A feminist approach of migrant domestic services: Materialism or post-structuralism?

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Bio Note

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Abstract

Often adopting a feminist perspective, the sociological literature on migrant domestic services (MDS) does not make explicit which feminist paradigm it speaks from. This article situates this literature within ongoing debates in feminist theory, in particular the tension between materialist and poststructuralist approaches. Then, it discusses the empirical relevance of each of those two paradigms on the example of the results of original research into the personalization of employment relationships in MDS.

The contribution proposes a new way of making sense of the diversity of feminist theories, distinguishing between modern and postmodern approaches. Indeed, since the 1980s, feminist theory in the US and Western Europe has undergone a 'postmodern turn', which renders previous typologies much less up-to-speed with recent developments in the field. Then, the article examines which paradigms are implicit in the sociological literature on MDS. Initially, personalization in MDS was mainly seen in materialist terms, as a way to maximize the quantity and quality of labour (including emotional labour) extracted from domestic workers. The emergence of postmodern approaches in feminist theory set off a progressive shift in MDS literature. First, this literature showed that personalization also fulfils identity functions for employers and workers, then it widened its focus to include the affective dimensions of domestic

labour (not to be confused with emotional labour). The final section shows how modern and postmodern feminist approaches can be combined within a single research, on the example of original research on personalization in MDS in Belgium and Poland. In particular, the contribution shows that the distinction between material functions of personalization on the one hand, and its emotional/identity functions on the other is not empirically operative. Indeed, migrant domestic workers generally use emotional/identity categories to frame material questions, and vice versa. This final part shows that, rather than representing incompatible approaches, modern and postmodern feminisms complete each other, in this case showing a fuller image of personalization processes in MDS.

Introduction

Feminist researchers envision a research process attentive to power relations of all kind: structural power relations at work within human societies, but also the way those macro-level inequalities are reproduced in and through inter-individual relationships. Often adopting a feminist perspective, the sociological literature on domestic services has thus demonstrated how structural power inequalities play out between workers and employers within the domestic employment relationship. Additionally, this literature tried to interpret the development of close personal relationships between domestic workers and employers, that is the personalization of the employment relationships that link them. However, this literature usually does not make explicit which feminist paradigm it speaks from. Since there is no 'feminism', but rather a multiplicity of feminist approaches, which draw from one another in often conflicting ways, it seems adequate to situate the existing literature on migrant domestic services within ongoing debates in feminist theory. Furthermore, this contribution shows how the (explicitly or implicitly) adopted paradigm influences research findings regarding the personalization of employment relationships between migrant workers and their employers.

Katie King (1986) criticized the tendency among contemporary feminists to elaborate typologies of different feminist 'moments' or 'conversations', in an effort "*to make one's own political tendencies appear to be the telos of the whole*" (Haraway 1991:157). Referring to King, Haraway further claimed that

> "these taxonomies tend to remake feminist history so that it appears to be an ideological struggle among coherent types persisting over time, […]. Literally, all other feminisms are either incorporated or marginalized, usually by building an explicit ontology and epistemology. Taxonomies of feminism produce epistemologies to police deviation from official women's experience" (Haraway 1991: 156).

Despite these potentially exclusionary and policing effects of taxonomies, this contribution starts with a proposal for a new typology, a new way of making sense of the diversity within feminist theory, through distinguishing between modern and postmodern feminist approaches. Then, I examine which paradigms are implicit in the sociological literature on migrant domestic services (MDS). Finally, I show how the implicitly or explicitly adopted paradigm influences findings, on the example of my own research into the personalization processes at work in MDS.

The objective of this chapter is primarily methodological, but methodology isn't here reduced to a discussion of research methods. Rather, methodology is understood as *"a*

coherent set of ideas about the philosophy, methods, and data that underlie the research process and the production of knowledge" (McCall 2005: 1774). Methodology is thus a question of paradigms, which are grand epistemological narratives guiding the formulation of research questions, the choice of research methods and the way data is interpreted.

