The welfare orientations of immigrant domestic workers in Greece

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THE WELFARE ORIENTATIONS OF IMMIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS IN GREECE

ABSTRACT

The language of welfare reflects not only life chances and redistributive practices that reduce income risks, but also occupational norms *and* welfare orientations. *The article examines the case of immigrant domestic workers and how they relate to state welfare services. Through a reappraisal of the social significance of their job, it is argued that women workers are not only pushed but also pulled by a rising work culture which establishes a life into the margins of state welfare.*[1] *The findings indicate that after a period of at least ten years in Greece and despite their legal entry or periodic legalisation in the country, their stable employment and their initial attempts to register with state welfare agencies, domestic workers are gradually distancing themselves from formal social insurance schemes. In addition to the existing analyses on the subject, it is suggested here that apart from work conditions, job customs and values seem also to reinforce* welfare orientations *that are more in line with paternalistic, informal and personality-based understandings and strategies of care.*

Keywords: *domestic workers, welfare orientations, informal care*

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INTRODUCTION: DEFINING THE PROBLEM

In principle it is fairly easy to understand why lacking resources, labour or citizenship rights, may push immigrant women domestic workers into the margins of state welfare. There is, however, the question of what life in the margins may mean for the workers' understandings of welfare. In dealing with such a question, Sociology of Work and of Migration has made several theoretical and empirical advances in our understanding of how being in the *"border lines"* of the labour market has a negative spiral effect on the workers' access and use of formal provisions. Several areas of concern relate the rising codes of informal welfare practices, to the habits and social expectations women acquire through their encounters with the host society and the job they perform (Watson, 2001; Beynon and Glavanis, 1999; Brochmann and Hamar, 1999; Morris, 1994). In Greece, social research has showed that it is impossible to underestimate the prospects and the ways workers are thinking and acting towards social insurance and other forms of welfare. Through the presentation and analysis followed in three consecutive research analyses (i.e. Psimmenos, 2007; Psimmenos and Skamnakis, 2008; Psimmenos, 2010) it has so far been argued that objective and subjective parameters inhibit immigrant domestic workers' welfare chances. Having examined so far the social mechanisms, the facets and the stages involved in the making of welfare marginality, the question remains of how inequalities and expectations about welfare persist, especially when work conditions change. Seen from the side of immigrant domestic workers, one is almost pulled to identify welfare problems with various factors. Job experiences and welfare prospects seem to be intertangled shaping both moral and social relations women have with welfare state agencies. Both constitute a reasonable good proxy by which to measure not only the existing limits, but also the motives required to reinstate domestic workers' state welfare options (Lindbeckm 1994). In trying to understand this complex relation between domestic work and welfare marginality[2] (WF) it is worth considering the following case.

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2. Marginality is usually defined in normative, resource based and personal conditions. In relation to the *first*, individuals or groups of people don't participate to what according to norms are being expected to participate. The *second*, examines all those material conditions limiting *access* to different rights and goods. The *third*, refers to personal capacities (physical or mental) and personal *motives* that one should posses in order to follow the expected social behaviour, see also Germani G. (1980) and Moller I. (1997). *Welfare Marginalisation* (WF) refers to a life condition that is barred from state welfare goods and services and is in opposition to formal care expectations (see, also, Psimmenos, 2007).

Olga (age 48) from Gjirokaster of Albania, is married with two daughters and has more than twenty years of residence in Greece working as a domestic worker in private households. Olga feels that her distance from state agencies grew out of both work conditions, and the way life is ordered by an unstable immigration status. Poverty, although always near, was not the main problem concerning her social security contributions. Instead, lacking citizenship rights and having temporal work permit, the unwillingness of her employers to register her with the labour office and sharing the days' work between different employers, have all had a significant turn against state welfare. In addition, the range of the tasks performed, the irregular pays, the hours worked and the screening devices and schemes used by the welfare agencies, have played a major role in her social insurance marginality. But, as she explained in her interview, this is only part of her story.

Initially, the job was seen as a way to "earn" her work permit and as an extra income to help her family stay together. With the passage of time, she became more and more involved with the job, the life of employers, and the rules and norms of the particular labour market. After a couple of years, her ways of living and her life expectations changed. Both became intricately interwoven with the social bonds and customs developed at the job environment. Over the years she stayed longer at the work place, learnt to care more about her employers, and even charged less for her services. More importantly, however, she started running her personal and family affairs according to her job expectations. The latter became associated less with immigration status, income returns and to a larger extend with social gratifications derived from the occasional gifts given by employers, and from the *"freedoms"* of the informal economic activity. At the beginning of her employment *"career"* in Greece Olga thought of social insurance as being necessary and crucially dependent upon her immigration status and employment conditions. However, after several years in the domestic services, social insurance was more or less perceived as a matter of personal choice. The great uncertainties of life regarding social protection gradually led Olga to opt for the hidden merits of casual work and to invest substantially on how best to ensure the continuation and extension of her private informal networks of social protection.

