

**“CLEANING AND IRONING . . . WITH A SMILE”:
MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE CARE
INDUSTRY IN FRANCE***

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to contribute to current debates about the “international division of care,” by dealing with the development of the “care industry” as an employment sector for migrants. Most studies focus on the traditional forms of domestic service in the private sphere: this obscures employment in other settings such as companies providing home-based domestic service. In France, this sector has been dynamic in recent years, thanks to public policies that have aimed to promote employment through tax exemptions. The article analyzes the intensification of work in such companies, which is based on time constraints and the pressure of customer demand. It also compares this sector with work in other settings such as living-out cleaning jobs in direct employment. It identifies similarities and discontinuities between the two sectors with regard to the forms of labor control, the ideology through which work relationships are constructed, and the employees’ strategies.

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Feminist analyses concerning the global restructuring of the economy as well as international labor migration often focus on the reorganization of social reproduction that accompanies these processes (Misra & Merz, 2007). In particular, several recent studies investigate global inequalities in terms of the differential access to care provisions that affects people living in the different regions of the world. Care as a resource is unequally distributed in the world: on the one hand, middle-class women in affluent countries increasingly rely on migrant and racialized women to “buy out” domestic and care work, in societies characterized by durable inequalities in the gender division of labor and the restructuring of public care provision. On the other hand, women as well as some men from the global South migrate to meet this demand, working as nannies, caregivers for the elderly, and cleaners. These “care chains” (Hochschild, 2001), stretching across the world, accentuate the social polarization between women and connect the gender regimes existing in the global South and the global North (Lutz, 2002; Parreñas, 2001). Previous research investigates the role of racism and immigration policies in shaping the new arrangements of the gendered division of labor in the receiving countries and reveals the linkages between immigration policy and social policy (Lister et al., 2007). It also combines the traditional feminist concerns about the sexual division of labor, the welfare state, and the impact of neoliberal policies on women with recent developments in the sociology of gendered migration (Donato et al., 2006). In addition, these studies incorporate some of the results produced by historians and social scientists who have studied domestic service as a gendered relationship (Davidoff, 1974; Fraisse, 1979). The hiring of migrant domestic workers reaffirms gender and class relations but also global inequalities. Immigration policies tend to reinforce the employers’ position vis-à-vis migrant domestic workers; further, racialized models of gender are reproduced within these work relations (Anderson, 2000; Rollins, 1990; Scrinzi, 2003).

A critical evaluation of these scholarly contributions, which questions the restricted focus of these studies, is developing. Some scholars point out that our definition of the “international division of care” needs to be broadened by investigating other social actors, institutions, and sites. Eleonore Kofman (2006), for instance, stresses the importance of incorporating into the analysis of the global “care chains” other agents of social reproduction besides households, such as the market, the nonprofit sector, and the state. Most existing studies concerning migrant domestic labor look at care-related jobs in direct employment (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003). Understandably, this scholarship has privileged the traditional household-based organization of domestic service, in which a private employer pays an employee to carry out domestic chores in the house. The studies’ preoccupation with the traditional forms of domestic service has obscured the employment of migrants in institutional and bureaucratized settings such as residential care and cleaning services companies. By using the expression “care industry,” I will refer to the latter.

This article presents ethnographic data concerning migrant domestic workers in France, in order to explore work relations in two different sectors: private companies providing home-based domestic service and living-out cleaning jobs in direct employment. The ethnographic data are used to identify similarities and discontinuities between the two work settings, with regard to the forms of control over labor, the ideologies through which work relations are constructed by the employers, and the employees' strategies. By taking into account migrants' employment in the care industry more broadly, this article contributes to the broadening of our definition of the "international division of care."

PATERNALISM AND IMPERSONAL WORK RELATIONS IN DOMESTIC SERVICE

Studies of household-based domestic service in private employment have emphasized the centrality of emotional labor to the job. Emotional labor is defined by Arlie Russell Hochschild (1983: 7) as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display," which is required by workers in certain jobs in order to enhance the customers' well-being and social status during face-to-face interactions. Hochschild specifies that most jobs place an emotional burden on the employee, such as that of boredom, but only certain jobs require the emotions of the worker to be used for the purpose of the work itself. Indeed, what is sold and bought within the domestic service relationship is not just material work but also, crucially, the personal identity of the worker. Nannies and caregivers, for instance, make use of their personal and family experiences at work while providing care for the families of their employers. Emotional labor can also be demanded in cleaning jobs, as domestic workers are expected to perform rituals of deference while interacting with their employers. In this respect, the employment of domestic servants functions as a status symbol for middle-class employers. Emotional labor in domestic service is closely associated with the personalized nature of work relationships in the job. The organization of work is negotiated within face-to-face interactions between the employer and the employee, who is "personally subordinate to an individual employer" (Glenn, 1992: 22). Employers' satisfaction is based on personal criteria, as they lay emphasis on the quality of the relationship with their employees (Rollins, 1990). This is consistent with paternalistic work relations and the specific ideology that is associated with the exploitation of migrant domestic workers: their emotional labor is made invisible as they are constructed as honorary members of the family. Such an ideology serves to mask both the poor working conditions and the social hierarchies that structure domestic service relationships. The employees are represented not as workers but as people who need help, on the basis of gendered and racialized constructions: as women who need to be protected and as migrants who need help in order to integrate into a new society. These forms of exploitation of domestic