Feminist paradigms

Taxonomies and typologies

US textbooks usually classify feminisms into liberal, radical or socialist. The feminist movement in France used to be described as divided between 'differentialists' and 'equality feminists'. In Germany, Renate Hof differentiated between feminist research coming from psychoanalysis on the one hand and Marxism on the other (cited in Möser 2013: 36). The distinction between feminisms that I would qualify as 'modern' and those rather 'postmodern', relevant in each of those three cultural contexts, seems more up to speed with recent developments in the field. Indeed, since the 1980s, feminist theory has undergone a so-called 'postmodern', 'linguistic' or 'cultural turn' (Barrett 1992; Ebert 2005; Hennessy 1993; Wicke & Ferguson 1992). This postmodern turn is linked to the pre-eminence of post-structuralism in human and social sciences in US academia. Post-structuralism, also called 'French Theory' or 'French postmodernism' is a paradigm originating in the works of French authors Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault (although Foucault always denied belonging to the post-structuralist 'school'), as well as in the writings of the representatives of so-called 'French Feminism': Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous[1]. Judith Butler, self-proclaimed representative of feminist post-structuralism (Butler 2004: 194), defined post-structuralism as

> "not a unitary event or set of texts, but a wide range of works that emerged in the aftermath of Ferdinand de Saussure, the French Hegel, existentialism, phenomenology, and various forms of linguistic formalism" (Butler 2004: 195).

Butler's 1990 *Gender Trouble* is probably the most famous attempt at a poststrucuralist

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[1] For a detailed study of how post-structuralism came to pre-eminence in social and human sciences in US universities, see François Cusset's *French Theory*, translated into English in 2008.

reappraisal of Second wave feminisms, including French Feminism. The way Butler explains what she found exhilarating and new about the structuralist legacy of French Feminism is how this feminism applied Lévi-Strauss' theory of the 'exchange of women' to language, in showing how it comes into being through sexual difference:

> "[O]ne has to understand the sea-change that took place when feminist studies turned from being the analysis of 'images' of women in this or that discipline or sphere of life to being an analysis of sexual difference at the foundation of cultural and human communicability. Suddenly, we were fundamental. Suddenly, no human science could proceed without us" (Butler 2004: 208).

In short, on could say that while modern feminisms were about women's presence, absence or invisibility in this or that sphere of life, postmodern feminisms, as a legacy of (post)structuralist theories of language, show how gender is the basis of language, which is constitutive of all human experience.

The postmodern turn has been strongly criticized, notably by authors who identify with the materialist tradition in feminist research, be it in France, Germany, the UK or the US. Marxist, socialist, postcolonial and some queer theorists have criticized postmodern feminism's focus on discourse analysis, said to cut it off from the material, tangible aspects of heterosexist oppression (Eisenstein 2009; Epstein 2010; Hennessy 1993; Hennessy & Ingraham 1997; Jackson 2001; Stabile 1995, 1997; Turcotte 1996).

> "Many critics on the [American?] Left have expressed strong skepticism toward the claim that anything politically progressive can come of [poststructuralist] premises." (Butler 2006 [1990]: ix).

Numerous feminist scholars have accused postmodern approaches of burying the powerful anti-system critique put forward by 1970s feminists (Fraser 2009, 2013; Jackson 2001; Turcotte 1996). Some authors even claim that the cultural turn has led to a co-optation of feminism by neoliberal capitalism (Eisenstein 2009; Fraser 2009, 2013). As put by Butler (2004: 175), *"there are now pro-business forms of feminism that focus on actualizing women's entrepreneurial potential, hijacking models of self-expression form an earlier, progressive period of the movement."* Recent theoretical endeavours have thus pleaded for a materialist renewal in feminist and queer studies (Camfield 2014; Crosby et al. 2012; der Tuin 2011; Floyd 2009; Hennessy 1995, 2013; Jackson 2001; Sears 2005).

It seems the strongest resistance to the postmodern turn came from feminists in Europe, where materialist approaches have been most firmly implemented.

Materialist feminisms

Materialist feminisms developed as a remedy to male domination both within Leftist political and social movements and in Marxist theory (Sim 2000). Materialist feminists have for example challenged the idea, long accepted within Marxist theory, that housework is not a form of labour and that it is not productive/does not generate surplus value (Benston 1969; Dalla Costa & James 1973; Delphy 2013 [1998 & 2001]; Molyneux 1979; Morton 1970). The term 'materialist feminisms' has been used to encompass diverse strands such as Anglo-American socialist feminism (see US authors such as Donna Haraway or Rosemary Hennessy, also British sociologist Stevi Jackson), French materialist feminism (whose tutelary figures are the sociologists Christine Delphy, Colette Guillaumin and Danièle Kergoat, as well as anthropologist Nicole-Claude Mathieu)[2], German Marxist-socialist feminism (with authors such as Ursula Beer, Frigga Haug or Maria Mies) and the feminist descendants of the Frankfurt School (Regina Becker-Schmidt or Gudrun Axeli Knapp for example). These strands can all be described as a feminist re-examination of classical Marxism: although they do not necessarily agree with all tenets of Marxism, they share a common identification with the Marxist legacy of historical materialism[3].

