European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies
Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe

No. 98 (2015) April, pp. 69-86
www.erlacs.org

Male Domestic Workers and Gendered Boundaries among Latin American Migrants in Brussels

Inés Pérez
CONICET and Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata

Christiane Stallaert
University of Antwerp and University of Leuven

Abstract

Based on ethnographic research conducted in Brussels, this article analyses gender-based constructions in relation to paid domestic work. We focus our attention on Latin American migrants who, unlike migrants from other regions, come from societies where paid domestic work has been the main occupation of women throughout the twentieth century, where it was strongly shaped by a colonial legacy. We identify two main tropes within the discourse of our informants regarding this kind of work: the '(gendered) professional' and the '(domestic) worker'. In our analysis, particular attention is given to the participation of men in paid domestic work within the context of migratory experiences. *Keywords:* paid domestic work, gendered boundaries, Latin American migrants.

Resumen: Trabajadores domésticos y fronteras generizadas entre migrantes latinoamericanos en Bruselas

A partir de una investigación etnográfica realizada en Bruselas, este artículo analiza las construcciones de género relacionadas con el trabajo doméstico remunerado. Focalizamos la mirada en migrantes latinoamericanos, quienes, a diferencia de migrantes de otras regiones, provienen de sociedades donde el trabajo doméstico remunerado ha sido la principal ocupación para las mujeres durante el siglo XX, fuertemente marcada por una herencia colonial. Identificamos dos tropos centrales en el discurso de nuestros informantes sobre dicho trabajo, el 'profesional (generizado)' y el 'trabajador (doméstico)'. Merece atención particular en nuestro análisis la participación de los varones en el trabajo doméstico remunerado en el marco de experiencias migratorias. *Palabras clave:* trabajo doméstico remunerado, fronteras de género, migrantes latinoamericanos.

ERLACS is published by CEDLA – Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation/ Centro de Estudios y Documentación Latinoamericanos, Amsterdam; www.cedla.uva.nl; ISSN 0924-0608, eISSN 1879-4750.

Gender and Intercultural boundaries within the domestic space

As noted by Raffaella Sarti (2006), in homes where migrant domestic workers are employed, 'private' spaces become spaces of intercultural interaction, which may also include the negotiation of gender identities. Although gender has been an important analytical dimension in migration studies over the past decades, it has been noticed that 'the field of migration studies continues to be less receptive to the theoretical and empirical insights of this research when compared to other area-studies disciplines' (Andall, 2013, p. 525). In an attempt to highlight the value of this category in the study of male migrants usually considered as 'gender-neutral', the use of 'gender' as restricted to 'women' has been particularly criticized (Mahler and Pessar, 2006; Raghuram, 2008; Andall, 2013). Recent studies have addressed empirically the gendered dimensions of migrants' participation within the labour market in the host societies (Kępińska, 2013; Oikelome & Healy, 2013; Oso & Catarino 2013; Kofman, 2013; Näre, 2013). Research on male migrants working in feminized occupations, particularly in paid domestic work, has revealed the tensions they experience while trespassing both national and gendered boundaries (Scrinzi, 2010; Qayum & Rey, 2010; Näre, 2010).

While paid domestic work has been a feminized occupation in Western Europe since the nineteenth century, in recent decades, an increasing involvement of migrant men in paid domestic work has been pointed out (Sarti & Scrinzi, 2010; Kilkey, 2010). In Italy, for instance, the proportion of men in paid domestic work fluctuated between a third of the migrant declared workers and a 10 per cent of all (migrant and national) declared domestic workers (Sarti, 2010). This trend is also visible in other countries, such as the United Kingdom, Germany and Spain (Kilkey, 2010, p. 132). This phenomenon has recently been accentuated by the European economic crisis, characterized by the lack of work 'for men', and particularly migrant men (Borrás Catatalà et. al, 2012; Oso & Catarino, 2013). If paid work is a key element in the construction of masculinity (Connell, 2005), being employed in a feminized occupation puts the gender identity of the male worker under stress (Williams, 1993; Gallo, 2006; Guichard-Claudic, 2006).

Based on ethnographic research conducted in Brussels, this article analyses the negotiation of gendered boundaries among domestic workers. We focus on Latin American migrants, who, unlike migrants from other regions, come from societies where paid domestic work has been one of the main occupations for women throughout the twentieth century, where it was strongly shaped by a colonial legacy (Von Oertzen, 2005). As the most feminized occupation, it is characterized by precarious labour conditions, high levels of informality and low wages. This is related to its definition as low-skilled work, as long as 'the skills required for these services are embodied, transferred from practices in the domestic sphere and depicted as innately female' (Kofman, 2013, p. 580). The physical and social isolation of the workers in their employers' homes to-

gether with low levels of unionization add to these precarious conditions (Chaney & García Castro, 1989; Blofield, 2009).

In Belgium, paid domestic work is one of the most common jobs for Latin American migrants (Suárez Orozco, 1994), for both male and female (CIDALIA, 2012). Although Belgian public policies have made an effort to improve the labour conditions of paid domestic work, giving it a more 'professional' status, this work continues to be associated with a subaltern position, which, as in Latin America, is anchored in ethnic and gender inequalities (Rollins, 1985). Latin American migrants, many of whom had never been employed in this occupation in their home countries, usually experience paid domestic work as a step back down on the social ladder.

