

# **BETWEEN VIRTUAL INTIMACY AND THE TRANSFER OF FAMILY MEMBERS TO THE WORKPLACE. STRATEGIES OF MIGRANT CARE WORKERS TO DEAL WITH THE TEMPORARY SEPARATION FROM THEIR FAMILIES IN POLAND**

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Labour migration between Poland and Germany poses challenges for migrant care workers as well as for their families. Migrant care workers have to develop strategies to compensate for their physical absence in the daily lives of their family members. Nevertheless, working in the domestic care, especially the so-called 24-hours-care offers several possibilities to deal with these challenges. The goal of this study was to find out how migrant care workers from Poland organize their family lives from a distance and to what extent do their employers or clients commit themselves for the cause. For the purpose of this study 26 problem-centred semi-structured interviews with mainly female and a few male commuter migrants from Poland were carried out. The data analysis identified two strategies of organizing family life during absence. One group fosters a so-called intimacy from distance or virtual intimacy. They use various media, for example the internet, mobile or landline phones, to almost continuously stay in contact with their families in Poland. The other group manages to create conditions at their workplace which allow them to bring along their family members (mainly small children) for a short period of time or even for the whole duration of the employment. This solution depends on an agreement and cooperation with their clients. It appeared that the presence of family members at the workplace brings both families (of migrant workers and of clients) closer and creates a fictive kinship. In some cases it leads to conflicts. The understanding on behalf of the employers and the possibilities to stay in an intense and regular contact with their family influence the migrants' work satisfaction, increase their ability to cope with stress and encourages an extended sense of the term 'family'.

**Keywords:** commuting, commuter migration, migrant care workers, transnational family, world family, virtual intimacy, transfer of family members to the workplace

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Today's globalized world imposes stronger and denser networks of support and service, which directly affect the way the modern families function. How are (priceless) time and presence to be managed, or made up for, if they are sold to third parties? "Love and care become the new gold", establishes Arlie Russell Hochschild (2003, as cited in Mears 2009: 4). In prosperous countries, traditional gender roles have undergone a shift as both men and women combine work with taking care of their dependents. However, it should be emphasized that women are under higher pressure than men to effectively harmonize these important life areas.

Effects of the global work hierarchy and work distribution are apparent primarily in the families of migrant workers from poorer countries, who form so called 'world families'. According to Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2013: 30), these are families who live across national, religious, and cultural borders, where the unknown other becomes the loved one and confidant. Families or couples who live in different countries or on different continents and share the same cultural origin (religion, language, citizenship) are called 'multilocal world families' (Ibid.: 30). Quite often it is the wives, mothers and grandmothers who temporarily leave their families in order to offer their time, love, household and caregiving skills abroad. For example in German households, this kind of work engages an uncertain, although according to estimates significant, number of Polish women and men. In their case the discussion has to be about shuttle migration or rather short-term labour migration which, thanks to the proximity to the (German) border makes short, but regular, stays at their own home possible (Kontos, Shinozaki 2010: 97).

On the one hand, lack of family friendly solutions in the labour market results in the delegation of child and elderly care to third parties. On the other hand, some countries, like e.g. Germany, have to deal with the shortage of labour in the low wage sector. Both factors have led to the creation of global care chains (Fudge 2010; cf. Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 2013: 154–155). These chains can become complex leading to various caregiving structures, seen also in the

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case of the Polish migrant care workers in German households. Tasks and roles which are performed by them professionally also have to be organized and carried out (in spite of their physical absence) within their own families (Metz-Göckel et al. 2010: 28). This helps migrants maintain their position in the family and minimize the losses and burdens which are connected to their absence from home (cf. *Ibid.*: 163–164). Right now the possible ‘live in’ arrangements, the work rhythm and the special employer-employee relation in home care make a bilocal or simultaneous management of two households feasible, although in one of them, it is only done from a distance.