Broadly speaking, materialist feminisms have been concerned with demonstrating *"how the subordination of women, variously described as oppression, subjugation or exploitation, is, although often seen as 'extra-economic', in fact founded on a material basis and linked into the political economy of capitalist society"* (Molyneux 1979). Materialist feminisms generally opted for one out of the two most common solutions to achieve that goal. The first strategy consisted in redefining patriarchy as class oppression of women by men within the reproductive sphere (see for example the work of Christine Delphy, and more generally the 'Domestic Labour Debate' in the UK), while the second approach presented patriarchy as a system organizing the

[2] Materialist feminist approaches have been popularized in France by the feminist journal *Questions Féministes* founded in 1977 with the support of Simone de Beauvoir, a journal which became *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* in 1981 after a conflict within the editorial board.

[3] As defined by Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham (1997: 4), "historical materialism takes as its starting point real living individuals and what they need in order to produce their means of subsistence, that is, in order to survive. It recognizes that the continual production of life through the satisfaction of human needs is a collective undertaking involving an ensemble or system of connected productive activities. […] Historically, these activities have taken the form of divisions of labour or relations of production, organizations of state and of consciousness or culture. Emancipatory change that aims to eliminate exploitation and oppression within a social system cannot take place by eradicating inequalities only in one sphere of social life – whether it be the economy, state, or culture."

appropriation of women as commodities (see for example the work of Colette Guillaumin).

There are important differences between French materialist feminism and its British or US counterparts. Contrary to American and British feminists who, for the most part hesitated well into the 1980s whether a 'divorce' between Marxism and feminism was unavoidable (Sim 2000: 137, see the title of Heidi Hartmann's 1979 influential article 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism', later published in a collection of essays), French materialist feminists separated early on from the Marxist left (Delphy 2013 [1970]). Dominated by men, the socialist and communist activist groups that proliferated in France after 1968 considered patriarchy as a function of capitalism, and marginalized feminist claims as a secondary struggle compared to anticapitalism. In 1970, Christine Delphy, declared patriarchy the 'main enemy' of feminism in an eponymous essay now considered a classic (Delphy 2013 [1970], published in English in 1980). She subsequently developed a theory of the 'domestic mode of production', in which women are considered a class exploited by men. As a consequence, Delphy argued that the left-wing construction of stay-at-home wives of the bourgeoisie (whose 'stay-at-home' status excluded them from participation in capitalist relations of production) as class enemies of working-class women deny the existence of the domestic mode of production, within which all women are exploited, and hence created artificial divisions among the female class (Delphy 2013 [1998 & 2001]).

Postmodern and queer critiques of modern feminisms

McCall (2005: 1776) explains the success of postmodernism within feminist theory by the convergence of their respective critiques of modern scientific discourse. Postmodernism aims to abolish modern dichotomies like body and mind, nature (nurture) and culture, form and content, sex and gender, hetero- and homosexuality, or man and woman. This is for example apparent in the figure of the cyborg developed by the post-Marxist feminist philosopher Donna Haraway in *Cyborg Manifesto* (1991: 150). Neither animal nor homo sapiens, neither machine nor human, the cyborg is a new kind of hybrid being.

As a result of this rejection of modern dichotomies, postmodern feminists do not speak

of 'gender' (singular) as a social relation between men and women, but rather of a multiplicity of 'genders' (plural) and sexualities, as demonstrated by the overthrow of the old, limiting categories woman/man, straight/gay (lesbian or bisexual) in favour of the more encompassing and less binary term 'queer'. The latter is not a synonym of 'lesbian, gay, bisexual and transexual', but rather a refusal to domesticate marginalized, 'deviant' genders and sexualities (Rallin 2008).

In her book on the relationships between Filipino and Indonesian migrant workers and their Taiwanese employers, Pei-Chia Lan remarked that *"the opposition between maid and madam wrecks the feminist romance of global sisterhood."* (Pei-Chia Lan 2006: 241). It seems however that feminist theorists have long abandoned the idea of an idealized 'global sisterhood'. Indeed, postmodern feminisms are very attentive not to reproduce the (unintendedly) exclusionary ways of Second wave universalism.

