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EMPLOYERS OF MIGRANT WOMEN DOMESTIC WORKERS FROM ALBANIA AND UKRAINE

ABSTRACT

The views of employers of migrant women domestic workers from Albania and Ukraine who are employed either to care for elderly people or to assist with the domestic chores some days per month or week are focused on: how to locate the workforce, the importance of the nationality of these domestic workers for the employers, their work content and employment conditions, the relationship between employers and employees and on the employers' evaluation for the presence of migrants on the Greek labour market.

INTRODUCTION

The needs generated in countries at a satisfactory level of economic and social development for provision of services of a domestic work such as care of the elderly, child-minding and house-cleaning cannot be covered by the local workforce because of unwillingness to be employed in work of this nature. This leaves the field open for an influx of immigrants, chiefly women, to fulfil such needs, so much so that in fact that today one speaks of "feminization of migration" given that from 1990 onwards of the 120 million legal and illegal immigrants in the world it is estimated that around half are women.¹

These movements involve either economic migrants in search of a better life or refugees from areas afflicted by ethnic strife. The women either

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1. Ehrenreich B. and Hochschild A.E., 2003, Introduction in Ehrenreich B. and Hochschild A.E. (ed.), *Global Woman, Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy*, London, Granta Publications, p. 5.

accompany their families or take the risk of exposing themselves alone on the labour market of the host country, undertaking to perform domestic labour services unrelated to their own specific educational background – in most cases they are in possession of university qualifications – or technical competencies.

“Greek employers of migrants” is an interesting topic for research because of the paucity of examples of investigation of the views, attitudes and inclinations, or the assessments, of employers in relation to this important segment of the workforce in our country. The well-known studies that have been carried out on migrants focus on their living conditions in our country, the mechanisms for integrating them into economic and social life in Greece and their contribution to economic development.² Still less has there been adequate investigation of employers of working immigrant populations. In our specific case there are two special features that are of relevance. Firstly, those providing the employment are mostly women, who decide the terms of employment without usually being themselves those who pay the wages of the women being employed. Secondly the migrant populations in our study come from two particular countries: Albania and Ukraine. They are

2. We could cite by way of illustration the studies of the IAPASIS programme and of the sixteen papers published we mention in particular: K. Kassimati, “Immigration and integration of immigrants into Greek society”, Hellenic Social Policy Association, Gutenberg, pp. 353-411 (in Greek), I. Psimmenos, “Immigration control and informal discrimination policies: the role of the Social Services”, in K. Kassimati (ed.), 2003, *Immigration Policies and Strategies for Integration. The Case of the Albanians and Polish Migrants*, KEKMOKOP-Gutenberg, pp. 195-222 (in Greek). I. Psimmenos and K. Kassimati, 2003, “Immigration control pathways: Organizational culture and work values of Greek Welfare Officers”, in the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 29, no 2, pp. 337-372. I. Psimmenos and K. Kassimati, 2006, “Albanian and Polish undocumented workers’ life-stories: migration paths, tactics and identities in Greece”, in F. Düvel, *Illegal Immigration in Europe beyond Control?*, Palgrave Macmillan Editions, pp. 138-170. I. Psimmenos and K. Kassimati, “Polish workers and flexible service work”, in A. Triantafyllidou (ed.), 2006, *Contemporary Polish Migration in Europe: Complex Patterns of Movement and Settlement*, The Edwin Melen Press U.K., pp. 291-319. Lazaridis G. and I. Psimmenos, 2000 “Migrant flows from Albania to Greece. Economic, social and spatial exclusion”, in King R. et al. (eds), *Eldorado or Fortress?*, London, Macmillan, pp. 170-186. K. Kassimati and L. Moussourou, 2007, *Gender and Migration, Vol. I, Theoretical Aspects and Empirical Explorations*, KEKMOKOP – Gutenberg (in Greek). H. Kambouri, 2007, *Gender and Migration, Vol. II, The Everyday Life of Migrant Women from Albania and Ukraine*, KEKMOKOP – Gutenberg (in Greek). M. Thanopoulou, 2007, *Gender and Migration, Vol. III, Intergenerational and Gender Relations in Albanian Migrant Families*, KEKMOKOP – Gutenberg (in Greek).

exclusively women and work as domestic workers in Greece, specifically in child-minding, care of the elderly and house-cleaning. These working women, apart from those who are live-ins, are not employed on a full-time basis but alternate between employers, usually working in each house only one, or at most a few days a week. Given these peculiarities, our investigation of this subject using data provided by the “Pythagoras I” Gender and Migration programme, acquires particular interest and will provide useful information on the terms and conditions of employment of migrant women, their mode of insertion into the labour market, the relationships generated between female employers and domestic workers, their differentiation on the basis of nationality, and the attitudes of this peculiar type of employer.

Employers of domestic workers are notably different from employers involved with entrepreneurial undertakings: there are peculiarities in the conditions of employment that make them something entirely different. The businesswoman-employer is distinctive in the following ways: there are neither stable working hours nor stable working relationships, and stable remuneration because often she will be functioning both as an employer and as an employee.³ The female employer of domestic workers has a different role: she is not – usually – herself part of the service provided by the home help and she obviously does not seek to derive profit from exercising the role of employer. What develops is a specific relationship substantially different from that between the businesswoman-employer and those she employs, with evaluation based more on such employee characteristics as trustworthiness, punctuality, honesty and less on factors such as performance and ability in provision of services.