In actual terms and in the technical jargon of welfare agencies, cases like Olga constitute examples of informal labour and of unqualified applications for state assistance. For the workers themselves though, informality is a condition of life necessary in the market of domestic services. Such a condition almost leads them to opt-out of state contributions and

instead to concentrate their effort and resources on alternative care chains. Therefore the question that arises is to what extent the incentives and use of state social security are shaped by the job that is performed. This issue runs short of established or mainstream views which consider welfare marginality to be either an issue relating to system administration and the distribution of resources or an issue relating to immigrants' legality, abilities and cultural norms.

Thus brushing away questions like that of *agency* and of the social and moral interaction between workers and the economy (Psimmenos, 2007; Therborn, 2006) traditional understandings dominate the debate of welfare marginality. In the past, throughout the period of the unquestioned rule of social services, sociological and social policy enquiries concentrated more on the functions and operations of the welfare system. The aim was both to produce a more efficient, in organisational terms, system of state provisions and to combat anti-social behaviours, through the socialisation of the individual or of the groups of people in question (Gans, 1995). Ironically enough, despite the crumbling of the centralised welfare system, the failure in efficiency and the persistence of the social problems, the spirit of the old thought remains almost intact. We still look for answers concerning welfare marginality in both the moral sphere of the individual and in the ways the system of state welfare is administered (Burney, 2005; Hartman, 2005; Roche and Berkel, 1997).

On the other hand, critiques on the nature and functions of the welfare services in Capitalism have for long offered interpretations of the unequal distribution of resources, of class hegemony and of the role of social work in reproducing and maintaining the order of immigrants' social stratification (Byrne, 1999; Cohen, 1985; Ehrenreich, 2008). For radical thinkers the question of welfare marginalisation as all laymen and specialists to their regret have come to understand, include almost all aspects of life except the occupation and how it does shape views about life (Muehlberger, 2007; Vettori, 2007). On the whole, analyses have identified the problem of marginality as being produced either by the lack of income, labour rights, and/or by the nature of capitalist welfare state. In actual fact, few would challenge the view or doubt that welfare prospects are not determined by people's class, gender or ethnic opportunities to life. Nevertheless, these opportunities are not only limiting people's access to welfare but also welfare motives and expectations.

With this in mind, it is necessary to recall the fact that the fastest growing occupations in Europe and the U.S. in the decade from 1997 until today

(Thompson and Warhurst, 1992), include jobs which are low-pay/status, and mostly uninsured. Personal services are constituting the new *"industrial"* endeavour. In studying these, a number of scholars (Anderson, 2000; Campani, 2003; Edgar at al., 2004,) have pushed further the debate on how social divisions destabilise immigrant women's bargain powers and limit opportunities and welfare incentives (Brown, 1997; Hochschild, 2003; Mingione, 1996; Zeitlin and Trubek, 2003). Under the rubric of domestic work especially immigrant women are exposed to employment-generating activities that do not guarantee safety. In particular they do not guarantee: the reduction of income risk, the availability or access to income subsidies in the form of health care, housing, child care, education etc., and more importantly the mitigation of *moral hazards* stemming in the first instance by precarious employment and the social dependencies it produces (Breckner et al., 1999; Kelson and De Laet, 1999; Kofman et al., 2000; Moore and Pinderhudges, 1993). On pragmatic grounds however, those risks and limitations of state welfare affect also workers confidence insofar their social security contributions (Hochschild and Ehrenreich, 2004; Moras, 2008; Parrenas, 2001). For immigrant women income and employment fluctuations, push further to supplement state welfare losses with uninsured work and informal networks of social protection.

From a number of well documented reports by the U.S. Labour Office (Mitchell, 2003; IMISWE, 2006), the UN (UNRISD, 2007; RMMRU, 2007) and from various research findings, especially on immigrant service workers (Avato et al., 2008), it becomes clear that the jobs performed have an important underside effect. This is that they strengthen precariousness and increase state welfare disincentives (see, also, Lindbeck, 1994). The problem however, is not only that people are pushed and pulled to the margins of formal agencies of care or even that non-standard regulations of welfare limit workers' abilities to maintain their state social security. Of equal concern is also the question of how domestic work shuffles the burden of responsibility onto the worker, increases gender and ethnic segregation, informal employment and deepens the trust gap between immigrant women and state agencies.

Before analysing those, two issues are necessary to recall here. *First*, from historical documents and international comparative data, it becomes clear that unlike other types of low-status, repetitive or menial jobs and collective places of production located inside the market economy, personal services and in particular domestic services are situated in the workers' understanding of self (Hardy, 1972; Lis, 1986; McIntoch, 2005; Secombe,

1993). In contrast to much celebrated discussions of the capitalist rule as an impersonal rule of organising economic relations and labour exchanges, domestic work is based on the traits and abilities of the person who is performing the job. After a while in services, as Meacham (1977) explains in an insightful manner about the English working class (1890-1914), job contents prepares subjects not only for the limits but also for the life expectations. Cleaning, ironing, cooking, child or adult minding become gradually linked with class, gender and ethnicity and are being identified as manifestations of *"inborn abilities"* as well as of expected roles in society. Nature and Nurture seem to collide, making the understanding of the rational or market-driven side of the work even more difficult to identify.