Summarizing the critique white Western Second wave feminism has faced from its Black, lesbian or Third World counterparts, Butler (2006 [1990]) pointed out that attempts at constructing 'women' as a homogenized political category came with the exclusion and/or invisibilization of most non-White, non-middle class, non-heterosexual, not-cisgendered women. In consequence, the invisibilized or excluded groups (Afro-American women, women of colour, Chicanas, lesbians, working-class women, lesbians of colour, Third World feminists, trans women…) ended up contesting the 'master' category's claims to representativity. Postmodern feminisms are thus strongly 'anticategorical', that is distrustful of categorizations:

> "Social life is considered too irreducibly complex – overflowing with multiple and fluid determinations of both subjects and structures – to make fixed categories anything but simplifying social fictions that produce inequalities in the process of producing differences" (McCall 2005: 1773).

Postmodern feminisms also reject the so-called 'metaphysics of substance', that is the idea of a pre- or post-social ontology. As a consequence, they do not share the feminist materialist utopia of a society without gender, an *"utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender, [...]"* to which Haraway (1991: 150) explicitly refers to in *Cyborg Manifesto*. In *Gender Trouble,* Butler explained that there are no un-gendered subjects behind gender performativity, it is precisely performativity that creates an (already gendered) subject. Similarly, gender does not have performative properties because of a pre-existing gender order (as Pierre Bourdieu (2001) seems to suggest in *Masculine Domination*), it is rather that the gender order comes to existence through

performativity (Bourcier 2003: online).

Materialist critiques of postmodern and queer feminisms

As put by Catherine MacKinnon (2000: 707),

"a question, large in Western philosophy, [has been] whether the world exists independently of our ideas of it".

Postmodernism answered it through pronouncing

"ontology dead because all knowledge of the real world requires human interpretation and the truth claims of one human interpretation cannot be distinguished from those of another" (Mc Call 2005: 1793).

Postmodern feminist approaches tend to consider that nothing exists outside of the way it is constructed through language:

"Language is regarded as constitutive of experience and not simply representative of it. Language is not separate from experience, because they way [the latter] is understood and expressed is reliant upon [language]" (Frost & Elichaoff 2013: 2).

This focus on language can go as far as to analyze societies as if they were languages, which goes against the materialist understanding of social change. While materialists perceive social change as driven by social struggle, the way a language evolves in time usually does not result from a comparable "*conscious activity designed to bring about these changes*" (Markus 1986: 35).

Postmodern feminists often insist on the performative proprieties of speech, that is the ways in which it produces the conditions of its own reality. In other words, performativity is the

capacity of speech to produce tangible consequences. The economist Stephen Marglin illustrated it on the example of a society believing in the necessity of human sacrifice*:*

"Imagine the priestess called upon to explain the consequences of a failure to sacrifice the requisite virgins in the requisite manner. She might well say, 'Society will fall apart. Our women and our land will become barren because our men will become impotent as lovers and ineffective as cultivators.' And she will be right. Believing themselves to be impotent in the hammock and inefficient in the field, the men will be unable to perform in either context. The birth rate will decline, and the harvest will fail. Society will fall apart....
[B]eliefs bring about the very conditions that will make these beliefs come true" (Marglin 1990: 13, quoted in MacKinnon 2000: 708).

The belief in the performative character of discourse renders postmodernism all the

more anticategorical:

> "[T]he use of categories [is] suspect because they have no foundation in reality: language (in the broader social or discursive sense) creates categorical reality rather than the other way round" (McCall 2005: 1777).

Having adapted Austin's theory of the performativity of language to gender, Butler has inversed the causal relation between sex and gender developed by Second wave feminism. In *Gender Trouble,* anatomical 'sex' is no longer the necessary material basis for the corresponding social construct of 'gender'. It is 'gender' which gives its meaning to anatomical characteristics described as 'sex'. Butler went even further: she moved away from feminist analyses of the sex/gender relationship towards a theory of genders as performative identities decoupled from 'corresponding' anatomical elements. She pointed to the masculinity of butch lesbians and drag kings and the femininity of drag queens to show that masculinity and femininity are not always produced on the basis of the anatomically 'corresponding' sex. She underscored thus that the man/woman binary does not limit gender expression: (the mulitplicity of) genders transcend (the binary of) sex (Bourcier 2003: online).

This move away from a feminist analysis of the relationship between (anatomical) sex and (corresponding, socially constructed) gender has been criticized as a way of forgetting the material aspects of gender as an identity and as a system. Butler attempted to answer those criticisms in *Bodies that Matter* (1993), an essay in turn attacked for reducing 'materiality' to the body, rather than adopting the materialist understanding of materiality as primarily related to relations of production or social divisions of labour (Möser 2013: 144-145).