1. EMPLOYERS AND DOMESTIC WORKERS: SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILE

(i) Employers

The research on employers of immigrant women domestic workers from Albania and Ukraine was conducted using the biographical/oral history approach.⁴ It is a method that facilitates analyses with sociological content,

3. Stratigaki M., 2005, “Enterprise and nurture: Cumulative women’s roles”, in M. Stratigaki (ed.), *Womens’ Entrepreneurship*, Gutenberg (in Greek).

4. This analysis is based on eleven interviews of employers of the Work Packet: The Employment of Migrant Women from Albania and Ukraine in Household Work (I. Sakellis) of the Program PYTHAGORAS I entitled “Employment and Gender” KEKMOKOP 2003-2006.

having the advantage of permitting in-depth investigation of subjects through a limited number of interviews, in the process uncovering the complex network of relationships that make up a social phenomenon.

With thematic axes including the way that household helps were found, their occupations, their behaviour and their evaluation of their presence in Greek society, eleven interviews were conducted with Greek employers, who - for reasons of homogeneity - were chosen to be by occupation either self-employed (e.g. doctors) or salaried employees in the public or private sector, but all graduates from tertiary educational institutions. Their ages ranged from 29 to 65, the largest number being between the ages of 45 and 55. They were married women, usually with at least one child, apart from the youngest, the 29-year-old, who was unmarried, and it was precisely their situation, i.e. being working women with children and dependent parents, that obliged them to seek help so as to cope with their daily routine, either through employment of a full-time live-in or through employing part-time help once or several times a week. To quote Soula, an employee working in an insurance company:

“As I work, I have to be away from home. Who, then, is going to do the housework? I am not there to do it myself. I don’t have time. I barely have time to cook and prepare the food in the evening – for the next day”.

On the basis of the limited sample, this morphological data indicates that employers of domestic workers are to be rated among the lower-middle class if their educational attainment and occupation are used as criteria of class affiliation, as a complex variable also serving as an indicator of economic situation. Nevertheless, it is well-known that in farming and working-class strata it is by no means uncommon for domestic workers to be employed, chiefly for looking after the elderly relatives such people have in their domestic environment. Employment of domestic workers is thus something that can be found at all levels of society.

(ii) Domestic workers

According to a field study with a specially designed questionnaire involving 300 women from Albania and Ukraine working in the Athens area⁵ (190 from Albania and 110 from Ukraine), of the immigrant domestic workers from these two countries working in Greece, the highest

5. Final Report on the “Employment and Gender” Work Packet of the PYTHAGORAS I programme entitled “The Employment of Migrant Women from Albania and Ukraine in Household Work” (I. Sakellis), 2006, pp. 14-19.

proportion, 76%, of the women from Albania, were aged between 30 and 49, while 70% of the women from Ukraine were aged between 40 and 49. We see in other words a ten-year shift in age distribution. Most were married with children (90% of those coming from Albania and 76% of those coming from Ukraine) with differences also in the number of family members: 3.5 for the sample from Albania and 1.3 for the sample from Ukraine, suggesting that the majority of women from Albania come in families while from Ukraine they come as individuals.

The educational level of the subjects in the sample was high. A significant proportion of those coming from Ukraine (46%) said that they had had a university education while 23% were graduates from technical schools of some kind and 26% had a high school diploma. Those coming from Albania were of a lower educational level, specifically with 13% having a university degree, 48% having completed senior high school and 23% junior high school.⁶

Certainly migration involves many difficulties because in the host countries – specifically in Greece – their qualifications are not readily recognized, the philosophy of the education system in the countries of the so-called Eastern bloc having been different from that in the Western world, specifically focusing on preparing the individual for an active working life⁷ and not so much on theoretical knowledge. These people were not in possession of support networks in the host country so that it was difficult for them to practise professions befitting their qualifications. The fact, moreover, that there is a high level of unemployment in Greece, particularly among native-born graduates, makes it even more difficult for migrants to be employed in work appropriate to their qualifications.

Among domestic workers, those working as live-ins are mostly engaged in looking after elderly people and to a small extent in childcare, usually – but not always – also working in house-cleaning. By contrast those working part-time for one or two days a week are employed exclusively in house cleaning.

There is thus a discrepancy between their educational qualifications and the professional roles they have taken on. In the limited sample of our investigation we encountered domestic workers who were doctors, teachers, musicians, a geologist, a translator. This shows that we are pinpointing a peculiarity that will inevitably have both positive and negative repercussions on the relations being created between employers and domestic workers.

6. See the Final Report on the “Employment and Gender” Work Packet, op.cit., pp. 14-15.

7. K. Kassimati et al., 1991, *Ponteians Immigrants from the former Soviet Union: Economic and Social Integration*, KEKMOKOP, pp. 149-155.

The employers themselves note this discrepancy. Maria, a literature graduate who employs Tina from Ukraine, says:

“Tina had a previous life. She studied to be a doctor. Her dreams were not fulfilled. She came here and started from nothing to pay off her debts and help her family. Sometimes this comes out and she says: ‘I am not a servant. I am a doctor and I just happened to come here to do this work’.”