Secondly, from earlier studies on social stratification and low-status jobs, there are indications that there is a placating attitude built in time amongst workers to treat their jobs or tasks in a supervisory way, often feeling to be in charge of other personnel or as being necessary and skilful as any other worker in higher status or better jobs (Brown 1984, 1995). The usual effect of such a work ethic accommodation is the removal of negative labels and their replacement with values which evaluate or furnish domestic service in a rather attractive manner for the worker. *"Being part of the family"*, or seeing the job as an extension of *"self employment"* suited only to people with *"supervisory abilities"* or roles, usually prevents workers from questioning their employers' paternalism and work conditions (Parrenas, 2001).

THE STORY OF DOMESTIC WORKERS' WELFARE IN GREECE

Greece has approximately more than one million immigrants (Baldwin-Edwards, 2005; Kanellopoulos et al., 2009), the majority of which are occupied in various personal services, and are not insured by state welfare organisations (Petronoti and Zarkia, 1998; Allipranti and Gazon, 2005; Sakellis and Spyropoulos, 2007). Those workers who are insured, are considered by the welfare system agencies a liability because they claim more than what their actual contributions permit or because they stretch personnel resources to their limits (EKKE, 2005). Either ways there is a sense that the relationship between immigrant workers and welfare agencies is problematic (Psimmenos, 2006; Rombolis et al., 2007). For the rest of the immigrant force, access to various forms of social security is denied on the basis both of their undocumented immigration status and their unregistered employment (Psimmenos, 2007; Rombolis, 2007; Vassilikou, 2007, 2010).

In the case of the majority of immigrant women, sixty percent of which are in domestic services (EKKE, 2005; Alipranti, 2007; Tastsoglou and Hadjiconstanzi, 2003), the problem of social insurance and social security in general, is more than active. Looking purely at the options available for these women workers, under the existing statutory social insurance system, one concludes that these are minimal or almost nill. Formally speaking, a large segment of the above population is being cut off from the welfare system due to their unauthorised entry into the country, whilst in regard to those who have attained all necessary documents for residence and employment, the volume of income contributions necessary for social insurance does not usually qualify them for either a pension or income subsidies like health, child care etc. Furthermore, informal hiring practices, temporary employment and work share between different employers, subcontracting and the substantial difficulties workers have in the understanding of bureaucratic rules makes matters worse.

It is however questionable whether overriding technical barriers would lead to the use of social insurance benefits by domestic workers. Despite social policy efforts to mitigate domestic workers' welfare marginality, job or labour market induced risks and the moral hazards involved undermine both workers' incentives and actions towards state social insurance. From early case studies on immigration and on the work immigrants do in Greece, it is clear that the work environment has more to say about immigrant women's welfare opportunities and expectations. In some cases women workers seem, due to the conditions of work, to become unable both to bargain their position in the labour market and also to seek state welfare protection (Anderson and Phizacklea, 1997; Kassimati, 1991; Lazaridis, 2000; Lazaridis and Psimmenos, 2000; Psimmenos, 1995).

In referring to the job environment and the organisational values of domestic work, a great deal of fairly recent research in Greece (Kampouri, 2007; Kassimati and Moussourou, 2007; Papataxiarhis et al., 2008; Psimmenos and Skamnakis, 2008; Thanopoulou, 2007; Vassilikou, 2007a, 2007b, 2010; Petronoti, 2003) suggests that welfare is determined by both objective (i.e. material) and subjective (i.e. cultural) variables. The research studies raise valuable questions about how workers' welfare understandings and practices, with the passage of time, become part of the work and employment regimes. The findings show that demarcation lines between personal needs and job requirements become blurred and that social ties with employers mystify further workers' priorities and values concerning welfare. One such *"value"* relates to domestic workers' understanding of

unregistered and uninsured employment. At first glance evidence from interviews confirms the general idea that informal work is not acceptable but nevertheless necessary for the survival of immigrant women. However, a more cautious interpretation of the data is more than necessary, and this is due to the complex composition of the workforce as well as due to the social and cultural influences non-insured work has on workers.

Existing research suggests that not all immigrant women share similar or same information, ideas, aims, and relationships at the job and certainly they view uninsured work differently. A variety of cultural backgrounds, immigration status (i.e., documented/undocumented) as well differences in the way workers engage with the economy, put in question an overall understanding of informal work. Furthermore, common or lay interpretations of uninsured work usually ignores the personal influences a job and its labour market intermediaries have on workers (i.e., job centres, household employers, kinship, state bureaucracy, etc). These are believed responsible for producing *"weak-ties"* with social insurance agencies. Given the objective and subjective parameters involved and the variety of advantages attributed to uninsured work by workers themselves, it comes as no surprise that workers explore alternative methods of care, of job seeking and of social prosperity in Greece (Lazarescu, 2010; Stratigaki and Vaiou, 2007). Most of the above would be otherwise unavailable in conditions of impersonal and state-regulated labour market.