Research shows different kinds of bilocal household management models. Maria S. Rerrich (2006: 131) writes about the model of “the Polish cousin”, which explains how the workplace abroad and the family care in the homeland can be shared between two women (relatives or friends) and organized in a certain rotation system. The women would not only be working in the same workplace, but also alternately take care of both their families. Another model characterizes the employment of foreigners (for example from Ukraine) to take care of relatives for the time of one’s employment in Germany. According to Arlie Russell Hochschild (2000, as cited in Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 2013: 162) such an arrangement creates global care networks. Migrant workers are regularly sending money and gifts back home to protect the quality of the care. To compensate for shorter or longer separation phases from their families and to be able to realize transnational parenting (Kontos and Shinozaki 2010: 99), modern technology is employed in addition to money transfers. Making phone calls, using Skype, e-mailing, and texting – all these means of communication help to reduce the spatial and temporal divide between commuter migrants and their relatives (cf. Haidinger 2013: 59; Metz-Göckel et al. 2010: 280–287). They also help migrant workers to fulfill their role as mother/father, e.g. to be a moral authority and/or to supervise caring or parenting (Haidinger 2013: 250). In the case of the migrant care workers it is important to mention transnational motherhood (*Ibid.*: 59). In contrast to transnational fatherhood, transnational motherhood can involve overcompensating. “Mothers must perform greater work to show their children that despite the distance they still do really care for the family. This burden raises the bar in the transnational work of migrant mothers who find themselves responsible for both the emotional and material wellbeing of their children” (Parreñas 2005: 66).

World families try to foster virtual intimacy (Phoenix 2009: 86) which, despite physical absence, strives for emotional connectedness with relatives. New activities and routines are created and leave their mark on family life. Migrant care workers are involved in 24/7-care and presence at the workplace,

where they not only work, but also sleep and live. The distinguishing feature of employment in domestic care is a close relationship with the client, because of the intensity and the time-consuming character of this job. In the literature this relationship is called *fictive kin relationship* (Karner 1998, as cited in Karakayali 2010: 51).

The questions arising from the above considerations are the following: which forms of ‘family care from distance’, as described above, do migrant care workers from Poland prefer? How do they manage their lives in two households? How do they overcome the longing for relatives in their homeland? This study shows what the bilocal way of living looks like from the perspective of the home and host country. Furthermore, it demonstrates what role employers play in the execution of the migrants’ livelihood strategies. Influences of both the origin and destination household will be analysed and the symbiosis formed between the migrant care workers’ relatives and their clients will be considered in order to determine which kind of relationships develop between them and how they are related to global care chains.

## METHODICAL APPROACH

The research was conducted as a doctoral project<sup>2</sup> and based on problem-centred semi-structured interviews (cf. Witzel 1982; Lamnek 1989) with 23 women and 3 men from Poland (n=26). At the time of the interviews 22 respondents still worked as carers whereas 4 quit their jobs. The interviews were conducted in Polish and located in Germany (n=17) and in Poland (n=9). The investigated group was recruited through snow-ball sampling. This strategy stems from the fact that the precise number of foreign carers is unknown as an overwhelming majority is employed informally (cf. Błaszczak 2014; Meier-Gräwe 2014: 23). Therefore, it is not clear how representative this sample is for all Polish migrant care workers. However, the data analyses have shown interesting tendencies in the ways of living and working of the interviewed commuter migrants.

Table 1 shows the characteristics of the respondents: age, number and age(s) of children (in parenthesis), and the period of employment: Names of those interviewed have been changed in order to protect their identity.

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Table 1.

