day and are thus expected to be permanently “on call” for their employers. Live-outs are not always spared by the lack of precise definition of working time: even though they are hired « to do whatever is required in the house for a set number of hours each day » , they often complain that « they work unacknowledged overtime to finish jobs, are expected to change work times to suit employers, spend a long time travelling between jobs » (Anderson 1998).

Confusion of roles and ambiguity regarding the nature of the tasks –work or loving care– lead to psychological abuse and moral pressure, studied under the concept of « maternalism »,

« a system of power relation wherein the maid is under the mistress’ protective custody, control, and authority. Structurally, it is characterised by mistress benevolence, which is a ‘false generosity’ or an ‘ideological camouflage’ that conceals the exploitative nature of the relationship » (Arnado 2003).

The presence of a live-in maid in a household contributes to perpetuate the concept of reproductive labour as women’s work, and tends to displace the conflict over the division of caregiving labour away from husband and wife to struggles between housewife and domestic (Glenn 1992, Andall 2000). Formal wage employment on an hourly basis often creates the necessary distance for the relationship to exist outside strong emotions, but not live-in arrangements. A relationship of competition, displacement, a feeling of threat and sameness tends to build between the two women that generates means and strategies of boundary construction and « otherisation » (Lan 2003) from the part of the employer. Live-in domestics may be deprived of control over their time, space, body, freedom... Violence or even open abuse and forms of torture regularly occur⁴².

Several studies have pointed to the fact that the cultural background and origins of the migrant women play a role in their propensity to find themselves in situations of domination and accept them without revolt. Patriarchal domination in their home countries may explain women submission to abuse, which grounds their reputation of patience and good behaviour, as for the Filipinas (Mozère & Maury 2002, Arnado 2003).

Wages, debt and unpaid labour: Ambiguities on the status of domestic labour as an activity, the dominated position of live-in domestic workers in the public political space of transnational migration and of the host country, to which their dominated position inside the *locus* of work – their employees’ household – should be added, in a context of frequent indebtedness and lack of legal and social protection, all inevitably lead to an unfavourable capacity to perceive adequate pay for work. The level of remuneration of domestic workers is determined by various factors. Some reflect market mechanisms: as long as no minimum wages are enforced, structural supply abundance will exert a strong pressure on wage level, to the point where maids may accept just being fed and put up. Domestic labour market price thus also reflects alternatives open to women of similar conditions, and thus the level of wages and labour conditions in employment branches for low qualified foreign women.

⁴² Lebanon, Jordan and the Gulf countries have acquired a regrettable reputation in that regard.

The level and nature of remuneration also result from the status granted and recognised to the work and the worker, and to the relationship of domination it allows and reflects: documented or not, a worker or a family help status, a free lancer on an hourly base or a dependent live-in, with or without a contract and paid social contributions, etc... Being documented or not generally draws a clear limit among the domestic workers,

« undocumented workers often being extremely badly paid or not paid at all. Sometimes documented paid less because employers say have to pay tax etc... ». Research led in Europe shows that « agencies who deal with undocumented workers often are approached by employers offering accommodation and food in exchange for work. Work for no pay is not unusual, particularly when people are new in a country. Employment is a favour to the worker [...] Getting accommodation and food knocked off pay. [Often the worker is] being given gifts instead of money - doubly a problem because workers are supposed to be grateful for this. [...] Payment in 'good relations'. pay is almost always low, but is extremely variable, from country to country and employer to employer » (Anderson 1998).

Generally, wages are not considered as a real right: in all the cases where domestic workers are live-in migrants, there is usually no chance to negotiate wages: a domestic worker claiming a higher wage is often just sacked. Non-payment of wages is a common complaint of domestic workers in most countries considered.

Above all, it appears that the level of remuneration of a domestic worker reflects the value socially granted to her work⁴³ and the representations she is submitted to, within the country and within the labour relationship. The ostentation of a bourgeoisie with a strong consumption of domestic workers, as well as visions presenting society as a collection of groups *naturally* different –according to cast, ethnic origins, race, and skin colour– tend to amplify devalorisation of the domestic workers. In most countries, domestic workers are hierarchised according to their national or regional origin, which is supposed to reflect an objective hierarchy of their qualifications and qualities, and affects the remuneration structure⁴⁴: « [One often finds] Sub-Saharan Africans paid very badly, Polish and Filipinos paid more than Africans, Christians paid more than Muslims, Sri Lankan badly paid [...]. [They are] being played off one against another: who is the cheapest? Who is the best status symbol? » (Anderson 2000) Liane Mozère says that Filipino women are the « Mercedes Benz » of domestic service (2002). Augustin (2003) emphasizes that according to European employers, different cultures clean and care differently and that « Latin American women are said to be good at child care because they are affectionate or sweet, but they are also accused of being sloppy cleaners ».