METHODOLOGY

The *Pythagoras* research project on Gender and Migration (funded by the Greek State) was launched in 2004 by the Centre of Social Morphology and Social Policy, and was completed in 2007. Amongst other topics (i.e. employment conditions, everyday life structure, inter-generation relations) it sought to investigate immigrant women domestic workers access to and use of public welfare services in Greece. Apart from its qualitative direction the added value of the present study in relation to past studies lies in three distinct kinds of comparative inquiry. These refer to the *objective* and *subjective* elements involved in the welfare of immigrant women domestic works, the *dynamic relation* between the two, and the actual *groups* involved in the *formation* of welfare access and use of services. The *first* refers to the actual social and economic conditions affecting women's welfare and their perceptions, motives and practices concerning welfare. The *second* relates with women's past experiences of welfare (i.e. both in home

and host country) how objective and subjective factors interrelate, and how both the state welfare responds to domestic workers and women respond to agencies and provisions. The *third*, pertains to the target groups in the study, and the innovation here lies in the understanding that different types of workers and services create a variety of obstacles or barriers to welfare. Insofar as the analysis in this article is concerned, two groups were chosen (i.e. Albanian live-out and Ukrainian live-in workers) according to their immigration status, duration in Greece, type of work and employment and social background (2001 census). The study also concentrated on three types of services identified here as key variables of women's inclusion into formal welfare (i.e. *social insurance, hospital, and pre-school care*).

Apart from their availability and willingness to respond to the research, the criteria for the selection of workers interviewees were based on: their documented visa permits, their duration in the job (at least ten years), their work and employment duties and their relationship with the above mention three types of service variables. The sample (not statistical) of interviewees was drawn through a snowball technique using: existing lists of national, work distribution and residential location in Athens (i.e. based on 2001 census, welfare and household data), key informers, social networks and immigrant associations (i.e. trade unions, church registrars etc).

The research team conducted ten pilot and fifty in-depth interviews, of which eight were not included in the analysis due either to technical difficulties or to sudden conclusion. Each interview consisted of two one-hour sessions: one which covered life in the home and host country and one which clarified further the experiences of work and of migration in Greece. In developing the interview structure the emphasis was placed on four main thematic areas. These, in short, covered issues relating to: the demographic and social characteristics of women, their employment history, and their current work conditions and tasks performed, their welfare needs and practices, and finally attitudinal issues combining workers' welfare and job expectations and prospects in Greece. The greater part of the semi-structured interviews was designed in such a way so as to allow further comparability both between home, early and late experiences of work and welfare in Greece and between variations in employment and social filiations. Where appropriate, the research team using additional information from employers, agencies or social networks, asked questions which compared workers' early and late relationship with the various welfare agencies.

RESULTS: MORAL HAZARDS AND STATE WELFARE
DISINCENTIVES

Recent discussions on precarious work and on welfare amongst immigrants (Maroukis, 2010; Psimmenos, 2010), have focused on the undesirable effects of an occupation on workers' incentives to register, even if technically they could, with the state welfare system. Within the above framework, the recently concluded (2008) research project on the access and use of welfare services by Albanian live-out and Ukrainian live-in domestic workers (see Psimmenos and Skamnakis, 2008) casts further light on the above subject.

Qualitative survey data seems to support the view that workers' welfare depends on a number of factors, one of which relates to work conditions whilst another to social motives and expectations. The most consistently appearing value in the project was workers' gradual loss of interest in state welfare provisions. However, what drew the attention of the research team, was the fact that the more Albanian and Ukrainian women became established into their jobs and the local labour market, the less interest they had in state social security provisions. This however, does not suggest that women workers were not interested in acquiring work and welfare rights from the Greek state, but that other forms of welfare become more *"attractive"*. In the case of Albanian women, multi-share employment and pay instability tended to deregulate workers' efforts to keep up with social insurance contributions. In the case of Ukrainian women the job content and the shadowy demarcation lines between labour and non-paid work or between duties, tasks and personal initiatives, seemed to further encourage social insurance irregularities.

The significance of the above mentioned objective conditions is being increasingly recognised by social scientists and welfare agencies as factors which show not only why and how immigrant women in personal services are being marginalised, but also the deficiencies of the system (Mitchell et al., 2003). However, the limitations of the above objective conditions in the understanding of women's welfare marginalisation become evident when those are being *"interrogated"* by women domestic workers and the meanings they attach to work and state welfare services.

The research identified that in the course of employment, domestic workers adopted new welfare orientations[3] in contrast to the ones they

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3. The meanings attached by workers to their work and welfare which conditions their acts in relation to state or formal welfare agencies. In contrast to Goldthorpe, Lockwood et al. (1968)

used to have at the beginning. The fostering of such orientations became manifest on the ways women understood their jobs, their "contractual" obligations to employers and social relationships with other workers, as well as in the ways informal social insurance was perceived.

