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A space for one's own: a comparative case study of live-in domestic workers' spaces in South Africa and Italy

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CHAPTER 1:

MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS IN ITALY AND SOUTH AFRICA

1.1 Introduction

My research is personally related to my everyday life as a babysitter in Johannesburg. In particular, my focus has been on live-in nannies in South Africa and live-in caretakers in Italy through a comparative analysis.

Firstly, my region in Italy and South Africa, have remained attractive sites for immigration because they are "borderlands". Italy is now one of the main countries of immigration in Southern Europe, due to the absence of consistent migration policies and the size of the informal economy (Reyneri 2004). On the contrary, South Africa adopted strict immigration policies, but despite that, temporary labour migration within the country appears to have increased, driven particularly by the rise in female labour migration (Posel, 2003).

Secondly, the phenomenon of live-in work, although it has different features, is well- rooted in both countries. In fact, domestic service has long been a major sector of the South African labour market (Gaitskell, Kimble, Maconachie & Unterhalter 2007) as well as in Italy where, as a result of the limited offer of public home care services, a system of private welfare has been developing. In fact, the recruitment of foreigner family assistants (caregivers) who assist and cohabit with the elderly persons is now a very widespread phenomenon.

1.2. Outline of the topic and issues to be investigated

"Live-in-work is an accommodation that allows domestic workers to earn more money without spending anything for the usual current expenses," argues Verbal (2010: 105). Nevertheless, live-in domestic workers often see their life revolve around the members of the family they take care of, within the same spaces of the house that they share with their employers. They perform numerous tasks such as cleaning, cooking, shopping, taking care both of the elderly and the children, and sometimes it is required to offer specialised paramedical care. Especially this last function confirms that their tasks often go beyond the professional dimension and enter the personal sphere of micro-welfare. On the one hand, all these activities keep domestic workers in close touch with their employers in order to better respond to their employers' needs, on the other hand, they generate a form of "domestic alienation" (Verbal 2010). Well- aware of the Marxist implications of the concept, which I will examine, my interest in alienation is rather in those aspects of the live-in work that do not allow migrant domestic workers to integrate within their host societies – everything

from customs and language to the interpersonal intimacy of friendship.

1.3 Key Questions

- In the context of live-in work, living and working spaces, working tasks and personal attitudes often correspond. Does the impossibility of distinguishing the working sphere from the personal sphere affect the social integration of the domestic workers both with the local community and with fellow migrants?

- Which spaces are perceived from the domestic workers as spaces of integration?

1.4 Literature Reviews

An extensive literature on paid domestic work now exists, and it is useful, through some representative texts, to detail the historical origins and changes of paid domestic work in both countries, towards an understanding of the recent situation. The literature can be classified into three different categories: a) Historical and current analyses on domestic work in Italy b) Historical and current analyses of domestic work in South Africa c) Theoretical framework: Feminist versus Race, Gender and Class framework.

1.4.1. Historical and current analyses of paid domestic work in Italy

Many scholars have explored the history of migration and domestic work in Italy. According to Marchetti (1997), there are connections between the Italian colonial empire in North East Africa and the Eritrean women who arrived in Italy during the 1960s that imply a continuity between women's role within the domestic walls of the colonizers and the role that was assigned to them in the middle-class houses during the years of the Italian economic boom. Together with colonialism, Catholicism exerted an attractive power on the first female immigrants (Sarti 2004) and promoted the integration of the migrant women in the social context (Tognetti Bordogna 2004).

Despite the common idea that Italy is a country of recent immigration, Andall (2001) demonstrates that Black women were among the first migrants, employed almost exclusively as live-in domestic workers. Andall adopts an analysis where gender, ethnicity and class are interconnected. Challenging the myth about the Italian family, she argues that while live-in domestic work creates typical forms of social marginality for Black women, it allows Italian women to claim to be emancipated.

During the 1980s, changes in immigration occurred due to political turmoil such as the

liberalisation of the Eastern Bloc, and the later conflicts in the former Yugoslavia (1991-1999). Colombo (2005) analyzes these changes focusing on the last generations of domestic workers coming from Eastern Europe. What emerges from this recent literature is a transformation both in the role of domestic workers and in demand: as a consequence of the dismantling of the welfare state demand for caretakers now comes from families who represent different social statuses and not only the middle-class. Sciortino (2004) attributes the female migratory pattern in Italy today to a welfare system designed on a male breadwinner model where the social consequence is the need for a supply of foreign domestic workers.

The contextualization of migrant women's experiences in global processes is analyzed by Parreñas (2001). Her extensive comparative study of Filipina domestic workers in Italy and the United States explores how their lives are influenced by patterns of global capitalism and transnationalism. Parreñas approaches the topic from different levels of analysis: Firstly she considers how labor migration and gender are linked to global capitalism showing that the groups analyzed come from countries where economic development is tied to globalization. Secondly the author focuses on the constitution of particular migration flows and the institutions of migration, and thirdly she considers the way in which subject positions rewrite existing power structures. Domestic workers, as low-wage laborers in global capitalism, participate in four experiences of separation: quasi-citizenship, transnational families, contradictory class mobility, and alienation within the migrant community (Parreñas 2001).

A section of the literature is focused on providing historical and ethnographic analyses of the changing of women' role from the Soviet system to the new capitalistic Ukraine. Lloyd Hoffmann (2003) describes collectivism and coercion as the two main instruments that the Soviet state applied in order to pursue its goals. Zhurzhenko (2001) and Vianello (2009) investigate the patterns of the new female Ukrainian migrations where women emigrate alone for working opportunities, becoming the breadwinners. In particular, with the transition to the market economy in post-socialist Ukraine, the destruction of the "working mother" role, has led to the emergence of two forms of women's identities: the housewife and the businesswoman, both facilitated by free market ideology and linked to the development of consumer capitalism and Western consumer standards and lifestyles.

Vianello (2013) examines Ukrainian migrant women's remittances, focusing both on the migration of Ukrainian women to Italy and on the social impact of this phenomenon in Ukraine. The author describes two different types of remittances, monetary remittances and social remittances

transferred by migrant women to their families. Rubchak (1996) describes how gender has shaped Russian and Ukrainian history from the twelfth century to the present, analysing the current backlash against women's emancipation. However, she also finds out that women have not merely submitted to the patriarchal system, but instead have found creative ways of resisting it.

1.4.2. Historical and current analyses of domestic work in South Africa

Most of the literature on domestic service in South Africa emerged in the late 1980s, when the domestic workers union's struggles brought attention to their situation. The literature is amazingly rich, based very often on qualitative research and consists not only of academic dissertations but also novels, poems and even comic strips. Therefore, the texts shown below are just a representative sample of this literature.

Cock (1989) offered a detailed account of the lives of domestic workers under apartheid paying particular attention to the exploitation of the black women as 'servants' by white women. She adopts the race, class and gender framework to discuss the societal position into which domestic workers were forced. According to her, domestic labour represents a "social status marker" rather than an economic fact (Cock 1989).

The development of domestic work before and after 1994 has been analyzed also through the concept of citizenship. While Ally (2009) argues that, despite the political-social transformations and the state efforts in regularizing the domestic sector, precious little has changed in the "master-servant" dynamic, Du Toit (2013) suggests that state intervention can resolve the problem of exploitation and rights.

Democratization is another lens through which to understand the changes in domestic work policies. King (2007) argues that the process of democratization has not changed the exploitative labour practices prevalent in the sector. According to Fish (2006), although "domestic workers are one of the largest sectors of working women, their location in private households poses severe obstacles to formalising this particular labour. In the South African case, domestic work continues to reinforce social constructions of the household as a feminised and racialised space, through the paid labour of black women. While domestic workers face severe marginalisation as a result of continuing social inequalities, women are also actively confronting barriers to democracy in the private employment sphere" (Fish 2006: 1). Domestic work, she argues, seems to be "the last bastion of apartheid" (Fish 2006: 1).

Transnational migrant domestic workers usually do not possess South African identity documents and therefore they are seen as "illegal". Laura Griffin (2011) analyzes the conditions of Basotho domestic workers, who, despite the extension of the basic labor protections in 2008, live in fear of being detected by the authorities. This condition precludes any engagement both with institutions and with fellow domestic workers, creating dependence on employers who, in turn, intimidate domestic workers. Indeed, Griffin shows, Basotho women are so scared about their condition of illegality in the country that they are extremely vulnerable to exploitation.

Zimbabwean domestic workers, too, suffer exploitation and lack of rights and are often dehumanized by their employers. Domestic workers are often viewed as deferential workers, implying an acceptance of the legitimacy of their own subordination in the social order. However, this is more an apparent attitude than a real one. According to Nyamnjoh (2005), the relation between maids and employers is constituted by "negotiations" and "compromises". Indeed, domestic servants use everyday strategies, even sabotage in order to resist dehumanization. The author states that it is necessary to investigate both how the structures of exclusion work and how these structures are challenged. There is a culture of contestation that is often ignored:

> It is important to look beyond our conventional focus on constitutional and institutional forms of power, or on rules and procedures, to social action by maids and madams that renegotiate and redefine power relations on a daily basis. (Nyamnjoh 2005: 191)

The sharing of the workspace between so-called 'maids' and 'madams' reveals how the space is constructed, how boundaries are drawn within the home and how this reproduces the relationship between employers and domestic workers. Bonnin and Dawood (2013) analyze these dynamics focusing on the relationship between Durban Indian-Muslim women and their domestic workers. Despite the madam's role being more powerful in the relationship, and crucial in order to determine construction, meanings, access and use of the workspaces, domestic workers can somehow negotiate these limits. Bonnin and Dawood state that, even though live-in domestic workers may have close relationships with their madams, they "live in the margins of the home, in enclosed balconies or 'maid's' quarters always at the beck-and-call of their employer" (Bonnin and Dawood 2013: 63).