The level and type of remuneration is also affected by the existence of a debt. There are several types of debt interfering. Moral debt to the family plays a role in the motivation to migrate and to endure hardship and bad treatment, but it is also what ties a child worker to his/her position. Debt contracted by migrants with their family and/or other lenders to pay for their trip is a motivation to accept any kind of employment upon arrival. Debt to intermediaries is often inflated to the point of constituting a long-term bondage and a powerful lever for exploitation. Moral debt to the employer contributes to the feeling of indebtedness and thus weakens resistance both of children and adults. It is a major constituent of maternalism. It is used to reduce remuneration and secure submission and compliance. Debt repayment can be enforced by local legislation, as in the case of Lebanon, or by social relationships and pressure, especially when they link the migrant

⁴³ Which, according to feminists, explains why the conditions of national and migrant women are tied together: the social value granted to paid domestic labour derives from that granted to the unpaid care and house work of the housewives.

⁴⁴ As well as other conditions, such as live-in *versus* live-out.

with a host of relatives and community members. In many cases, a large part of the agreed-upon wages is kept by the agency or the employer to pay back some alleged debt (visa, passport, ticket, costs of contract...). Sometimes, wages are not paid until the end of the contract period, under the pretext that the migrant worker should pay his/her debt first. It is not unusual that some monthly wages are retained to cover the cost of some alleged damage or broken object in the household. In Lebanon, it is not rare for migrant domestic workers to be unable to leave the country because of a pretended debt towards the employer. In all cases, the existence of a debt changes the *nature* of the remuneration: it is not the employer who owes money to the domestic worker in exchange for her work, but the worker who pays back something she owed before even starting to work. Having a debt to pay back can lead to situation of quasi-servitude. The issue of the debt plays such a role in migrant bondage that several governments, e.g. the Philippines and Sri Lanka, have tried to organise formal credit institutions for migrants.

Child domestic labour: Abuse is particularly salient, and intolerable, when domestics are children, meaning that no policy has yet been enforced regarding child labour, protection and school attendance. Child domestic labour is *in itself* regarded as an abuse, a bad practice, since it violates international conventions and moral norms, in terms of lifestyle, ability to learn and rest, food, life chances, affection, love, care and protection: child domestics are generally heavily exploited and often badly treated. In Egypt and Tunisia, where the Human rights reports of the US Department of State denounces child domestic labour, it is apparently slowly disappearing. In Morocco, however, it is still common and tolerated by the government.

The case of Morocco is by far the worse and relatively well documented (Kapchan 1996, Sommerfelt 2001). The 1999 US Department of State Country Report on Human rights Practices in Morocco⁴⁵ denounces: « the Government has not acted to end the plight of young girls who work in exploitative and abusive domestic servitude....[...] Credible reports of physical and psychological abuse in such circumstances are widespread. Some orphanages have been charged as knowing accomplices in this practice; however, more often parents of rural girls "contract" their daughters to wealthier urban families and collect the salaries for their work as maids⁴⁶. In the 2004 report, again, it appears that « the problem remained prevalent, although the National Observatory of Children's Rights has conducted, since 2000, a human rights awareness campaign regarding the plight of child maids »⁴⁷.

Child domestic labour is often associated with bondage, or some form of coercion.

Modern slavery: As defined by several conventions and statements⁴⁸, modern slavery results from a combination of intense labour exploitation and the existence of a bondage that limits the freedom of the worker. It concerns particularly vulnerable groups, and reinforces their vulnerability. Modern slavery applies to two types of situation: one linked to international traffic of human beings, contract slavery and debt bondage, as in the case of Asian and African domestic workers in Lebanon, denounced by Jureidini (2002 & 2004). The second

⁴⁵ U.S. Department of State Country Report on Human Rights Practices 1999 - Morocco

<http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.htm?tbl=RSDCOI&page=home&id=3ae6aa720>

⁴⁶ Which is generally the case for children domestics. In their study of child domestic workers in Tunisia, Dostie and Vencatachellum (2004) show that « some characteristics of child domestic workers in Tunisia are similar to other forms of child labour in that a large share, if not all, of their wages accrue to their parents either through compulsory or voluntary remittances ».