In the Greek study of domestic workers' welfare, women understood paid work in services as a necessity for their survival in the host country. In the words of an Albanian woman, domestic work is described as the only job (apart from sexual services) that immigrant women can do in Greece which also separates them from Greek workers according to the tasks they perform and the conditions they endure.

> ...I am employed as a *"pastruese nager shterign"* (cleaner) in various houses and not as a *"ridihmése shtëpiake"* (domestic helper)... (Tefta age 44, in Psimmenos and Skamnakis 2006: 132).

On the other hand, Ukrainian live-in workers defined their work more in terms of the workplace and in relation to the freedoms they lacked.

> ...[The job is like a prison] since you're locked in and you cannot open the doors, you cannot go somewhere, phone at your home... I was not feeling well, I was not feeling a human... [I was feeling a servant] this is what I was feeling a servant, a servant... (Elvira, age 50 ibid: 138).

A more positive repertoire however was offered when women were asked to appraise their present job situation.

Appreciation of shared problems with the employers, the perception of the job as an opportunity to explore inner-capabilities and as a place to acquire and master new flexible and *"cosmopolitan"* ways of living, were only some of the key themes brought up in the interviews. The majority of women identified their job as an activity which can be at some level gratifying and promising. After a ten-year experience in cleaning houses, Tefta from Albania argues that:

> ...Now after so many years in the job having the experience, I don't feel [the negative sides]. I feel quite relaxed and the employer feels me as being part of their family. I appreciate them and the same with them... I feel as if (being at work) I am out with friends... I am saying [also] that I have acquired experience [since the first day I worked]... [my employer] was

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the emphasis here is placed on the influence the occupation has on people's welfare understandings and actions, see also Brown (1993).

an older *"hand"* [experienced woman] she appreciated the family and I
have learned from her. I love her... (ibid: 234).

Another domestic worker from Albania explains a similar line of thought:

> ...[finally with all the difficulties] I like Greece. I am saying that I am a
> cleaner, OK, I work, I feel proud being working. When I go to a home
> to clean, I see the lady not as my employer but rather as a friend. I have
> made friendships with all my [employers]. When I first came I was feel-
> ing a bit ugly [about the job]... (Fatmé ibid: 233).

In addition to the above, in most of the interviews there was a pervasive
linkage between job tasks and roles at home. In contrast to their earlier un-
derstandings, workers adopted gendered views which explained why they
were suited for the job and why they had stayed in domestic services for
so long. Natural familiarity with the tasks and their ability to perform them
best, were in the interviews two recurring issues.

> ...The first year when I visited Ukraine, my friends were asking how did
> I do such a job,... every woman at the home I was doing housework, I
> cleaning, washing, ironing... every woman does such a job... (Olga, age
> 45 ibid: 139).

Similar concerns were also raised by Georgia (age 45) from Albania claim-
ing that, in addition to the above, her *"employer resembles a traditional
Albanian housewife"*. By contrast to how she viewed her work when she
first came to Greece, Georgia felt that because of her employer her job ap-
peared more appealing.

> ...[My own employer] had many abilities as a woman. She admired her-
> self, her children, her husband. She was a special woman for me. She
> looked like me and I think that she looked like a housewife and she re-
> sembled a little to with the Albanian women... (ibid: 146).

In theory of course little attention has been paid to the way labour segmen-
tation and assimilation to the norms and values of domestic service domi-
nates over women's perceptions of work. Recovering from the interviews
the tacit knowledge of domination and how people, in a way, see themselves
is a valuable, yet frustrating lesson to be learned. Job hierarchies however,
rested not only on gender but also on racial and ethnic categorisations. Im-
migrant women used the existing colour or ethnicity lines already drawn by

Greek society at large to justify social inequalities in the ways the domestic job was organised. In the interviews they referred to the division of tasks as an inevitable way of separating *skillfull*, *committed* and *innovative* or flexible personnel. For some Albanian workers *"Filippino women were good at following orders"* but not *"good for taking initiatives"* and on the other hand Ukrainian women considered Albanian women and immigrants from the Far-East as being less prepared to be innovative at the work place. The argument about racial or ethnic divisions, categorisations and hierarchies in the world of domestic work has had no ending. In some cases stereotypes went deeper than ethnicity and included immigrant women, who although of same origin, were nevertheless considered as being inappropriate for the job, because they were slow to adapt to the new social environment and adopt a more flexible, *"European"* or modern way of living (Psimmenos, 2007, see also Psimmenos and Kassimati, 2006a, 2006b).

WELFARE ORIENTATIONS: THE SELF

The motives and attitudes of immigrant women domestic workers towards state welfare can be summarised here as relating: *first* to the actions they initiated to enhance personality with employment and, *second*, to the niches and social networks workers become attached in order to secure solidarity at difficult times or when in desperation.