The high educational level of the domestic workers is sometimes detrimental because, in the words of the employer herself:

“I didn’t treat her as a servant who had to look after grandmother. Just my saying that such-and-such had to be done for grandmother was enough to make her think that she, the doctor, should be deciding, not me”.

At other times it appears to make it easier for them to adjust to our society. In the words of Youli, a sociologist also employing a woman from Ukraine.

“I think that she is a geologist. It is obvious that she is educated from the way she talks, from her behaviour, her breeding. You see that she has good manners. She reads a lot and keeps herself informed”.

Obviously the high educational level, for the most part, of the domestic workers, signifies a new proletarianization of this workforce, because they had the prerequisites to practise professions of high social prestige. If we compare them to the Greek emigrants to Western Europe in the postwar period we can see that the latter were already proletarianized, originating from farming and working strata of the population, with a low educational level and without specialized technical skills, so that in their host countries they performed unskilled labour with bad working conditions and low pay.⁸

2. HOW DOMESTIC WORKERS ARE FOUND

Households needing domestic services, such as looking after old people, house cleaning or child care, use a number of different methods for contacting prospective employees. Two methods are most prevalent:

8. From data on Greek migrants in Germany it emerges that between 70% and 90% have only primary education and between 6% and 13% are illiterate. Between 1.5 and 2% have received a technical education. See K. Kassimati, 1981, “Trends in post-war European internal migration”, in *Review of the European Communities*, volumes 2-3, p. 390 (in Greek).

- (i) Searching via special agencies established in migrant host countries. These agencies handle this section of the workforce and indeed specialize in male and female migrants from particular countries because there is a racial hierarchy and an element of national prejudice in customer preferences. As Anderson⁹ notes:

“Greek employers and agencies tend to frown upon Albanians and Ukrainians”.

In Greece the agencies initially established handled workers from the Philippines, other Asian countries and Africa. The common element with these workers was therefore their non-“white” colour. However, after 1990 when the mass influx got under way of migrants from neighbouring countries and the countries of the then “existing socialism”, similar agencies handled workers from these countries.

These agencies have at their disposal a wide range of facilities for satisfying customer requirements as regards the particular specifications they have in mind and the money they are prepared to spend. Success in finding domestic workers from this source is a function of the seriousness and reliability of the agency and of clarity in the formulation of the required specifications by the customers, and of the agreements they conclude.

This method for finding domestic workers applies first and foremost to working women who are prepared to live in or to undertake a full-time work schedule at the house where they will work. Their work involves house cleaning and/or looking after elderly people or children.

- (ii) Searching via one’s social network by means of introductions, preferably from other employers. In the worlds of Eleni, employer of an Albanian woman:

“We find them by word of mouth, but always from employers and never from migrants”.

In this type of case the migrant women are usually employed part-time – once a week or more – without of course excluding the possibility that the woman may be employed on a live-in basis – and the services provided are usually confined to house cleaning. The specifications are generally more flexible, hiring and firing of employees being a straightforward everyday matter.

9. Anderson B., 2003, “Just another job? The commodification of domestic labour”, in Ehrenreich B. and Hochschild A.R. (eds), op.cit., p. 109.

Nevertheless, irrespective of the way in which domestic workers are found, what plays a particularly important role is the confidence and trust which must be generated between employer and employee. The fact that in most cases employers are not at home to supervise what precisely is done by the household helps heightens the need for them to assign particular significance to the trust they can have in them, above and beyond the quality of the service they offer:

To quote Zoe, a retired airline hostess who employs a young woman from Albania:

“I found her through a friend of mine who was employing her and said she was very good and trustworthy. I was looking around at that time and I took her on and she is in fact very good. My friend had taught her the household tasks because she had had her working for her for years. The most important thing for the householder is confidence because you leave her in your house all day long and you want when you come home to find everything in its place. The most important thing is for me not to steal or bring strangers into the house”.

An introduction may overshadow national prejudices because, as pointed out by Athina, a doctor who three times a week employs a domestic worker from Albania:

“She was introduced to me by a friend of mine whose judgement I trust. She told me that she was a good, upright and honourable person, and that she does her work very well. Otherwise the very fact that she was from Albania with everything that you hear would have been an inhibiting factor . If someone like her but from another country: a Pole or even a Greek, had been introduced to me, who was also better, I would have preferred it. I wouldn’t have had any objection”.

3. PREFERENCE FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS ON THE BASIS OF NATIONALITY

There is a correlation between the nationality of the domestic worker and the trust that is considered a necessary prerequisite for problem-free co-existence between employers and employees – particularly live-ins. As indicated, there are prejudices against those coming from Albania and Ukraine but working women of these nationalities comprise a significant proportion of those in the labour market because from a purely arithmetical

viewpoint there are many more of them in the country. Our research points to a variety of viewpoints among employers. One category of employer claims to have no particular preference on the basis of nationality because, as asserted by the literature teacher Maria:

“I don’t have any preference for one over another. A person can be good or bad quite irrespective of his or her nationality”.

Attention is thus focused on individual features, personality and moral qualities without any emphasis on the collective characteristics associated with individuals of a particular nationality.

