

CHOOSING THE RIGHT AGE GROUP?: INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF DEMAND FOR PAID DOMESTIC WORKERS IN SLOVAKIA

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Drawing upon interviews with paid carers and their employers undertaken in Bratislava and Banská Bystrica between the years 2013 – 2015, this article focuses on employment of paid domestic workers (nannies, babysitters, and cleaners) in Slovakia. This research focuses on the situation, which is globally unusual: unlike in Slovakia, where paid domestic workers are local women, paid domestic work is generally undertaken mostly by migrant women or women coded as ethnically other. In general, employment of paid domestic work operates on the base of ethnic hierarchies: women belonging to particular ethnic groups are seen as more or less suitable domestic workers. Analysing demand for nannies, babysitters and cleaners in Slovakia, this article argues that employers of local paid domestic workers do not use ethnicity but age as connoting particular qualities considered as necessary for undertaking paid care or housework. In particular, specific age groups are seen as more or less suitable for doing particular types of paid domestic work (e.g. cleaning, daily care for an infant, babysitting). After describing in detail how employers categorise paid domestic workers according to their age, I will reveal that in decisions of who to employ the age does not operate as an isolated individual category. Rather, it operates in intersection with other categories such as gender and can be understood only when we adopt an intersectional perspective.

Key words: Intersectionality, age, gender, paid domestic work, nannies

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RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE AND RESEARCH METHODS

Ageism is broadly defined as prejudice, stereotyping and unfair treatment of people because of their age (e. g. Butler, 1969; Nelson, 2002). Ageism is similar to racism or

sexism in describing stereotyping or discrimination of people based on their (ascribed) belonging to various social groups or categories (Nelson, 2005). However, existing research usually treats discrimination based on age and discrimination based on gender as distinct and unrelated social phenomena (Harnois, 2015). Indeed, Clary Krekula argues that “[w]ithin the gender theoretical sphere, older women have tended to be left out, and age and ageing are seldom addressed” (Krekula, 2007: 155) and while social gerontologists have frequently studied older women, “social gerontology lacks a widespread connection to theoretical advances from gender research [...]” (Krekula, 2007: 156). Indeed, Krekula describes relations between feminist sociologists and research on ageing as “‘diners at separate tables’, exchanging glances but without bringing together their conceptual resources” (Krekula, 2007: 156). Instead, Krekula and other researchers (e. g. Harnois, 2015; Taefi, 2009) suggest an intersectional perspective recognising that neither women nor elderly are a homogenous group. Indeed, intersectional approaches do not presuppose an undifferentiated human subject (Anthias, 2012). Rather, they propose that experiences and identities of individuals result from a range of different positions they have in a society and these positions cannot be studied as distinct and unrelated:

“Broadly speaking, an intersectional approach emphasises the importance of attending to the multiple social structures and processes that intertwine to produce specific social positions and identities. From this perspective, we need to simultaneously attend to processes of ethnicity, gender, class and so on¹ in order to grasp the complexities of the social world and the multifaceted nature of social identities and advantage/disadvantage. (...) In this way classes are always gendered and racialized and gender is always classed and racialized and so on, thereby dispelling the idea of homogeneous and essential social categories” (Anthias, 2012: 106).

Intersectionality has been variously theorised (e. g. Anthias, Yuval Davis, 1992; Collins, 1993; Crenshaw, 1994). This article is inspired by processual intersectional approaches understanding gender and age as intertwining and mutually constructed systems which are done in social interactions rather than existing as distinct and separable qualities of an individual (Anthias, 2012; Lykke, 2012; Krekula, 2007). In particular, within this perspective intersectionality is not simply a matter of adding different grounds of inequality or discrimination together. Rather, it tries to dissolve the boundaries between different social categories:

“women do not share experiences that are independent of positions like ethnicity, class, age and sexuality. We do not ‘do gender’ as an isolated process, it has been claimed: when we are ‘doing gender’ we simultaneously ‘do’ ethnicity, class, age, sexuality, ability, etc.” (Krekula, 2007: 157).