The general line of thought amongst women, showed that although at the beginning of their employment they were eager to register with social security agencies, with the passage of time, they became less interested. Part of the problem as it was revealed in the previous section, lies in how women perceived their work, their employers and other fellow workers in the domestic services. Perhaps we could also add the technical or other difficulties domestic workers experience with social security agencies. But the life of domestic workers is also affected by the ways the job itself strips them of any social endeavours, occupational mobility and long-term expectations. Instead, women experienced their ties to their jobs and their employers as a necessity and a fulfilment of a strategy that temporarily consoles their spirits and makes their stay in Greece and in the job more comfortable.

Domestic workers frequently expressed in their interviews the hazardous sides of temporariness which instead of diminishing, increased women's indifference and mistrust towards bureaucracy and any long term state regulations.

...I am doing everything. I am occupied only with house duties. I have be-
come closed. I am thinking, thinking, and I do not come [to a conclusion].
Men [instead] can go, leave home... Not that I have become worse. I have
destroyed myself, not my relationships with others. I, inside myself, what
do I feel?... (Pania, age 29, Albania in Psimmenos and Skamnakis 2000:
270).

Another interviewee explained that domestic work limits not only one's
relationships with state agencies but also the ways *"one woman looks at
herself"*.

...When you are loaded [psychologically, from work] you think nothing.
You are so tired that you want to go to bed and sleep... you have no life.
You are a zero. And you cannot look yourself at the mirror, caring your-
self... domestic work limits your actions, you don't have [the stamina]
to look at yourself, neither to give [anything] to the people that surround
you... (ibid: 159).

The majority of women remained ambivalent about their state welfare con-
tributions not only because they were occupied in an unstable work envi-
ronment, but also because they were quite concerned about whether or not
Greece will be their last destination. They found it *"easier"* not to think
of future prospects, than to do the opposite. The state of temporariness as
it was illustrated in the words of another interviewee, seemed to have ex-
hausted almost all interests in signing-up with social insurance agencies.

...[life in Greece] I don't know what dawn will bring. Now it is night. I
don't know about tomorrow. When you say that everything will be OK,
something [may happen] and I am thinking of this.... I was not like this, I
have changed. My personality has changed... (ibid:170).

One avenue however, open to women domestic workers, which was thought
to counteract employment and immigration uncertainties, was to *"invest"*,
as they referred to it, on the *"welfare of their mind"*. Although women
did not contest the importance of labour rights, they nevertheless insisted
that it is even more important to know how to cope psychologically with
domestic work. As an Ukrainian (age 43) worker explains:

...for us the Ukrainian domestic workers there is no life without having
a job, it is important that one is employed... to be here [in Greece] so far
from Ukraine, I was unemployed for four months... I was crying every

> day, I didn't know Greek, I was ready to commit suicide, when I could not speak [Greek] I was not working, *this is not a life* [Italics mine], life is not lived like this, not to work is [something] I cannot do, I working even during the summer vacations. [When my employers are not home] I have the keys, I go there and I am doing on my own at the houses, what else should I do? (ibid: 277).

The issue was addressed in different ways including how job temporariness *"occupies workers' minds"*, thus leaving *"no time for remembering"* or *"thinking of the conditions of previous life endeavours"*. As some women argued, discovering the positive sides of both the casual nature of employment and of job tasks leads one to always make *"a fresh start in life"* and to look for *"fresh sensations"* from relations. Further analysis of the interviews however, has revealed a strong linkage between the flexible or fluid nature of employment and careers. As an interesting turn, most interviewees stressed how *"life in flux"* strengthens both their autonomy at work and their skills. One interviewee suggested that being in touch with and open-minded to the unsettled nature of employment makes one not to *"feel isolated or psychological down"*. In this way:

> ...we help our own selves, our strength, our will. But we must always rely on our backs, on our hands, on our ways of thinking... (ibid: 241).

Moving from employer to employer or from one place to another, certainly is a factor of social insecurity. State welfare provision could play a significant role in limiting at least part of this insecurity. Nevertheless, as the majority of women argued, coming to terms with the job and its risks, makes life more difficult or even unpleasant at times, but also quite interesting. Even those women who felt insecure insisted that small steps at a time of personal initiative *"may do wonders"*. One woman obtained particular joy from investing time and effort in her work place to improve her language skills, whilst another tried to consume better products to secure good health, and yet another enjoyed bringing into her job routine, parts of her culture and social upbringing. Writing poems, singing, and even explaining to employers how life was at home meant a lot for keeping up with domestic work. The repertoire of *working with the self* is endless. But the constantly repeated refrain amongst domestic workers, that of changing the way one looks at domestic work, remains central in almost all of the interviews.

...[I am working at domestic work] in order to meet people, to be for a little out of my home, to see something new [more than the things I know], because at home you cannot do anything else. [It helps] also with my financial situation... Yes, even that... Working, for me, means nothing special, it simply helps my finances and to speak with people... (ibid: 236).