Another category of employer makes its choices on the basis of the collective characteristics of nationality and what has been registered as predominant ideology in our social unconscious. The image of those coming from Albania is not, in general, good, as maintained by Soula, who works in a private-sector company and employs a Ukrainian woman once a week to clean her house:

“She is very nice and I most definitely prefer her to an Albanian. I think they are more responsible. Another two friends of mine who have domestic worker from Ukraine see them as being very good”.

And Eugenia, who is self-employed and has a Ukrainian woman working for her, adds:

“Previously I had women from Albania and Bulgaria: generally they weren’t good at their jobs. When I leave the house and I can’t keep an eye on them I don’t find the house clean when I come back. They tend to be irresponsible”.

Attitudes against women coming from Albania are generally harsher than those against those coming from Ukraine or other countries. Nevertheless, there are exceptions. As Georgia indicates:

“I quite like the Albanians, not only for personal reasons – because I trust Athina who works in my house and whom I know – but as a reaction against the way people here in Greece speak worse about Albanians than anyone else. It is going too far, what people say about the Albanians. I see it around me from my own friends and acquaintances”.

An interesting contrast is drawn by Greek female employers between Greek and foreign domestic worker. By common consent they prefer foreigners, and that for a number of reasons, one of them being the difficulty,

indeed impossibility of finding a Greek woman today. Soula, employee of an insurance company and employer of a Ukrainian woman, explains:

“It isn’t easy today to find a Greek woman. I see this from the people I know. One friend of mine had a Greek woman for eighteen years. She paid her well, with the bonuses and leave that she gave her. But despite all this the woman didn’t show herself to be of good character. My friend sees the difference now that she has a Ukrainian. The Greek woman was always demanding this and that and her behaviour was bad. Today my friend wonders how it was possible that she kept her on for eighteen years. Of course there are good Greek women, but mostly they aren’t”.

Maria, a teacher, gives her account of Greek domestic workers and why she prefers not to employ them:

“No, no, I have thought about it. I was afraid that the Greek woman would be sure to have her own people and her own house here. If I don’t know her well and she isn’t recommended by a relative of mine or by a person very much in my confidence and if I don’t warm to her myself I’m afraid that she would slowly but surely empty my house and everything would end up in her own house”.

But the preference for migrant women over Greeks is not explicable only by the worries evoked by this teacher. In the background, albeit only implicitly, is the notion that the demands of migrant women are modest – often they do not require even insurance cover, because they need work and they have no support networks – particularly in the initial period when their presence in Greece is illegal – to back any assertion of their rights as workers. They thus comprise an attractive workforce, which however bears all the hallmarks of extreme proletarianization. A number of employers mentioned that they do not pay the insurance contributions for domestic workers who work one or two days a week housecleaning and so have more than one employer.

Soula, who works in an insurance company, does not mince matters:

“Greeks are more expensive. When you want quality work you take a Greek woman, but you will pay her more”.

Greek female employers’ preferences in domestic workers mostly reflect racist conceptions. Women from Albania can find houses to work in because the need is urgent and the numbers coming from Albania large. But the climate in society as a whole is highly charged and prejudiced. It has emerged

from numerous empirical studies that 3/5 of those questioned consider that racism, particularly against Albanians, is predominant in Greek society. Given the various transgressions to which they are prone, Albanians are charged with anti-social behaviour.¹⁰

4. WORK CONTENT AND EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS OF DOMESTIC WORKERS

There are essentially two poles around which the work of domestic workers revolves.

- (i) Of those who live in, the overwhelming majority are engaged in looking after individuals, mostly old people, in need of support and care. There are, secondarily, some live-in domestic workers who have been appointed to keep the house clean, particularly if there are children and the mother is working.

Migrant women from neighbouring Balkan countries and from the countries of Eastern Europe make a substantial contribution to Greek society, undertaking the care of elderly people unable to look after themselves who would otherwise have to be committed to old people's homes or institutions for the incurably ill, with all the negative consequences life in such institutions would entail for them. In their familiar environment their lives are more human, even in this – its most difficult – phase. It is for this reason that the presence of migrants is seen as being particularly useful and important. Employer requirements are more narrowly focused on maintaining such good relations as they can achieve with those providing the care, treating them well and cultivating the confidence that is a necessary prerequisite for having them looking after loved ones. An important role is also played by knowledge of the Greek language for purposes of communicating and conversing with the people in their charge, by their graciousness of their behaviour towards them and by the delicacy with which they treat them whenever it becomes necessary to move them or otherwise tend to their needs. The employer Youli mentions that the domestic worker she has from Albania:

10. Kassimati K., 2006, "Integration of Albanian immigrants into Greek society (from accounts by Albanians and Greeks)", in Bagavos C. and Papadopoulou D. (eds), *Migration and Integration of Migrants into the Greek Community*, Gutenberg, p. 400.

“was a little awkward in her movements...she would go to put a cardigan on the old lady and as I watched her I said to myself ‘she is going to pull her arm off’”.

It is a fact that migrant domestic workers without specialized skills in or knowledge of caring for the elderly and sick, in their endeavours to find work irrespective of whether or not they are suitable for it, assume tasks they are not in a position to carry out satisfactorily. This in turn causes problems, leading to conflicts and firings.