Ginsburg (2000) describes the domestic worker's backyard rooms during apartheid. The workers' detached living quarters, designed by architects as landscape complements to the main houses

consisted of backyard rooms, and the African women who inhabited them in these otherwise exclusively white areas. Domestic workers were forced to live their working lives in one room with a toilet at the back of the employer's house, without the protection of law and for a meager salary. The rooms, constructed of bricks with concrete floors and no ceilings, measured about eight by ten feet. They rarely had electricity and furnishing consisted in a twin bed, a wardrobe and a small bench. The sight from the single window was often partially blocked by tall shrubs or walls. In some high-density suburbs, large apartment buildings had on each roof a dormitory for domestic workers, with rows of single rooms and communal toilets, dubbed 'locations in the sky.'

Hidden from public view in suburbs like Parktown, Northcliff, and Kensington, domestic workers often bore a heavy workload, segregation and social control, racism and sexism, and a lack of privacy. As Ginsburg states (2011) the homes of white South Africans were meaningful sites of the important contests between white privilege and black aspiration. Everyday negotiations between white householders and black domestic workers happened within the walls of these houses.

Cock argues that paid domestic work resulted in a "set of frustrations due to exposure to others' standards of living", revealing the inner contradiction between "work space" and "private space" (1989: 68). These "social boundaries and distance from one another" transformed the private household into a "microcosm of social inequality" (Lan, 2003: 527), that mirrored class and race distinctions of the wider society.

Since the aim of my research was to investigate the situation of Zimbabwean nannies in South Africa, I decided to understand better how women's roles were shaped in their origin country from pre-colonial time to the current period.

Parkhurst and Jacobs (1988), demonstrate that during the pre-colonial time, participation of the Shona and Ndebele women in the distribution of land and political authority was limited to their linkages with male members of the family. The two further attest that, in exchange for rights to use male-dominated land, women were expected to produce subsistence crops such as maize among various other crops that were considered women's crops.

Schimdt (1990), states that during the early years of European occupation in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), a degree of female "emancipation" was encouraged by European missionaries and the colonial state through outlawing child marriages, setting limitations on bridewealth, and prohibiting the marriage of women without their consent. The author article explores the dynamics of the struggle for female "emancipation", as it was pursued by generations of Africans, African women

and men, and between missionaries and the colonial state. One of the primary terrains of contest, the power to create and implement customary law, is a central focus of her investigation.

Seidman (1984), demonstrates how ZANU's policies, instead of restructuring the gender division of labor, aimed at easing burdens within the existing framework of sex relations. Hindin (2002), explores the nature of women's autonomy in household decision-making comparing women's autonomy across marital status, age at marriage and duration of marriage. Contrary to expectations, most women did not experience complete male domination. Indeed, older single, divorced, and widowed women had a considerable amount of autonomy while married women gave input through joint decision-making. Regardless of marital status, women who lived with their parents were often not even consulted in major household decisions. This study shows that in Zimbabwe, marital status is a core predictor of decision-making and that women may have incentives to alter their marital status to improve their degree of control over their lives.

Made and Mpofu (2005) analyse the situation of women in Zimbabwe since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action[1] in 1995 examining the gendered impact of various policies and programmes, which have been introduced in Zimbabwe from 1998 and 2004. They assert that "illiteracy, economic dependency, and prevailing social norms prevent women, rural women and girls in particular, from combating societal discrimination."

Concluding, although Pasura (2008) is focused on describing the situation of Zimbabweans in Britain, I found his work very helpful in order to examine the process by which Zimbabweans negotiate boundaries, assert meanings, interpret their past, and define themselves in relation to others in the host country.

1 "The Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace", United Nations' conference hold in September 1995 in Beijing, China.

CHAPTER 2:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The subject of the research is the result of reflections around three general concepts and over the interactions between them: live-in domestic work, female migration and integration/isolation.

2.1. Comparative Method

The aim of comparative research is precisely to find shared features in situations apparently very diverse. Therefore, although there are differences related to the work, reasons of emigration and contexts of immigration between Ukrainian and Zimbabwean domestic workers, there are crucial commonalities. Indeed, these women are constrained to leave their families and emigrate, and as live-in domestic workers, their living and working spaces coincide.

I have focused my attention particularly on the situation of Ukrainian caretakers in Italy and Zimbabwean nannies in South Africa because the majority of the female labour migrants from these countries are employed in the domestic sector. Furthermore, they are both victims of the same stereotype. Indeed, Italian employers believe that Ukrainian women are smarter than other Eastern European women while South African employers consider Zimbabwean women "quicker" than other African female workers.

I justify the geographical comparison with two arguments. Firstly, my region in Italy (Friuli Venezia Giulia) and South Africa, both have long and important histories of immigration. In particular, the region Friuli Venezia Giulia has been historically considered the gate of the East because it borders the Balkans and, therefore, it always has been at a crossroads of immigrants for different Eastern countries. Similarly, Johannesburg is situated in a strategic position within the traditional paths of cross-border migrations from Southern African countries, and therefore temporary labour migration within the country appears to have increased (Posel, 2003).

Secondly, live-in domestic work, although it has different features in Italy compared to South Africa, is nonetheless a very widespread phenomenon in both countries. However, despite these commonalities, there is a major difference that concerns the contexts of domestic labour. Scholarly research acknowledges the historical and current post-apartheid racialisation of domestic work in South Africa, where women of colour who work for white employers are subordinated by the

effects of race. On the contrary, the Italian domestic work sector is not as intensely racialized, although the labour market is split along ethnic lines as a consequence of the recruitment of immigrant labor available for manual work or jobs with low prestige that Italians refuse to do (Reyneri 1996).

2.2. In-depth semi-structured interviews

The investigation technique I utilised in order to assess this was the *in- depth semi-structured interview*. I considered this instrument to be the most appropriate, as my intention was to investigate the individual inner conceptions, behaviours and perceptions, as well as their interpersonal relationships. According to Johnson (2002: 106) "in-depth interviewing begins with common sense perceptions, explanations, and understandings of some lived cultural experience…and aims to explore the contextual boundaries of that experience or perception, to uncover what is usually hidden from ordinary view or reflection or to penetrate to more reflective understandings about the nature of that experience".

The *in-depth interviews* were mostly individual, in order to provide a more inclusive atmosphere and make the interviewed feel as comfortable and as relaxed as possible. However, since Ukrainians meet up in public spaces in groups of two to four people, I often conducted group interviews. On the contrary, I always met Zimbabwean domestic workers individually. I initially intended to interview 10 Ukrainian caretakers in Friuli Venezia Giulia and 10 Zimbabwean nannies in Johannesburg as a representative sample, I interviewed more than 10 Ukrainians but less than 10 Zimbabweans. On one hand, considering the group interviews, I talked with 20 Ukrainians and with 8 of them we also talked individually in a meeting every week for a month. On the other hand, because most of the Zimbabwean domestic workers are illegally in the country and exploited, they hide in the houses and they are reluctant to talk with strangers. It took me months to establish a good relationship with these women and mainly for that reason I was able to interview 4 Zimbabwean domestic workers. However, even though I interviewed more Ukrainian caretakers, in South Africa I had time to build stronger relations with the Zimbabwean women and got to know them very well. For this reason, I collected sufficient stories that allowed me to draw a picture that, even if not representative of the whole situation of domestic workers in South Africa is enlightening about the rich and textured experience of some migrants domestic workers in the country.

Furthermore, in Italy I interviewed two employees of the help desk for caretakers and one of the organizers of a caretaker's training course in order to collect information about the situation of domestic workers in my region. The employees explained to me not only the bureaucratic process

of hiring a caregiver legally, but also what the needs and the duties are of both the caretakers and the employers, especially focusing on some meaningful stories of cohabitation. The trainer also described to me the importance of professionalizing the caregivers to allow them a better cohabitating relationship with their patients. Although, it should be noted, that these courses do not provide any psychological assistance which tends to be the most urgent necessity for the Ukrainian caretakers who often face the death of the cared person.

The interviews had a semi-structured format, meaning that I drafted some pre-planned questions but that did not insist on asking specific questions in a specific order and often adjusted my questions according to the respondents' answers, and to the frequently unexpected information which they provided. Indeed, *semi-structured interviews* unfolded in a conversational manner offering participants the chance to explore issues they felt were important. They "allow more fluid interaction between the researcher and the respondents" who "are not forced to choose from a pre-designed range of answers; instead they can elaborate on their statements and connect them with other matters of relevance," argues Marvasti (2004: 20).

I also prepared an interview guide which outlined and grouped the main questions and topics that were to be addressed during the interviews. Therefore, the interviews were aimed at investigating the following general issues: personal background and migration history, gender aspects, aspects related to their living spaces and their relations with the employers, and perceived degree of integration. However, it did not happen often that we were able to discuss all the issues during the same conversation. For some women, some topics were more relevant than others and some, like religion, I did not take into consideration in my initial interview guide.

2.3. Snowball sampling technique

I used the *snowball sampling technique* in order to find respondents. This sampling technique allowed me to meet other subjects who were basically recruited by the first persons with whom I came in contact and who, in turn, recommended other potential subjects from among their acquaintances. This strategy can be viewed as a response to overcoming the problems associated with difficult-to-access populations.

If the aim of the research was primarily qualitative and descriptive, then snowball sampling was used as an informal method to reach a previously hidden population. This sampling technique is most frequently used to conduct qualitative research through interviews and it may be applied for making inferences about respondents where they are few in number or where some degree of trust is

required to initiate contact. Furthermore, it has been shown to be a good technique in order to produce comparable data in comparative research (Atkinson & Flint 2001: 2-3).