Adopting an intersectional perspective, this article analyses demand for paid domestic workers (i.e. nannies, babysitters and cleaners) in Slovakia. Domestic work is heavily

¹ From the perspective of my study it is important that Anthias (2012) in the next part of the text recognises also the importance of age and stage in the life cycle in (re)production of either cultural phenomena or social hierarchies and inequalities.

gendered, being both undertaken by women and seen as constituting femininity (Lutz, 2011; West, Zimmerman, 1987). Drawing upon interviews with both paid domestic workers and their employers I will demonstrate how employers of paid domestic workers use age and stages in life-cycles of women as connoting particular qualities considered as necessary for undertaking paid childcare or housework. Apparently, paid domestic workers are chosen on the base of their age and gender. After describing in detail how employers categorise paid domestic workers, I will reveal that in deciding whom to employ the age does not operate as an isolated individual category. Rather, age and gender intertwine, and demand for paid domestic workers can be understood only when we adopt an intersectional perspective.

This study uses qualitative research methods² allowing for deeper insight into the practices and interpretations of research participants. Research methods include ethnographic interviews and participant observation. During the years 2013 – 2015 I interviewed 25 employers (23 females and 2 males) and 11 providers of paid domestic work (full- or part-time nannies, babysitters, and cleaners). Twenty-nine interviews took place in Bratislava, and seven in Banská Bystrica. All interviews, but two, were recorded and transcribed. Empirical material and interview quotes presented in this article are representative examples of the data, illustrating the theoretical discussion well. All names of research participants appearing in this text are pseudonyms.

CONTEXT: PAID DOMESTIC WORK AND HOME-BASED CHILDCARE IN SLOVAKIA

There is growing evidence of increasing demand for paid domestic workers in former socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (e. g. Ezzeddine et al., 2014; Kordasiewicz, 2012; Suralová, 2015; Suralová, 2017; Tkach, Hrženjak, 2016) including Slovakia (Sekeráková Búriková, 2016; Sekeráková Búriková, 2017).

I have argued elsewhere that reasons to employ paid domestic workers in Slovakia are related to gaps in the welfare regime, ideology of childcare, local models of parenting and grandparenting, as well as life styles of middle and upper classes (Sekeráková Búriková, 2016; Sekeráková Búriková, 2017). In particular, the state does not provide childcare facilities for children younger than three years (and in some cases even for pre-school children). Parents prefer home-based care (mostly provided by mothers) for children younger than three years and kindergartens for pre-school children older than three years. Full-time nannies are employed when mothers³ do not provide care for children younger than three years, usually because returning to their workplace before their child turns three. Part-time nannies are employed when mother wants to participate in some part-time work during maternity or parental leave, has twins, or children with different developmental needs. Cleaners are hired when middle and upper classes, who often work long hours, prefer not to spend their

² For more details on research methods and analysis look at Sekeráková Búriková (2017).

³ Fathers only rarely take maternity or parental leave in Slovakia. While the of women on parental leave oscillated around 69 thousand between 2004 and 2013, the number of men was during same time 480 (Hanzelová, Kešelová, 2014). Among employers analysed within this research no man took maternity or parental leave, and interviewees did not mention fathers as possible substitutes for mothers (For details see Sekeráková Búriková, 2017).

free time doing housework. Babysitters and sometimes part-time nannies are hired from similar reasons, since they enable parents to spend free time without children. Part-time nannies also accompany children to and from school, or to and from various free time activities (Sekeráková Búriková, 2016; Sekeráková Búriková, 2017).