- (ii) Of those who are not live-ins, the norm is that they are employed one or more days a week or fortnight with regular working hours, usually for house-cleaning. A characteristic feature in these cases is that for each migrant woman there is more than one employer. The employers are themselves working women, which is why they are looking for help with the housekeeping. In such circumstances conditions of employment are simplified and employee-employer relations more flexible. What is of interest is that the work undertaken should be done well. If employers are not happy it is relatively easy for them to replace their home help. The basic reason for them employing migrant women as domestic workers is the difficulty of finding Greeks to perform these tasks, but also because economically it is more advantageous given that the daily wage is lower – much lower if the migrant women do not have the legally required “papers”. Moreover employers, particularly in the second category, often do not pay insurance contributions. Non-insured labour is of course illegal, but the law is regularly circumvented, particularly with migrants, for they lack support networks and do not dare to demand their rights under Greek law. Often employers indicated that they pay the women only their daily wage, regarding it as self-evident that they would not provide insurance cover for the women. As Evanthia, a civil servant, puts it:

“I pay only the daily wage because I employ her once a week and as far as I know we don’t pay insurance for foreigners. That is after all why we choose them”.

And as Zoe declares, the amount her friends and acquaintances pay the migrant women they employ depends on “how crabby they [the employers] are”.

Clearly she is familiar with the discriminatory treatment of migrant women in terms of pay, indirectly acknowledging that enforcement of the

law and maintenance of terms of equality in employment with the Greek workforce is primarily dependent on the character and ethical sensibilities of Greek employers.

Legalization of the presence of the migrant women in Greece is a basic prerequisite for their securing better working conditions (salaries, working hours, insurance) from employers, but it is also a factor underlying a change of behaviour on the part of the domestic workers. Many employers acknowledge that after acquisition of their “papers” domestic workers begin to behave differently. They begin to demand that there be adherence to the agreed-upon working hours. Those who work part-time one or more times a week on house cleaning may not have insurance but they demand payment of their Christmas and Easter bonuses and go on holidays for one month each year. Certainly their employees admit that the migrant women’s behaviour changes once they “become legal” because they are freed from the anxiety they experience while ever their presence is illegal. They begin to feel that they can do what Greeks do. Legalization makes them more adaptable to Greek society, because, to quote Maria, the literature teacher:

“Of course an isolated, oppressed, undernourished individual is going to be unco-operative and stubborn. If you want a person or a citizen of any country to feel better you have to accord him recognition and pay him. Wouldn’t I feel better if I got a 500 euro raise? Let migrants live like human beings... Let’s get it straight that happiness in this world depends on the person next to you being happy... Your neighbour’s problem must become your problem. From the moment that the world ceases thinking like this the downhill course starts”.

Other employers declare that they are not in a position to judge because all the migrants who have worked for them have been legal so that they have no basis for comparison. And there are others too like Soula who works in a private company and says that:

“The good ones will be good as before. They don’t change: they have goodness inside them. The baddies will be bad whether or not they are here legally. And their badness will come out wherever they are: in Greece or in their own country”.

Nevertheless the more socially conscious employers can see things from the migrants’ viewpoint, perceiving the responsibility of the government for them being in Greece legally. In the words of the literature teacher Maria:

“People face huge difficulties in getting the necessary documents, with the state all the time taking more and more of their money from them. It has them continually running after bits of paper, and is constantly threatening to expel them...passports and again passports, visas and again visas, they go away and come back again. They drive them almost out of their minds”.

Zoe, who occupies a senior position in the public sector, puts it most graphically:

“The state exploits the migrants. It prolongs their status of illegality so as to keep them afraid, so as to have a reserve of cheap labour, without insurance, always anxious that they are going to have to leave, that they’ll get thrown out. The insecurity they feel forces them to accept even lower wages. If they are not enrolled in some union, in some organization where they can legally, and with a single voice, demand their rights, they get nowhere...”

The situation, then, is that employment of domestic workers is focused, for live-ins, on caring for old people, and for those working part-time for one or more days and for several employers, on house cleaning. Domestic workers work for pay generally lower than that received by Greeks, often without insurance cover. Legalization of their move to Greece is to their advantage. It is an essential factor in being able, with greater confidence, to assert their legal rights as workers.

Naturally with social justice as their criterion some employers are able to find ways around the structures of indeterminacy and fluidity (which are nevertheless expedient for them) and seek to treat their working women as individuals who have rights. But a state like the one in Greece makes life hard for them with the prevailing bureaucratic system and with the vested interests that are quite comfortable about having an easily manipulable and cheap workforce that clearly presents a number of advantages to any employer.

One aspect that was the focus for special attention was the confidence that employers had (or did not have) in migrant men or women who although working today as domestic workers nevertheless possess academic qualifications or are otherwise specialized and would be able to assume professional roles consistent with their educational level. Most interviewees asked gave favourable answers, justifying this choice in terms of the personality of the immigrant. They could trust a doctor, for example, if they

felt that he had the requisite qualifications and specialized knowledge. Maria, who is an employee with a private company gave the following answer to the question:

“Would you assign some other kind of work to a migrant woman?”

“I am not in a position to be assigning any other kind of work to my home help. But my attitude is not negative. I think that a lot of these people deserve something better. A position better than doing household work or other manual work”.