In the following sections, after a brief description of the Latin American migration trends to Belgium, and of the labour conditions that situate our informants' experience of paid domestic work in Brussels, we discuss two main tropes within our informants' discourse, which we have labelled as the '(gendered) professional' and the '(domestic) worker'. In the assumption that gender identities are relational constructions crossed by class and ethnic inequalities (Yuval-Davis, 1997), the narratives of male and female informants have been analysed in order to discover the ways in which gendered boundaries are negotiated and (re)created in the experience of paid domestic workers within international migration (Hondagneu Sotelo & Ozyegin, 2008; Lutz, 2008). As we will show, rather than eliminating gender boundaries, the involvement of men in paid domestic work displaces and reinforces them.

Latin American migrants in Brussels

Following the Second World War, instead of continuing to be a recipient of immigrants, Latin America became one of the regions with the highest levels of emigration. Since the 1970s, migration levels from Latin America to Europe and the United States have increased without interruption. In recent decades, migration to Europe has increased significantly, particularly to destinations such as Spain, Italy and Portugal. Up to the 1980s migration was triggered mainly by political motives, but since the 1990s economic migration has become dominant, following neoliberal policies in Latin America that resulted in slashed social services, increased job insecurity, poverty growth, and social inequalities intensification. In this context, migration to the Global North was an alternative to job uncertainty and impoverishment (Gil Araujo, 2008).

In Belgium, this period was marked by changes in immigration policies. Since 1974, the Belgian state has limited the access of foreigners to the country. Nevertheless, immigration has continued to increase in the past four decades, generating a growing population of undocumented migrants with little or no possibilities to legalize their presence in the country. In 2007, it was estimated that two-thirds of the 30,000 Latin American migrants residing in Belgium were undocumented (Sáenz & Salazar, 2007).

Among Latin American migrants in Belgium, the most common countries of origin include Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador. Migration from the latter two countries increased sharply from the late 1990s to the 2000s, in line with political and economic crises that dominated both countries. The Latin American population in Belgium is relatively young, between 20 and 35 years old, predominantly female, with at least a high school diploma. For the most part, women work in domestic service and men in construction, painting, and gardening (Sáenz & Salazar, 2007). However, in recent years Latin American men are increasingly working in cleaning and domestic services, occupations strongly identified as 'women's work' (CIDALIA, 2012).

The labour conditions under which paid domestic work is performed in Belgium, and under which our informants' experience is situated, are diverse. The rights of domestic workers are regulated by law under the status of '*travailleur domestique*'. Unlike the '*ouvrier*' and the '*employé*' status, domestic workers are entitled only to the minimum salary, without any limitations in overtime and night work (ORCA, 2010). Domestic workers' legal conditions discriminate between full and part time workers regarding social security coverage, family allowances and maternity leave.

However, in recent years various European countries have developed different policies aimed at both the creation of employment and the professionalization of paid domestic work (Tomei, 2011). In this context, the implementation of the *Titres Services* scheme (Service Voucher scheme) in Belgium has changed the legal status of many domestic workers since 2004. Under this scheme, the Belgian state subsidizes part of the cost of labour, giving licenses to agencies who act as intermediaries between employers and workers. Even for part time workers, being employed by one of these agencies implies having an employment contract and being covered by the social security system. By 2011, the scheme had 834,959 users and 2,754 registered agencies. Of the 149,827 workers in the scheme, 73.4 per cent were Belgian and 26.6 per cent were foreign. However, in Brussels, where 13.5 per cent of those who work in the scheme are concentrated, this proportion is reversed. There, of the 13.5 per cent, 77 per cent of the workers were foreign. Of the 55.1 per cent from European countries, most were from Poland; 21.9 per cent were from outside Europe. Of the 13.5 per cent workers concentrated in Brussels, 94.8 per cent were women. Regarding age and qualification, 61.4 per cent were between 30 and 49 years old, and 63.4 per cent were low-skilled (Gerard, Neyenes & Valsamis, 2012).

Despite the many advantages offered by the Service Voucher scheme, only a minority of the domestic workers are employed under this measure. The legal status of paid domestic workers in Belgium is still extremely heterogeneous (Pasleau & Schopp, 2005a, 2005b), including registered workers, workers involved in the informal economy, and workers who occupy an intermediate position between the two. As most paid domestic work in Belgium is performed by migrants (De Keyzer, 1997; Pasleau & Schopp, 2005a; ORCA, 2010), the

migrant status is the key to understanding labour conditions (Anderson, 2000; Hondagneu Sotelo, 2001; Pasleau & Schopp, 2005a, 2005b). Undocumented migrants are employed within the informal market under very precarious conditions. The combination of registered and informal work is also common within migrants.[1] A category difficult to classify, though nevertheless frequent in Brussels due to the international functions of the city, are domestic workers under a 'diplomatic' contract. These migrants arrive in Belgium with a legal employment contract for a fixed term with a diplomatic agent, giving them legal residence in the country. This makes them completely dependent on their employer, who in some cases even confiscates the workers' passports (Pasleau & Schopp, 2005 b).[2]

The diversity of labour conditions makes it difficult to estimate the total number of domestic workers and the segment of male workers. While workers employed by *Titres Services* agencies are mostly female (95 per cent), the number of male workers has grown significantly in recent years with an increase up to 50 per cent between 2009 and 2011 (Gerard, Neyenes & Valsamis, 2012). As has been observed in other cases (Sarti, 2008; 2010; Kilkey 2010), the presence of men in paid domestic work is concentrated within the migrant population. For instance, in 2011, 50 per cent of the Ecuadorian women and 17 per cent of the Ecuadorian men residing in Brussels were employed in 'domestic' or 'cleaning' services, this being the main occupation for women and the second for men (CIDALIA, 2012).