workers are reinforced when the employee lives at her employer's house. This arrangement is rather common in Southern European countries, where it is associated with care work for the elderly. In Italy, Spain, and Greece, such jobs are mainly performed by migrant women (Anderson, 2000). Living-in domestic workers are dependent on their employers for accommodation and food; because they live and work in the same place as their employers, they end up being in a state of "permanent availability" (Anderson, 2000: 41) to the employers' families, while their own personal life is hindered. It is the blurring of the boundaries between work and personal relationships that is characteristic of living-in jobs, especially when workers develop relationships of affection with the people for whom they care. At the same time, care-work relationships can also be characterized by psychological exploitation, which is aggravated by the isolation in which the domestic worker lives.

However, domestic service in the household is not always based on personalized work relations. Domestic service can also be based on relationships akin to commercial transactions, as some workers have to deal with multiple "employers-clients" at the same time. These jobs involve very little emotional labor and few face-to-face interactions between the employer and the employee. Indeed, as Mary Romero (2002) suggests, "specializing" in cleaning by the hour is a strategy through which some workers manage to increase their autonomy and also to avoid unpleasant or humiliating tasks. Similar findings are provided by Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001), indicating that workers select those employers who are not too fastidious and who are inclined to delegate the responsibility of domestic chores entirely to the workers, thus showing deference to their skills. In making such selections, workers manage to obtain greater control over the labor process. Working in living-out cleaning jobs is often more remunerative than working for only one employer, but workers need to spend time in looking for new employers-clients to maintain a constant demand for their work.

Existing studies of domestic and care work in bureaucratized and institutional settings present similar findings, as workers in these jobs appreciate the lack of close personal relationships and the minimal amount of emotional labor required (Glenn, 1992; Mendez, 1998). However face-to-face interaction between the employer-client and the domestic worker, even if limited, is still compulsory in living-out jobs, for example, for the purpose of recruitment. Only a company offers the opportunity for employers to completely subcontract domestic chores so as to avoid face-to-face interactions with cleaners. Companies' clients delegate not only the domestic chores but also the work of controlling the domestic workers. This suits those who are not comfortable with having a domestic worker carrying out domestic chores in their home, as this substitution can be experienced as socially reprehensible. Indeed, as Barbara Ehrenreich (2002: 72) put it, "cleaning services are the ideal solution for anyone still sensitive enough to find the traditional employer-maid relationship morally vexing."

However, Jennifer Bickham Mendez's (1998) study of a domestic service agency in California shows that even bureaucratized and impersonal domestic service can incorporate paternalistic management practices. In the agency that she studied, in fact, management aimed at creating and imposing a gendered work culture of care and service vis-à-vis the clients. The managers in this company expended a great deal of emotional labor in dealing with both the clients and the workers, in order to build highly personalized relationships with them. Both domestic service and work relationships in the company, in which cleaners worked in teams, were systematically constructed as affective and akin to family relations. The managers' emotional labor vis-à-vis the clients aimed to convey the idea that the company really cared for each individual client and offered her help in juggling work and domestic responsibilities. Paternalistic practices such as the celebration of employees' birthdays and the provision of free food in the agency's office were intended to combat the high turnover rate. In cleaning services agencies, however, domestic workers tend to lose control over the labor process, as the company imposes routinized practices in cleaning and ironing and exerts detailed control over the quality of work: as a result, workers may experience their work as dehumanizing (Mendez, 1998). Workers in bureaucratically organized work settings, such as residential care, can enjoy the opportunity to meet their colleagues and to work in a team (Glenn, 1992). Care workers in institutional settings also enjoy the opportunity to develop close relationships with the people they care for, as they do in private employment (Timonen & Doyle, 2010).

Finally, as Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1992) showed in her analysis of domestic labor in hospitals in the United States, racism and gender relations are reproduced through domestic service not only in the private sphere but also in institutional and bureaucratized settings, where they are embedded in impersonal structures. Such hierarchies are expressed in terms of the level of formal qualifications and expertise, through a complex gendered and racialized division of tasks and roles, where the distinction between management and execution is pivotal.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CARE INDUSTRY IN CONTEMPORARY FRANCE

The private sector constitutes an important provider of care and domestic service in various European countries. Companies, usually small-size businesses (Dølvik, 2001), tend to invest in the domestic service sector if they can benefit from special incentives, such as tax exemptions or subsidized jobs: indeed, in the absence of these measures they cannot compete with the prices offered by the informal market. In Denmark, for example, companies provide 50% of the care services demanded by households, providing especially services for the elderly (Cancedda, 2001). In the United Kingdom, too, since the 1980s, companies have provided care services for the elderly (Kofman, 2006). Although in other European countries this private sector is already important, in France it occupies