The snowball sampling technique was particularly useful to reach Zimbabwean domestic workers. Since I established a good relation with Anele[2] a nanny who helps my landlady sometimes, she then gave me some contacts, introducing me to her friends. Indeed, as long as Alice trusted me, her friends were not scared to talk to me. That does not mean that all her acquaintances agreed for an interview but at least, thanks to Alice, I was introduced to the church and to some Zimbabwean domestic workers who described to me, even if briefly, their work. In Italy I found my contacts through friends who have/had a relative cared for by a Ukrainian caretaker. Some caretakers have a good relationship with their former employers and agreed without fear to talk me while others, when I was introduced by their employers, remained initially skeptical. It must be said that, even if in the north-east of Italy the majority of the caretakers are now legal and work with a regular contract, they did not always feel comfortable with telling me their previous experiences, and not even the current ones. However, they were not as scared as the Zimbabwean nannies, whose lives are very insecure.

2.4. Photography

Another method that I used in order to gather data was photography. My intention was to take pictures of the living/working spaces and use them to integrate with the interview material. In fact, interactions with the photographs, I imagined, could also enable studying the meanings that the women attribute to aspects of their everyday spaces (Schwartz 1989). There is a tendency to consider photography as objective evidence of the reality, ignoring the boundary between the picture and its interpretation. For this reason, the use of the photographic method was used in an interactive context in which it could acquire meaning. I believed photographs could be a valid instrument to extend personal narratives that illuminates viewers' lives and experiences. Alongside the semistructured interview, I expected they could also provide comparability across the data obtained (Gaule 1992).

2 Zimbabwean names used in this research are pseudonyms.

However, just two women, one Ukrainian and one Zimbabwean, gave me permission to take pictures of their living/working spaces. Still, just the photographs alone provide a perfect comparison between the situation in South Africa and in Italy. On the the one hand, looking at Hanna[3]'s place, it is possible to see the sense the alienation of sharing a bedroom with a sick old woman (pictures 3-4-5-6 in Appendix A). Two pictures are meaningful in describing this situation: in the first one (picture 3) you can see the two beds separated just by a curtain while in the other one (picture4) you can see the garden and some people through the window but first of all through the bed's arm where the sick woman lives as a vegetable. It seems to me a meaningful metaphor of alienation: watching the life outside behind the eyes of someone else's illness. On the other hand, Anele's room's pictures (pictures 1-2 in Appendix A) are meaningful in describing a living space which at least does not coincide with the working space. It is a private space where, during the few hours of rest, domestic workers can be alone. Indeed, the room is decorated with personal belongings, such as pictures, calendars, cards and make up. Ukrainians caretakers' rooms are completely empty. Pictures and memories are hidden from view.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

All studies of delicate issues face the challenge of how to convince people to speak openly about intimate aspects of their lives. The degree to which openness is achieved depends in part on whether questions are clear and understandable and in part on how comfortable women are made to feel during the interview. Disclosing domestic workers' experiences of exploitation and segregation, risked exposing these women to revenge from employers or suspicions from other co-workers. For this reason, I provided guarantees of complete privacy during the interviews and during the South African fieldwork I avoided going anywhere near their places of employment while the employers were home.

I provided the participants with a consent form with all the information about the project, in which they could also specify whether they prefer being included in the pictures or not (see Appendix B). When they refused to let me take pictures, I proposed to them that I could provide a disposable camera for them to take pictures themselves of their rooms. Furthermore, domestic workers were free to decline at any time.

I am aware that this research would have been significantly enhanced by also interviewing the

[3] I used the real names of Ukrainian domestic workers. Since they are legal in the country, they gave me permission to use their identities.

employers. However, ethically it was risky to engage with the employer of the domestic workers because the domestic workers could have been made vulnerable by approaching the employers. In Italy, where I knew the employers well, and there was no risk of revenge or retribution on workers, I accessed caretakers through trusted employers. Secondly, due to the time constraints, I was not able in six months to cover this aspect of the research. However, if further work has to be done, employer interviews will provide a more complete view of the issue.

CHAPTER 3:
UKRAINIAN CARETAKERS IN ITALY

> My name is Lyuba and I come from Ukraine. I worked as a nurse in a hospital. I decided to migrate because of the heavy economic crisis in my country during the nineties, and left my two children and husband in Ukraine. I arrived in Italy during spring 2001 straight in a village in Abruzzo, where a cousin of mine from Leopoli worked as a caregiver. I have never heard a single Italian word before, not even "ciao". At the beginning I had lots of problems, also because of language. But I needed to work, so I did my best to make myself understood, even with gestures. I took with me a small bilingual dictionary: it has been my salvation. I wrote on a notebook Ukrainian words and the Italian translation beside them. From the very beginning, I worked with elderly people: first with an old paralyzed man and then with a lady with Alzheimer's disease. Relatives and neighbours helped me to learn Italian: they wrote on a notebook the easiest sentences and phrases, in the beginning just questions and answers and a list of nouns referring to food, kitchen, house. How many difficulties and how much loneliness you feel when you do not understand the language people speak around you! I was always crying in the evening in my room because I missed my family so much, as well as my language and my country. I felt lost and anxious, but I had to keep going, set my teeth, endure and overcome all difficulties to help my family in Ukraine. I did not talk very much at home with my new "grandparents" and always watched television: at the beginning it was just confusion of sounds but later, step by step, day after day, words began to take place in the puzzle. I worked seven years with a lady who spoke Italian correctly, so she taught and always corrected me. I learned all that I know from everyday practice but even now, eleven years later, I have problems with Italian and sometimes feel ashamed of that, even though I understand and make me understood.[4]

This is Lyuba's story and I would like to start my report on the Italian fieldwork with her testimony, because it is representative of the situation faced by every caretaker who arrives in Italy, no matter where she comes from or how old she is. The themes of homesickness, language difficulties, elderly health issues, solitude and sometimes desperation recur in the stories of every woman that I met and interviewed. Despite the fact that they are now mostly legal in the country and there is a widespread attention to their work and their conditions, they face the suffering of living far from their families

[4] Lyuba, Italy, July 2014

in houses that are not their houses, with elderly who are not relatives but strangers. They are alone when they cry thinking about their children in their rooms, if they have any, and alone when they face the death of a cared person. Alienation is part of the experience of their work, even when there is recognition of their rights as workers.

3.1. From the Soviet mother-worker to the woman breadwinner: A brief history of women's roles in Ukrainian society.

The majority of the Ukrainians migrating to Italy are mostly grandmothers over 40 years old (Shehda and Horodetsky 2004). The migration of Ukrainian grandmothers is an unusual but peculiar feature of this migration, and it is analytically significant because it is intimately connected to Ukraine's post-Soviet nation-building project. During the Soviet era, the socialist economy required labour intensive, thus full employment of the entire population. To facilitate women's employment, the Soviet state socialized domestic labour providing "maternity benefits, state-run childcare facilities and even collective dining halls" (Verdery 1994). However, despite the effort of the Soviet state in restructuring domestic labour, women continued to be the heads of the house as well as perform wage work. The average age of retirement was 55 for women and 60 for men, allowing the Soviet state to rely on pensioners to perform unpaid household labor (Verdery 1994). Thus, the Soviet family was an extended family usually run by a grandmother. Therefore, "a particular gendered understanding of the relationship between men and women, and women and the state, not only made 'mother-workers; a structural reality but was accompanied by state discourses that exalted mother-workers as Soviet "heroes" (Solari 2006).

3.1.1. Remittances as women's instrument of emancipation.

All of the caretakers I interviewed asserted that sending remittances to their families is the primary reason for their migration and work. Sending money to the children, providing for their studies and needs means being a good mother.

When I went to interview the employees of the help desk for caretakers in my hometown, they discussed with me the difficulties they have been facing in explaining to the caretakers the relevance of saving money for themselves, in order to enjoy the fruits of their efforts. The Ukrainian women nonetheless continue to send every single euro they earn to their families.

I think ethnography is extremely helpful in understanding why these women deny themselves what every western European women born in a capitalist society would claim: the right to economic self-

sufficiency. Ukrainian caretakers who migrated to Italy after 1991 still belong to the Soviet world where the dominant cultural discourse was aimed at "the elimination of egoism and the championing of collectivism over individualism" (Hoffman 2003: 16).

In the new Ukrainian state-building project, Soviets and women were accused of having created an anti-natural order between sexes destroying the traditional patriarchal, pre-Sovietic values (Verdery 1994). Pushing men to work at the peripheries far from their families expropriated them of their traditional role of heads of the household. Following its liberalisation, it is presented that the apparent 'natural' order between the sexes is restored, as represented by the capitalist, European, nuclear family that is a fundamental part of nationalist discourse. The revalued post-Soviet and nationalist icon of the ideal Ukrainian woman is *Berehynia*, an ancient pagan goddess, protectress of the family and the Ukrainian nation (Rubchak 1996). Like Ukrainian women, she is strong but devoted to maternal duties, respectful of husbands and independent within the family context. This respect accorded to women is appreciated as one of Ukraine's cultural traits that makes Ukraine "modern" and "European" (Solari 2006). However, the nuclear, modern, European family formation considered as the basis of Ukrainian nation does not happen spontaneously within capitalism. Indeed, men's wages are not high enough to support this family structure. Thus, in order to produce Ukrainian women as *Berehyni* and Ukrainian men as patriarchs, it seems that someone must go abroad and send back remittances.

3.1.2. A generation of housewives and patriarchs: Ania's story

Ania has two adult children. She paid their studies and thanks to her efforts both of them got a degree. However, they are now both unemployed with families to sustain. Ania's daughter has a degree in languages, and she is a housewife while her brother is an engineer who works for private companies. Ania is proud of helping her children through remittances as a contribution to the construction of a new Ukraine where daughters are "housewives" and sons "patriarchs" (Solari 2006), in compliance with tradition. However, she is worried because their university education does not guarantee them a job.