## Personal details and employment periods of the respondents

No.	Respondent	Age	Number of children (age of children)	Period of employment
1.	Agnieszka	44	2 children (21/ 24)	2004–2009
2.	Monika	50	1 child (25)	2007
3.	Otylia	55	2 children (30/ 35)	1998 – present
4.	Dagmara	29	1 child (6 months)	2002 – 2006
5.	Anna	61	4 children (30/ 33/ 35/ 40)	2004 – present
6.	Aneta	67	2 children (40/ 42)	2009 – present
7.	Joanna	60	2 children (32/ 35)	2004 – present
8.	Erika	54	2 children (26/ 27)	2005 – present
9.	Brygida	58	3 children (36/ 37/ 39)	2006 – present
10.	Tomasz	54	6 children (9/ 10/ 12/ 12/ 13/ 29)	2010 – present
11.	Wiktoria	47	2 children (21/ 25)	2000 – present
12.	Natalia	52	1 child (32)	2005 – present
13.	Oliwia	39	1 child (18)	1999 – present
14.	Ewelina	56	4 children (27/ 30/ 33/ 34)	2001 – present
15.	Paulina	53	2 children (27/ 31)	1996 – present
16.	Julia	58	4 children (27/ 35/ 36/ 37)	2010 – present

Continuation of tab. 1

No.	Respondent	Age	Number of children (age of children)	Period of employment
17.	Daria	30	1 child (3)	2000 – present
18.	Adrianna	65	3 children (27/ 39/ 40)	2007 – present
19.	Karolina	39	no children	2002 – present
20.	Maria	56	1 child (18)	2008 – present
21.	Judyta	32	2 children (3/ 6)	1999 – present
22.	Joachim	63	3 children (32/ 36/ 39)	2007 – present
23.	Wiola	22	no children	2011 – 2011
24.	Kamil	38	no children	2009 – present
25.	Gabriela	64	2 children (32/ 42)	2006 – 2010
26.	Jolanta	65	2 children (40/ 43)	2008 – present

Source: Author's own study.

The interviewees were chosen mostly through private contacts in the family and acquaintance circles and with the help of already interviewed carers. Some of them knew each other because they worked in the same neighbourhood, used to meet in their free time or helped each other find the job. Some contacts were also established through two catholic parishes.

Contacts established this informal way reduced the interviewees' distance and apprehensions about the conversation. Since most of them work irregularly (n=21), it was very important to build mutual trust and openness during the interview. That is why some of the interviews were conducted at the migrant carers' workplaces or at locations where they meet other migrants in their leisure time (e.g. parishes, cafés). The mutual determination of a general framework has strengthened the interviewees' sense of security on the one hand. On the

other hand it has allowed to observe some interactions between the carer and the care recipient at the workplace (n=8).

Because they have their families and own houses in Poland, the interviewed migrants work according to a rotation principle, meaning that they share their job in Germany with at least one other person, mostly in shifts lasting 6–12 weeks. As most of them are involved in informal employment, the arrangements concerning the substitution, tasks, and payment take place on verbal and undocumented terms.

Since the interviewed women and men were looking at their lives retrospectively, efforts were made to keep the conversation open, but simultaneously led by means of a manual/guideline to focus on the leading question.

Based on the guideline and the interviews, categories have been created, which allow the classification of commuter migrants' strategies of either maintaining contacts and relationships from a distance and/or family reunification in Germany. Also the relationship and the sympathy of the care recipients and their families for the personal situation of the migrant carers was observed. Those issues were first analysed in single interviews after which a comparison of all interviewee's statements was conducted. During the analysis of the interview contents (cf. Mayring 2008) a question surfaced about the relations and the communication between the migrant carers' families and their employers, and how they influence the migrants' work satisfaction. Some tendencies in the management of living in two households were also recognized.