Contrary to the idea that it is primarily discourse that structures reality, materialism considers bodies and relations of production as prior to or determinate of thought (Camfield 2014: 3). Consequently, materialist feminists believe that what people think (their 'conscience') is structured by their location within social relations. Materialist feminists are hence critical of the notion that discourse has performative properties. Catherine MacKinnon (2000: 708-9) sees the belief in performativity as an emanation of patriarchy, stemming from men's power to bend reality to what they think. She underscores that the only discourse having performative properties is the discourse of those who have the power to make it performative:

> "The reality of people who don't have power exists independently of what they think. The social constructs that control their lives very often are not their constructs. What

women think doesn't tend to make things be the way we think because we don't have the social power to do them or to stop them" (MacKinnon 2000: 708).

Personalized employment relationships in the literature on (migrant) domestic services

Initially, the main focus of feminist theory has been women's relations with men, at inter-individual and structural level. It is only gradually that differences between women have emerged as another central issue in feminist theory, in parallel to what we could call a transition from the modernist universalism of a 'global sisterhood' to postmodern identity politics. This evolution renders feminist theory well equipped to explore the variety of employment relationships in domestic services provided by migrants (MDS).

Domestic services are a highly feminized occupation (according to ILO figures, in 2010 83% of the world's domestic workers were women, ILO 2013: 21). Existing studies of employment relationships in domestic services tend to describe them as a confrontation between middle- and upper-class women with their much less class privileged counterparts, often with a migrant or ethnically/racially/religiously subordinated background (Moras 2013). Judith Rollins' 1985 pioneering and influential study of the relationships between maids and 'madams' in the suburbs of Boston is thus eloquently titled *Between Women*. This confrontation has been described as resulting from the persistent and seemingly universal gender division of labour, in which it is women – no matter their class, racial, ethnic or religious background, or their sexuality – who are made responsible for domestic labour, be it paid or not (Delphy 2013 [1998 & 2001]; Federici 2012). Employment relationships in domestic services have thus been dubbed "*one of the most paradigmatic forms of contact between [...] social classes*" and a "*critical location for the reproduction of social differences and inequality*" (Gorbán & Tizziani 2014: 54), a site where boundaries (both spatial and social) are negotiated (Anderson 2014; Lan 2006; Lutz 2011).

In the course of my fieldwork investigation into MDS as provided in contemporary Belgium and Poland, I however encountered (be it only in the narratives of the workers I interviewed) a variety of employers, not only middle- or upper-class heterosexual women:

- Single women or men privately hiring a migrant to clean their home (and/or their workplace), sometimes also to cook and generally take care of their homes or of them

- Homosexual couples hiring someone to help with cleaning their home (and sometimes workplace)
- Productive age or retired sons, daughters or more generally children hiring a live-in or live-out carer for their elderly parents
- Husbands or wives hiring a carer for their dependent spouse (elderly or not)

Besides being a highly feminized occupation, domestic services, be they provided with or without a legal contract, are also highly 'migrantized' (that is dense in transnational migrants) in most countries across the globe (ILO 2013: 24). This is why domestic services have been discussed as the intersection of feminized labour and (post-) coloniality (Gutiérrez-Rodriguez 2014). Feminized labour is a concept originating from Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (1991: 166)[4], and later used for example by Encarnación Gutiérrez-Rodriguez (2010, 2014) or Rosemary Hennessy (2013: 136-142), who showed that workers of all genders can be 'feminized'.

I focus here on MDS in Belgium and Poland. The choice of those two contrasting case studies might seem unusual at first, but it is illuminated by the peculiar care chain[5] that links those two countries. Indeed, with regard to domestic services, Poland is simultaneously a sending country (the country of origin of many migrant domestic workers employed across Western Europe) and a receiving one (a country where a growing number of households privately employs domestic workers from abroad) (Safuta, Kordasiewicz & Urbańska forthcoming). In Belgium, since the late 1980s-early 1990s, domestic services provided informally have become an ethnic niche for female migrants from Poland (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2005; Kuźma 2013). Today, Polish women still make up the majority of foreign domestic workers legally employed in Belgium (Idea Consult 2013: 36)[6]. Although the majority of domestic workers in Poland are native women, qualitative studies show that Ukrainians are the most numerous national group among transnational migrants working in the sector (Safuta, Kordasiewicz & Urbańska forthcoming; Krajewska 2012).