The research presented here is based on an ethnographic fieldwork carried out between November 2012 and March 2013. Data were gathered through a period of intensive ethnographic fieldwork in Brussels. The research team consisted of one senior researcher with longstanding experience with migrant communities in Brussels, and one fulltime researcher specialized in domestic work in Latin America. We were involved in participant observation in different social spaces, such as evangelical and Catholic churches, migrant associations, socio-cultural meetings and informal gatherings. Informants were reached by snowball sampling. In-depth interviews were done with 35 Latin American migrants who were either employed at the time of the interview or who had been previously employed in paid domestic work, particularly in household cleaning activities (25 women and 10 men). All interviews were conducted in Spanish.

By national origins, our research sample covers most of Latin American countries, namely: Ecuador (17), Colombia (6), El Salvador (4), Paraguay (4), Bolivia (2), Argentina (1) and Chile (1).[3] The working conditions of our informants, both male and female, are diverse and are strongly marked by their migration status. Their residence in Belgium ranges between 21 years and a few months, although most of them arrived ten to thirteen years ago. Those who have a legal residence permit have better working conditions regarding working time, wages and licenses. Those who do not face serious difficulties in finding a job, and when they do find one, they are strongly dependent on their

employers. This vulnerable situation is exacerbated in the case of migrants who have recently arrived in Brussels and do not know anything of the two official languages, French and Dutch.

(Gendered) professionals

The first trope we identified in the narratives of our informants (both men and women) is professionalism, which connotes equality and dignity of work, and is connected with the language of rights and with an emphasis on the specific knowledge that domestic work requires. However, as we will show, professionalism is not gender neutral. For most of our informants, the observation of their labour rights regarding working hours, overtime, sick leave, health and unemployment insurances was achieved only after their entry into the *Titres Services* scheme. This is a common trend with other migrant workers. According to a survey carried out by the Belgian state in 2011, foreign workers declared that their main purpose in entering the Service Voucher scheme was to get out of the informal sector and acquire professional experience and social rights, while Belgians said they entered the scheme mainly for its flexibility and because it allowed them to work near their homes. For non-Belgians the scheme is an opportunity to work within a legal context, but for Belgian workers it is for practical reasons possibly related to family needs (Gerard, Neyenes & Valsamis, 2012, p. 54).

As the *Titres Services* scheme is limited to those people with a legal residence permit in Belgium, entering it only became possible for many of our interviewees after being regularized (that is, their status was adjusted) by the Belgian State in 2009. Although many of our informants continued with the same employers they had had before, entering the scheme gave them the prospect of a future retirement pension and the possibility to assert their rights regarding the number of working hours, illness, or unemployment.

> Libia: I worked in the informal sector. I was able to get a very kind Spanish lady [an employer] who also helped me in getting other jobs. And I still continue to work for them [her employers], because I haven't changed or anything, I received my [residence] papers five years ago and started declaring my work at a *Titres-Services* agency.... There are advantages. If you work as unregistered sometimes your employers fire you and they don't pay you. Then you're stuck, because you still have to pay the rent, you have obligations, but the advantage with the agencies is that if you lose your job, they help you look for another one. And if you can't find one, they send you to the union, because you are entitled to a union, and the union gives you unemployment compensation.... And you also have a right to a paid vacation. And in the union they give you a bonus.[4]

Professionalism, however, does not only rest in formal rights. For our informants, the equal treatment received from their employers also expressed the

recognition of their professional status. This is highlighted by the contrasting image of domestic service they bring from their home countries, even if the informant did not have previous experience in this work before migrating. Being an equal of the employer is identified with situations and practices that have a particularly symbolic value. However, as we shall see in the second excerpt quoted below, even though 'equality' and 'respect' are highly valued, anxiety can also be experienced:

> Liliana: Here [in Belgium] they always treat you with respect.... There [in Ecuador], they make them [domestic employees] wear a uniform and everything.[5]

> Ivonne: My Spanish employers used to say to me, 'come, sit and eat with us'. I used to set the table, but I don't know, it made me feel uncomfortable to eat with them. I always ate last, after they had finished.[6]

The employers' invitation to share a meal with them is perhaps the practice most frequently recalled to symbolize equality. In Latin America, where the relationship between employers and domestic workers is characterized by an intense inequality, the 'myth of being like a daughter' does not usually imply commensality (Young, 1987; Gorban, 2013). If workers would share the table with anyone, it would usually be with their employers' children, in a practice that reinforces their own infantilization (Chaney & García Castro, 1989; Von Oertzen, 2005). In Belgium, sharing the table and other gestures that imply an equal status usually generates discomfort. However, workers highlight this treatment as a positive element of their experience in the receiving country.

Professionalism is not only related to working conditions, but also to the way in which workers present themselves. In this regard, our informants have built an ambivalent image of paid domestic work. On the one hand, it is seen as a deskilling and, in that sense, a de-masculinizing activity. As documented, many of the migrants – both male and female – employed as domestic workers in the Global North are highly qualified, yet experience their job as a step back down on the social ladder, related to the misrecognition of their abilities (Salazar Parreñas, 2008). This perception is intensified in the case of men. Even those who had previously been involved in 'feminine' occupations, as in the case quoted below, experienced an inability in finding a job different from that of paid domestic work, which is seen as a form of marginalization, anchored in their national origin. This creates hierarchies among migrants, between those who have a 'masculine' profession – such as painter or mason – and those who do not.

> José Carlos: It is much more difficult for a man, but it varies according to one's professional area. Of course if one comes with a profession such as painting, or masonry, it's easier to get into a company. But it's much more difficult in my case: I am a nurse. I have been here for seven years, and when I arrived, I started trying to get my degree approved with no results to

> date. Some guys I work with in house cleaning have told me, 'if you do not have help from a Belgian, it won't be easy to open doors'. There is this marginalization, especially for Latinos, although not only for Latinos. Even though this area of nursing has priority, it is not easy to find employment.[7]

On the other hand, our informants praised their housekeeping abilities in knowing how to organize different tasks to increase efficiency, what products should be used in order to clean and protect diverse surfaces, what techniques should be implemented for ironing, among other things. The possession of specific knowledge required for this job is also an element of the professional image our informants build in their discourses. However, men and women link this specific knowledge to different experiences. While women tend to relate this specific knowledge to unpaid domestic work, men emphasize its connection with their previous working experience, even though our informants' previous working experience before migrating – both men and women – was not in paid domestic work.