## CELL-PHONE-MOMS AND DADS

Every third child in Philippines socializes with its mother only by telephone (Burghardt et al. 2010, in Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 2013: 162). In case of Polish migrant care workers the situation is not that extreme, but during the presence abroad, telephone communication is usually the most preferred. The telephone – both landline and cell phone – is used in every workplace in order to stay in close contact with the relatives. It allows to have and to strengthen the influence on the family living in Poland, which was organized and structured in a certain way prior to migration. The interviewees in this study have also been displaced from their dependents due to their tasks and functions. The obligations of taking care of the household and other relatives in Poland have been delegated to the spouses and siblings living in the neighbourhood, and parents or children themselves. The family fosters the organization of this arrangement and creates safety and trust. Daily virtual contact alleviates the longing and creates strength to overcome the temporary separation:

*(...) I have to hold on, because I need money. I have to call my daughter every day. This is a duty... And I have to call my brother every day. I am not able to do anything without these phone calls... (...) [My daughter] is still going to school... So when she gets home after school, she has to prepare some lunch for herself. She eats on Sundays at my brothers. She has to light the coal-heating, she has to cut the grass in summer. If there is something difficult to do or to fix my brother comes and does it (...) (Oliwia, 39, 1, 1999<sup>3</sup>).*

Skype allows the family in Poland not only to hear their relative's voice but also enables the family to see them. The migrants gain the possibility to see their own house, to help the children pick clothes for school or, in case of emergency, to be there for them verbally. This reassures the migrant carers and makes them feel like a family member – a mother/father – who is still in charge. Therefore, the openness and the creation of these enabling conditions by the employers are important and determine the work satisfaction:

*I have to hold on somehow, you know. It is good, that I have a flat rate and internet here... although when I did not have internet here, I had my cell phone, a German number and a subscription. He [the employer] was paying all the bills. I was able to turn to his landline, or I could send as many SMS as I wanted to. I could write 20... even 50 SMS daily if I needed to (Ewelina, 56, 4, 2001).*

If the contact with the family in Poland is not supported or made difficult by the employers, the burden caused by the family separation increases and work satisfaction declines. This can, along with other difficulties at the workplace, finally lead to resigning from the job:

*Back then [2002] in my first job, I was only allowed to make one five minutes phone call a week and to write letters. Nothing else. And I was waiting and waiting for the Saturday to come... I was so scared, [to say something]... Later in my second job I had pay for phone calls by myself... (...) I could stay and work here [in Germany], but not in that kind of work [24/7 domestic care] (Dagmara, 29, 1, 2002–2006).*

The strategy of virtual intimacy shows some differences depending on costs and number of alternative communication tools. They can be classified into three groups: supported virtual intimacy, permitted support, non-supported virtual intimacy. Supported virtual intimacy refers to those care workers who are allowed

<sup>3</sup> Names have been changed. Interviewee's age, number of her/his children and year in which she/he started working in the domestic care is shown in brackets.



to use flat-rate land-lines (supported virtual intimacy). Whether there is a limitless/open access to the telephone, depends mostly on the employers. Some of the care workers staying in contact with their families must pay for the phone expenses themselves. Permitted support refers to a situation when after internal discussions the employing family facilitates electronic interaction with children in Poland. However, the mobile phone costs and bills have to be covered by the migrant carer. Non-supported virtual intimacy refers to a situation when employing families do not allow the employees to use their telephone land-line. This forces the respondents to call home less frequently or using their mobile phones, resulting in the payment of the mobile phone expenses and bills from their salaries.

The need to be a 'complete family member' with all her/his rights and entitlements shows also in the material support and the shipping of food and money to Poland. The migrant care workers want to earn respect and gratitude of their children with the help of these 'tokens of love'. They are hoping for a 'repayment' of their sacrifice in the future. This kind of behaviour is, at least in the case of women, strongly determined by the principles of the 'role of the Polish mother' and 'domestic matriarchy'. The notion of a 'Polish mother' refers to a representation of femininity in the framework of motherhood, which allows to become a member of the national community (cf. Walczewska 1999: 53). 'The Polish Mother' played a multifunctional role in the communist system. She was responsible for providing for the family, work and raising the children. She had to care for stability and safety of her loved ones. The female migrant carers are therefore showing their strength and heroism as mothers, because they are 'fighting abroad' for a better daily life and future of their children. The term 'domestic matriarchy' was introduced by Sławomira Walczewska. It comprises a system of norms and practices in Polish households which marks the dominance of the mother, "who has a real power over her family and her household" (Kałwa 2007: 218), in the private sphere. Migrant care workers wish to facilitate a good life for their children. The children's age does not play a great role here. This kind of behavioural pattern is also activated in cases of adult and independent children. Some female interviewees define this support as an investment, which would, not immediately but eventually, pay off. In this context, it is about 'the general reciprocity rule' (cf. Friedrich 2010: 72), according to which parents support their children financially to get appropriate help from them in the future or in case of need. The female interviewees follow the 'reciprocity rule' by acquiring the economic capital which helps their children begin their work life and start a family. By their parental sacrifice and financial investment they also earn gratitude and an outlook to a 'secured' retirement within the family circle, like one of the female interviewees summarized:

*I am glad that I am able to help my children, because if there comes a time when I am not able to work anymore and if I sit down at the table and my daughter gives me a bowl of soup, then I would never think she does it because of mercy or because she has no choice... I have worked my whole life. I was helping whenever I was able to. It is important to me to eat my daughter's bread with the knowledge that I've earned it. I did not get it for free. That is the rule. What you do to me I do to you'. I am earning this lifelong soup bowl or this piece of bread at my daughters. Whatever I am able to do, I am sending them money and packages. Last time I've sent two of them. 15 kilograms of sugar. Well, they do not use so much sugar, but my father needs to sweeten his tea... I guess sugar costs [in Poland] 5.50 or 6.50 Zlotys at the moment... This is nothing – just one kg of sugar?! The shipping costs 15€, but I am not only sending sugar. I am also sending some sweets. Well I do not like it when kids are eating too much sweets. They should eat more fruits, but we have Easter soon... So I am trying... I am looking after [children] and thanking my dear God that I have this job. And I am begging him daily for a long life for my grandma [client]. (Julia, 58, 4, 2010).*

#### MALE CARE WORKERS AND THEIR “STRATEGY-TO-PROGRAM-ONESELF”

Despite intensive support, the feeling of guilt and the fear of losing the children's love are noticeable among female migrants. They try to foster their position within the families by intensive communication with relatives in Poland and multidimensional material and emotional activities. Yet even then they experience doubts and regret the absence from home and the waiver of family celebrations and presence in the everyday life of their children and grandchildren. In contrast to women, men seem to adapt better to live several weeks or months far away from their families. Men appear to concentrate better on their tasks at the workplace and of distancing themselves from family life or blocking it temporarily out. This attitude is named the ‘Strategy-To-Program-Oneself’. This is how male carers define and name it:

*I am programming myself and I know nobody is forcing me [to go]. That is how I explain to myself. It was my decision and I just have to hold on. With ‘hold on’ I mean, I have to be there for a certain time [at the care work]. But if I would experience something bad from my patients [clients] or his family's side, I would leave this job. This money won't be worth it... (Joachim, 63, 3, 2007).*

Men define themselves, first and foremost, as breadwinners. They earn money to provide for their families and feel less internally conflicted than female carers, who are breadwinners and parents at the same time. They fulfill their fatherly child rearing responsibilities in their free time, when they are on break in Poland and see their engagement as sufficient enough.

Permanent contact of male care workers with their children via the internet and telephone offers them the possibility to satisfy the emotional needs of their children. An internet connection and a limitless possibility to call home are often preconditions for starting work in domestic care. Moreover, they set basic requirements to be fulfilled by the employers. Back home male care workers try to spend as much time as they can with their families, e.g. they organize trips or walks in the surrounding areas. For most of the male migrants work abroad without virtual contact with their families via Skype or telephone would be unimaginable. However, they find it sufficient to stay up to date about the family matters and to fulfill their paternal or spousal role from a distance:

*I am used to it [separation from my family]. We are talking via Skype many times a day and my computer remains switched on the whole day... It helps a lot. So I am really up to date and know what my family is doing and they know what I am doing here (Tomasz, 54, 6, 2010).*