a very limited part of the market. However, the private sector has proved to be dynamic in France in the last few years. The number of companies offering home-based domestic service is rapidly increasing: the number of these companies doubled between 2004 and 2005, and today there are more than 1,000 of them in France (DARES, 2007). This growth has largely been promoted by recent public policies. Since the 1980s, French governments have provided cash subsidies for care and promoted the demand through tax exemptions (DARES, 2002). These measures have concerned employment in traditional household-based domestic service, in nonprofit associations (cleaning, care for the elderly, and care for children), but also in companies. While initially granted to nonprofit associations and private employers only, since the late 1990s tax exemptions have also applied to companies offering home-based domestic service (*entreprises de services à la personne*). Since 2004, companies have also been able to operate as intermediaries between domestic workers and private employers, who pay them to carry out the administrative work connected with the hiring of an employee. Moreover, companies not only provide domestic service but are also clients of the care industry themselves: companies, as well as local institutions and associations, can purchase domestic and care services to offer as benefits to their employees, in the form of prepaid vouchers, in order to increase their productivity. In France, the companies providing domestic service are usually located in Paris and the surrounding areas. The companies' clients are often dual career households requiring not just cleaning, ironing, gardening, and home-maintenance work but also home-based tutoring for schoolchildren (*accompagnement scolaire*) and even IT assistance. Today, a growing amount of the activity of such companies is related to the provision of care services for the elderly (DARES, 2007).

The recent interventions aiming at promoting and normalizing domestic service have resulted in an increased segmentation of the labor market on the basis of a racialized and gendered organization of work (Angeloff, 2000). In fact, these social policies appear to be primarily a means to cope with unemployment by creating jobs that in France are usually referred to as *emplois familiaux*, "jobs within a family." These temporary and insecure jobs are mostly taken on by women, who constitute 97.9% of all the domestic workers hired by private employers and 98% of those working for nonprofit associations (Dussuet, 2005). In France as well as in other European countries, jobs in home-based care and cleaning services, both in the nonprofit sector and in companies, are poorly remunerated, unstable, and part-time (Dølvik, 2001). However, the role played by racism in the organization of the French domestic service sector is difficult to measure: because of French institutions' official ban on the use of "ethnic categories" in producing statistics (De Rudder, Poiret, & Vourc'h, 2000), very little information is available about the nationality or the country of origin of the workers. As a result, those domestic workers who are naturalized migrants or French citizens who come from France's overseas regions, such as Guadeloupe and Martinique, remain invisible in the statistics. Immigration law plays a key

role in establishing a gendered and racialized division of labor, as the migrants' juridical status has a gender-specific impact on their inclusion in the labor market. In France, female migrant labor has been mobilized in order to test and develop new forms of flexibility at work, within the context of the restructuring of employment (Merckling, 2003; Sabah, 2008). Migrant women are overrepresented in domestic service in comparison with French women: in 2002, 26% of female migrants worked in this sector while only 11% of female French nationals did (Tavan, 2005). In 1990, foreigners constituted 16% of all workers in domestic service; 77% of these workers were women (Merckling, 2003). Many other migrants work in the informal economy. Also, the commodification of care provision has increased class inequalities between families, based on differential access to commodified care services. In fact, only the most affluent families can afford to become private employers and thus benefit from available tax reductions (Marbot, 2008).

METHODOLOGY

This article is based on ethnographic data collected in Paris in 2003: 12 interviews with cleaners working for a company providing cleaning, ironing, home-maintenance and gardening services, interviews with the same company's manager and also with the president of the French organization of the private service-providing companies, as well as participant observations. The observations involved the manager's phone conversations with clients and some job interviews conducted by the manager. These interviews were recorded. The article also relies on 12 interviews with private employers and migrant domestic workers involved in direct employment as cleaners. These migrants came from Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Peru, Morocco, and the Ivory Coast. Finally, a content analysis was undertaken of the publications produced by the cleaning services company whose employees and manager were interviewed, such as advertisement brochures and the monthly "magazine" that is distributed to the employees. These written materials served to document the company's management procedures and the organization of work. Other materials, produced by the French organization of the private employers, served to illustrate how work relationships in private employment are represented. I relied on my observations as well as on the interviews to gather information about employment conditions, the organization of work, forms of control over labor, the social construction of work relationships, and the workers' strategies. While most of the interviews were recorded, I also relied on notes taken during or immediately after some conversations that I had in the company's office with the manager and a few cleaners.

At the time the fieldwork was carried out, the company employed 260 workers in the Ile-de-France, the Paris region; these were all women except for five men. Among the workers, 46% were French nationals, 23% were nationals of an African country, 13% were from Southern and Central America, 11% were from

North Africa, and 7% were from a European Union country. The manager said that most of the French workers had become naturalized or came from France's overseas regions. All the workers I interviewed, except for a French man, were migrants; most, with the exception of two workers, were women. They came from Cameroun, Senegal, Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritius, as well as from Martinique. Most of them had previously worked in other nonskilled, feminized part-time service jobs that tend to employ migrants: industrial cleaning, care work for associations, and washing up in restaurants. Except for two French nationals, all the workers held a temporary residence permit, which they could renew only if they had a job.