> Mercedes: Thank God they [my employers] are happy with my work.
> Interviewer: And what do you attribute this to?
> Mercedes: My mom. I thank my mom that she always taught us to be responsible. So we grew up to be responsible and do things right.[8]

> José Carlos: They [the employers] asked me 'what can you do?' I said I can do everything, I wash, iron, cook, clean. Because the work I had done before helped me. I worked in the area of hotel and tourism, and there, one had to do everything.[9]

> Yoder: When she [the employer] asked me to iron [her husband's] shirts, I did it well, because back in the store in Ecuador, I learned to iron cuffs and everything, and they looked like new.[10]

This discursive difference is translated into a displacement of the sexual division of labour (Scrinzi, 2010). Most of our informants combine cleaning with other activities, which also depend on the sex of the worker: women tend to combine it with caring, while men usually combine it with more 'masculine' activities, such as gardening or repairing. Although cleaning is the more stable work for our informants, men value these other activities as more important, not only in economic but also in symbolic terms. Many informants even present their work as 'gardening' or 'repairing', and it is only within the course of the interview and from direct questions that the centrality of cleaning activities becomes apparent.

Traditional gender stereotypes play a crucial role in differentiating feminine ('unskilled') and masculine ('skilled') activities. While the knowledge required for caring depends on personal rather than professional experience which reinforces the naturalization of domestic labour as feminine, 'masculine' activities are supposed to require specific training. Our informants refer to the courses

they had taken to learn this kind of work. Men also argue that they are better than women in activities such as cleaning. *Titres-Services* agencies, in fact, present them as better workers to potential employers, who are sometimes reluctant to hire men to perform activities seen as 'feminine'. This superiority is related to 'masculine' characteristics, such as rational use of time or physical strength. Previous professional experience such as handling machines and chemicals is mentioned to highlight the higher professional skills of the male domestic worker (Chopra, 2006; Scrinzi, 2010).

The differentiation between 'skilled' (male) and 'unskilled' (female) activities translates to an inequality in earnings. Vouchers subsidized by the state under the *Titres Service* scheme can only be used to pay for specific services (cleaning, ironing, household purchases, and transportation of persons with limited mobility). Within this scheme, each voucher is theoretically equivalent to one hour of work. Thus employers pay less for services, and employees are able to hold on to a registered job in a time of increasing unemployment. However, fraud often occurs when workers are paid for other services with vouchers. In practice, while cleaning and caring for an hour is equivalent to one voucher, repairing or gardening is considered more expensive and workers receive more vouchers than the hours they actually worked.

Professionalism is a central trope in the discursive strategies of our informants to enhance the value of paid domestic work, and one of the strategies developed by men to enhance their masculinity while being employed in a feminized occupation. However, as we have seen, professionalism is not the same for men and women. Gender inequalities, as part of the sexual division of labour, are replicated or even reinforced in the world of paid domestic workers.

(Domestic) workers

Our informants state that, in the context of migration, paid domestic work is usually the first job of the majority of Latin Americans for both men and women. However, unlike women, who eloquently describe their experiences related to paid domestic work, our male respondents exhibited some reluctance in talking about their everyday working experience or even refused to be interviewed on that topic (see also Näre, 2010).

While most of our informants have improved their working conditions over the years, their first job in Belgium was characterized by precarious labour conditions and a strong dependence on their employers. The pejorative regard they already had of paid domestic work before migrating to Europe was further intensified by this situation. In most cases, their decision to migrate had been triggered by unemployment, due to the severe economic crisis in the Latin American home countries as a consequence of neoliberal policies. Their arrival in Belgium and a first job in paid domestic work is a crucial point in a trajectory marked by unemployment, poverty, and economic instability in the countries of origin. In the informants' narratives, and especially in our male re-

spondents, the scene in which they first see themselves cleaning someone else's house is a pivotal moment in which they realize how drastic the change taking place in their lives has been.

Among men, this change was experienced differently depending on our informant's age. Those who were older when they started to work in cleaning services emphasize the drop in their working careers, and the need to step up for their families. The younger ones, on the other hand, see this work as the end of childhood and their initiation in the responsibilities of adult life: they migrated leaving behind their parents' home and their life as students with a professional future. Paid domestic work is, nevertheless, seen as a way to earn more money than they would have been able to in their home countries, a step forward in a career that could enable them to leave cleaning behind in order to build their own company. In this sense, most of our male informants – regardless their age – present paid domestic work as the beginning of an upward path embedded in the image of the 'self-made-man'. Despite the poor labour conditions they had to face, this work allowed them to make money and support their families.