Employers of paid domestic workers belong to middle and upper classes in the widest sense of the word. Previous research demonstrates that paid domestic work is usually undertaken by migrant women (Anderson, 2000; Henshall Momsen, 1999; Lutz, 2008). Because of the restrictive migration policy in Slovakia, combined with the relatively low economic attractiveness of the country (Divinský, 2007; Divinský, 2009; Filadelfiová et al., 2011; Hlinčíková et al., 2014), the demand for paid care is supplied not by migrants but rather by local women. The employment of paid domestic workers in Slovakia is not situated within either global or regional care chains (Hochschild, 2000; Hochschild 2003; Parreñas, 2000; Parreñas, 2001; Williams, 2012; Yeates, 2012): neither paid domestic workers nor their employers are migrants; paid domestic workers are local women who neither live in the households of their employers nor do they have young children (Sekeráková Búriková, 2017: 24–29).

Paid domestic work in Slovakia is characteristic by high informality. Paid domestic workers work mostly informally and employers also prefer informal ways of recruiting them. My informants found their nannies, babysitters, or cleaners either through their informal social networks or used the specialized online portal Domelia (2017). Specialized agencies are used less frequently and my informants described them as either too expensive or not professional enough (meaning offering mostly students working part-time). Agencies mediate contractual work; other domestic workers work mostly informally. Furthermore, both paid domestic workers and their employers explicitly distinguish paid domestic work from other paid occupations, describing it as *help*, *specific relationship* or not *an ordinary job*.

As elsewhere (Anderson, 2000; Lutz, 2008; Lutz 2011) paid domestic workers in Slovakia earn low wages. In particular, paid child-carers (i.e. full-time or part-time nannies and babysitters) earned 2 – 6 euro per hour, cleaners 3 – 8 euro per hour. While this is slightly above minimum hourly gross income⁴, it is still less than the average hourly wage⁵. Working informally or as self-employed persons, domestic workers are responsible for their health or social insurance. Both low wages and the need to pay for social and health insurance make employment in paid domestic work precarious and attractive to women, who either have some other source of income or at least have their social and health insurance paid by the state. For this reason students, retired women and women registered as unemployed prevail among paid domestic workers. Only a few full-time nannies work as self-employed persons. Since full-time nannies are usually needed during usual working hours, they cannot hold other full-time jobs. Compared to childcare, cleaning is more flexible regarding time, and unlike nannies cleaners often have other jobs and cleaning provides them only with supplementary income (I have repeatedly come across nurses working in hospitals complementing their income cleaning and ironing for other families). However, students and either retired or unemployed older women also prevail (Sekeráková Búriková, 2016).

4 Minimal net wage was in Slovakia 2.023 euro per hour in 2014 (Minimálna mzda, 2015).

5 The average hourly wage was in Slovakia 7.1 euro in 2014 (Finančné centrum o peniazoch, 2015).

UNFOLDING DEMAND: WHO IS SEEN AS SUITABLE FOR DOING PARTICULAR TYPE OF PAID DOMESTIC WORK

Comparing paid domestic workers within my research (i.e. either paid domestic workers I interviewed or paid domestic workers employed by my interviewees) I recognise the following categories of paid domestic workers employed in present Slovakia⁶: firstly, there is a full-time nanny, who looks after a child or children younger than three years⁷ from Monday to Friday or daily eight – nine hours. The mother is absent (at work) during this time. Secondly, there is a part-time nanny, who works either daily (but less than eight hours), or for several (but not all) days a week. During this time mother works part-time, undertakes some short-term project alongside maternity leave, does some free time activities or errands, takes a rest, or provides care for her other child or children (usually in case of twins or children with different developmental needs). For example, the mother provides care for a baby while the nanny takes her preschool child to the playground. A part-time nanny is sometimes employed when parents cannot afford a full-time nanny. Thirdly, there are part-time nannies accompanying children to and from school, or to and from various extra-curricular activities. Fourthly, there are babysitters putting children to bed or looking after sleeping children while the parents are out. Babysitters sometimes walk outside with babies sleeping in prams or pushchairs. Fifthly, cleaners, who do a weekly or biweekly cleaning. Sixthly, cleaners, who do occasional cleaning (e.g. wash windows before Christmas, clean the house after renovation).