Almost 90% of the company's clients were couples, of whom more than half had children; the remaining 10% were single people. The clients benefited from tax deductions corresponding to 50% of the cost of the service. The cleaners were paid by the hour and salaries were low. In fact, a cleaning services company makes its profit by keeping its employees' salaries low. While the cleaners' hourly rate ranged from 6.83 to 7.50 euros, the company charged the clients up to 19.8 euros per hour. The cleaners' hourly pay is significantly lower than that for individually employed living-out domestic workers. At the time of my fieldwork, in the wealthiest areas of the city, living-out employees working in the informal economy could earn up to 13 euros per hour. Working for the company was mainly based on part-time permanent contracts (averaging 15 hours per week). Neither training nor experience was demanded from the workers: the cleaning and ironing skills of potential employees were tested by asking them to iron a skirt. However, employees were required to be able to read and write in French in order to fill in the forms and vouchers through which they were paid. Services were available to clients for a minimum of two hours per week, and demand could change from one month to another. As a result, salaries were also very variable and turnover was high. The data suggest that employment in companies providing domestic service has the typical features of other flexible or casual, low-paid, feminized, nonskilled service jobs.

INTENSIFICATION OF WORK IN THE CLEANING SERVICES COMPANY

The work performed for the company did not normally include any emotional labor. The workers met the clients only once, on their first working day, as the clients were usually working outside the house during the day. This lack of face-to-face interaction had another consequence: as workers were interchangeable, the job did not involve personalized work relations. The agency acted in fact as an intermediary between the clients and the cleaners: the clients informed the agency of the tasks that needed to be carried out, and the agency reported the information to the cleaners. Finally, unlike the situation in direct employment, in the company there was no exchange of money between the clients and the

workers; in order to be paid, the workers were responsible for giving the clients an invoice for each hour of service accomplished, while clients had to leave a payment voucher in their house or apartment for the cleaner. In order to be paid, the employees had to send to the agency a monthly “activity report,” enclosing the vouchers from all their clients. The company’s clients simply needed to inform the agency, through a phone call, of the tasks they wanted to be carried out then leave the key with the agency. They could even choose to buy all the necessary cleaning paraphernalia from the company together with the cleaning service; in this way, they were free from all sorts of household-related burdens.

Specific forms of labor control and work organization were used in the company. Cleaning and ironing tended to be fragmented into specific tasks, as the company aimed at rationalizing the organization of work. When the clients called the agency to request a service, the manager asked them the size of their dwelling in square meters, whether there were pets (which were seen as likely to increase the amount of time necessary to clean the dwelling), and the number of shirts that needed to be ironed. The company also aimed to direct the employees with regard to work rates: it was established, for example, that no more than seven minutes should be necessary to iron a shirt. Workers were provided with uniforms as well as with numbered cleaning products and tools. In this respect, the cleaning services companies represent an example of the recent growth of nonskilled service jobs that are characterized by an organization of work akin to Taylorism; examples of such jobs include call centers and the fast food industry, where work is based on simple routine tasks (Bradley, Erickson, Stephenson, & Williams, 2000). The Parisian company on which I conducted my research combined the application of such “industrial” criteria in the organization of work with the flexibility imposed by market fluctuations in a context of scarcity of jobs. In “post-Fordist” employment regimes, work is intensified as employees are made responsible, to some extent, for managing customer demand (Gollac & Volkoff, 1996). The company’s cleaners had to manage the pressure and uncertainty of customer demand while struggling to accumulate a maximum of jobs in order to earn a decent salary. As I noted, work for the company was based on a part-time system. Moreover, as Cancedda (2001: 57) reports, in France the number of weekly hours set out in cleaners’ contracts is not legally binding. In the company, “post-Fordist” forms of labor control were typically based on time constraints. The company paid half the price of the workers’ public transport passes but the time spent by the workers in moving from one client’s house to another’s was not counted as working time. Each client might live in a different area of the city, while the workers themselves were likely to live in other areas of Paris, often in the suburbs. A single employee might work for up to six or seven different clients per week, spending a few hours at each client’s house. In a large city like Paris, this could mean at least three hours transport time a day besides the actual work of cleaning and ironing. In these conditions it was not always possible for the cleaners to rest and take a break between one service session and another.

They had to manage their time and juggle work for different clients in different areas of the city. Few workers managed to obtain full-time work; this was also because of the time spent on public transport. The “industrial” imposition of standard work rates in relation to specific tasks resulted in an intensification of work, as these rates were associated with the pressure of market demand. The manager urged the employees to stick to the standard work rates, and reminded them that if they were slow they would not be paid for any extra hours or fractions of an hour.

Therefore, unlike domestic workers in direct employment, the company’s employees confronted two sources of control: the management and the clients. Besides instructing them about the required tasks, the company provided the workers with the clients’ addresses and keys. Most of the exchanges between the agency and the cleaners were conducted by phone. The workers needed a mobile phone and an answering machine in order to make them available at all times. They also had to constantly telephone the agency to see if any new job had come “on the market.” In this respect, the cleaners were in competition with one another to secure the highest possible number of clients, as jobs were allocated on a first come, first served basis. The workers were also expected to actively foster the customers’ loyalty to the company in order to increase the demand. For example, they might be responsible for selling books of vouchers to the clients, as well as for advertising new services and encouraging the clients to buy cleaning products from the company, for which they were paid by commission. They could also choose to be paid a little extra to advertise the company to potential new employees in the areas where they lived. These additional services involved a certain amount of face-to-face interaction and were intended to promote the customers’ satisfaction. This aspect of the job was expressed by the slogan used to advertise the company: “cleaning and ironing . . . with a smile.” The management did not carry out any quality control checks on the work done for the clients, but the clients could call the agency and complain if they were unhappy with the service offered.