On the one hand, their daughters are celebrated as the "Berehyni" and their sons are welcomed into the center of family life as breadwinners. On the other hand, these women live in a suspended state, contributing on the one hand to the nation-building project of a nation that does not accept any more women as head of the family:

> During the Communism I had my job as a bookkeeper. I worked from Monday

> to Friday, but there were lots of festivities, so we had many days off also during the month. We often organized dinner with colleagues, and I had lunch at the restaurant at least twice a week. Until 1991, we ate meat three times a day! I was happy; I miss that period! Everybody had a job, even the domestic worker could save some money and afford the holidays once a year. People were friendly, and the door of every house was always open. Now everything is changed. I lost many friends because they were envious of the money I sent home. I became the "rich" while they became poor, but I am always the same person I have ever been.[5]

It is not my aim to judge this picture of Communism as a golden age, but I found a link between Ania's consideration and a sentence that a South African domestic worker told me once: "we lived better during the Apartheid". Despite the provocation, it is necessary to recognize that with the introduction of neoliberalism, something new has upset the organization of everyday life. It is undeniable that, while during Communism or Apartheid people were united against a single, well-identified enemy (Capitalism or white supremacy), now everyone stands alone in the struggle for survival.

3.2. Public Spaces

Public spaces, such as parks and squares, are part of the fundamental landscape of Italian cities. In fact, since antiquity, these places were the site of the most relevant social activities. However, recently, the historic cores of southern European cities have become a particular site of immigration in the urban areas of Europe. These urban cores have often been by-passed by modern development and are now undergoing difficult renewal processes. These districts have become sensitive areas, where the population changes taking place do not always converge with urban renewal.

Immigration flows are now part of the picture: migrants concentrate in places that the locals are leaving, distributing themselves in ethnic enclaves or mixing with the urban population. With their material and cultural baggage, they arrive in Italy pushed by different reasons, and they plan to stay either for short or long periods. Migrants arrive and occupy a space that in turn is restructured in their image. Thus, spaces tell the stories of those who occupy it, transform it, and live in it.

When I came back to Italy in July for my fieldwork, the first places I considered in order to find

[5] Ania, Italy, July 2014

domestic workers to interview had been parks and squares. I was not wrong. Every day after lunch, from 2 pm to 4 pm, when the elderly usually take a rest, domestic workers, who in my region are mostly Romanians and Ukrainians, gather with their fellow migrants in public spaces. Usually, Romanians meet in a park close to the city center while Ukrainians meet in a major square and the park surrounding the Greek-Orthodox church in town. This separation of spaces does not mean that there hostility between the two groups, it just describes a moment specifically conceived as an occasion to speak the native language, to confront different experiences and give each other advice and information.

The main difficulty encountered during my fieldwork was entering the private atmosphere of the public gathering place and building confidence. Initially I used to bike around the perimeter of the square paying attention to the language I heard but then I realized that during that couple of hours, Ukrainian domestic workers would always sit together on a bench, in small groups of 2 to 3 women. I introduced myself and my research, demonstrating a real interest in their experience both as migrant women and caretakers. Some of them were reluctant and suspicious, some believed I was a journalist and for others it was simply too hard to talk with a stranger about their tough experiences. However, due to my perseverance, or just tired to see me around, most of these women eventually decided to tell me their stories.

3.2.1. Transnational links and practices of migrants' organisation

A well-frequented area of migrants' social interaction in Pordenone is the beautiful park that surrounds the building owned by the local diocese. The facility used to be thought as a meeting place for groups or single persons who needed spiritual comfort. Today, the majority of the frequenters of the par, are migrants from different countries who meet here with their fellow immigrants, and they spend time talking their native languages, sharing information, negotiating job opportunities and collecting material of every sort to send to their families. Every Saturday morning, a bus from Pordenone with destination Ukraine leaves with remittances and parcels destined for caretakers' relatives and families.

Lyuba has sent some clothes for her nephews together with monthly remittances for her children:

> When I arrived in Italy, I came to help my kids. Then my children built their families and had babies, and now I must stay and work for them. I called my daughter a couple of months ago, and my little nephew picked up the phone. I said: "Hi, I'm your grandmother Lyuba!." He didn't say anything; he put the receiver

> down and screamed to my daughter: "Mom, there's a woman called Lyuba on the phone". He doesn't know me. I saw him for a month when he was born, and I've never gone back home since that day. My daughter tells him about his grandmother when he received a present from me. I'm sad and happy at the same time. I'm sad because my nephews don't know me, but I'm also glad because I know they have everything they need. That's the important thing. During the week, I buy not even coffee because every euro that I save goes to my family at the end of the month.[6]

3.3. The private space of the household

Apart from public spaces, it is generally difficult to enter houses because both of the employers and often, caretakers themselves do not feel comfortable to invite their friends in a place that they do not perceive as theirs. However, thanks to some personal contacts, I entered in the private space of the houses where caretakers spend most of their time working and living, and was able to understand more fully the dynamics of domestic work and the private spaces migrant domestic workers live in:

3.3.1. Facing the death of the elderly: Hanna's story

One of my friend's mothers is close to a woman name Hanna, a Ukrainian domestic worker who has spent years taking care of her elder brother. When the man died, Hanna found a new job in the countryside, not far from Pordenone, where she went to live-in with an old woman. The lady is not independent anymore, she is bedridden since February 2013, assisted just by Hanna. While I was driving to the countryside with my friend and her mother, they told me briefly the story of the elderly's family. Apparently, the old lady's son is a rich man, owner of four car dealerships but, despite not having any financial difficulty, does not want to provide a better housing solution for Hanna and his mother who still live in an old house, half ruined.

Hanna is a woman in her sixties, well-set and tall, with rosy cheeks and blue eyes. She introduced herself with a smile at the entrance, and I felt her warmth. The house was an old, typical country-house made of stones, surrounded by a luxuriant vegetable garden cultivated by Hanna. She had prepared for us some homemade juice in the garden where we sat around a plastic table. We started talking about the weather and the country feast in honour of the patron saint of the village. Feasts are still very popular in Italy; they are celebrated during the summer season. Traditionally linked to the patron saints, they are now attended by everyone who wants to eat typical Italian food and listen to popular Italian music. Hanna loves the feast; it is the only occasion during the year where she can

[6] Lyuba, Italy, July 2014

go out and dance and spend time with friends who are not just fellow migrants but also locals. The village is small; everybody knows each other and Hanna feels now part of the community. She loves Vivaro, it reminds her of the countryside in Ukraine where she grown up.

Hanna arrived in Italy closed in a car trunk in 2004. She prefers not to talk much about her arrival in the country because she does not want to seem like she is complaining. She often repeats, smiling: “this is our life; we must accept it.” She decided to move to help her son whose leg was amputated. Because the health system is now privatised in the Ukraine, Hanna's son could not afford medical care, and his mother decided to contribute by finding a job in Italy. Hanna has a degree, and she worked in a furniture store until the end of Communism, in 1991, when the factory failed, and she remained unemployed. Although as a caretaker she has experienced the inevitable pain of becoming attached to someone that has died, she really likes her job.

In the handbook that I received from the employees of the information desk for caretakers, there are several pieces of useful information that analyse the daily work and the home-related vocabulary. The guide is written in Italian and translated in English, Romanian and Ukrainian in order to be accessible both to employers and caretakers. Just to give an idea, shown below there is a list of the chapters in which the guide is divided.

waking-up
personal care
breakfast
taking medicines
shopping
lunch
leisure
emergency call
snack
at the doctor
dinner
in the evening
personal care
going to bed
caring for a senile patient
how nurses can prevent pains in their back
moving the cared person

managing the nursed person’s hygiene
preventing decubitus ulcers
making lying in bed more comfortable
feeding the nursed person correctly

Despite the undoubted utility of the *vademecum* regarding everyday practical situations, not a word is said about the psychological aspects of a work that is always related to facing the patient's death, one of the major emotional challenges for the women that I interviewed. Not only Hanna has experienced the suffering of seeing a patient dying, rather the death of the elderly is an inevitable step in the caretaker’s life. “For how long will I be employed for this family? Until the patient dies”, is the cynical answer. Hanna told me a story of a fellow migrant who, after the death of her patient, went through a serious breakdown and disappeared.

After an one-hour chat in the garden, I politely asked Hanna to let me visit the spaces were she lives. I immediately realized that the house is not liveable nor even suitable for two women, one of whom is ill. In front of me, at the entrance, with the longer side leaning on the wall, there are two beds, one is Hanna's bed and in the other I saw the old woman, supine. I went close to the lady, waiting for Hanna to introduce me. The lady just uttered sounds, and I felt something similar to what I felt in front of my grandmother’s bed. She died at ninety-six, but she worked in the fields until her nineties. She depleted slowly, and during the last months of her life she was a vegetable. It was so distressing, and a source of such anguish, to see her dying; I was young and emotional when facing situation, and I asked my mother to permit me to stop the visits to my grandmother’s house. Now I am almost thirty and I still have difficulties facing this kind of situation. Hanna is in front of me, smiling at this woman, and for a second I try to imagine what it means living with a person in a vegetative state, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

On the walls, there is just a picture of the elderly’s family and a Ukrainian calendar above Hanna's bed that is separated from the other one just by a curtain. Alongside the bedroom, there is a kitchen, but no door separates the two spaces. The stoves are old and used, but Hanna can prepare delicious food even without sophisticated kitchen tools. She let me smell the fragrant smell of soup made with the vegetables picked fresh from the garden. I notice that the window has a broken glass that someone has covered with a ground cloth. I realise it will be cold here in the winter. The last room is the bathroom, old and used like the stoves in the kitchen. The visit is finished; we take some pictures, and we go out to drink our lemonade.