When I asked my interviewees about their preferences regarding paid domestic workers, I got typified responses. The employers were looking for an *older lady/woman* (*staršia pani/žena*) or a *pensioner* (*dôchodkyňa*) on the one hand, and a *student* (*študentka*), *young woman* (*dievča*) or a *young lady* (*slečna*) on the other hand, or they looked for a *professional* (*profesionálka*) or *someone qualified* (*niekto kvalifikovaný*). While the first two categories are broadly defined by an age and stage in a life cycle, the third one is defined by qualification gained by either institutional education (i.e. students or graduates of specific disciplines such as pedagogy, psychology, or medicine) or specialized courses organised by agencies providing nannies (e. g. first aid certificate, course on childrearing, etc.) and cleaners (e. g. courses on cleaning and cleaning utensils, briefings on attitude towards employers).

I argue that in order to understand employers' ideas about who is suitable to undertake a particular type of paid domestic work we have to take into account a local division of reproductive labour within both nuclear and extended families. The way how reproductive labour is divided and shared is related to particular ways of doing gender (Lutz, 2011; West, Zimmerman, 1987). Since gendered division of labour is different in delegating childcare and in delegating housework, I will start analysing demand for childcare and then continue with housework.

I have argued elsewhere (Sekeráková Búriková, 2016, 2017) that the employment of both full-time and part-time nannies, and babysitters is related to the local culture

6 I based this categorisation on the analysis of practices. Particular categories do not necessarily overlap with labels my informants used for paid domestic workers. I have argued elsewhere that there is not a shared explicit categorisation of paid domestic workers in Slovakia (Sekeráková Búriková, 2017).

7 The full-time nannies look after a child older than three years only if the child has not got a placement in a state kindergarten, or is ill too often to attend a kindergarten.

of childrearing involving help of an extended family (Botíková, Švecová, Jakubíková, 1997; Feglová, 2002; Ratica, 1990; Salner, 1983; Švecová, 1986, 1989). In general, mothers are considered to be the best persons to provide care for young children and grandmothers are seen as the best persons to *help them* with childcare (Marošiová, Šumšalová, 2006). *Help* to children is a common way of spending one's retirement: Retired women expect and are expected to spend at least some of their time looking after their grandchildren (Bútorová, Filadelfiová, 2008). Crucially, my interviewees commented that they decided to hire paid child-carers when grandmothers could not or would not provide them with such a *help*⁸.

Not only paid carers substitute for unavailable grandmothers, their employment reflects this model of childrearing in the following ways:

(1) The employers apply a model which is analogous to the model involving help of grandmothers. Hence they want someone who will be *like a grandmother for their child*, meaning the hired person will provide the care mothers associate with an ideal type of grandparenting and/or has similar demographic characteristics such as the age and stage in the life-cycle. Thus they do not expect that nanny will have special courses and qualifications and will teach the child specific skills, but expect that nanny will provide their child with a "natural family environment", will "bake cakes together" with the child, will know "how to dress children when it is cold" or "how to feed them properly". These employers often prefer nannies that are older than themselves – actually, the nannies they employ are often in their mother's age. For example, when Mariana, currently on maternal leave, got an offer to teach a course at the faculty of arts, she decided to hire a part-time nanny to provide care for her six month old son during the time she was teaching and preparing her lessons. She explicitly looked for the nanny who would substitute for absent grandmothers and explicitly looked for the person with experience with grandmothers:

Interviewer: What were your expectations? Whom did you want? What kind of person?

Mariana: The only thing I really wanted was an older lady. The thing was that one grandmother was in Brussels and I am not from Bratislava, so my mother was not around either. So I said to myself, God, please let it be an elderly, mature woman, that would be fantastic! [emphasis by the author] I was not against hiring a student either, but I know they have other demands on their time, they are not flexible. And their sense of responsibility... If it rains, they do not come, that kind of thing. I was afraid of this. And I needed someone responsible, someone stable, fixed. So I decided – an older woman. And my desire was to have someone, who would be like a grandmother. That would be perfect [emphasis by the author]. (...)