Recruitment Practices

Observation of recruitment practices in the agency revealed the role played by clients’ racism as well as by gender assumptions and the sexual division of labor in shaping the organization of work in the company. For instance, some clients called the agency to request French cleaners only, or to say that they did not want black cleaners. Some cleaners complained about clients’ racist attitudes:

Some clients lock the fridge because they did not want me to touch the food. They were afraid that a black will touch their food. They locked the fridge with plastic-wrap, but I had no intention of stealing anything! I would have only taken some water. (Senegalese cleaner)

Even when workers were critical of the management, they did not describe it as racist. However, as in other structures that operate as intermediaries between the offer of domestic labor and the demand for it, the management seemed to play a key role in reproducing the clients' gendered and racist assumptions. For example, the manager said that, in coping with clients openly requesting Portuguese or South American cleaners rather than black cleaners, the agency managed to place North African workers with these clients instead of those they requested. In such a case, recruitment and management practices activate racist assumptions that contribute to the stratification of the migrant population by differentiating among workers of different nationalities. Also, men were usually assigned to home-maintenance and gardening jobs rather than to cleaning and ironing. This observation is consistent with the data concerning domestic maintenance jobs in other European countries (Cancedda, 2001). When I carried out my fieldwork, the manager told me that the company was not recruiting men since at that time there were no requests for gardening and home-maintenance services. Although some men did perform ironing and cleaning work for the company's clients, no women were ever assigned to gardening or home-maintenance jobs.

Racist stereotypes were also mobilized during the recruitment process, since the manager described the migrant women who went to the agency in search of a job as needy and disadvantaged women who needed to be helped out. This is consistent with findings concerning other sectors of domestic service, for example, nonprofit associations, where practices in terms of management and recruitment of employees, often formerly unemployed women, are inspired by charity work (Angeloff, 2000). Some associations in fact aim specifically at the recruitment of unemployed people into the labor market, and constitute the most precarious and lowest-paid sector for domestic workers. Racialized and gendered constructions of migrant women as nonskilled workers with family problems were introduced by the manager when she interviewed potential employees. The following is an excerpt from the transcript of a job interview conducted by the manager, a naturalized Frenchwoman from Algeria and formerly a cleaner herself, with a South American woman:

Your goal is to get a job with a permanent contract, I know that. If I have accepted your application, it is because you need to work. Don't worry, you will have a job. You have some problems, don't you? I know that. I have perfectly understood your situation. (manager)

At the same time, the manager did not seem sympathetic to the women's attempts to maintain their legal status as migrant residents and workers. She said that she would not recruit someone if she thought that that person's only motivation was to renew her residence permit. The manager also complained about undocumented African women who borrow a residence permit from someone else and attempt to pass themselves off as that other person in order to obtain a job. Also, according to the manager, the company did not recruit women

with children younger than six months. There were three questions that potential employees were always asked when they applied for a job: whether they had any experience, where they lived—supposedly to see if this was compatible with their moving to other areas of the city to carry out services—and, if they had children, how old were they. The female cleaners struggled to combine child care and family responsibilities with the uncertain working times typical of the job. At the same time, they themselves could afford to pay for care provision only if they could obtain full-time employment. Thus a typical dilemma for them was the choice between paying for a crèche and attempting to work full-time, and taking care of their children by themselves while coping with unstable working conditions. At the time when I conducted the interviews, only women without children worked full-time with the company.

The role played by racism and sexism in organizing the job is also related to its functioning as a site for the reproduction of multiple inequalities: like other forms of domestic service, cleaning services sustain urban middle-class lifestyles. This is suggested by the company's advertisements, reporting the comments of some satisfied clients:

Between his exciting job (communication manager) and his various hobbies (tennis, sailing, diving . . .), Philippe has hardly any time to devote to the cleaning of his two-bedroom flat in the city center. Thus he is delighted that [the company] takes care of it, in exchange for a contract of twelve hours per month: "I leave my key and when I come back everything is spick and span: it's magic!"

Elisabeth, soon to become a mother, is particularly demanding in relation to the cleaning of her beautiful house, especially in view of the arrival of the baby. She is not disappointed by [the company]: "every week I make a list of the priorities with my cleaner . . . and since she is very well organized, she always manages to do a bit more than what we planned."

WORKERS' STRATEGIES

Clients of the company could refuse a cleaner but the reverse was, at least in principle, also possible. In certain cases, for example, cleaners would report back to the agency if they found that the time slot paid for by the client was too limited for the requested tasks. However, since the cleaners struggled to combine as many jobs as possible, this happened very rarely. Sometimes, though, cleaners refused to work for clients who lived too far away from the area where their other clients lived, or for clients whom they considered too demanding.

Sometimes they are fussy. They will leave a note to say that you must not eat in the house, that you have to go out if you want to have your lunch. One client told me I did not do my work properly, but I had. I said: "You can look for another cleaner." (Martinican cleaner)

The clients who take the time to make a list of all the things one must do in the house are the worst! (Algerian cleaner)

To their benefit, those few women who had been in the job for a long time developed a certain specialization and were sometimes assigned by the agency to the kind of service they preferred, such as cleaning rather than ironing.