3.3.2. Separation from the children: Helena's story

Helena, a young Ukrainian caretaker and Hanna's friend, arrives with her patient, an old cheerful man with whom she seems to get along. Helena is a beautiful woman, who arrived in Italy ten years ago. In Ukraine, she worked as a nurse but she left to sustain her family economically. The major difficulty, according to Helena's experience, had been the suffering for the distance from her son who was just fourteen when she left. By the time she arrived in Italy she did not have a computer and Skype to communicate with her son, and she could not even call him on the phone every day because it was too expensive. The first years were grievous and difficult. She was alone in a country without knowing the language and far from the family.

> I used to cry every night thinking about my son. For a mother, leaving a son is the most horrible thing. I felt often a bad mother, I felt guilty when I heard my boy crying on the phone, but then I realized, or maybe I convinced myself, that I was helping him to build his future and I found a consolation to my pain.[7]

When I asked her if she feels integrated with the community's life, she listlessly answered that there is not much happening in the village. However, she has a boyfriend, an Italian man, who lives in a beautiful small town on the sea. They meet each other once a week, usually every Sunday. Her life in Ukraine seems far, her son is now a young independent man and Helena is young enough to desire a new life in Italy. Among the Ukrainian women interviewed, Helena is the youngest. As the employees of the caretaker's information desk explained to me, Ukrainian caretakers are usually older than the Romanian women and, different from the latter, their project is to earn enough money to help the family and retire around their sixties in their home country. On the contrary, Romanians prefer to settle in the host country, and they often get married to Italian men.

3.4. Church as preferential channel of migration and instrument of integration: Alina's story

Ukraine declared independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 and the end of the Soviet system led to an economic crisis and increasing emigration. Italy soon became attractive for Ukrainian migrant women because of the "care crisis" (Sciortino 2004) that was facing the welfare state in order to provide solutions for the growing aging population. For this reason, domestic caretakers have been seen the solution to the high demand for care work.

[7] Helena, Italy, July 2014

Additionally, as Sarti states (2004), religion has been relevant in attracting domestic workers in Italy. Especially Ukrainian migrations were facilitated by a number of church-based institutional channels between the two countries (Solari 2006). For example, in the city where I conducted my interviews, the main social gathering for Ukrainian caretakers was the church where every Sunday a Greek-byzantine Catholic mass was celebrated by a Ukrainian priest.

Alina is very religious. She arrived in Naples (Italy) in 1999 where she worked for a year as caretaker for the old grandmother of a rich family. The old lady used to beat her head with an umbrella and told her off because she could not understand the Italian or Neapolitan language. When she arrived in Italy she did not speak a word in Italian, and she soon discovered that the elderly in Italy do not even speak the national language, but their dialects differ from region to region. She had a hard time struggling with the language and even with the local culture. Where she comes from, the daily diet is based on meat while in Naples, which is located on the Mediterranean coast, pizza, pasta, and fish are the typical meals. Alina was forced to eat fish almost every day, and when she tried to decline, the family accused her of being fussy and they stopped cooking for her. She decided after one year, to move to the North, to a city where “I knew a Ukrainian priest was helping my people." She is still very grateful to the nuns who helped her when she arrived, and she prays every day because praying to God makes her feel stronger and able to overcome every difficulty.

Despite facing many challenges, Ukrainian domestic workers do not lead a miserable life. They have found a way to construct both a mental and a physical private space to survive the alienation of live-in domestic work. The first one is filled in with memories, pictures and stories from their origin country, and it is experienced every time the homesickness and the necessity of belonging to a culture become urgent. The second, the physical space, is open public space to escape the claustrophobic constraints of the household.

CHAPTER 4:

ZIMBABWEAN NANNIES IN JOHANNESBURG

Working with women from other countries, with a different culture, makes you reflect on how the social context contributes to shaping women's roles. Without understanding the gendered history of Zimbabwe, I could not analyse the Zimbabwean nannies' stories. For this reason, I have decided to introduce my fieldwork with a brief summary of the history of women in Zimbabwe, from pre-colonial times to the present, with the aim to enlighten some core gender dynamics and crucial historical steps in their claim rights. The second section is about the stories of the women I interviewed, their lives and experiences as live-in domestic workers in Johannesburg. Furthermore, since the aim of my research is investigating the living and working spaces of domestic workers, I dedicated another section to the churches in Johannesburg. Although domestic workers meet their fellow immigrants often in the streets or in private households, like the house of a relative during Sunday lunch, the only space which they insisted on introducing me to was the church. I think that, in order to create confidence, it was important for them to let me participate at the Sunday function, as a gesture of creating shared values.

4.1. Brief history of women in Zimbabwe

It is estimated that between three to four million Zimbabweans have voluntarily or involuntarily migrated to South Africa (Pasura 2008). The migration of Zimbabweans can be attributed to different causes, and in some cases, dates back to the 1960s. However, a notable movement of the population happened after the launch of the Land Reform and Resettlement Programme II (LRRP II) resulting in the transfer of land from large-scale commercial white farmers to black peasant farmers, the resulting imposition of international sanctions, and the ensuing political conflict with the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) (McGregor 2002).

According to Pasura (2008), it is within this context of high political tension and growing economic crisis that we have witnessed the large-scale migration of Zimbabwean asylum seekers, refugees, economic migrants and students in South Africa.

The status of men and women in Zimbabwe today reflects the cumulative experiences of the pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence periods (Hindin 2002; Stoneman and Cliffe 1989). It is generally argued that prior to the impact of colonial capitalism, Shona women had access to a socially defined minimum amount of land from their husbands' holdings and some kind of

autonomy (Pankhurst and Jacobs 1988). However, as Seidman (1984) argues, this may be a romanticisation of the past. Looking only at access to the means of production, this view of traditional society ignores non-economic forms of male domination. Although both women and men had access to land through membership in lineage groups, women had almost no formal authority outside the home. They were considered minors under their fathers' or husbands' tutelage, and any surplus they produced was expected to go toward feeding their children. Furthermore, "women were also used as objects of exchange between lineage groups, and from victorious chiefs to loyal soldiers" (Rucks 1989: 4). "There were also numerous controls over female sexuality in 'traditional' society. Polygamy was common, and multiple wives were considered a sign of the man's status. Female infertility was one of the few grounds for legal divorce, but male infertility was never discussed. In a polygamous society, where women did much of the agricultural labour of clearing fields and weeding crops, and where land was available, additional wives were an economic asset as well as the bearers of future generations" (Seidman 1984: 422). Among both the Shona and Ndebele-speaking people (the main linguistic groups in Zimbabwe), men paid *lobola* (bridewealth) to their brides' parents before marriage. Lobola payment gave husbands legal control over wives, children, and their labor. Where precolonial society treated women as both reproducers and producers, colonial policy tended to treat them primarily as mothers, whose proper role was to care for children while their husbands supported the family (Schmidt 1990).

Perhaps the clearest example of how colonial administrators imposed their own vision of women's proper role in Zimbabwean society comes from the ways in which colonial educational programs differed for girls and boys. Although no Africans had easy access to schools, girls were far less likely to receive formal education than boys. In colonial times, women's autonomy was taken away as white settlers, complicit with some Zimbabwean men, tried to restrict women's mobility and keep them in the domestic sphere (Schmidt 1990). A system of passes and permits kept women and children on land designated "tribal trust lands" (TTLs), while men worked as wage labourers on white-owned mines and farms.

"If British colonial administrators tended to ignore or marginalise women's labour, traditional society continued to treat women as responsible for feeding their families. In both cases, reproduction defined women's lives." But where pre-colonial family structures assigned productive responsibilities to women, colonial policies denied women access to the land they needed to meet those responsibilities. Thus the migrant labour system placed black Zimbabwean women in an impossible situation. Denied access to resources, they were simultaneously given primary responsibility for family maintenance. Low wages meant even well-intentioned men could not send

much cash home. Although women had fewer and fewer resources with which to work, they became increasingly responsible for meeting their families' basic needs. Not surprisingly, many women rejected this life, and followed male migrants to urban areas despite legal prohibitions on such movements. In town, however, women's employment opportunities were severely limited" (Seidman 1984: 424).

The "gendered application of pass laws" (Barnes in Pasura 2008: 91) regulated African women's mobility. Hence, a gendered pattern of male mobility contrasted sharply with the female immobility that characterises the colonial period (Pasura 2008: 91). However, Schmidt (1990) documents incidents in which women resisted customary law and efforts to control their movements. From the late 1960s on, a new factor began to affect Zimbabwean society. For more than ten years, the country was torn by a guerrilla war that forced black Africans to examine the conditions under which they lived. Instead of leaving rural areas to seek their fortunes in town, many young men went across the borders to Mozambique and Zambia to join the national liberation forces. Soon, young women began to make the same choice. The war experience and the exposure of many exiled Zimbabweans to Western feminism during the years of the independence struggle created within the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) a new awareness of women's special needs (Seidman 1984).

Before came to power in early 1980, ZANU's leaders strongly affirmed the necessity of improving women's position in the independent Zimbabwe. "For the revolution to triumph in its totality..there must be emancipation of women"[8]. "Throughout the liberation struggle, black Zimbabwean women described their goal not only in terms of freedom from racial and economic oppression, but also in terms of freedom from oppressive gender relations" (Seidman, 1984: 419).

As Seidman states, "like many revolutionary movements, ZANU relied heavily on women's participation in the liberation struggle, giving them at least a limited voice in decision making." However, after the war "older views of women's roles re-emerged among the party's leadership. Rather than retaining an analysis that linked women's oppression both to class relations and to relations in the home, many ZANU leaders, even those sympathetic to women's concerns, now see government's goal as helping women become better mothers and citizens within the existing family structure" (Seidman 1984: 420).

