

Long abstract – Monographic section

EXPLOITATION OF WORK, RIGHTS AND HEALTH IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Edited by Marco Omizzolo

Dual mastering and labour exploitation: life and work stories of Romanian women in home care in Italy from Romania

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The study analyses the dual nature of mastering in the specific context of home care services of Romanian women employed in Italian families through 10 life stories collected through in-depth online interviews and a literature review. This duality stems from the overlap in the home environment between personal and work time. The surveillance of Romanian domestic workers by the employers combine with prejudices and sometimes sexual urges, expressed through verbal and non-verbal languages, to define a coercive and segregating way of life and work.

This has significant consequences for workers in terms of exploitation, mental health and dependence on the employer's needs, even to the extent of shaping specific transnational relationships with the family of origin and its social network. Moreover, one of the primary challenges emphasised by caregivers is the “non-stop program” and very limited rest hours, leading to chronic fatigue and exhaustion.

The precarity of work of Romanian women employed in home care services in Italy is primarily determined by low wages and poor working conditions, including a lack of work-life balance, and high stress. Additionally, factors such as distance from family, poor social relations, and limited language proficiency further impact the quality of life for caregivers.

The processes of dehumanisation and exploitation are analysed through secondary data analysis of interviews and in-depth interviews with Romanian women who worked or work in care services and who lived or still live in Italy. The main dimensions considered in the analysis of the life stories were working conditions and job precarity, relationships with family and children in Romania, work-life balance, and the effects of their work in Italy on mental and emotional health and family relations.

The care work of Romanian women employed in Italy is characterized by a dichotomy between the public dimension of their work and the private dimension of their employer's family sphere, leading to significant subordination and various forms of exploitation. This dynamic results in severe economic and social dependence, compromised fundamental freedoms, and sometimes even blackmail and violence, making their plight less visible compared to other forms of labor exploitation. Recognizing the dignity of waged domestic work is essential to elevate it to the same level as other work activities.

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The study explores briefly the *concept of dor*, a Romanian word meaning the longing for what one has left behind and the yearning for what one will no longer find. This concept helps to formulate hypotheses about the ethnicized labor market, which tends to view Romanian women employed in Italy as less 'immigrant' because they are European. The foreign workers most frequently discussed are irregular workers or non-European ones; given the difficulty of tracking them, especially with regard to European female home-workers, they are somehow even more exposed to the risks of exploitation and violence. This perception masks the persistent conditions of marginality and subordination these women face.

The present article reveals how ethnic and social factors contribute to Romanian migrant women exploitation and marginalization, despite their European status, and underscores the need for policies and practices that address these inequities.

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