Occasionally, too, the agency offered some support to employees when they were confronted with angry clients. This was the case, for instance, when one of the cleaners was verbally attacked by a client, but it was also the case when clients forgot to leave the signed voucher to be collected by the cleaner. As the signed vouchers were necessary to complete the monthly "activity report" in order to be paid, workers would leave notes in the clients' dwellings as reminders.

The fact that they were working within an organization, rather than for a private employer, did not protect the cleaners from unstable and individualized work relations. My interviewees complained about the scarcity of working hours and about working conditions, especially the time spent on public transport.

There is work here, but it does not pay much. At the moment I have five clients; I move from one end of the city to the other throughout the whole week. They don't pay for the time spent on transport and you have to count at least half an hour per client: that makes two or three hours in total, plus four or five hours cleaning at each client's house. At the end of the day you are tired and your back is broken. On top of that we have to buy our own phone card to call the agency if we don't manage to do a job, and they don't pay for our mobile phone. (Moroccan cleaner)

However, those who had experience of domestic service in direct employment appreciated the lack of personal ties in work relations, and enjoyed the autonomy they had in carrying out domestic chores, if not in setting their own work rates.

Private employment is hard because you are always on call. The employer calls you even if he only needs to drink a glass of water: "Do this and do that," all the time. You can never sit down and have a rest. Your working day is over when your employer goes to bed. Cleaning in the agency too is hard: you have to Hoover, you clean the toilet, everything must be at its proper place in the house. It's bad for your back. I have had a sore back for the past five years. (Cameroonian cleaner)

Some workers combined cleaning for the company with other, better-paid jobs in direct employment during the weekend, for example, or looked for a job with the company to fill up periods of inactivity in their main job. They considered that obtaining a job with the company was easier than obtaining a job in direct employment, where employers request some kind of references from potential employees. Being hired as a cleaner for the company instead was relatively simple, given that turnover was high and experience in the job was not considered mandatory. Most interviewees had worked with the company for less than a year at the time of my fieldwork. Some migrant workers also attempted to use

the job in an instrumental manner, in order to renew their residence permits, then move to better-paid and less precarious jobs.

The Ideology of “Self-Management”

My data suggest another discontinuity between commodified domestic service in the care industry and in private employment, a discontinuity that is related to the way in which work relations are constructed. In the Parisian company, paternalistic practices, similar to those described by Mendez (1998), aiming to increase the workers' loyalty and to avoid a rapid turnover, were limited. Every month the franchise owner visited the agency and a prize was awarded to the “best cleaner”: a voucher worth 32 euros. Idealized representations of ethnic diversity and family imagery were mobilized by the manager in describing the work environment. While mentioning the predominance of migrant workers and the number of nationalities represented in the agency, the manager described the company as a “wonderful mix” in which cultural diversity was accompanied by mutual understanding, communication, and humanity. The idea of cultural diversity can be associated with the collectivity that characterizes bureaucratized cleaning jobs. Private employers tend instead to rely on moralizing representations of domestic service as an opportunity for workers to become integrated into their new environment, and they see hiring a migrant domestic worker as doing a personal favor.

In the company, however, discourses on the Otherness of the workers were not central. Instead, the company's culture was centered on an ethic of “self-management”: the cleaners, who worked on their own at each client's house, were considered responsible for creating the conditions of their own employment. The notion of “self-management” refers to the emergence of a “market-based governance” (Lehndorff, 2002) of labor in “post-Fordist” work settings in the service sector, where employees enjoy autonomy at work but are directly confronted with the pressure of customer demand. In the company, the responsibility for meeting the necessary quality criteria was delegated to the cleaners. A “magazine” was distributed monthly to the employees, reporting information about the agency and reminding them of the procedures for submitting the vouchers that reported the services they performed every month. This “magazine” also contained a letter, signed by the manager and addressed to the cleaners, which instructed them about the values of the company. One of these letters emphasized the most attractive elements of the job: “independence” and the “freedom” to arrange one's own work schedules were described as employees' privileges. At the same time, the letter warned the employees to make responsible use of their freedom at the client's house. The manager would also tell the cleaners that it was up to them to manage their clients and that they would be able to obtain longer working hours if they did a good job and were capable of effectively managing their working time. Obtaining full-time

employment in the company was made possible only by accumulating a number of long-term clients who were happy to have their houses always cleaned by one specific employee.

This emphasis on workers' responsibility for "self-management" is consistent with current neoliberal policies and discourses on unemployment and employability, as framed by normative reference to an entrepreneurial model of society. Within this context, both workers and the unemployed are increasingly expected to demonstrate their ability to self-promote in the labor market (Ebersold, 2001). The interview conducted with the president of SESP (the Syndicat des Entreprises de Service à la Personne), the French organization of the private companies, shows that the employers describe the care industry as an opportunity for employees to benefit from better working conditions than are found in other forms of organization of service jobs. The industry is said to provide a shift from premodern servitude to a contractual relationship. The president of SESP explained the increasing demand for domestic service as being generated by an inevitable cultural change affecting French society, thus masking the gendered and racialized division of labor that existed and the use of domestic service as a status symbol.

This activity has always existed and it will always exist, while its forms evolve with time. . . . Direct employment will disappear as it will be replaced by companies providing home-based services. (president of SESP)

The official mission of SESP is the improvement of quality of service through the development of professional skills. In accordance with this, the idea conveyed by the company's manager was that, thanks to the rationalization of work, the cleaners carried out domestic chores more effectively than the clients themselves. For the company, this emphasis on the commodification of work was a way to promote its services to the customers. As I have noted, however, the Paris agency invested very little in personnel training or quality.