Pasura (2008) summarises that in post-independence Zimbabwe, the government made "some

[8] Zimbabwe Women's League, *Zimbabwe in Bread and Roses Collective, Women in Struggle,* London, Bread and Roses, 1978, pp.6-7

efforts to change the gender norms for the public sphere through legislative actions to empower women, but the changes do not seem to have taken effect in the private or household sphere" (Hindin 2002: 170). Despite these, Pasura quotes Made and Mpofu (2005: 3) describing the position of men and women in Zimbabwe in terms of "unequal power relations that are still underpinned by a deeply rooted system of patriarchal beliefs, norms and structures". Thus, the history of Zimbabwean women points to the legacy of male dominance and power as an important aspect of gender relations in households. The husband exercises control over property, money and decision making processes within the household (Hindin 2002; Pankhurst and Jacobs 1988). As Pasura (2008: 93) highlights in his study about Zimbabwean migrants in Britain, this view is contested and transformed in the diaspora context where we often witness a "reconstruction of gender relations". The majority of respondents in his study acknowledge that some women "are now the main breadwinners for their families".

4.2. Being a migrant domestic worker in Johannesburg

In 1991, Zimbabwe embarked on a major Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). As Kanji (1995:55) states: "plans to support the informal sector in Zimbabwe, while attributed much importance in alleviating unemployment, do not take into account women's disadvantaged position in terms of education, skills and access to capital, let alone the way in which women's time for such activities is constrained by their household responsibilities".

As a result of the decline in women's income and the increasing conflict with wage-earning husbands who continued to engage in private spending rather than on household needs (Kanji 1995), many Zimbabwean women emigrated in South Africa with the hope to find better wages and working conditions. Below are the stories of Zimbabwean women who emigrated to guarantee a better life to their children. Their stories are about women who manage on their own to provide for their families.

4.2.1. Gender dynamics through Constance's experience

Constance is married to a Zimbabwean man who does occasional jobs in Johannesburg. When she decided to quit her live-in job, she went to live with him in a small apartment in Braamfontein. She did not tell me much about her husband until he decided to go back to Zimbabwe. She was not sorry about his decision. On the contrary, she seemed relieved. She told me they are still married and will continue to remain married, but she does not know where he is going to move and what kind of job he wants to find: "I will move to my sister's place. We both work and we can provide for our

children and families. Anashe's children are now grown-up so she can help me to support mine if I do not have enough money to send that month".

When I asked her about her husband's handout, she said:

> "Zimbabwean men are used to being the ones who bring money in the house and the women do all the domestic matters. However, since we arrived here, I am the one who earns more money and that is probably the reason why he decided to leave. Probably he was annoyed by the situation he could not accept both as man and husband. From now on, if he wants to contribute he will do it but I will be the breadwinner. I can not count on him anymore"[9]

From Constance's explanation, it can be seen that while the position of women in the family and society is described as inferior, this view is being contested and it has undergone transformation. Yet this transformation does not fully overturn patriarchal relations. Constance is very independent and she can provide for her children without her husband's financial support. Despite that, she does not challenge the legitimacy of her marriage, even if her husband has decided to leave. They will be married forever, because *lobola* has been paid, she insists. I told Constance that even in Italy, until the Second World War, men used to pay to the bride's family a price, money or cattle. She seemed disappointed when I told her that is not a practice anymore because during the sixties the feminist movement condemned this practice saying that women were not for sale. Constance believes that *lobola* is a warranty with which the husband commits himself to the relationship with his wife. That is why, according to Constance, her marriage will continue even if they do not live together or if her husband does not provide for the family.

The current economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe has therefore transformed the traditional male breadwinner role as families seek to survive in harsh economic conditions. The changing of gender relations and roles has also resulted in transformations of marriage and the family, as men lose their role as head of the family, return to Zimbabwe. Amongst Zimbabwean domestic workers in South Africa the contestation of roles has not produced a complete shift in gender relations, but there is a subtle transformation.

4.2.2 Anele's story

Anele is a young beautiful woman from Zimbabwe. She arrived in Johannesburg seven years ago to work as a nanny for an Indian family. Her aunt knew the employer very well because she had been

[9] Constance, Johannesburg, July 2014

working for them for several years and entrusted Alice with replacing her in the job.

The main reason why Anele decided to migrate from Zimbabwe was to help economically with her child, giving her daughter the opportunity to study and afford basic needs in Zimbabwe, where she lives with Anele's sister. According to Anele, the positive aspect of being a live-in domestic worker is saving money for the rent and, sometimes, the food. Different from the other domestic workers with whom I talked, Anele is the only one satisfied with her relationship with her employers, where she feels she is "part of the family". "They don't even treat me as a domestic worker" she said. However, when I asked if she can invite friends or relatives where she lives she explained to me that she can not invite anyone without asking permission because it is not her house. Even then, the only time she asked permission to invite her daughter she received a negative answer.

Anele lives in a small room in the backyard, with a wardrobe, a bed, a television and a small table full of cosmetics. Hanging down the walls are pictures of her daughter, dressed with a school uniform, a drawing that her child made for her, and a necklace that belonged to her mother. The bathroom is outside. There is no kitchen, just a small stove for making tea. She always eats in the main house, when the family has finished its meal. "Everything I do, I do it in the main house, I use my room just to sleep".

Anele is very fond of the children she is taking care of. She tells me that sometimes to bear the distance with your own child, the only thing you can do, is transfer all your love and your care to the children you are looking after. They become your family, you see them growing, you console them when they cry, you follow the development of their own personality. That, of course, becomes a problem when the working relationship comes to an end for whatever reason. The similarity with the Ukrainian caretakers is clear. Indeed, the major difficulty for the caretakers in Italy is precisely forming attachments that are destined to end. Similarly, Zimbabwean nannies grow fond of the children they take care of and on whom they often direct all their affections.

4.2.3. Constance's story

Constance arrived in Johannesburg in 2012 and she started work as a nanny for an Indian Muslim family. Before moving to South Africa, she worked for a rich Zimbabwean family in her country. The landlady expected each room to be cleaned in five minutes, not a minute more because if it took longer, that would mean Constance was stealing. Cleaning the upstairs floor was a problem because she could not go up and down to take what she needed. She had to bring all the detergents upstairs at once. Constance said: "It does not matter if the employers are black or white, when

people have money, they treat even their own people like slaves".

Constance is a young woman, with a husband who has occasional jobs in Johannesburg and two children, a seven year old boy and a four year old girl. Both the children live in Harare with one of her sisters, a Christian pastor. Constance pays her sister six hundred rands each month for the school fees, for a baby sitter and basic needs like food and clothes. During her first experience in Johannesburg as a live-in domestic worker, her salary was one thousand rands per month, meaning that, after giving money to her sister she could not even afford food for herself. One thousand is all the employers claimed they could afford to pay her, after paying the gardener and another domestic worker.

Constance went to work for an Indian Muslim family. They repeatedly told her that she was dirty because she was not Muslim, so she could not use their dishes and mix their things with her belongings. They gave her one tableware of every kind to keep under the sink, next to the dog's dry food. She could not eat or sit at the table with the employers, just stand and watch them eat and wait for the leftovers if there were any to eat; otherwise, she skipped meals. She complains sometimes to her employer because she does not have enough to eat but the employer does not want to hear complaints, so she buys for Constance a pack of bread saying that "it must last for a week". She works not only for her employers but also for the old mother of her employer, where she cleans, irons, does the laundry and babysits the old lady's nephews. She works seven days a week, without a day off except a few hours on Sunday to visit her husband who lives in town. Before going out she must be searched by the employers. Her employers open her bag to check if she has stolen something, do not trust her and consider her a thief. When the employers go out, they leave her inside the house with the children and without keys, and put on the alarm to ensure that she cannot run away.

Constance has a room in the backyard with just a bed and a wardrobe, no stove, and a toilet outside, She cannot use the shower as her employers say she would waste the water so she has to boil the water and use a bucket. "The landlord is very mean with me, sometimes he goes mad for no reason and he starts to shout against me. If there is no more butter in the fridge he blames me. During Sundays, when I go to visit my husband, if I come back home and the landlady is not there but the husband is on the couch, he refuses to open the gate. I must wait until the lady comes back. He often asks me to put on his socks and then the shoes and sometimes you know, men ask you for something else". I did not ask Constance to give me further details about the husband's requests. Constance has an asylum permit and she often has to bribe the police to let her go. "What do you

think police would do if a domestic worker goes to report the offenses suffered by the employer? They do not care, they just want money and they have the power to repatriate you".

After a year with that family, Constance literally escaped the house. She decided to work for different families and comes back to her husband every evening. She still sends messages to the family, asking about the children but they never reply. She can not complain about her current situation, although she still can not afford to buy a house for her family. However, working in different places she can earn more and is treated with respect by the employers.

4.2.4. Anashe's story

Anashe is Constance's older sister. She has five children, all grown-up, but some of them still have financial issues and she decided to move to South Africa to guarantee them economic support. She has been working for years as a live-in domestic worker for Indian Muslims families. The first family for which she worked has a disabled daughter, with an amputated leg due to a bad case of diabetes, and an elderly mother. The daughter could move only with a wheelchair and Anashe had to carry her around, working both as domestic worker and caretaker. Due to this further task, the employers decided to raise her wage to two thousands rand per month instead of one-thousand but, according to Anashe, quickly changed her mind after speaking with some friends who told her "you can not pay a black person so much, they are monkeys, not human beings". The lady used this word "monkey" refer to Anashe as well as other black people who she saw on the street.

Anashe had no day off, could not go to church on Sunday because her employers were not interested in her religion and, as with Constance, she had to keep her belongings and especially her food and dishes separately from where her employers used to ear. Once she had a very bad, persistent cough and she wanted to go to the doctor, to test for tuberculosis but they denied her the permission, saying that she was not paid to have free time.

One evening the two women organised a party at their place and the elder lady, while she was bringing some glasses from the kitchen, broke two of them and put the pieces into the sink. The next morning, Anashe noticed the broken glasses in the sink and went to warn the elder lady who, instead of thanking her, blamed her for breaking them. At the end of the month, when Anashe asked for her salary, the women told her that they would not pay her, because the glasses she was blamed for breaking cost more than one thousand rand. Anashe left the house the next day after went to live for a while with her sister and her brother-in-law.