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[4] "To be feminized means to be made extremely vulnerable; able to be disassembled, reassembled, exploited as a reserve labour force; seen less as workers than as servers; subjected to time arrangements on and off the paid job that make a mockery of a limited work day; leading an existence that always borders on being obscene, out of place, and reducible to sex" (Haraway 1991: 166).

[5] The term 'global care chain' has been coined by Arlie Russell Hochschild (2000).

[6] There are no statistics pertaining to informal domestic services. Since 2004, Belgian authorities have implemented a voucher system that allows private households to access subsidized domestic services legally at a relatively low cost. In 2012, Polish women were the best represented national group among workers employed within this scheme. They represented 9,06% of all service voucher workers, Belgian and foreign, while the second most represented national group – Romanian nationals - represented only 1,95% of all voucher workers (Idea Consult 2013: 36). If statistics showing the proportion of foreign nationals among service voucher workers were available for the Brussels region alone, the proportion of Polish women would most probably be even higher.

Studies of domestic services agree that this occupation is often characterized by a high degree of personalization, defined as the process through which a "*strong personal attachment*" (Lutz 2011: 95) or a "*close personal relationship*" (Moras 2013: 248) develop between workers and employers. Initially, personalization was explained mainly in materialist terms, as a way of interacting allowing employers to maximize the quantity and quality of labour extracted from domestic workers, and as a means of labour control (Anderson 2000; Glenn 1992; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007 [2001]; Katzman 1981; Parreñas 2001; Rollins 1985; Romero 1992)[7].

Hiring (migrant) domestic workers has been identified as a way for employers to deal with the materiality of everyday life, allowing them to answer actual needs in terms of house- and/or care work, which result from insufficient welfare provision, increased labour market participation of women, population ageing, longer working hours, etc. (Lutz 2011: 24). On a more symbolic level, domestic services have also been shown to still be a class marker, a matter of social status performativity (Anderson 2000; Rollins 1985; Yeates 2009: 49). Significantly, the editor's description of Rollins' pioneering 1985 study explains that "*the book reveals how this labour arrangement functions* ideologically as well as materially *to support the class, gender and racial hierarchies*" in the US. Marxist terminology is here clearly visible – domestic services are analysed in their material and ideological aspects.

Identity functions of personalization, for both involved parties, have also been discussed. Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007 [2001]: 184) for example described how acting as a personal benefactor to a migrant domestic worker (in the framework of what she identified as a 'maternalistic' employment relationship) allows (mostly female) employers to experience themselves as "*generous, altruistic, and kind*" and receive "*personal recognition and appreciation*" (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007 [2001]: 187). Maternalistic relationships seem however on the decline in contemporary urban contexts across post-industrial economies. For lack of time or energy, younger professional employers are not willing to personalize the relationship with their cleaners (Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007 [2001]: 171-209). They do it only with workers providing care, in an effort to secure a better quality of service (what Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007 [2001]: 174-180) described as 'instrumental personalism'). To lack of time and energy, Lutz (2011: 86-7) added yet another explanation of younger

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[7] On the contrary, Thornton Dill (1994) suggested that close employment relationships in domestic services might have an empowering effect, increasing workers' job leverage.

employers' reluctance to personalize: class guilt.

It seems however that personalization is not a necessary condition for the employment relationship to fulfil identity functions from employers' perspective. Lutz (2011: 90-94) showed for example that employing a female domestic worker allowed German single father Simon to uphold his gender identity despite (or rather all the more thanks to) maintaining a rather distant and depersonalized relationship with her. Indeed, the worker he employed spared him the 'feminine' activities of cleaning and care that he perceived as menacing his masculinity. As explained by Lutz (2011: 94), it is not the employment relationship with the worker that fulfilled identity functions for Simon, but the work provided by her.

From workers' perspective, personalization has been shown to help them regain the respectability of which they feel deprived abroad, especially if migration was related to downward occupational mobility (Cvajner 2012). Emotional functions of personalization have also been underscored. Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007 [2001]: 194-207) and Ambrosini (2012: 8) showed the role played by personalization in alleviating the loneliness and isolation from which suffer overworked migrant domestic workers, all the more when they are employed on a live-in basis.

There seems to be a duality in domestic services literature between materialist approaches insisting on personalization as a tool for exploitation and labour control of workers by employers (although those studies are also concerned with the identity and emotional functions of personalization) and studies showing workers' strategies in adopting, co-constructing or resisting employers' ways (Gorbán & Tizziani 2014; Lutz 2011; Romero 1988). For example, *"contrary to the work of researchers who describe the relationship between employers and domestic employees purely in terms of an exploitative relationship or 'refeudalization'"(*Lutz 2011: 16), Pei-Chia Lan (2006) and Helma Lutz (2011) speak rather of a two-way (although not necessarily symmetrical) process of boundary demarcation between workers and employers.