CLEANING BY THE HOUR IN DIRECT EMPLOYMENT: BETWEEN AUTONOMY AND UNCERTAINTY

The relative autonomy in carrying out the work, the impersonal nature of the relationships with the recipients of the service, the unpredictability of the activity and income, and the necessity to manage customer demand characterize jobs offered through the company. However, these elements can also be found in living-out cleaning jobs in direct employment. In France, in many cases, cleaning jobs paid by the hour do not even involve an exchange of money between the employer and the employee. A system of vouchers, similar to the system used in cleaning companies, can be used to pay workers in short-term domestic service relationships. This form of payment, called CESU (Chèque Emploi Service Universel), was designed in 1996 to simplify the process of paying the salary of a domestic worker. Most of the jobs recently created in France are based on

this arrangement, whereby employers benefit from tax exemptions. The use of vouchers helps to increase the impersonal character of the domestic service relationship, as the payment is processed by an institution that is in charge of calculating and collecting social security contributions.

Domestic workers appreciate the lack of direct control over their work in living-out cleaning jobs, as this offers them the opportunity to exert a certain control over their own working times and the organization of their work. As the interview quoted below shows, some employees carry out the requested chores with the help of other domestic workers or relatives:

With a friend of mine we arranged things in order to work together at the place of one of our employers. One used to iron while the other one was doing something else; we divided a job of nine hours among two or three people, so we could go to the cinema at the end of it. The flats were always empty anyway. We completed all the work in the morning, and in the afternoon we went to the cinema, or else we watched soap operas on TV.
(Peruvian domestic worker)

This strategy shortens the working day and allows the employee to have more spare time or more time for other jobs. This arrangement is also convenient for those domestic workers who have children, as they can stay in the employer's house while their mother is working.

In France, moving to jobs by the hour, as cleaners, nannies, or caregivers, can be seen as a form of social mobility, especially by women who have previously been employed by nonprofit associations. These associations are employers of domestic workers and providers of home-based domestic and care work for their clients. Those women who manage to work in direct employment by the hour often earn more money than those working on a part-time basis in associations. Moreover, an important amount of emotional labor is involved in caregivers' work in the nonprofit sector. These associations mostly provide care services for elderly individuals who benefit from state allowances. Because of the way in which working time is organized by the associations, elderly clients may be left without care services during unsocial working hours, holidays, and weekends. As a result, employees tend to do extra work without pay because they feel personally responsible for the people they care for (Dussuet, 2005). As the following excerpt from an interview shows, migrant women may develop strategies that go beyond the individual dimension that is more typical of workers' practices of resistance in domestic service. The group of workers described below, mostly middle-class women from Zaire, the Ivory Coast, Cameroun, Senegal, and Burkina Faso, but also from Algeria and Morocco, managed to avoid the intermediary role of nonprofit associations as well as the low salaries and emotional burden that are associated with the job.

Some of us worked in nonprofit associations, but it was clear that this didn't work very well, so we put some cash together in order to put some

advertisements in some doctors' magazines, or family magazines, and one of us went to meet the potential employers. The nonprofit associations took advantage of us nannies. It's easy for them; they send a bill for 150 euros to the client while they give 90 euros to the nanny. In [our] way, the nanny gets the 150 euros, while giving 3 euros to our collective budget. The advertisements look more professional than relying on word of mouth; moreover, doctors don't have much time so it's good if they find us in their professional magazine. The nannies like to work with doctors' children because doctors pay well. They make a good living; they are self-employed professionals. They require some experience in baby-sitting, but for someone who has three children of her own this is nonsense, so we ask our French friends to act as our referees: "When they phone you, you tell them that I worked for you." This works quite well. (domestic worker, Ivory Coast)

These nannies seemed to take the entrepreneurial model seriously. They promoted their professional image in various ways. While establishing direct contacts with potential employers-clients, they also aimed at targeting those who seemed to be comfortably off, such as self-employed professionals. Similar findings are reported in a recent study conducted by Sarah Van Walsum in the Netherlands (Van Walsum, 2008). Thus, some migrant domestic workers attempt to turn a precarious status into a more privileged position in the local market, by specializing in a specific activity, such as child minding. The nature of recruitment in the sector, which is based on informal networks and word of mouth, contributes to the reinforcement of racializing assumptions as to the supposed "cultural predisposition" for care work of women of some nationalities. Migrant women themselves can also rely on these stereotypes in their search for customers.