Interviewer: And how did you find that lady?

Mariana: Via family. A colleague of a relative of mine hired her as a housekeeper. She was doing cleaning, shopping, etcetera, for their family. This lady had not been

8 I. e. grandmothers either did not live in the same place, they were too ill (or already passed away), or still worked full-time. Other reasons regarded relationship between mother and grandmother (i.e. the relationship between mother and grandmother was strained, mother and grandmother had conflicting ideas about childcare and mother preferred to have more control over childcare, or parents needed more help than grandmother would provide).

a nanny before, she had not cared for children, but we tried it. She was 56 years old, Hugo was six months old at that time. She has finished a high school education, an economic academy, she was working in human resources all her life, she was even a boss of her department. At the time we met she was working in a pawnshop. Housekeeping was only her side job. However, the main thing was that she was a mother of two and grandmother of five. That was the main qualification for me, the main reference was her experience with children. (...) **When I was looking for a nanny, the fact that she was a grandmother and mother was sufficient for me** [emphasis by the author].

(2) Looking for someone who would complement but not substitute the help of grandmothers the employers hire someone who has different demographic characteristics and provides care conceptualized differently from the care provided by grandmothers. For example, Vierka's mother comes once a week to help Vierka with house-chores and children. Usually, while her mother cleans and cooks, Vierka spends time with children outside. Vierka's husband travels a lot for his work, so when Simona – a university student and Vierka's former pupil – offered Vierka *help* with her three children, Vierka agreed and hired her for one – two afternoons a week as a part-time nanny. Simona's work is complementary to *the help* of the grandmother. While the grandmother *helps* Vierka to spend time with the children, Simona allows her to spend time without them: on afternoons when Simona plays with the children Vierka does her errands or meets her husband for a coffee somewhere out. Also Simona's activities with the children are conceptualized as different from activities they do with grandparents: unlike their grandmother, who prefers indoor activities, Simona takes the children outside, where they cycle or spend time at the playground. Vierka is happy that Simona is willing to do things "grandmothers are afraid to do". Vierka's age, experience and care she provides are constructed as different from these provided by grandmother. As such, Simona does not compete with grandmother and does not threaten her unique position in the lives of children.

Employers hiring carers as complementary to grandmothers sometimes delegated tasks to paid carers that they considered tedious and possibly threatening to a good relationship between either children or mother with grandmother:

Katarína: I knew I needed help with transport. I have a highly demanding job and my sons have many [extra-curricular] activities. (...) **I really wished my mother would have my children only when she wanted to. I wanted them to have fun together. I did not want to force her** [emphasis by the author]. I wanted someone alongside my mother. My mother is active, she is still at work, she has not retired yet. My mother has her own life and activities and I want neither to exploit her nor to bother her always, when I need someone. I want to have this freedom. For example, I want to go to movies and hire someone during that time.

Interviewer: What were you looking for? What were your expectations?

Katarína: I needed someone who would accompany them to their extra-curricular activities. **That's a passive time** [emphasis by the author]. Once I tried it myself [to accompany her sons to training]. (...) **It was completely unproductively spent time** [emphasis by the author]. They were looking forward to training and I was sitting for couple of hours at the bench in front of the gym. I think that time could be spent differently. I prefer waiting for them at home and cooking dinner.

(3) Other employers make an analogous model also originating in an extended family hiring someone, who would be *a friend (kamarátka)* or *like a sister (ako sestra)* to children. Doing so, they look for the person who has appropriate demographic characteristics (i.e. is young and ideally is an older sibling from a family with numerous children). Usually, the person employed is a high school or university student. Some employers insisted that the person they hired was qualified as a carer because she used to care for her many siblings at home. This model is common especially among Christian (both Roman Catholic and protestant) employers, who often successfully recruit their nannies and babysitters through their church networks.