Another central theme in domestic services literature is the emotional and affective labour expected from workers (Gutiérrez-Rodriguez 2010; Romero 1992), of which personalization is often part and parcel (Safuta forthcoming). The nuance between 'emotional' and 'affective' labour is however important. Using the pioneering work of US materialist sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild (1983), research on 'emotional labour' shows how changing contemporary relations of production create occupations in which workers are forced to sell not only their labour power, but also their emotions

and identity. In what seems to be more a postmodern approach drawing from Spinozian ethics, theorists of affective labour insist rather on "*the affective dimension of the social*" (Gutiérrez-Rodriguez 2014: 45). Pointing out this affective dimension consists on the one hand in showing the impact of feelings and emotions on social relationships, human bodies and psyches, objects and spaces (Gutiérrez-Rodriguez 2014: 45&47), on the other in demonstrating that

> "the feelings and emotions circulating in the private households which domestic workers are exposed to and need to deal with, are expressions of social asymmetries and articulations of global inequalities" (Gutiérrez-Rodriguez 2014: 51).

A good illustration of how affects are not just the product of individual character traits, but shaped by macro conditions, is the relationship between employer Simon and domestic worker Aurora, described by Lutz (2011: 93). Aurora is undocumented and henceforth "*lives in permanent fear of discovery*", but has not informed her employer about her status. Her nervousness, which struck Simon, might well be the result of her living in illegality and not necessarily, as assumed by him, "*a sign of poor self-confidence, an individual quality, and one that he has not noticed in other 'Latinas'*".

Personalization processes in migrant domestic services from a feminist perspective

The qualitative data discussed in this section have been collected during 38 in-depth interviews with migrants working informally (without a legally valid contract) as cleaners and/or carers in private homes. The interviews have been conducted in 2012-2014 in Belgium (n=18) and Poland (n=20) in the framework of my PhD research on the personalization of employment relationships in MDS. In the Belgian sample of interviewed migrant domestic workers, Filipinos and Poles are the most represented national groups due to my ability to interview respondents in their respective native language. In Belgium, I interviewed 7 migrants from the Philippines (2 men, 5 women) and 6 Polish women, as well as women from Cameroon, Ecuador, Morocco, Peru and Rwanda. The Polish sample was more homogenous: all respondents were women, 17 originating from Western Ukraine, 2 from Eastern Ukraine, and one was a Russian citizen whose parents migrated to Western Ukraine before 1989.

In my research, I try to remain true to the way interviewed migrants describe their working and living conditions, while not losing sight of the materiality of those conditions. In other words, I struggle to reconcile the postmodern rejection of a universal, objective truth with materialist feminisms' emphasis on power inequalities. I initially planned to classify the functions of personalization identified in the course of the interviewing process into two analytically distinct categories: material functions on the one hand, and identity/emotional functions on the other. In most cases, this distinction proved artificial, due to the fact that respondents usually use emotional/identity categories to frame issues that could also be interpreted in materialist terms. Or, on the contrary, they use 'material proxies' to talk about emotions or identity questions.

In the absence of a regulatory framework in informal employment, the only way to defend your interests against those of your employer is through cultivating personalized employment relationships[8]. The importance of the latter is well illustrated by Polish domestic worker Małgorzata. She explained that she had to defend herself when employer B started questioning the quality of her work. She had been cleaning the respective household of employer A and employer B (at that time best friends), as well as the lawyer's office where they were both employed, for quite a long time. Then, one day, employer A came to ask Małgorzata "what did she do to employer B", because employer B seemed no longer satisfied with her services (a fact of which Małgorzta was not aware). She had then to defend herself against those indirect criticisms, and it is only then that she understood that employer B wanted probably to get rid of her because she has been the unwilling witness of employer B's affair with employer A's husband.