She now shares a small house with a fellow migrant and her child. She still works for a rich Indian family, from 6am in the morning until 5pm or 6pm in the afternoon. Every day the employer moves the furniture from one place of the house to another to give Anashe something to clean. She has Sunday off , but no sick leave. She is now hoping to find a daily job as a domestic worker, working for different families like her sister.

4.3. Sunday Morning at the Church

The only day off for a domestic worker, if they have one, is Sunday. Often, especially for live-in domestic workers, they just have the morning off to go to church and then they have to come back to work. Church is an especially important collective space for domestic workers, a space for meeting fellow immigrants and finding relief from everyday difficulties.

According to Pasura (2008), diaspora church congregations are an example of public spaces that resist changes to gender relations. "These congregations act as cultural reservoirs, not only in terms of religious beliefs and language, but also in terms of gender roles and relations. It can be inferred that men, consciously or unconsciously, use diaspora churches as a means of social control over women as the churches emphasise the importance of "doing things the way they are done back home". After realising the empowering status women now have through paid work, financial autonomy and the fragmentation of marriages, diaspora churches extol Christian values and Zimbabwean traditional customs that put the husband as the head of the family and the wife as a subordinate" (Pasura 2008: 103).

Pasura (2008) states that Zimbabwean are brought together in religious worship because "the conditions of racial discrimination in the labour market, everyday racism, being defined as "other" in the hostland's media" (2008: 103). Furthermore, the author identifies in congregations spaces where migrants can re-create and re-affirm their cultural identity, "gender relations and roles". Although Pasura's work investigates the links between gender dynamics and congregations in Britain, I found his considerations on the matter similar to my findings. Indeed, as he points out, "diaspora congregations provide Zimbabwean women with spiritual and emotional support and a sense of belonging" (2008: 103).

I accompanied Zimbabwean domestic workers in Johannesburg to two different Christian churches:, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG) in the CBD and the Rock of Victory Ministries INTL in Newtown. In both I noticed what Pasura states about the social control exercised

during sermons. Not only the subordination of women to their husbands is reiterated, but also the idea of the human being as subordinated to God's will is strongly affirmed. Everything that will happen has been already decided by God and men's freedom is coerced between the choice of doing God's will or not.

4.3.1. Universal Church of the Kingdom of God

The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG) is an evangelical, biblically-based church. The Church is a Pentecostal Christian denomination with headquarters in Sao Paolo (Brazil), established in Rio de Janeiro in 1977 by evangelist pastor Edir Macedo, whose aim was to offer the poor spiritual guidance to help uplift and transform their lives.

The Church has frequently been accused of illegal activities, corruption, money laundering. There have been accusations that the Church extracts money from poor members for the benefit of its leaders. The first church in Africa was established in Angola in 1992 and the same year a bishop and pastor arrived in Johannesburg and started evangelical work. In 1995 the first big church was built in Johannesburg on a city block between Hoek, De Villiers, Plein and Eloff streets (*www.uckg.org.au).*

The church is located in a huge building in the CBD. At the entrance plants and escalators remind me of the hall of a luxury hotel. Hundreds of people sit in the function room built on two floors with an amphitheatre’s structure. I sit next to Anele and I am surprised to see how crowded the venue is. People start spontaneously singing and dancing, waiting for the pastor. I am feeling very shy and my mind goes immediately to the sober and strict Catholic functions we celebrate in Italy. However, Anele takes my hand and I start to follow the rhythm. A white man, the pastor, comes on stage, praised by the crowd. The atmosphere resembles a rock concert. Bishop Pires is the first one to take the floor, followed by several other pastors who alternate themselves on the stage, each one with his own sermon based on the central theme of fighting sin and evil forces.

4.3.2. Rock of Victory Church

The IFCC came into being in Durban in 1985, and was known then as the International Fellowship of Christian Churches. The early days of the IFCC saw an emphasis on fellowship and a loose co-operation of affiliated churches and ministries (*www.rockofvictoryministries.org*). It provided an umbrella for hundreds of formerly independent churches. On the 12 and 13 November 1996 the name was changed to the International Federation of Christian Churches. The IFCC describes itself as "Socially Significant; Prophetically Relevant; Evangelistically Potent; and Spiritually Vibrant" *(www.rockofvictoryministries.org)*.

There are two different functions taking place on Sunday morning, the first one at 8am is a prayer session and the second one, at 11am, is a healing session. Healing is for physical ills of the human body and is wrought by God's power in different ways, like laying on of hands; the prayer of faith or anointing with oil. I usually go there with Constance for the first session. Under a huge depot, close to Market Square, hundreds of black people gather to hear the voice of Pastor Anosike. The function starts with songs and dance and the Pastor starts his sermon focused on the reality of the devil in everyday life. The devil is a fallen being cast down from heaven because of his transgression. He is not an impersonal force – personal names and pronouns are used with reference to him, while personal attributes and acts are ascribed to him. He is the real enemy of Christians; and together with his demons seek to deceive, tempt, afflict, oppress and destroy humankind. The believer, however, has been given authority over them in the name of Jesus Christ. Often the Pastor asks his believers to scream and reject Satan and pray for their sins in order to get redemption.

Each prayer session is usually divided in two parts. The first one, as I said, is focused on the themes of redemption and fight against evil forces. The second one is about the necessity to donate money to the church, first of all to become a member and secondly to guarantee yourself God's attention. Approximately halfway through the prayer session, before the communion, every believer must carry in their raised fist an offering to put into the donation boxes located at different points of the church. At the end the pastor advertises books for sale, considered as spiritual guides for a good believer. The relation between money and salvation is less emphasized than in the UCKG, but still people are called on the stage to tell their stories of good fortune due to their donation to the church.
I have never discussed my point of view on religion with Constance and Anele. On the contrary, I put aside my atheism and my concerns about the social control used by churches on poor people, and I tried to observe and understand why these spaces are relevant in the life of a domestic workers. Constance, Anele and Anashe spend every week alone or surrounded by people who are

strangers. During the function they feel part of a community where they can share difficulties and hopes and lift the burden of solitude and desperation. People are called on the stage to tell their stories that are representative and shared by the majority of the participating, creating a sort of public catharsis.

Once, just after the function, Constance and I were walking on a street in the CBD. Two guys were following us and they robbed me. While I was completely terrified, Constance decided to “fight in the name of God”, pushing and screaming against the guy who was trying to open my bag. After the episode, we went in a mall because I needed sugar to regain strength. I remember Constance told me: “we just have gone to Church. God gave us energy and power, why did you not fight back?” I believe Constance's question is enlightening because it made me realise that going to church is a process of mental and physical regeneration, which is so powerful to migrant domestic wrokers because it is shared within the community. In conclusion, the church is not only a physical space of gathering but also a space where migrant domestics find strength to face everyday hardships.

CHAPTER 5:

CONCLUSION: ALIENATION AS INTRINSIC TO DOMESTIC WORK

Two major issues emerged in my research about the spaces of live-in domestic work. First of all, despite what I initially thought when choosing to investigate the issue of space for domestic workers in South Africa, my research has led me to conclude that space alienation is felt more significantly in the Italian context, where most of the caretakers have to share a room with the elderly they look after. Secondly, while interventions in the regularisation of the work conditions provide legal benefits within the welfare system in Italy, it does not provide solutions for the alienation that seems an intrinsic characteristic of paid domestic work.

Some of the elderly in Italy are sick, senile or disabled and thus need assistance twenty-four hours a day, even during the night. For this reason, it is necessary that the caretaker sleep in the same bedroom of her patient in order to assist them in the case of an emergency. Despite the fact that some of the Ukrainian caretakers did not have experience of nursing in the Ukraine, they had to learn the basics of first aid, how to medicate, clean and move the cared-for person. For example, some elderly use an incontinence pad that has to be changed often to avoid skin diseases like decubitus ulcers. Especially patients who are still in bed or a wheelchair, suffer from ulcers that prevent blood circulation. About every two hours the patient has to change position with the help of the caretaker who, alone, has to move the cared person, helping him with putting on their clothes, washing, getting shoes, walking. In addition, senile patients need special attentions regarding communication. Some become violent due to confusion or fear; some are not able to make choices, and they get worried easily in the face of questions that require them to make a choice; others have difficulties in expressing themselves. In the worst case, the elderly person is completely paralysed in bed.

Hanna shares a room with an ill old woman who is not able to move and talk anymore. Hanna does everything: she cleans the house, she cooks, she does the grocery shopping, she moves and cleans the patient and she changes the intravenous feeding. When I met Hanna, she insisted on introducing me to the woman. When we went close to the bed, Hanna brought the lady's hand, she caressed it, and she gently told her about me and my research. I felt initially puzzled but then I realized that those two women live together. Even if the lady does not speak, she is there, she is present in that room and she is somehow company for Hanna, who has nobody else with whom she can talk. Despite this, it also a story of how acute Hanna’s isolation and solitude is; and representative of the

extreme alienation of Ukrainian caretakers in Italy.

Despite the fact that live-in domestic work like Hanna's means foregoing every degree of privacy, Ukrainian caretakers have found a way to create a personal space, mental or physical, inside a house that does not belong to them. For example, Hanna cultivates a vegetable garden which reminds her of her own vegetable garden in the Ukraine; Alina and many others, spend much of their free time sitting on a bench in the square or in the parish's park; Olga always carries with her a geographical map of Ukraine where she has circled in pen her hometown, as if she is worried she may suddenly forget it; Helena cannot close the door of her room so she does not feel comfortable phoning her children in her room because she does not want to be heard. For this reason every week she spends one hour in the close-by call center where she can talk freely with her family.