## THE TRANSFER OF RELATIVES TO THE WORKPLACE

Another strategy of caring about one's family and simultaneously working as a 24/7-carer is related to the 'live in' arrangement. Working and living in the same place blurs the line between (care) work and private life, it creates an opportunity structure which makes visits or stays of relatives from Poland possible. Some of the interviewees commute to work with their children and/or their spouses, or are at least receive frequent visits from their families. This is how it comes to a 'transfer of relatives to the workplace' in some cases. The visits can be sporadic or frequent. They can also be arranged as permanent presence at the workplace and with part-involvement in the care work. This strategy is chosen mostly by female carers with little children, but as the interview records show e.g., husbands become transferred to the work place too. Therefore, two kinds of transfers are characteristic within this strategy: commuting young mothers and commuting 'childless' marriages (where 'childless' refers to both a marriage without children and a marriage with grown-up children, who already have their own families and are independent).

The employers play a significant role here. They create conditions for the arrival of a third party to their household and sometimes they even help with the organization of her/his visit to Germany. That is the case for one interviewee, who has informal and personal relations with her client. She is friends with the care recipient's daughter and keeps in touch with her also outside of her shift/work time. At the time of the interview she was staying in Germany with her six-year-old daughter and her employer helped find a kindergarten near the workplace. Her employer also gifted clothes to her children. Only the relatives or close friends of the interviewee, who regularly alternate with one another, worked at this particular household. The job was organized like something that can be circumscribed as a 'family business strategy'. The several-week-long employment without the child at her side would be not bearable for this care worker. Since the working relationship had intensified with time, the child was in a certain way 'incorporated' into the care-setting and into the German family. At the same time this arrangement and the close personal relationship resulted in the employer's behaviour which was perceived by the interviewee as exploitation. She was indignant and burdened because she had to cook not just for her care recipient, but also for her daughter and her boyfriend who both live in the neighbourhood. This task was not agreed upon as a care task in the beginning, but gradually it has become the case. Now the interviewee sees it as stressful and a waste of time because she does not get paid extra for it.

Within the strategy of transferring the relatives to the workplace there are also arrangements which support a direct or intensive involvement of the relatives who are visiting or living at the migrant carer's workplace. This is the case of one carer whose husband accompanies her to Germany and lives with her at the care recipient's home. That is why she is able to spend more than two months in the care work unburdened and her husband helps her in some chores, like shopping or driving. His leg was amputated a few years ago and ever since he is not able to work anymore. His help relieves not just the carer, but also makes him feel needed and active in the care recipient's home.

#### THE TRANSFER OF THE CLIENTS TO CARER'S PLACE OF RESIDENCE: THE MEANING AND SUPPORT OF CLIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

The relations between both – the employers' and the employees' – families can also influence the family life in the homeland and can be developed and nurtured there. Regular client phone calls to Poland, packages, postcards and,

last but not least, longer visits in the employees' home country intensify those relations and serve specific purposes. On one hand, they facilitate doing care work during the break/presence in Poland. This prevents potential competition from other migrant carers and ensures stable income. In this case, this kind of transfer does not occur as a long physical separation from the migrant's family, but rather a kind of "adoption" or temporary transfer of the care recipient to carer's place of residence. On the other hand, the employer's motivation for choosing this strategy can also be recognized. This was especially noticeable in the example of one interviewee who shares her job with her brother. Her client visits her in Poland regularly and spends the vacations with the carer and her family. The interviews suggest that beside the search for family bonding and the personal emotional amenities, which is for both sides obviously the case, there are also some indications towards rational thoughts about the benefits of a family-tinted relation. The declaration of a sisterly/brotherly relation with the carer is for the care recipient a possibility to dismiss the suspicion that the migrant carer is employed irregularly. Thus the carer, because of the close relation, is able to avoid competition and to secure her job as her means of existence.