African women predominate in child care because of their culture. They are fantastic with children and the families will employ someone who already has a favorable reputation. They will take the girl that everybody in the neighborhood knows because she is good with children, and she took care of the children of Mrs. So-and-so. (private employer)

The private employers' organizations also lay emphasis on the entrepreneurial model, by describing it as the way forward for the modernization of domestic service: this constitutes another element of similarity between cleaning jobs paid by the hour and working for a company. This can be seen by looking at a training course for domestic workers that is organized by FEPEM (the Fédération Nationale des Particuliers Employeurs), the French organization of domestic workers' private employers, which reflects this individualized conception of the labor process. Through this training module, FEPEM invites domestic workers, many of whom are employed on the basis of CESU, to adopt a model of work that is associated with self-employment rather than with dependent work. FEPEM advertises the module by suggesting that working for several employers at the same time provides an opportunity for workers to become their own bosses by totally eliminating the servile character of the work relationship (Institut FEPEM

de l'Emploi Familial et al., 2002). However, this idealized representation of direct employment obscures the fact that the opportunity for social mobility is available only to those domestic workers who can speak French well and have the necessary resources to search constantly for new and better employers. As the interview quoted below suggests, setting up networks through which they can access new customers is vital for migrants who work by the hour, as they need to maintain a constant supply of work:

When they ask me to work on a Sunday rather than on the usual day, I have to do it. If I like that job, I must remain on good terms with the employer. If I say that I can't do it then I have to look for another one. (Sri Lankan domestic worker)

Moreover, domestic service paid by the hour is characterized by a particular form of dependency, which is associated with the need for a constant supply of employers-clients. The CESU voucher system is in fact specifically designed for short-term work relations: this arrangement can be used, for example, to pay for a single visit or the one-off spring-cleaning of a house. Since the introduction of CESU, direct employment relationships have become more unstable and individualized. In 2002, as many as 49% of the private employers involved in direct employment used this form of payment (DARES, 2002). While managing to avoid close personal ties, workers still depend on their employers for the maintenance of a constant demand for work and for the acquisition of new jobs.

CONCLUSION

According to data provided by the French government, the expansion of the domestic service sector was not seriously affected by the global financial and economic crisis. On the contrary, it maintained its upward trend, as 95,000 new jobs were created in 2008. In the same year, 8,800 jobs were created in private companies, which for the first time outnumbered nonprofit associations as providers of newly created jobs in the sector (Agence Nationale des Services à la Personne, 2008). The government has identified the promotion of home-based domestic service as a significant strategy to offset the financial and economic crisis. The elements characterizing jobs in the various forms of domestic service, such as the predominance of part-time work, have been confirmed by these recent developments.

The data presented here reflect the current situation. This article has investigated the diversity of the forms of exploitation and control over labor that are used in contemporary domestic service, as well as the workers' agency. The ethnographic data I have presented suggest that both working for cleaning services companies and performing cleaning jobs paid by the hour can be located on a continuum. Work in these sectors oscillates between the experience of autonomy on the one hand and precarious conditions with regard to working times and

income on the other hand: between the lack of paternalistic work relations and the presence of uncertainty. As the cleaning services company attempts to control the way work is carried out, domestic chores tend to be organized on the basis of industrial criteria, and paternalism is replaced by commercial relations. In living-out cleaning jobs in direct employment, migrant domestic workers establish impersonal work relations with a multitude of employers-clients, managing to avoid highly personalized work relations through the strategic use of the meager social resources available to them. In both cases, the management and the employers, as well as the employers' organizations, produce narratives that tend to construct the cleaners as managers of themselves and as self-employed professionals in a modernized domestic service sector. As the data presented suggest, however, actual working conditions contrast with these idealized representations. In particular, decentralized forms of control exist in the cleaning company, based on the pressure of customer demand. As happens in other jobs in the service sector, the intensification of work tends to be "self-managed" (Lehndorf, 2002: 8). In cleaning jobs paid by the hour, domestic workers benefit from a certain autonomy while at the same time they depend on private employers for the maintenance of a constant supply of work. In both cases, employees are entangled in a contradiction: their responsibility and autonomy increase while new forms of dependency are created. The migrants' insecure juridical status affects their working conditions and their strategies in both settings. The uncertainty of the labor demand for living-out jobs is problematic for those migrants who need to renew their residence permits. Also, paid holidays and training are difficult to obtain for those who work in private employment on the basis of CESU. Permanent jobs in companies are poorly paid, but they are relatively easy to obtain. Also, no specific regulation covers employees of cleaning services companies, as this is currently being negotiated; working conditions in this sector are defined by general labor law. Finally, despite the fact that, in the company, paternalism is replaced by commercial or impersonal relations with the recipients of the service, the organization and division of work are still informed by racist and sexist assumptions. The delegation of such work functions as a status symbol for middle-class clients, as it does in private employment.

The ethnographic data also show that structures or networks that act as intermediaries between workers and those who benefit from domestic service can play different roles with regard to improving workers' rights. First, both the cleaning services company that I investigated and nonprofit associations providing care work offer some support to their employees vis-à-vis abusive clients. However, in these structures, work is home based and individualized: no teamwork is involved. As a result, employees have few opportunities to get in contact with each other. Second, the strategies of migrant domestic workers in direct employment prove that the collective organization and management of job opportunities by the workers themselves can empower them and improve working conditions, by promoting workers' autonomy and increasing their pay. These rather precarious

and informal forms of collective organization could benefit from collaboration with existing trade unions, as well as with antiracist associations supporting migrants' rights and campaigning for more open immigration policies. Such informal networks could also evolve into formal nonprofit associations of individuals working in direct employment and exchanging information and advice about job opportunities, temporary replacements, and so forth. As Rosie Cox (2006) points out, formally organized unions of domestic and care workers could benefit employers too, by disseminating good practices and dealing with disputes between employers and employees.

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