And Athina, who is a doctor, adds:

“Of course this would depend on them having made progress in fulfilling the demands of the position I was offering. I have got a pharmaceutical representative from a Bulgarian company who does her job very well. She has been in Greece for six years and when she speaks Greek she speaks better than the average Greek”.

It is positive that they are unprejudiced about the abilities of the migrant women and are willing insofar as they have qualifications to entrust them with various professional roles. We should nevertheless note that the question was hypothetical and in reality we do not know if what they say today would be implemented tomorrow in practice.

One might expect that the gender of domestic workers – they are women – would be decisive when it comes to providing services, looking after people and so on. But apparently employers are not negatively disposed to taking on men for this kind of work. The answers to the relevant question were more or less stereotyped: “I would employ a man for work in the home. It is just that so far none have come along,” one employer, Eftychia, a civil engineer, says characteristically.

“I could employ a man in cleaning. I mean I don’t insist on having a woman to do the cleaning. I would employ a man if one applied, as long as he was OK, that is to say did the work well”.

Of course here too the question is largely rhetorical since all the employers have migrant women working for them and their answers have to do with hypothetical situations and demonstrate that they are not prejudiced about gender. But the reality is that they employ women. And there was no reference to someone looking for a man and not finding one. Only one employer, Maria the literature teacher, said:

“I wouldn’t have any objection if I knew there was a man working as a nurse. And if of course he had no objection to looking after grandmother and feeding the cats. I think it is grandmother herself who would not like it. She wouldn’t be able to accept it...she would feel ashamed, for one thing”.

It thus appears that in general the employers don’t demonstrate any objection to employing men as well as women for household-type employment. But in reality they have not done so, suggesting that there is a difference between theoretical positions and practice, so that it is not easy to evaluate this attitude. We should in any case bear in mind that in our society sexist conceptions still prevail concerning professional roles. Household tasks are classified as the province of women, and the same applies to looking after people. The roles of women are defined primarily as biological reproduction and work in the home. This is what has created the stereotyped image of the woman whose activity is channelled towards satisfying the needs of others.¹¹

5. RELATIONS BETWEEN EMPLOYERS AND DOMESTIC WORKERS

Employers of domestic workers comprise a special professional category radically different, as indicated, from businesswomen employers. The type of work being dispensed necessarily brings the employers into close contact with the domestic workers, particularly if the latter live in. It is thus to be expected that special relationships will be created above and beyond professional requirements. These relationships cover a wide range of situations including attitudes of confidence, friendship, emotional identification, general or partial acceptance in its positive or negative dimension. Domestic workers, after all, become “people of the household”, communicants for problems, attitudes and dispositions concerning a variety of viewpoints on life, and of values that are adopted and behaviours manifested – by both sides. Whatever relations are created require time to become clarified. Their point of departure is normally the quality of the workplace services provided by the domestic workers, and the way they are provided. But they extend to other aspects of the personality of the domestic workers. Relations naturally require input from both sides. For the

11. Kassimati K., 1982, “The woman in employment”, in the collective work *Equality File*, Odysseas editions, p. 7 (in Greek).

employers a key point is the way the domestic workers perform their work duties. For the latter good relations are constructed within the logic of good working conditions (salaries, insurance) but also of fair treatment, consideration as more or less equal members of the family in which they work, emotional closeness and demonstrations of trust.

As the literature teacher Maria relates:

“Our relationship has gone through some rough patches but it has finally stabilized, let us say, in a collaboration in which I am indulgent on things that have to do with cleaning and some responsibilities where she should organize herself better. I am indulgent because I know that I can entrust grandmother to her care when I am away and I have absolute confidence in her honesty, that is to say that she won’t steal things from the house”.

Some employers admit that frequently friction is generated with domestic workers when they have very definite ideas about the way they should be doing their duties, particularly if they have specific knowledge on the subject of caring for the sick. The story told by Zoe, who employs a Ukrainian doctor to look after her mother, is characteristic:

“She could have worked in a hospital. She deserves to be doing another job. But she needs money. It comes out as a kind of complex. She tries to show me that she is on Grandmother’s side and she is doing what she can. Everything else is up to me. If the lemons go bad it’s my fault not hers because I didn’t check them. But in any case she’s always trying to find an opportunity to show me that she doesn’t feel good about me being the mistress of the house, in spite of the fact that I don’t feel like the mistress. Nor do I behave towards her as if she is anything other than a friend of mine and we have agreed that she should do certain things. But the complex is there. It puts a distance between us. Afterwards we talk...I try to explain to her that she should try to stop being so touchy and forever on edge. With the discussion she gets over it and then she feels as if we are going forward together”.