> Osvaldo: When I started to work for the cleaning company, I had never cleaned before, I used to work in civil aviation; I worked in an office, wearing a suit. But when you already have a certain age, and you have a family, you have to be tough on yourself and say, 'this is going to feed me'. It is not the same for young people. I know young people who have their finished their studies and they tell me 'why should I do that [being employed in paid domestic work]?' But a person that already has a family thinks differently. And so, I became used to the idea.[11]

> Yoder: In Ecuador I was an independent man, I had my own business: I was a shopkeeper. To me, it [being employed in paid domestic work] was a bit hard, because I had never been given orders, I had employees in the store under my supervision. I rented an entire store, and the business was mine, I made investments and sales. I never even had a boss. And of course when I came here [to Brussels] I was a little shocked, but I said 'who cares', here my goal was to pay my debts in Ecuador and to help my family.[12]

> Dígar: It all depends on what you were used to. Me, back at home [in Ecuador] I didn't clean or do anything. Then, here [in Belgium], you have to change. In the first place, your mom is not here. In the second place, you start seeing that the way we were brought up in our countries is bad, because there is lot of macho behaviour.... And over time, you adapt to the condition you're in. [At first] I didn't know how to iron [clothes]. I learned how to here. I had no money and cleaning was the only work there was.[13]

Paid domestic work is presented by our informants as the beginning of a change of mind which involves a review of the gender stereotypes and the sexual division of labour that characterize Latin American societies. Our male in-

formants emphasize the learning value of their migration experience. Our female respondents also value positively men's employment in paid domestic work. The fact that a man engages in this type of employment is seen as a breakdown of traditional gender stereotypes. However, the discursive emphasis on more egalitarian gender relations cannot be disconnected from the confirmation of one of the main tropes of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005): the male breadwinner. For our informants – both men and women – what is at stake is that men should not be economically supported by women and must fulfil their task as family providers. This means that by accepting a job as domestic worker, men avoid being unemployed which would be the main threat to their masculinity (Borrás Catatalà, Moreno Colom, Castelló Santamaria & Grau Casajust, 2012). The 'willing-to-work man', who faces up to the family needs even if he has to take a cleaning job is seen as breaking with traditional gender patterns.

> Miguel: As long as you send them money, they [your family] are pleased and happy, and you come here and are a king to them. But if you're here and you're not earning or anything, you're lazy, you're bad, you're good for nothing, because you don't want to do anything.[14]

This latter image gains intensity in the context of the current economic crisis in Europe, where the institutions of the welfare state, and particularly unemployment subsidies, are under discussion. Latin Americans in Brussels use the trope of the 'state abuser' to build an opposition between 'good' and 'bad' migrants. The idea that 'everyone' – meaning every migrant – has to have the experience of paid domestic work gives way to another image: that not 'every' migrant is willing to accept such a job, only 'good' migrants do.

'Good' and 'bad' migrants are distinguished by their willingness to work. While Latin American migrants position themselves as hard working people that share the work ethics of the (Western) receiving society, they identify those coming from Islamic countries, labelled as 'Marrocanos', as the ones who do not want to work and abuse the state, living from its subsidies. The situation in Brussels is particularly shocking to our informants, and has to be explained by the difference between 'old' and 'new' migrants. Most of those Moroccans fall within the category of 'old' migrants (pertaining to migrant communities that arrived in Belgium prior to 1974), and hold Belgian citizenship, and with it, the social rights guaranteed by the Belgian welfare state (Stallaert, 2004). Latin American migrants who arrived in Belgium under different conditions and who, in many cases, still do not have legal residence in the country, question a model that 'privileges' those migrants who do not 'want to work'.

> Hugo: Marrocans, blacks ... they should be working…. Some people don't want to work, they want everything handed out.... For example, a Belgian person that's fired from a car assembly line, he does not want to work doing

> gardening, this is a reality. But we [Latin Americans] can work doing gardening…. It is work, but they [Marrocanos, Belgians] don't want to do it.[15]
>
> Miguel: The European has felt social disintegration a lot. Because they are not used to doing these kinds of jobs, [such as] cleaning floors, taking care of old people. Those are things that they have never wanted to do. Latin Americans, instead, we go and do it.[16]

The opposition between 'good' and 'bad' migrants is replicated in the differentiation between 'good' and 'bad' citizens. In this regard, our informants present themselves as better citizens than Europeans, as long as their willingness to work is stronger. The proof of this statement is that Latin Americans are willing to work in occupations that would be rejected by Europeans, such as paid domestic work. Willingness to work is highlighted by the fact that they are employed in a feminized occupation, rejected both by Moroccans and Europeans who would rather be unemployed than accept work in a 'woman's job'.

Final thoughts

In Western Europe, paid domestic work has been a feminized occupation since the nineteenth century. In recent years, the growing participation of men in this occupation can be observed, especially among migrant workers. In Brussels, paid domestic work is one of the main occupations for Latin American migrants, even among men. This situation generates different tensions among both Latin American men and women employed in paid domestic work. In this article, we have analysed migrants' discursive strategies to negotiate gendered boundaries within this 'feminized' work. We have focused on two discursive tropes: the '(domestic) worker' and the '(gendered) professional'.

As we have seen, our informants develop a professionalization strategy to enhance the value of their job. Despite common elements of the professional image built by men and women, we discerned a gendered pattern. While men base the specific knowledge and skills required for this job on their previous working experience, women relate it to their personal experience. This gendered pattern is reinforced by the fact that in Brussels, paid household cleaning is frequently combined with other activities, which differ according to the sex of the worker, and which receive different wages. In this regard, even if they have a lower status than men employed in other jobs, male domestic workers occupy a more 'privileged' position in relation to their female colleagues, reproducing, within a subaltern position, traditional gender inequalities.

Nevertheless, both our male and female informants value the involvement of men in paid domestic work as positive. Having a job, even in a feminized occupation, implies that it is better than being 'maintained' by a woman or by the state. Although the 'domestic' (and feminine) condition is given less value, accepting a job rejected by others shows a willingness to work. Our informants present themselves as 'good' migrants and 'good' citizens, and better than na-

tive Europeans or other migrants from other regions, who would rather be 'maintained' by the state than work in a feminized job.