WELFARE NETWORKS

In most cases of Albanian live-out and live-in Ukrainian domestic workers, the presence of family in Greece provided some form of security against the threats of undocumented and uninsured employment. However, kin members did not relieve workers of the need to search for alternative means of social insurance, one of which is their reliance on the assistance employers provided at hard times. Most often women casted their employers for the role, usually reserved for state welfare agencies of providing assistance and social counceling. Thus, the employers were assigned a role which far exceeded that of offering financial help to include advising on family, religious and public authority issues. Good employers in this sense were expected by workers to act as in-between contacts with the medical or hospital, police, school and local administration officers. Whether in good or not so good financial position, women thought that the final arbiter to their social security is the employer.

An Albanian worker explained in her interview that if it was not for her employers her two young kids would not have any chance to be registered at the local day care centre and she would still have to look for private means to keep her two daughters in safety while she was at work. Similar experiences were reported by live-in women domestic workers when they had experienced problems with the day care of their own children. The president (2008) of the Ukrainian society in Greece *"The Land of Storks"*, has argued that:

...The majority of women [live-in domestic workers] become acquainted with Greeks with our own [Ukrainian] men who are also *strangers* to them, those who are usually called *boyfriends* you see. He is a boyfriend and he provides care. At least till the child is at the age for day care centre. Otherwise she is unable, do you understand? Differently [the worker] asks for employment at a home where the old lady accepts the child too. It is extremely difficult to have a child here [in Greece] and not to have

any assistance. It is tragic. I have had my own experience and I know what another goes through [in order] to raise her child... [my own child] is not in the streets and I found the *"mediators"* [meaning philanthropists, employers, boyfriends etc] to help me. But even those may not find ways [for child protection]. [In those circumstances] we go outside a church, at the traffic lights [asking for help]. In other words, in desperation or you return back... (Psimmenos and Skamnakis, 2008: 295).

Apart from *"boyfriends"* and employers some Ukrainian women have resorted for help to political parties and religious philanthropic informal networks. As Roxana (age 44) from Ukraine explains in her interview:

...I have found [the boarding school] through a friend of mine from the Political Party... I don't differentiate the parties. I am neutral. Whoever helps me is good for me. There are no political parties for us [domestic workers]. [My friend] told me "my mother knows a social worker and she knows an institution. Do you want to take her there in order to stand a little bit on your own?". And I went. They asked me [there] to sign declaring that *"I leave my daughter* [five years of age] *for whatever it takes"*. That is what they told me. *For whatever it takes, as long as it takes*. The institution was private, run by an ecclesiastical agency. But even the mayor was member [of the council]... Old grannies were visiting the place, those who paid for the welfare of children... [after a year and a half] I went to take my child back and the director told me "Ah, you will regret it. Leave the child. I am going to pay for [the child's] English lessons tutorials for education [in general] and this and the other"... (ibid: 294).

If it was desperation that drove domestic workers to various quasi-religious philanthropic institution, it was sheer interest to socialize and escape from the routine of work that drove other women workers to employers and ethnic societies. In relation to ethnic societies, these offered a chance not only to discuss problems with other women workers, and try to solve them through the establishment of informal care chains, (as in times of financial hardship or whenever medical problems occurred), but also the possibility to forget their troublesome life in Greece. As a Ukrainian woman remarked *"these societies are there mostly to enable me to forget or to remember again who I am"*. For Dina (age 43) from Albania, her ways to socialize and *"escape"* from the perils brought by immigration and domestic work were discovered inside her job arguing that:

> ...[with domestic work] I meet people, they have parties,... it is not bad
> to meet [new] people... a human must have people not to be alone. Be-
> cause whatever happens you will call [someone]. Who should I call, my
> mother? She is far away... (ibid: 236).

The prevalence, however, of such ideas was not widely shared. The ma-
jority of domestic workers interviewed by the research team of Panteion
University, retained a negative idea about societies and other non-govern-
mental associations. Some were quite reserved about being involved with
issues and organisations other than their own families and the immediate
problems they faced at work. Linda (age 27) from Albania argued that:

> ...[in relation to ethnic or immigrant societies] I don't know whether or
> not they exist. Let me tell you something: I look after my family and I
> also care for my two brothers.... My father used to tell me continuously,
> to be careful and not to mingle with *"oats"*... (ibid: 184).

A Ukrainian worker (Oresia, age 56) rejected for much the same reasons
rejected the prospects of becoming a member of a social organisation as-
sociated either with ethnic or with immigrant issues.

> ... I don't care about any Greek, Ukrainian, Russian... [society] [What I
> care] is to return back to my home country, to my children. Yes, I want to
> return. I don't know... (ibid: 211).

Repeatedly, however, the majority of both Albanian and Ukrainian work-
ers brought the issue of social networking with the people in the houses
they have worked in. Keeping alive past or new acquaintances and *"friend-
ships"*, as women insisted in their interviews, provides both a sense of
social security and a sense of *"belongingness"* or of *"social solidarity"*.
Nataly and Nina, both from Albania, explained the importance of social
networking as follows:

> ...We are here on our own. Both here [Athens] and in Katerini [town in
> Northern Greece] I was living on my own with a child and I had nei-
> ther relatives, nor friends. We can talk to them [the employers] about our
> problems, about our worries, drink a coffee and if they can help us they
> do... (ibid: 238).
> ...I was not feeling well, she told me [the employer] you must go and have
> a medical test, she phoned the doctor and asked him to come as soon as
> possible... (ibid: 275).