Relationships are the social behaviour of individuals, determined by their interpersonal characteristics and reactions. As predispositions they are too relatively stable to be susceptible of differentiation in responses made to other individuals.¹² In the case also of relationships between employers and

12. Krech D., Crutchfield R. and Ballachey E., 1962, *Individual in Society*, New York, McGraw-Hill, p. 104.

domestic workers it is the personal characteristics of both parties that shape predispositions of expectancy on both sides and in the final analysis determine the relations between them. There is an interesting story told by the employer Maria about an Albanian who looked after her grandmother. She was young and learned Greek from the grandmother, who baptised her and educated her:

“Seeing her, poor girl as she was, being kind with my mother, I helped her with her Greek and we became friends. She told me her family history. Her parents came, and her brothers and sisters, and we took care of them. But because we had baptised her she had requirements: that I should leave grandmother’s house to her. And she wanted to have a say in everything. At a certain point we had a row. She started to say bad things about the animals (the domestic pets)... What would happen to them when we left for the summer. I told her not to worry about that and that I would speak to my children about it. And she asked me: “Doesn’t it count what I say? Aren’t I a member of the family?” She got angry and she poisoned the animals because, as she said, I loved the animals more than I loved her. But what she was really angry about was that we didn’t leave Grandmother’s house to her but instead sold it”.

Without a doubt in this case the domestic worker had acquired expectations above and beyond those that are usual in a professional relationship with the family. The employer’s kind behaviour in the first phase, her attempt to some extent to bridge the gap between them, all this gave rise to illusions in the domestic worker that she was a member of the family so that her opinion should be heard and taken into account equally with those of other family members. Of course it would be interesting to hear the home help’s side of the story also so as to be able to form an opinion as to how she herself saw the relationship between herself and her employer. But we do not have the relevant information.

The expectations that employers have of their domestic workers are predicated on the realism that distinguishes them and on acceptance that they cannot expect too much of their employees. Whether they are happy with the work the domestic workers do in the house depends on the requirements the employers themselves have set out and above all on the extent to which they are in correspondence with reality. The employer Athina, a civil engineer says in relation to her own employee, who is from Ukraine:

“The lady who looks after my mother doesn’t have any particular knowledge or skills. But on the other hand she is an excellent housekeeper. She cooks very well. She is a warm-hearted person, very helpful and in general family-centred in her attitudes”.

When the migrant women are not living in, the relationships that are generated are more casual. The employers focus more on evaluating their punctuality, their ability to work to a timetable, their ability to clean the house well. They are not so much interested in how they behave because usually the employers are not at home when the migrant women are working there.

Maria, who is an employee with a private company, a university graduate and one-day-a-fortnight employer of a Ukrainian woman, says:

“I am very happy both with the quality of her work and with our working relations in general. She is also very punctual about times. And if something comes up and she can’t come she always lets me know in time. She has never let me down”.

In this case we see that attention is focused on the quality of service offered and on reliability and not on other characteristics of the migrant woman’s personality or emotional life. One thing is certain: one kind of relationship between employers and domestic workers is created when the latter are living in and another, more casual and superficial, if they are working part-time for more than one employer.

Relationships between employers and domestic workers pertain to the working environment, and in cases of this type have a peculiarity to them because the latter are not just working women but individuals who live and move in a family-centred milieu. The answers given by employers to the question of whether they have social relations with migrants are interesting. Most answered in the negative, backing their answer with the vague reflection that “there has never been any occasion to”. Some tried to be more explicit, such as Maria, employee with a private company, who said that:

“There aren’t any in my circle. I don’t think I would be negative because I don’t think there are any clear differences between our peoples”.

With the working environment as their point of departure some employers said that after a certain time of the domestic worker being in their service and their getting to know each other better, the situation was as described by Athina the doctor:

“After a year or more I knew her better and we started to have some conversation about her past: how she lived, how many relatives she has, where her brothers and sisters are. I started to ask her about her own children and she to ask me what she should do with her children this year at school. We had some emotional contact...”

In this case too when the contact was more human it still fell a long way short of being equal treatment of migrants in the social environment. Even if unexpressed, there is a discriminatory attitude, in effect racist – albeit only latent – which in general perceives migrants as second-class people. They may deny it when directly asked, but everything about their behaviour reveals it. In any case, as emerged from an empirical investigation,¹³ three-fifths of those questioned consider that Greek society is permeated by racism, particularly against Albanians, and they see this confirmed every day in public and private life. The positions they put forward may not sound like personal views but they are a characteristic expression of the ambient atmosphere in our society.

7. EVALUATION OF THE PRESENCE OF MIGRANTS IN THE GREEK LABOUR MARKET

Greek female employers of migrant women as domestic workers for the most part employ women from neighbouring Balkan countries or countries of the former Soviet Union, this being economically advantageous and the women in question easier to find. This is a contributory factor to the situation whereby it is relatively easy for them to change domestic workers in the event of not being satisfied with the services they offer or with their behaviour. In this context the question might be posed directly:

“How do you evaluate the presence of migrants in this country?”

The answers in all cases were positive. Their view is that migrants work in jobs that are not wanted by Greeks, they are a cheap labour force and so make a substantial contribution to the country’s development; in a globalized environment such movements are inevitable and in any case help the development of the host country’s economy. It is characteristic that no

13. Gavroglou S., 2002, “Migration and far-right reaction in Europe: A comparative overview”, in Naxakis C. and Chletsos M. (eds), *Migrants and Migration*, Patakis editions, p. 102 (in Greek).