* * *

Inés Pérez <inesp18@yahoo.com> is a post-doctoral scholar at the Argentinean National Council of Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET), and assistant lecturer in the Universidad de Mar del Plata. Among her latest publications, see 'Modern Kitchens in the Pampas: Home Mechanization and Housework in Argentina (Argentina), 1940-1970', *Journal of Women's History* 26, 2014; and 'Entre las normas y sus usos. Servicio doméstico, trabajo, intimidad y justicia en el Consejo de Trabajo Doméstico (Buenos Aires, 1956-1962)', *Nuevo Mundo, Mundos Nuevos*, http://nuevomundo.revues.org/65167.

Inés Pérez
La Pampa 834
7600 Mar del Plata
Argentina

Christiane Stallaert <ChristianeStallaert@uantwerpen.be> is Professor of Intercultural Communication, Hispanic Studies and Anthropology at the University of Antwerp and the University of Leuven (Belgium). Among her latest publications are: Translation and Conversion as Interconnected 'Modes'. A Multidisciplinary Approach to the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism in Iberian cultures, in Joan Ramon Resina (Ed.), *Iberian Modalities. A Relational Approach to the Study of Culture in the Iberian Peninsula*, Liverpool University Press, 2013, pp. 109-125; and Discursos, políticas y prácticas de convivencia en la Europa del siglo XXI. Una traducción antropológica, *Gazeta de Antropología*, Universidad de Granada, 2012, *28*(3), Article 2.

Christiane Stallaert
Zwedenstraat 33
1060 Brussels
Belgium

Acknowledgements: The research presented in this article was possible thanks to an Erasmus ARTESS (Argentina towards Europe for Social Sciences) Scholarship that provided for a post-doctoral research position at the Interculturalism, Migration and Minorities Research Centre (IMMRC) of the University of Leuven (Belgium).

Notes

1. Pasleau & Schopp (2005 a) identify employment in Titres-Services agencies and in local Agences pour l'Emploi as part of the grey area. Here, however, we propose another interpretation. The Titres-Services scheme allows migrants to have an employment contract and to contribute to the social security system. In that sense, we consider it part of the formal economy, where workers' rights are recognized.
2. Though it might be interesting to study the 'diplomatic contract' in more depth, our informants have not participated in this. For further analysis on similar working conditions in the UK, see Cox (2006).
3. The interviews were conducted in Spanish. This is the reason why Brazilian migrants were excluded from our sample. The quotations from the interviews were translated for the purposes of this article.
4. Interview with Libia, Colombian woman, 50 years old, Brussels, 6 December 2012.
   'Yo trabajé al negro, me conseguí una señora española también muy gentil que me ayudó a conseguir otras plazas. Y hasta aquí estoy con las mismas, porque no he cambiado ni nada, me llegaron los papeles hace cinco años y empecé a trabajar declarada [en] una agencia de titres de services.… Hay ventajas. Si uno trabaja en negro hay veces que los patrones salen y se van y no le pagan a uno. Entonces uno queda varado, viendo que de todas maneras tiene que pagar arriendo, tiene que pagar la obligación, pero en cambio con las agencias sí hay muchas ventajas porque uno si se queda sin trabajo, pues le ayudan a buscar. Y si no, de todas maneras le mandan a uno, porque aquí uno tiene derecho a un sindicato y el sindicato cuando no está trabajando lo mandan a chomage … la ventaja es buena porque también le pagan a uno las vacaciones, eso también es pago. En el sindicato le dan a uno un porcentaje de una prima.'
5. Interview with Liliana, Ecuadorian woman, 45 years old, Brussels, 13 November 2012.
   'Aquí [en Bélgica] siempre te tratan como con respeto... Allá [en Ecuador], les ponen uniforme y todo eso.'
6. Interview with Ivonne, Salvadorian woman, 28 years old, Brussels, 20 November 2012.
   'La [empleadora] española me decía "ven siéntate a comer con nosotros". Yo ponía la mesa, pero no sé, a mí me daba pena comer con ellos. Pero yo siempre comía de última, cuando ellos terminaban.'
7. Interview with José Carlos, Salvadorian man, 42 years old, 17 March 2013.
   '…uno de hombre es mucho más difícil, pero también [varía] de acuerdo al área donde uno se desempeña o a la profesión de uno. Claro si uno viene con una profesión de pintura, albañil, es fácil poder entrar en una empresa. Pero es mucho más difícil en mi caso: yo soy enfermero. Tengo 7 años de estar acá desde que llegué he comenzado la homologación de mi diploma, hasta la fecha no ha habido ningún resultado. Tengo unos señores con los que trabajo, en la limpieza de casa, que me dicen "si acá no tenés ayuda de un belga no se te abren las puertas fácilmente". Hay esa marginación, sobre todo para los latinos, aunque no creo que solamente para los latinos. A pesar de que hay prioridad en esta área de enfermería, no es fácil encontrar empleo.'
8. Interview with Mercedes, Colombian woman, 50 years old, Brussels, 12 December 12 2012.
   'Mercedes: …gracias a dios [mis empleadoras] están contentas con mi trabajo.'
   E: '¿Y eso usted a que lo atribuye?'
   Mercedes: 'A mi mamá. Le doy gracias a mi mamá que siempre nos enseño a ser responsables. Entonces nosotros hemos llegado a ser responsables y a hacer bien las cosas.'