CONCLUSION

The article has explored domestic workers welfare orientations. In earlier essays on welfare marginality and domestic workers the argument put forward was that social insurance or other welfare barriers rise due to the occupational norms, values and prospects as well as due to a gradual distantiation of women's lives from social formal networks of care. In this article we have theorized that given all the above, immigrant domestic workers seem to develop orientations which question the social importance of welfare services and their centrality on people's lives. Given that this might be partially true and not the whole picture, the argument is not meant to deny the necessity of social insurance or welfare reforms. Rather it is important to note that welfare can no longer be understood in parochial technical terms or as administrators and various intellectual partisan traditions demand. The testimonies presented here, illuminate a further understanding of how welfare is thought by women, how and why women are being deprived of formal welfare and how dispositions make people to depart from ways of living and axioms essential for society and social policy regulation.

The analysis here has pursued further the question of what determines immigrant domestic workers' welfare in the host country. Having outlined the main objective conditions which are thought to raise obstacles in the relationship between women workers and state welfare agencies, the article suggests that occupational norms, customs and values may also add further obstacles to this relationship. Following from past analyses the development of women's motives and social expectations about their own jobs and welfare prospects, it seems that besides technical or bureaucratic limits and the unsettled nature of employment, social welfare is more social than is normally assumed by economists and administrators. Women domestic workers in their jobs rediscover notions, roles and ways of handling difficult situations in life, which replace the negative images and the humiliations associated with them arriving thus at *"new"* understandings of their economic activity. Finding a *meaning* in what they do, immigrant women through their interviews remind us of the importance of deriving a sense of purpose in life even from menial jobs, or of discovering their on alternative solidarity networks and of skills necessary for surviving into the market of domestic services.

In the language of welfare, personal motives and social expectations have a role to play, in conditioning the orientations women might follow

in order to secure what the Greek state and the labour market are unable to offer. In the course of their search for a more secure and gratifying employment and residence in Greece, domestic workers heavily invest on *"character skills"* as well as on the strengthening of filiations with employers and various informal networks of care. More than that, they seem to gradually depart from formal means of social insurance exploiting further the tacit merits or joys of an informal economy together with all its social manifestations.

Acknowledging the social impact domestic work has on workers' welfare orientations is, at least on a theoretical level, a major step forward. But from a practical point of view, social policy should probably opt for a combination of measures which contemplates in advance the risks from racial or ethnic and gender *social division* of labour, monitors and drastically increases occupational *mobility*, as well as reinforcing women's welfare *incentives*. All three factors are interrelated so that no single factor is in itself capable of solving the welfare problems that domestic workers experience.

In relation to the issue of welfare incentives, which is our concern here, one observes, from the case of Albanian and Ukrainian domestic workers, that what is missing is not a cherished responsibility either towards their selves or their employers. On the contrary, what is not present in women's life stories is an idea of social stability and of social mobility. A social insurance system which either forgets or ignores the essence or core of its existence is more likely to fail than prosper. One could easily argue that dilemmas of this kind are not scarce amongst other occupational groups. In regard, however, to domestic workers, the sense of duty, responsibility and solidarity seems to be shared more than in other groups with employers and a paternalistic and speculative way of economic and cultural living. In some cases it is even difficult to separate workers' from employers' interests and welfare prospects. It is at this level that we come nearest to the vicious circle of welfare marginalisation. Being cut off from the welfare system promotes a way of living and an understanding which motivates one to stay out of it. The *"sanctioning"* of informal and dependent upon employers forms of care develops into a *career* in Greece.

Nevertheless, in the meantime one could opt for measures which: *first*, increase women's residential *stability* in the country and confidence in pension schemes, *second*, create conditions for private ownership. Last but not least, society needs to reform the system of employment.

For Albanian and Ukrainian women welfare incentives may increase if they are given the opportunity to claim long duration permits, citizenship

rights and family allowances for themselves and kin members. Confidence on social insurance may also increase if pensions are guaranteed for the individual and are transferable to family members in need. In the case of Ukrainian women, separation from the family is crucial, therefore attention should be given to family re-unification.

In addition, private ownership is missing from women's life-stories. It would be irrational to expect the opposite but it would also be a mistake to think that it is only because of poverty or income shortages and not also because of a lack of motivation. Albanian men workers who feel more secure in the country have utilised this propensity to buy goods and land property (i.e. cars, plots of land, houses, etc.). Finally employment conditions are certainly a problem. An increased effort to regulate domestic work may lead to unemployment and/or to an increase of informality. Instead the state should introduce schemes for retraining and for providing attractive employment in other jobs. Therefore the intention should be to transfer at least care services from household back to the state and the market place. To this end the state should mobilise supplementary benefits and other non-income related benefits in order to attract the greatest possible number of women.

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