(4) The last type of employers explicitly avoid the analogy of carer with grandmothering or grandmothers reversing the model and looking for carers with different characteristics than grandmothers. Such employers usually avoid older carers as a whole:

Henrieta: I just did not want one more granny, who would tell me what to do with the children[emphasis by the author]. I had enough of that with my mother and mother-in-law. **I wanted a young girl** [emphasis by the author], whom I did not have to legitimize why I wanted her to do or not to do something with my kid.

While employers like Henrieta reverse the familial model (i.e. make a different choice in an explicit relation to the model), there are employers, whose decisions do not reflect the local model of childrearing at all. These employers either (5) delegate tasks they label as menial, boring and unimportant for the child's development to a sufficiently inexpensive and reliable worker⁹, or (6) being concerned about class reproduction they decide to employ *a qualified professional carer*. This is not an exhaustive list and there also exist variations and combinations of the listed alternatives: an employer might want a *qualified carer* because she does not want the care resembling care of grandmothers, or someone who wants a carer complementary to a grandmother decides to hire a *professional* or someone who will be like an *older sibling* etc.

Individual choices of child carers are a result of a particular employer's attitude towards the local model of childrearing, developmental stage of the child, and the type of paid domestic worker they are hiring. So when choosing a full-time or part-time nanny who is supposed to look after a baby or toddler, the employers prefer someone *who would be like a grandmother for their child* and chose an older women or they opt for *a professional carer*. Older the child, the frequency of the preference for having someone who would be *like a friend* or *older sibling* increases and having someone *like a grandmother* decreases.

When employers look for someone who would do tasks they consider menial, tedious or unimportant for the child's development or their mutual relationship with the child, they do not look for someone who would be *like a grandmother*, *older sibling* or *a friend* to their child. They basically want someone who is both reliable and affordable enough to do the task. Given this, they do not necessarily look for the

⁹ These tasks are accompanying children on their way to and from school or extra-curricular activities placed in various parts of the town; walk in the park with babies or toddlers sleeping in a pram or pushchair; babysitting sleeping children when parents are out.

person, who has certain caring attributes seen as related to the life stage. Often, they look for people who, in their understanding, might welcome a side job (*brigáda*), are not expensive to hire, and are reliable and respectable enough to be in charge of children. Consequently, they look either for *pensioners* living in their neighbourhood or for *students*. Both pensioners living in middle and upper class neighbourhoods and students of universities are considered reliable and respectable enough to do the job. Furthermore, both students and pensioners are situated at the fringes of the labour market and employers agree they do not have to be paid much. Unlike employers of full-time and part-time nannies, employers looking for nannies who would accompany children to and from school and to and from the child's extracurricular activities, or babysitters looking after sleeping children, do not look for a person having specific caring qualities because the person is situated in a specific stage of life cycle. They look for an inexpensive and reliable person and think that the person in a specific stage of their life cycle or, more precisely, the person in a specific work related life cycle (i.e. student or pensioner) will be both reliable and inexpensive. Interviewees often mentioned, that "even a student can do this" (Ivica employing students to walk in the park pushing the pram with her sleeping baby-twins), or, "that's easy work suitable for students" (Eva, explaining, why she is paying their part-time nannies only three euro per hour). Only few employers use agencies providing *professional carers* for this type of work. If they do, they usually want drivers, or do not know other means of how to recruit a domestic worker.

Employers hiring full-time and part-time nannies and babysitters often want a *professional or qualified carer*. These carers are supposed to have qualification (gained through institutional or informal education) ensuring proper physical, emotional and intellectual development of the child and his or her security, and be able to encourage the child in developing his or her talents and interests. Hence, these carers are supposed to know foreign languages, play a musical instrument, or be able to draw with a child. However, though parents look for *a professional*, in the end they also find *a student*, because the agencies providing nannies and babysitters offer mostly students doing paid childcare as their side jobs. The agencies do not provide older women, because students have specific taxation and are consequently cheaper to employ, and the owners of agencies associate the idea of professional care related to education with students, who are in a life stage dedicated to education. Some owners of the agencies also explicitly relate age with ability to provide care to young children. For example, the owner of the agency in the interview for the Slovak radio¹⁰ said:

Journalist:Is the age important in choosing the right nanny?