Greek female employer referred to negative aspects of migration such as the illicit behaviour of some immigrants that triggers society's negative reflexes, something frequently mentioned in other studies.¹⁴

The justifications evoked in support of their favourable assessment are interesting insofar as they cover a broad spectrum, from economic advantages up to perception of the position of Greeks. Georgia, who works with information technology, says:

“Those I have known show that they need the work. They work hard without complaining and feel that they are being done a favour – it isn't right that they should think that, but so it is – and it makes them agreeable. I don't believe what is said about them taking our jobs, particularly in the provinces. I don't think that Albanians are displacing Greeks and taking their jobs”.

The literature teacher Athina has very definite ideas about migrants:

“They have solved a lot of problems. They do jobs that our people don't do. They work for less and in the farming sector they have been a salvation”.

The civil engineer Anna believes that:

“They have been a great help to people; Greeks are fortunate to have the migrants but they don't appreciate them as they should. And the way the state treats them is terrible. It is a disgrace. It is very wrong to treat them that way”.

The literature teacher Maria has a more penetrating view of the subject, situating migrants in the framework of globalization, whose positive aspects she perceives in her own better understanding of the world:

“Globalization was an arrangement staged by those who rule this planet and wield the economic and political power. From the migrants I learned to be independent and to live more responsibly. Perhaps I have come to understand the person who sleeps on the park bench”.

14. Psimmenos I. and Kassimati K., 2003, “Immigration control pathways: Organizational culture and work values of Greek welfare officers”, in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 29, no 2, pp. 349-357, and Kassimati K., 2003, “Albanian migrants in Kythira: The views and the assessments of Kythireans”, in *NOSTOS*, no 3, pp. 97-99 (in Greek).

Only the doctor Athina qualified her positive assessment through a neutral stance on the presence of the migrants in Greece:

“Thinking about it coolly I believe it is good both for us and for them. They gave us something and we gave them something. Beyond that I don’t know if it is good or bad. I’m not in a position to be able to judge that”.

It is true that more than fifteen years have passed since the mass influxes of migrants into Greece. In that time much has happened and quite a lot has changed. Greeks have learned to live with foreigners in their midst and to acknowledge their positive contribution to economic development. The migrants for their part have by and large acquired legal status and, as people whose presence is legal, they are treated differently - more responsibly – and in any case there has been a significant fall-off in antisocial behaviour by immigrants. Both sides have become aware that co-existence is unavoidable so that modes of living together have to be found. As part of Greek society employers are aligned with general trends and so make a positive assessment of the presence of the migrants in Greece.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The key points of this small-scale study can be summarized as follows:

- i. The need for employment of migrants in performance of household-type tasks is a result of the rise in the socio-economic level of Greece and the collapse of the eastern-bloc states, which obliged a large proportion of their population to seek better conditions of life in other countries including Greece.
- ii. Greek employers of domestic workers are university-educated middle-class women working in the public sector or in the private sector as employees or self-employed professionals.
- iii. Migrant domestic workers from Albania and Ukraine have specialized training and a good university background. It is mostly the Albanians who are in Greece with their families, while the Ukrainian women apparently migrate as individuals. The average age of the women from Albania (30-49) is ten years lower than their counterparts from Ukraine.
- iv. Some domestic workers are employed in looking after old people and in these cases they live in, while with house-cleaning employment is part-time, one or more times a week, with more than one employer.

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- v. This work is not consonant with their educational qualifications, something noted by their employers, who acknowledge that in their countries of origin great importance was attached to education.
 - vi. Migrant women are mostly found by inquiry through the special agencies that have been created in the host countries to handle this specific labour force, or through the employers' social network by recommendation, preferably from other employers.
 - vii. There is prejudice on the basis of nationality more against those coming from Albania and to a lesser extent those coming from Ukraine, because it is well-known that negative stereotypes operate against immigrants in general and against those coming from Albania in particular. Nevertheless, given the difficulty of finding Greek domestic workers and the fact that those that can be found want to be paid more and usually require insurance cover, employers prefer migrants, declaring – whatever such assurances mean – that the choice is not determined by their nationality.
 - viii. Legalization of the presence of the migrants is a basic prerequisite for securing better terms of employment from employers and is a factor underlying manifestations of a different type of behaviour on the part of the domestic workers. Many employers concede that the migrant women face numerous chronic difficulties, and that the authorities have treated them in an exploitative fashion when for various peculiar reasons they have prolonged the migrants' illegal status.
 - ix. Employers claim not to be prejudiced against assigning other kinds of work to migrant men and women if they have the wherewithal to perform it successfully. Nevertheless this question has remained hypothetical because to date there have been no instances of any such thing happening.
 - x. The domestic workers in our study were women. It does however seem in general that employers would have no objection to employing men, so long as, naturally – in the case of provision of care – there were no objections from the persons on the receiving end of the services. But in this case too the question remains theoretical because the situation has not arisen.
 - xi. The relations created between employers and domestic workers are formal in the case of part-time house cleaning work. Closer ties are created when migrant women live in, whereupon they become more or less members of the family and then emotional links are generated

between the parties concerned. The length of time a person has been in service and the personality of the employee both play a role.

- xii. The evaluation of the presence of migrants in Greece is favourable. All the employers acknowledge that in providing the services they do, they have served Greek society. They have assisted in economic development because they are a source of cheap labour power and they have filled workplaces which are not attractive to the Greek workforce. No references to anti-social or illegal behaviour on the part of migrants were made by employers as typically occurs in all studies of migration.

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