9. Interview with José Carlos, Salvadorian man, 42 years old, Brussels, 17 March 2013.
'[Los empleadores] me preguntaron "usted que es lo que puede hacer", y yo les dije "yo puedo hacer de todo, lavo, plancho, cocino, hago limpieza". Lo que me ayudó fue trabajar en el área de hotelería y turismo porque uno tiene que pasar por todas las áreas.'
10. Interview with Yoder, Ecuadorian man, 44 years old, Brussels, 19 March 19 2013.
'Cuando [mi empleadora] ya me puso a planchar las camisas del señor, quedaban bien, porque yo allá en el almacén del Ecuador aprendí a planchar todo, los puños, que queden bien, como nuevas.'
11. Interview with Osvaldo, Ecuadorian man, 45 years old, Brussels, 16 November 2012.
'Cuando empecé a trabajar en la empresa de limpieza, yo nunca había limpiado. Yo trabajaba en la aviación civil, yo trabajaba en unas oficinas, con traje. Pero cuando ya uno tiene su edad, ya tiene su familia, tienes que hacerte un nudo en el estómago y decir "esto me va a dar de comer". No es lo mismo que la gente joven. Conozco gente joven que tiene su preparación y dice yo por qué voy a hacer eso [emplearse en el trabajo doméstico remunerado]. Pero una persona ya con una familia, ya piensa diferente. Y entonces nada, me fui haciendo a la idea.
12. Interview with Yoder, Ecuadorian man, 44 years old, Brussels, 19 March 2013.
'En Ecuador yo era independiente, yo tenía mi negocio: yo era comerciante. A mí eso [estar empleado en el trabajo doméstico remunerado] me cogió un poco duro, porque yo nunca fui mandado, yo tenía empleados en el almacén, yo tenía empleados a mi cargo. Yo arrendaba todo un almacén, y el negocio era mío, yo invertía y vendía. Yo nunca llegué a tener un patrón. Y claro entonces aquí [a Bruselas] eso me chocó un poco, pero me dije "que más da", acá mi objetivo era pagar las deudas en Ecuador y ayudar un poco a la familia.'
13. Interview with Dígar, Ecuadorian man, 32 years old, Brussels, 25 January 25 2013.
'Todo depende de cómo estás hecho. Yo en mi casa [en Ecuador] nunca hacía nada, ni limpiar, nada. Acá [en Bélgica] tú tienes que cambiar. Primero, tu mamá ya no está aquí. Segundo, vas viendo que la forma que nosotros hemos sido criados en nuestros países está mal, porque hay un machismo bastante pronunciado… Y bueno con el tiempo te vas adaptando al medio en que estás. [Al principio] yo no sabía planchar. Aquí aprendí. No tenía dinero y el único trabajo que había era limpiar.'
14. Interview with Miguel, Colombian man, 60 years old, 15 November 2012.
'Ellos [tu familia] con tal de que tú les mandes el dinero están contentos y felices, y vienes aquí y eres el rey. Pero si estás aquí y no estás produciendo ni nada, eres ocioso, eres malo, el que ya no sirves para nada, el que no quieres hacer nada.'
15. Interview with Hugo, Ecuadorian man, 40 years old, Brussels, 12 November 2012.
'Los marrocanos, los negros… ellos tienen que trabajar... Hay gente que no quiere trabajar, quiere todo regalado... Por ejemplo una persona belga que lo boten de una empresa ensambladora de carros, él no quiere ir a trabajar haciendo jardín, es la realidad. Pero nosotros [los latinoamericanos] podemos trabajar haciendo jardín… Igual es trabajo, pero ellos no quieren [hacerlo].'
16. Interview with Miguel, Colombian man, 60 years old, Brussels, 15 November 2012.
'La descomposición social el europeo la sintió mucho. Porque ellos no están acostumbrados a hacer esos trabajos [como] limpiar pisos, a cuidar viejos. Son cosas que nunca habían querido hacer. En cambio los latinoamericanos, vamos y lo hacemos.'

References

Andall, J. (2013). Gendered mobilities and work in Europe: An introduction. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 39*(4): 525-534.

Anderson, B. (2000). *Doing the dirty work? The global politics of domestic labour*. London: Zed Books.

Blofield, M. (2009). Feudal enclaves and political reforms: Domestic workers in Latin America. *Latin American Research Review 44*(1): 158-190.

Borrás Catatalà, V., Moreno Colom, S., Castelló Santamaria, L. & Grau Casajust, A. (2012). Male hegemony in decline? Reflections on the Spanish case. *Men and Masculinities 15*(4): 406-423.

Chaney, E. & García Castro, M. (Eds.) (1989). *Muchachas no more: Household workers in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Chopra, R. (2006). Invisible men: Masculinity, sexuality, and male domestic Labor. *Men and Masculinities 9*(2): 152-167.

CIDALIA. (2012), *Guía de recursos para ecuatorianos residentes en Bélgica*. Bruselas, Gobierno Nacional de la República de Ecuador.

Connell, R. (2005). *Masculinities*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Cox, R. (2006) *The servant problem. Domestic employment in global economy*. London and New York: Tauris.

De Keyzer, D. (1997) *Madame est servie. Vivre au service de la noblesse et de la bourgeoisie (1900-1995).* Paris: La Longue Vue.

Gallo, E. (2006). Italy is not a good place for men: Narratives of places, marriage and masculinity among Malayali migrants. *Global Networks 6*(4): 357-372.

Gerard, M., Neyenes, I. & Valsamis, D. (2012). *Evaluation du régime des titres-services pour les services et emplois de proximité 2011*. Brussels: Service public fédéral Emploi, Travail et Concertation sociale.

Gil Araujo, S. (2010). Migraciones latinoamericanas hacia el Estado español. La reactivación del sistema migratorio transatlántico. In Ileana Rodríguez & Josebe Martínez (Eds.), *Postcolonialidades históricas: (in)visibilidades hispanoamericanas/colonialismos ibéricos*. Barcelona: Anthropos.