⁴⁷ <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41728.htm>

⁴⁸ A lively debate surrounds the relevance of the use of the word « slavery » for new forms of bonded labour, servitude and trafficking of human beings, a word which has disappeared from most European legislation (Vaz Cabral 1998). For lack of space, we will not go into it here, although it could be relevant for our purpose.

type is one of child domestic servitude, often under the fashion of family fostering, of which Morocco is typical. In its working document on « domestic slavery », the Council of Europe (2001) notes that countries where forms close to domestic slavery are common often have not totally, or only very recently eradicated slavery, thus perpetuating practices of labour bondage not very far from it.

Modern slavery in domestic labour, or more generally bondage, aims at denying the right of freedom « to live-in workers by their sponsors (employers) because they consider it appropriate to safeguard the 'investment' which they made through up-front costs of airfares, agency charges, visas, work permits and residency permits (Jureidini & Moukarbel 2000). Bondage can exist only if the state authorities are playing their role in not protecting the employee's freedom, or even protecting the employers' rights by not allowing the worker to leave the country without release documents. It is the case in Lebanon.

A domestic worker who refuses to suffer her conditions any longer has often no other choice than to leave. However, she often does not even have this possibility, as immigration legislation ties her to her employer, which is the purpose of all types of bondage. Running away is a prevalent practice for maids in Arabic countries, who need to escape their employer's house physically, even though they may have nowhere else to go, and no authorization to leave the country⁴⁹. In Jureidini's writings, run-aways are one of the categories of domestic workers, beside live-ins and free-lancers. And one of the first steps taken to protect migrant domestic workers has been to set up temporary shelter or "safe houses" for run-aways (Moreno-Fontes Chammartin 2004).

One of the conclusions of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee of the Council of Europe (2001) working document concerning domestic slavery is that:

« The strong relationship of dependency between employer and employee that results in the latter being forced to accept violent and degrading treatment must be weakened. Domestic workers should be given the same rights as other categories, thus allowing them to freely choose their employer and place of employment ».

They should enjoy an independent legal status. Bridget Anderson (1998) adds:

« [abuse and exploitation] does not describe the situation of all domestic workers in the EU. Some have 'good' employers. But all domestic workers are dependent on their employer to be 'good', and all are vulnerable to bad employers. We somehow need to ensure that it is not up to the employer to be kind, but that there are obligations on them to be a good (in the broader sense) employe, and that it is possible to leave bad employers ».

The only way to ease dependency is to give domestic workers rights and to grant them protection, which is complicated as long as their status as women and workers is overshadowed by their migrant situation. The absence of a legal protection thus reinforces dependency towards the employer and generates considerable vulnerability for the domestic worker, whether migrant or national.

Concluding remarks

The international dimension of the domestic labour market leads to the racialisation, or the ethnicisation, of this occupation in most countries of employment. Domestic labour markets are demand-led, although conditions of supply determine how the demand will be fulfilled. Demand for reproductive services may be channelled to decommodified collective responses,

⁴⁹ In 2000, 19 000 domestic workers fled from their employers citing mistreatment, non-payment of wages and other grievances (Moreno Fontes Sammartin 2004).

such as those provided by the welfare state, more equitable division of tasks between men and women, etc. It is a cultural, social, economic and political choice to respond to certain social needs (e.g; child and elderly care) by outsourcing and market supply. It goes along a commodification of family responsibilities, suitable to a context of growing liberalism (Mundlack 2005). The literature shows that frequently, rather than challenge the inequity in the relationship with their husband, or challenge the State in its provision of public care services and benefits, or find other ways to organise social reproductive labour, inside and outside the household, as paid or unpaid work, etc., middle class women, most often white in the case of Europe, prefer to push the burden of domestic chores onto other women, with less power, and in a situation to be exploited (Andall 2000, Anderson 2000, Glenn 1992). Migration and labour market regulations combine with attitudes and « preferences » to channel racial-ethnic women into domestic service and block their entry in other fields and their strategies of mobility (Oso Casas 2000 & 2001, Chaib 2003). They are maintained at the lowest stages of society and labour market, in a pattern of racial and ethnic specialisation, segmentation and hierarchisation. This is why Lutz (2001) can write that « the maid issue has evolved from one of class to one of ethnicity and nationality ». For most of them, the only chance of mobility in the host country is to become a live-out cleaner. Structural conditions of access to host countries thus contribute to secure abundant and cheap domestic labour supplies and affect the positions of migrant domestic workers on the labour markets and the nature of their relationship with their employer, the « global in the local »⁵⁰. At the international level,

« despite regulations enforced by the home country on the migrants themselves and the agents, exploitative practices persist. The negotiations at national level are heavily loaded in favour of the host country as international labour transactions are mediated at a buyers market with foreign principals always at an advantage. Thus women, especially housemaids categorised as unskilled workers, are generally considered as a commodity to be bought at the lowest price » (Dias and Jayasundere 2001).