A space for one's own is necessary, and live-in domestic workers struggle to find one inside a house that they perceive as unfamiliar. Migrant women actively negotiate their space inside their employer's homes as 'outsiders' in the same way they have to negotiate spaces inside their host cities as 'foreigners.'. The same happens in the South African context. Indeed, despite lack of rights and the exploitation suffered by Zimbabwean domestic workers, as Nyamnjoh (2005) and Bonnin and Dawood (2013) state, domestic servants also use everyday strategies to survive emotionally in a situation of dehumanisation and marginalisation.

For the migrant domestic workers in South Africa, the issue of space is not perceived as urgently as it is amongst migrant domestics in Italy. Domestic workers in South Africa have a room separated from the main house. Despite the fact that these backyard rooms are not comfortable, and are a spatial form of domination (Ginsburg 2011), they at least are a private space that can be customised with pictures and personal belongings. It is true that the domestic workers interviewed would prefer to live alone in their house, but not for reasons of space. Rather, they would prefer their own home because of the abuses by their employers who have enormous leeway in determining working conditions, setting wages, establishing job descriptions, and determining the work structure. Domestics have little influence over their working conditions other than the choice to accept the job or quit. Given the power that employers exert over working conditions domestics feel dependent on, and at the mercy of, their employers.

In addition, racial discrimination is still a major problem. Whether in Italy where Ukrainians are victims of stereotypes about East European culture - such as their supposed physical force and their predisposition to bear exertion - in South Africa migrant domestic workers from Zimbabwe are still

victims of discriminations because of the colour of their skin. As emerged during my fieldwork, black domestic workers are treated as sub-humans, as “monkeys” (to quote Anashe's employers). Migrant domestic workers in South Africa pose an interesting case of the intersection of race, class, gender and citizenship status. Indeed, they suffer the compounded discrimination of being black, women, poor, *and* migrants with no rights and protection. As Constance explained to me, if a domestic worker complains about her employer's abuse to the police the worker could be deported, or worse still, brought back to her employer who will probably punish her for complaining. Proposals to address this abuse that focus on immigration law maintain exploitative working conditions. Unless proposals include safeguards for both undocumented and documented migrant workers, domestic workers may not necessarily escape the alienation intrinsic to live-in paid domestic work.

In 2009, the Italian government planned an amnesty to regularise undocumented domestic workers in the country. Since then, the majority of the caretakers who were illegally in Italy have a regular contract and they enjoy the benefits of public welfare: public health care assistance, sick leave, maternity leave, paid contributions and maximum working hours, per day and per week. However, when a domestic worker lives with a lonely non-independent elderly, she must be present twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. For this reason, most of the benefits linked to a regular contract cannot be utilised. The entire responsibility of the patient falls back on the caretaker's shoulders who can not, in practice, take a day off or visit her family in the Ukraine for two weeks without having to find a substitute themselves. Indeed, some caretakers organize their holiday months before leaving, making agreements with Ukrainian friends available to take care of the elderly on their behalf. When a domestic worker is sick, she often works despite her health conditions because she cannot find a substitute in advance. Furthermore, despite the fact that the national caretaker's contract sets the night rest at eleven consecutive hours, what happens if the elderly has an overnight crisis?

South African domestic work legislation is an advanced law very similar to Italian laws on domestic labor. However, there remain wide gaps between the policies on paper, and compliance in practice. In particular, in 2013, the South African government ratified ILO Convention 189 with the aim to extend protections to migrant domestic workers and facilitate transnational movements. However, specific provisions to give effect to it are not yet in place. In practice, the only basis on which a non-South African who does not possess “qualifications or skills and experience” can obtain a permit is through the declaration by a potential employer that they are “unable to employ a person in the Republic with qualifications or skills and experience equivalent to those of the applicant.”

Low-skilled migrant workers are thus practically excluded from legal work permits (Fish 2013).

Although I believe that the regularisation of undocumented domestic workers has improved their life conditions, alienation is still present, intrinsic to the very nature of domestic work as a feminised occupation in both the local and global labor market. Migrant women become transnational breadwinners but remain burdened by their gendered duties as mothers and wives back home. They reconstitute the meanings of womanhood when occupying multiple positions or shifting between them, and they bargain with the interchange between monetary value and emotional value associated with their labor. Transnational mothers send remittances and gifts to sustain family ties impaired by physical separation while searching for emotional attachment and moral recognition in their paid mothering work. In this life journey, migrant domestic workers not only travel across national borders but also march through the public-private divide of domestic labor, struggling with the dilemma of the interchange of money and love.

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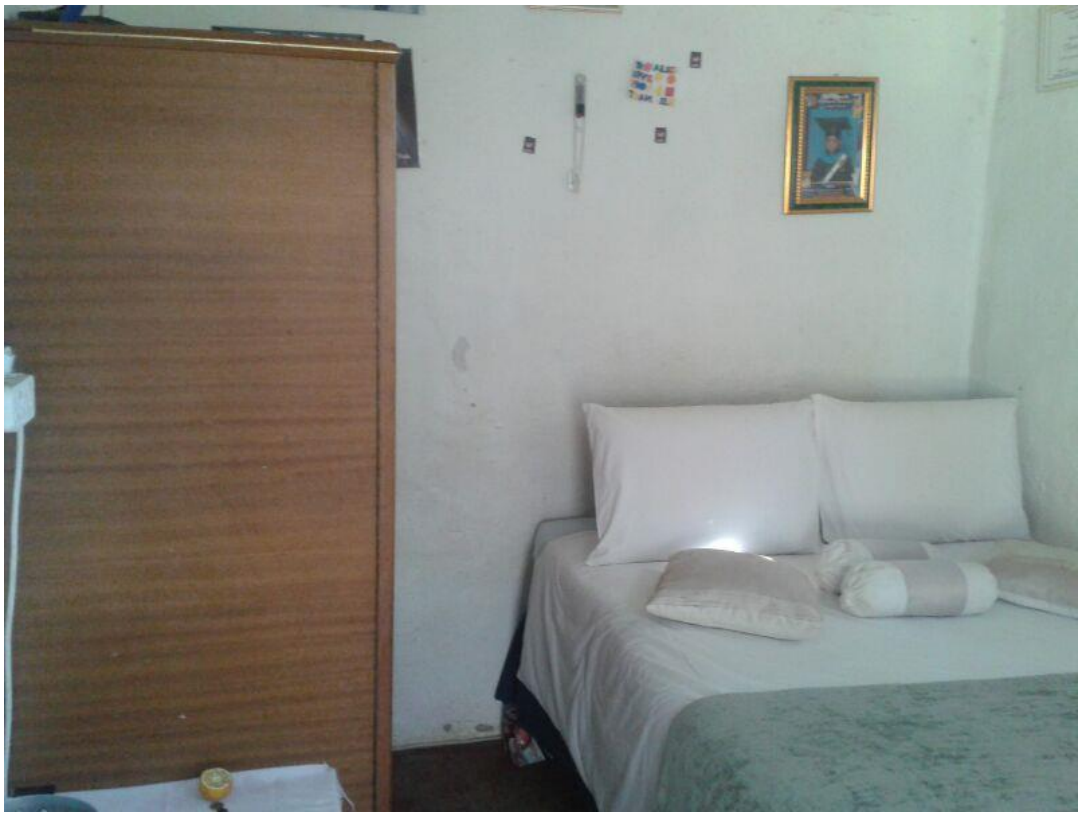
PHOTOGRAPHIC APPENDIX A:

1. Anele's room in Johannesburg



2



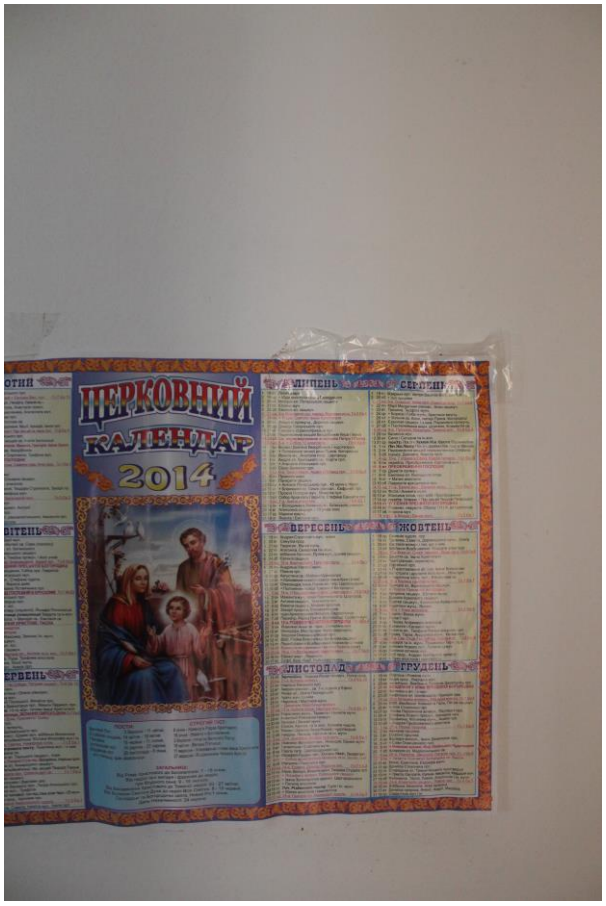
3. Hanna's room in Tesis (Pordenone, Friuli Venezia Giulia)



4



5



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APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.

Why did you come to Italy/South Africa and why?

1)How did you find this job?

2)How and where do you spend your free time? How much free time do you have in a week?

3)With whom do you share your living spaces?

4)Is there any difference between your living and your working space? If so, in what way are they different?

5)Do you have a good relation with your employers?

6)Which are in your opinion the benefits and the negative aspects of the live-in domestic work?

7)In your opinion, what are the advantages or disadvantages of having a place for your own?

8)Can you describe your room?