Gorban, D. (2013). El trabajo doméstico se sienta a la mesa: la comida en la configuración de las relaciones entre empleadores y empleadas en la ciudad de Buenos Aires. *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 45: 67-79.

Guichard-Claudic, Y. (2006). L'inversion du genre ou les logiques complexes de l'avance en mixité. *Nouvelles Questions Féministes 25*(2): 134-138.

Hondagneu Sotelo, P. (2001). *Domestica: immigrant workers cleaning and caring in the shadows of affluence*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Hondagneu Sotelo, P., & Ozyegin, G. (2008). Domestic work, Migration and the new gender order in contemporary Europe. in Helma Lutz, (Ed.), *Migration and domestic work: A European perspective on a global time* (pp. 302-323). Aldershot: Ashgate.

Kępińska, E. (2013). 'Gender Differentiation in Seasonal Migration: The Case of Poland.' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 39 (4): 535-555.

Kilkey, M. (2010). Men and domestic labour: A missing link in the global care chain. *Men and Masculinities 13*(1): 126-149.

Kofman, E. (2013). Gendered Labour Migrations in Europe and Emblematic Migratory Figures. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 3*(4): 579-600.

Lutz, H. (Ed.) (2008). *Migration and domestic work: A European perspective on a global time.* Aldershot: Ashgate.

Mahler, S., & Pessar, P. (2006). Gender matters: Ethnographers bring gender from the periphery toward the core of migration studies. *International Migration Review 40*(1): 27-63.

Näre, L. (2010). Sri Lankan men working as cleaners and carers: Negotiating masculinity in Naples. *Men and Masculinities 13*(1): 65-86.

——(2013). Migrancy, gender and social Class in domestic labour and social care in Italy: An intersectional analysis of demand. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 39*(4): 601-623.

Oikelome, F., & Healy, G. (2013). Gender, migration and place of qualification of doctors in the UK: Perceptions of inequality, morale and career aspiration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 39*(4): 557-577.

ORCA. (2010). *Le personnel domestique: un autre regard*. Brussels: ORCA and Université Catholique de Louvain.

Oso, L., & Catarino, C. (2013). From sex to gender: The feminisation of migration and labour-market insertion in Spain and Portugal. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 39*(4): 625-647.

Pasleau, S., & Schopp, I. (2005a). Les trois couleurs de la domesticité en Belgique au début du XXI^{e} siècle. In S. Pasleau & I. Schopp (Eds.), *Proceedings of the servant project, Vol II: Domestic service and the emergence of a new conception of labour in Europe* (pp. 125-146). Liège: Université de Liège.

——(2005b). Une législation 'tardive et précoce' pour les travailleurs domestiques en Belgique aux XX^{e}-XXI^{e} siècles. In S. Pasleau & I. Schopp (Eds.), *Proceedings of the servant project, Vol III: Domestic service and the evolution of the law* (pp. 203-230). Liège: Université de Liège.

Qayum, S., & Rey, R. (2010). Male servants and the failure of patriarchy in Kollata (Calcutta). *Men and Masculinities 13*(1): 111-125.

Raghuram, P. (2008). Migrant women in male-dominated sectors of the labour market: A research agenda. *Population, Space and Place* 14: 43-57.

Rollins, J. (1985). *Between women: Domestics and their employers*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Sáenz, R., & Salazar, I. (2007). Realidad y sueño latinoamericano en Bélgica. In I. Yépez del Castillo & G. Herrera (Eds.), *Nuevas migraciones latinoamericanas a Europa. Balances y desafíos.* Quito, Flacso/ Universidad de Lovaina/Universidad de Barcelona.

Salazar Parreñas, R. (2008). *The force of domesticity: Filipina migrants and globalization*. New York and London. New York University Press.

Sarti, R. (2006). Domestic service since 1750. *Gender & History*, *18*(2): 187-198.

——(2008). The globalisation of Domestic Service: A Historical Perspective. In H. Lutz (Ed.), *Migration and domestic work: A European perspective on a global theme* (pp. 77-98). Avebury: Ashgate.

——(2010). Fighting for masculinity: Male domestic workers, gender, and migration in Italy from the late nineteenth century to the present. *Men and Masculinities 13*(1): 16-43.

Sarti, R., & Scrinzi, F. (2010). Introduction to the special issue: Men in a woman's job, male domestic workers, international migration and the globalization of care. *Men and Masculinities 13*(1): 4-15.

Scrinzi, F. (2010). Masculinities and the international division of care: Migrant male domestic workers in Italy and France. *Men and Masculinities 13*(1): 44-64.

Stallaert, C. (2004). *Perpetuum mobile. Entre la balcanización y la aldea global*. Barcelona: Anthropos.

Suárez Orozco, M. (1994). Anxious neighbors: Belgium and its immigrant minorities. In W. Cornelius, T. Tsuda, P. Martin, & J. Hollifield (Eds.), *Controlling immigration: a global perspective* (pp. 237-268). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Tomei, M. (2011). Decent work for domestic workers: reflections on recent approaches to tackle informality. *Canadian Journal of Women and Law* 23: 185-212.

Von Oertzen, E. (2005). From *muchacha* to migrant domestic worker. Ethnic relations in domestic service in Latin America and Europe. In S. Pasleau, & I. Schopp (Eds.), *Proceedings of the servant project, Vol I: Servants and changes in mentality, 16th-20th centuries*. Liège: Université de Liège, 183-198.

Williams, C. (1993). *Doing 'women's work': Men in nontraditional occupations*. Newbury Park, London: Sage Publications.

Young, G. (1987). The myth of being 'like a daughter'. *Latin American Perspectives 14*(3): 365-380.

Yuval-Davis, N. (1997). *Gender & nation*. London: Sage Publications.