Agency representative: Personally, I think it is very important that the person is energetic. It might sound funny, but in order to provide an adequate care to children and keep up with them, the person providing care has to be close to children in age. To keep up with their needs, because children are very active. Thus I prefer girls under thirty. And the minimal age is twenty.

In contrast to paid child carers, employment of cleaners and housekeepers is not directly related to the presence or absence of grandmothers. Rather, it relates to the

¹⁰ The interview was broadcasted on February 2nd 2013 in the programme *Dobrý večer, Slovensko*. It is available at the webpage of the agency (Baby Nanny, 2016) in the first record from 1,57' to 2,19'.

division of labour within a nuclear family. When asked about the situation leading to the employment of paid domestic workers my interviewees rather referred to their husbands, who were working too long hours or were too exhausted by their workload to undertake a more equal share of housework. While employment of cleaners and housekeepers does not reflect the local model of childrearing, it reflects gendered division of labour within the nuclear family and gendered character of reproductive work: all domestic workers I came across were female.

The employers' categorization of cleaners and housekeepers is slightly different than categorisation of paid child carers. I have not encountered a shared stereotype connecting a particular age group or specific phase of life cycle with the ability to perform housework or particular type of housework (for example ironing or general cleaning). However, this does not mean that employers do not have strong opinions about the suitability of particular age groups or women with specific life course experience for undertaking (a particular kind of) housework. Indeed, the opinions of individual employers were similar to these demonstrated in the previous part. The difference is that unlike preferences of employers of child carers the preferences of employers of cleaners do not form any generally shared pattern. Rather, the mechanism connecting particular types of workers with housework is similar to the logic of hiring au pairs. Considering particular ethnicity as a guarantee of qualities they expect from an au pair, host families commonly hire a string of au pairs coming from the same country. While one British family decides to employ French au pairs expecting them to be sophisticated governesses able to teach their children French, another family prefers Slovak au pairs seeing them as hardworking and warm. Just as another family can think of Slovak au pairs as not dedicated enough and doing too many side-jobs and as such, cross them out from the list of suitable au pairs. Often, the opinions on suitable ethnicity of au pairs are based on the experience with the first au pairs of that ethnicity, hence a host family can decide to employ only Czech au pairs, because they had loved the spirit of their first Czech au pair and expect that other Czech au pairs will be similar (Anderson, 2007; Búriková, Miller, 2010). In an analogical way employers of paid domestic workers in Slovakia see women belonging to particular age groups/phases in life-cycle or coming from specific professions as more or less suitable cleaners and housekeepers. In particular, while some employers consider *students* (*šudentky*), or *young ladies* (*slečny*) as suitable cleaners, because they are young, strong, docile and *educable* (i.e. they accept the employers' ideas and techniques of cleaning), other employers dismiss them as irresponsible and careless. Similarly, while some employers prefer older domestic workers - *ladies* (*panie*), *pensioners* (*dôchodkyne*), *older women* (*staršie ženy*), *older ladies* (*staršie dámy*) - describing them as experienced, responsible and having a knack for details, others see them as *too bossy* or physically weak. And as employers of child carers, some employers of cleaners prefer *professionals* and use specialized agencies, or decide to employ nurses who often do ironing or cleaning as a side job alongside their shifts in hospital.

INTERSECTIONALITY REVISITED: A STUDENT OR A PENSIONER?

In the previous part I examined preferences the employers have regarding particular types of paid domestic workers and revealed nuances of their decisions related to women they call *students*, *girls*, *young ladies* on the one hand and *pensioners*, *older*

women or ladies on the other hand. Now I am going to focus on what exactly my interviewees meant by these categories.