And then:

« Migrant domestic workers are marginalised in host countries through politico-legal regulations and the cultural discourse of racism; their everyday interactions with host families are mediated by the construction of class distinctions, ethnic stratification, and spatial segregation » (Lan 2003).

Live-in arrangements lie at the heart of several parameters: since they imply deregulation of working time, they allow a more intense exploitation of labour, as well as intensified control, to the point of seclusion. They make abuse easier, while retrenching the labour relationship from the legalised sphere, into the private locus of the household. They allow a very loose bulk count of worked hours, which are paid at a cost below any kind of legislation, and cost certainly less than the total sum of hours worked if they had to be paid on an hourly basis. These conditions are tailored for vulnerable migrants who enter a multifold situation of domination, implying strong dependency links. Narratives show that living in the employers' household is chosen mainly because the overall situation is so gloom: because it may allow the worker to save on rent (but food and housing are implicitly or explicitly deducted from pay); because she is illegal and risks less by staying at home in a upper or middle class neighbourhood than taking public transportation everyday; because working inside a private space reduces risks of control by labour or immigration authorities. These are components of domestic labour affordability.

⁵⁰ Dirlik, Arif, 1996: « The Global in the Local », in *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, edited by R.Wilson and W.Dissanayake, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, quoted by Lan 2003.

And thus migrants find themselves in a position where they should supply cheap work without demanding rights, guaranties or social security. Informality is not an *intrinsic* characteristic of domestic labour: it is one of the modalities imposed on a particular segment of the labour force. Informality is not a-historical: what is going on in several countries is a process of informalisation, parallel to that studied in other sectors of activity, which accompanies labour transnationalisation and de-regulation. As a result, the reproduction of social status and position takes place within a context marked by gender, but also by a difference of regional or ethnic origin, and more and more by a difference in races, as it could have been in the colonial past. Bridget Anderson (2000) thus adds:

« So the employment of a migrant domestic worker enables the expression and reproduction of the proper role of racialised groups and their proper relations to European households as servers, doers of dirty work that citizens are too important to do. When the worker is charged with looking after children these identities are quite literally reproduced. ».

Throughout the domestic workers' vulnerability and informality is a social, political and economic construct⁵¹. Lack of protection is the main link between, on the one hand, the type of activity designated as « domestic work », and the conditions in which it is performed in most Mediterranean countries, where both are components to its « informal » status; and, on the other hand, the persons for whom this type of employment has become a specialisation at the international level, for lack of other opportunities but also because many different stakeholders have a vested interest in it. In this context, lack of protection cannot be labelled “informality” only in its classical definition.

Lack of protection and vulnerability are the product of circumstances that result from policies, institutional factors, and strategies.

Policies and institutional factors: those leading to an impoverishment of large segments of the population from labour sending countries, to a lack of employment opportunities, to a deprivation of attractive life perspectives for young people; but also immigration control policies, laxity and tolerance towards labour and social law encroachment, scarcity of social equipment and services in labour receiving countries.

Strategies: those of developing countries, that need hard currency and remittances, those of intermediaries and traffickers that cheat and exploit migrants; strategies of employers, often going to extremes to defend their life style and comfort, social status and couple arrangements; strategies of migrants ready to pay a very heavy price to improve their family's living conditions, allow a child to attend school or escape a hopeless situation.

Socially constructed informality, lack of protection and vulnerability are necessary components to the very lucrative international domestic labour business. They are needed to control and use a precious labour force outsourced from further and further away. They are responses to periodic servant crises that have occurred everytime a source of domestic labour supply would turn short or make “unacceptable” demands.

⁵¹ In countries where domestic labour has, to a large extent, been incorporated within the realm of labour and social protection laws (e.g., France), the number of live-ins has diminished, and the dominant model has become hourly-based cleaning ladies.

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