*We are [going] to Poland... WE are spending some time in Poland, I mean the two of us. Well, he used to go to Poland twice a year in the past. Now after the second stroke he is not up for it anymore. Otherwise we were going always twice a year. He spent one month with us, we took vacation together in Poland. We are having two Holy Communions this year. One is at my brother's and another one is at my daughter's. He got an invitation and he accepted it. He went to Poland for the first time in his life, as I came here for work. He wanted to visit Poland, to go there. (...) He is telling everyone, that I am his sister, but he does not have any siblings. «She is my sister». I treat him like my brother, like family... (Ewelina, 56, 4, 2001).*

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS: THE FORMATION OF THE GLOBAL VERBAL-AGREEMENT-FAMILIES

Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2013: 174–175) establish: "The personal is global (...) the change of everyday work in the family and the formation of transnational shadow region at the fringes of legality are not just questions of the private lifestyle or the personal purse: They are directly connected to the global equity and resource distribution question". The interviewed commuter migrants from Poland decide to care for their families not just as parents and grandparents, but also as breadwinners. To reconcile

both roles and not to perceive them as a burden, overexertion or sacrifice, they develop strategies to compensate for their temporary absence from home in Poland. As other surveys prove (Rerrich 2006, Haidinger 2013, Metz-Göckel et al. 2010), migrant carers organize the family life in Poland with the help and support of other family members. They do not pay them for doing it, they rather invest, which means they transfer money and food back home to motivate them, to console them and to show them their ‘love from distance’. In case of the empirical material gathered in this study the “Polish cousin” model or employing someone for the childcare was not used (Rerrich 2006). The virtual, although almost permanent, contact via telephone, internet, etc. (Metz-Göckel et al. 2010) serves to keep one up to date and to influence decisions and family life. This kind of contact enables to keep at least provisory maintenance of the (strong) motherly position and serves the reciprocity rule, which aims at securing care from one’s own children in the future in case of need in exchange for the investments now and the ‘sacrificing’ attitude. Therefore, commuting female migrants are performing a multitasking-support for their families and still long for or regret missing important moments in their families’ lives. However, male carers see themselves primarily as breadwinners and deploy their so called ‘strategy-to-program-oneself’ to bear the separation from their families with relative ease.

Where the employers organize or help with the transfer of relatives to the workplace, new opportunities and risks emerge for the migrant care workers. The work satisfaction for example increases, because it tempers the burden of separation and the carer, to some extent, receives help from their relatives in performing some tasks. This strategy resembles the ‘model of friendly worker’ (name translated from Polish “zaprzyjaźniony pracownik”, introduced by Anna Kordasiewicz (2008: 103) in her study of Polish female domestic workers in Italy). A ‘friendly worker’ also forms a close relationship with his/her employer, feels supported, respected and well paid. Both sides define the work in the categories of understanding and helping each other.

This possibility of transfer can also influence the relation with the employers, who, as this research showed, can include themselves in their employee’s family life. This can secure the migrants from competition in the care sector, allay the suspicion of undocumented work, but also activate an exploitative behaviour from the employer’s side.

This study shows that in the field of domestic care not only the extra-professional relationships between the carer and his/her client are implicated but also a bonding between both families. A dual interfamilial relationship is created, which starts with the employer-employee-relation and is able to develop with

time into a fictive kin relationship (Karner 1998, as cited in Karakayali 2010: 51) and a much closer relation. Such bonding-process is determined both by solidarity and support and by conflicts and critical situations. It is also relevant to mention that in contrast to a purely professional and impersonal employers' attitude, the close and intimate relation with the employee results in greater job satisfaction of the latter and makes it possible to organize working and living in two countries by means of interlinking two households and two families, by creating a 'global verbal-agreement-family'. Strategies which were described and are mostly practiced by the undocumented migrant care workers can be also employed in organized and regular forms of employment undertaken by the care agencies, which want to optimize the working and living conditions for their employees with e.g. little children.

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