All paid domestic workers within my study are females and belong to one of two age groups: They are either older than eighteen and younger than thirty years (e.g. *students, girls, young ladies*), or older than fifty-five and younger than seventy years (e. g. *older women, pensioners, ladies*). The women belonging to the first group are younger, those belonging to the second group older than their employers. However, it would be simplifying at best to see the gender and age of paid domestic workers as two distinct hierarchies or additive principles (Krekula, 2007: 163) the employers use in order to choose a domestic worker and to decide how to pay (or, more frequently, underpay) her. They don't basically look for a woman, who is in her thirties. Actually, in demand for paid domestic work age and gender are mutually constitutive and inseparable principles the employers use in order to position particular female as more or less suitable to do a particular type of domestic work. This intersection of age and gender regards reproduction and the labour market.

When my interviewees looked for a nanny, they were looking for a female in a specific stage of her reproductive life. In particular, they were looking either for a woman who has experience with motherhood and has grown up children, or were looking for a young woman who has not entered the reproductive phase yet and does not have children of her own. The fact that the woman is a successful mother (i.e. has grown up children) is the key qualification for the job. When Mariana in an interview quoted above spoke about her wishes to find an older woman, she mentioned that the main reference for her was the fact that her prospective nanny was mother and grandmother. The experience ascribed to the age in the interview intertwines with gendered identities related to mothering and it is not possible to divide them and see them as separable entities.

Not only demand, also the supply of paid domestic workers is structured in relation to this intersection of age and gender. Neither younger nor older child carers have other caring responsibilities. Younger women working as nannies and babysitters do not have children yet and older women have grown up children and do not have grandchildren yet. My older interviewees claimed they would stop working as nannies once they had grandchildren and indeed, Judita stopped her side job as part-time nanny once her daughter had a child. Women who have young children of their own provide paid childcare only as childminders in their own homes, where they look after children alongside their own child, and do not work as nannies and babysitters in the homes of their employers.

This intersection of age and gender in an employment of paid domestic work has also the dimension related to broader economic structures and labour market. As I have mentioned, women working as paid domestic workers usually rely on the state for having their social and health insurance paid: i.e. they are students, pensioners, (less often) unemployed, or they do paid care and housework as a side job complementing their main income. Adéla Souralová (2014) argues that both young women working as au pairs and elderly women working as nannies for Vietnamese families in the Czech Republic are positioned in a liminal phase in relation to a labour market: the au pairs have not started their full participation in the labour market and nannies have just finished participating in the labour market. Among the unemployed nannies I interviewed were women who had lost their jobs shortly before their retirement age or women who finished their university education but either could

not find the job they wanted (such as Johanka, who finished her studies as a preschool teacher and worked as a nanny while she was looking for a job in a kindergarten) or took “the break” after university and before embarking in a corporate job such as Tereza.

CONCLUSION

In this article I described in detail demand for paid domestic workers in Slovakia. I have demonstrated how employers differentiate among *students/younger women/young ladies* and *pensioners/older women/ladies* working as paid domestic workers, and introduced reasons why they prefer particular groups for particular types of work. I argued that it is neither gender nor age per se that makes these women suitable nannies and babysitters. It is a specific phase in a gendered life cycle that enables younger women to position themselves and be positioned as energetic older siblings and older women as affectionate grandmothers without threatening exclusivity of care either for their own children and grandchildren, or for their charges. I also revealed that when choosing a student or a pensioner, the employers choose a particular type of care they associate with particular group of people. I demonstrated that students and pensioners can connote different types of care regarding the type of work they are employed for. So when employing a full-time nanny looking after a baby, a pensioner is seen as a substitute grandmother and as such is expected to provide the care resembling a family setting. When employing a student for similar care, employers see students as professional carers having skills gained through education. In contrast, when employing the very same students as part-time nannies accompanying children to their free-time activities, they are basically seen as reliable and inexpensive source of labour. In other settings care provided by students can be constructed as similar to the care provided by an energetic older sibling or an older friend. Clearly, while the employers of paid domestic workers in Slovakia use the intersection of age and gender as the point of departure for ascribing qualities necessary for undertaking paid domestic work, this very same intersection connotes different qualities in relation to the type of domestic worker.

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