Personalizing the employment relationship can give domestic workers leverage. The personalized relationship the Polish Ewa had with one of her employers in Belgium enabled her to refuse to perform a task without losing her job. One day, Ewa's employer – for whom she had been working for a long time prior to the incident – unexpectedly left her a long list of things to do during her's usual working hours. Ewa refused and stormed out. The employer in question ended up calling her to apologize and asked her to come back. Ewa described the incident as a question of identity, of

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[8] Although Belgian labour law guarantees to migrants "working in the informal economy, irrespective of holding a regular or irregular residence status […] a minimum of rights to a legal minimum wage in cash, to safe work and compensation after a work-related accident, to sick pay, and to a minimum of labour protection against dismissal." (Michielsen et al. 2013: 49).

self-respect:

> "Not, but, you know, when you already know someone well and that person confides in you, sharing the most secret things with you, everything is OK and then suddenly, I don't know why, because she's in a bad mood or just, I don't know, all of a the sudden she wants to act . . . as a great 'lady of the house' and so on, so I thought that, you know, she went a bit too far"[9] (Ewa, Polish MDW employed in Belgium, 44 years old).

In Ewa's narrative, this incident is not just a question of refusing that employer's excessive demands with regard to the quantity of work to be performed in one working day, that is a question of resistance to material exploitation. Ewa insists on identity-related aspects of what she seems to describe as the whim of an idle, privileged woman: she talks of self-respect, autonomy and mutual trust. The narrative of Polish migrant Stenia is on the contrary a good illustration of the way some of my respondents use materiality to convey difficult emotional experiences encountered in the framework of their jobs as domestic workers. After mentioning one of her long-term employers fell one day and broke her knee, Stenia switches very quickly to the proud recollection of how she managed to 'save' the stained towels with which this employer attempted to wipe away the blood she was losing after the fall:

> "She fell and after that, when I came home to clean, she was in the hospital. I was thinking to myself 'What happened here, God almighty, underpants covered in blood, what did she do that those underpants are so covered in blood, shirt covered in blood, towel as if you slaughtered a pig'. The wedding band lies on the floor, the necklace, everything thrown around. God almighty, she got so drunk that when she fell she got herself an open fracture, they had to operate her to put it back together. She was trying to stop the bleeding with that towel, but it was streaming down. I soaked it in cold water on Saturday – I got there on Saturday because they asked, I guess the son asked me to come over – I came back on Monday, washed that by hand, later I also put it in the washing machine, it was soaking up the whole Sunday. Blood has to be soaked up in cold water, you know, but quickly, while this thing was lying around for several days. So I was changing the water again and again, until I managed to clean those clothes. And it is then that I slept two weeks at hers – she had an endoprosthesis" (He, Polish MDW employed in Belgium, 64 years old).

Similarly, after confessing having felt very uneasy when a long-term employer discussed her good work performance with a neighbour in her presence ("*As if I was an object [...] It was horribly humiliating*"), she mentions knowing her since so long that she was the one who ironed the shirt that this employer's husband wore in his casket.

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[9] Translated from Polish.

Stenia mentions this shirt, while glossing quickly over the fact that she slept at this employer's place to take care of her husband when he got paralyzed.

Conclusions

In Undoing Gender, Judith Butler wrote that

> "the program of feminism is not one in which we might assume a common set of premises and then proceed to build in logical fashion a program from those premises. Instead, this is a movement that moves forward precisely by bringing critical attention to bear on its premises in an effort to become more clear about what it means and to begin to negotiate the conflicting interpretations, the irrepressible democratic cacophony of its identity" (Butler 2004: 175).

In short, there is no 'feminism', rather a multiplicity of feminsims which draw from each other in conflicting ways. They share a political commitment to change the world with a scientific commitment to produce knowledge (theory, methodology and methods) which serves this political aim. This contribution aimed to show how the paradigm within which one speaks influences the elements of respondents' stories to which one is sensitive, and the conclusions one reaches. This demonstration focused on discussing dominating paradigms within contemporary feminist scholarship and used research on employment relationships in domestic services provided by migrant workers) to illustrate how these paradigms manifest in a concrete area of study.

The contribution started with a proposal for a new way of making sense of the diversity within feminist theory, through distinguishing between modern and postmodern feminist approaches. Modern approaches were here represented by the materialist paradigm, while poststructuralist feminism has been chosen as the most salient manifestation of postmodernity in feminist theory. After discussing core tenets of each approach, the contribution confronted the criticisms that proponents of each paradigm addressed to the 'opposing' party. Subsequently, the paper examined the sociological literature on migrant domestic services, with the aim of making explicit the paradigm represented by different strands of this literature. The final part drew on the results of my own research on personalization processes at work in MDS. In this final part, I showed that, rather than representing incompatible approaches, the tenets of modern and postmodern feminisms complete each other to show a fuller image of the living and working conditions of migrant domestic workers.

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