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*Ukrainian Migrant Women in
Warsaw's Domestic Work Sector*

MARTA KINDLER

AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

A 'Risky' Business?

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Warsaw, 2011

1 Ukrainian migrant women, migrant domestic work and risk

'[I]t's normal work, this is what you do, everyone does it,' said Maria, a 43-year-old woman from Ukraine, when asked about working in Poland's domestic work sector. Maria first came to Poland eight years ago. At the time of our interview, her visa had expired. As an undeclared care worker, she initially lived in Warsaw's suburbs in a room shared with over twenty other people. And yet she referred to what she was going through as 'normal'. Maria's migration experience is similar to that of many other women interviewed. The risks of irregular migration, such as undeclared work, overstaying or poor living conditions, were a part and parcel of their experience. When asked how they understood the notion of risk, several of the women I interviewed mentioned a Ukrainian proverb: *Who does not risk, does not drink champagne*. They claimed that risks are an integral part of their migration. Well, where then was the champagne?

1.1 The rationale and aims of this study

The main purpose of this study is to examine how far the notion of risk may be useful as an analytical tool in explaining the process of irregular labour migration using the example of the domestic work sector. The study focuses on risk involved in labour migration of Ukrainian women who work as cleaners and care workers in Warsaw, Poland. The basic question to be answered in this study is to what extent the Ukrainian women's evaluation of and response to risk shape their experience of migration. Thus, the present study addresses risk both as an analytical and normative concept. The central issue is how the perception of risks contributes to women's choice of their destination country, modes of entry and stay, type of work abroad and how it affects their gendered roles as mothers and wives. I will use the notion of risk to analyse the complex decisions migrant women have to make when they undertake irregular labour migration. I will attempt to understand what it means for migrant women to 'take risks' and to 'be at risk' during migration, as well how far responses to risk are a factor shaping their migratory paths.

Although the literature on migrant domestic work abounds, studies on Ukrainian women migrating abroad to work in the domestic work sector

are still rare. This may be due to the fact that contemporary labour migration from Ukraine is a relatively recent phenomenon. Research on Ukrainian migrant domestic workers was carried out in Italy (Scrinzi 2008; Vianello 2009, 2008; Solari 2006; Näre 2003) and in Austria (Haidinger 2008). However, their presence in Poland remains an uncharted territory (Kindler 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b).

Another area of research that has received little attention is the role of risk in migrant domestic work. The literature on migrant women working as cleaners and care workers addresses the negative experiences of migrant women, from physical violence, including sexual assault, to labour exploitation, to generally poor living conditions (Anderson 1999; Ismail 1999). Nevertheless, this literature seldom treats risk as the key explanatory variable. Risk is indirectly taken into consideration in research concerning immigration and labour policies, which determine the living and working conditions of migrants in this sector. This research addresses migrants' limited labour rights or their complete lack thereof (Hune 1991; Chin 1997; Hondagneu-Sotello 2003; Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2003; Schwenken 2005; Anderson 2006) and the precarious working conditions of migrant domestic workers (Aronson & Neysmith 1996; Anderson 2000; Hess 2002; Lan 2003; Anderson 2006). Other research themes revolve around a migrant's uncertain family status and the strategies he or she employs to cope with this insecurity (Young 2004; Parreñas 2005), the way migration influences the migrant's power position in the work place and in the household (Pessar 1984; Williams 2005), as well as the development of transnational networks by migrants (Morokvasic 1984; Gamburd 2000; Lutz 2004). Many of these studies do imply that migrant women working in the domestic work sector are recognised as a group exposed to danger. The question of risk in labour migration has been addressed comprehensively mainly in economic studies (Elkan 1959; Stark 1991). These studies, however, focus on economic risks, such as those related to the migrant household's income in the country of origin, rather than the financial risks that are also part of the actual migration experience. Studies that adopt a broader risk perspective to analyse labour migration, such as Wallman's (2001), who analysed the experience of migrants involved in prostitution, are rare and apparently non-existent in the case of domestic work sector research.

In this study, risk is understood as a series of potentially undesirable events, which are mediated by social interpretation (Lupton 1999). This definition is in keeping with the perception of risk presented by women interviewed in this study: when asked about their understanding of the word 'risk', they mentioned danger, uncertainty and instability. One of them told me that when she hears the word 'risk' she thinks of 'a flying bird, something...uncertain [...] Better to have earth underneath your feet..., as if you would fly, this... uncertainty, because when you stand on

earth you know what's going on, and otherwise...'. The migrant's perception of risk is filtered through sociocultural contexts and his or her response to risk is based on particular value judgements.

In the light of what Giddens (1999) wrote about risk, Central and Eastern European societies are a perfect research field to analyse everyday risk perception and strategies. The region is undergoing rapid changes and the people living there have been and continue to be confronted with new risks caused by the restructuring of their political, economic and social environments. The change of the political system and the introduction of the capitalist economy deeply affected not only the official institutions, but also social relations. After all, capitalism forces individuals to rely on the calculation of future losses and gains, involving risk, seen as an ongoing process. Risk in that sense can be a mobilising force for the society to change, but it can also lead to potentially negative outcomes. If institutions responsible for ensuring security are weak, the responsibility for coping with risk will become increasingly individualised.

1.2 Ukrainian labour migration: Background information

Currently, Ukrainian labour migrants in Poland – among them women working in the domestic service sector – come mainly from the so-called western borderland. Labour migration from these territories is not a new phenomenon. In the nineteenth century, emigration from that area developed on a large scale: many people moved to live in the United States and South America, others engaged in temporary or seasonal migration to some regions of Germany, Denmark and France (Kacharaba 2003). There is little data available on migration from this region to work in domestic service in that period. The Soviet era brought internal and international mobility to a halt. However, with the Soviet Union's falling apart in the 1990s, restrictions on cross-border movement were relaxed, allowing people not only to look for work abroad, but also to return home. This has had important consequences for seasonal and temporary migrants, who generally do not move with their families, but invest only in the migration of some household members.

Currently, Ukrainian nationals constitute probably the fastest growing migrant group in the European Union and certainly the fastest growing migrant group in Poland, with a number of researches being carried out.¹ What are some of the causes of the contemporary labour migration from Ukraine? Labour migration, as implied in the world systems theory, is triggered by economic inequalities (Wallerstein 2000). In 1991, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Ukraine became an independent state, attempting to establish a functioning democracy and to shift from command to market economy. However, the reforms failed and the economic

situation began to deteriorate with Ukraine's GDP decreasing by between 40 and almost 60 per cent (depending on different sources) in the 1990s. Inflation in the first half of the 1990s caused real wages to drop by 63 per cent (World Bank 1996: 1). The decrease in the real value of public sector wages had a relatively greater impact on women, who made up the majority of the public sector employees. Additionally, payment of wages, pensions and stipends was delayed for several months. With the closure of many public enterprises as well as massive lay-offs in health care and education sectors, women were the first to lose jobs. They also faced higher unemployment and limited access to the labour market due to age discrimination. All of these factors, frequently combined with their husbands' loss of employment, made women look for work in the informal economy, for example, subsidiary agriculture on private land plots or cross-border trade, buying and selling imported goods at bazaars (Dudwick, Srinivasan & Braithwaite 2002: 25). The economic decline in Ukraine in the 1990s was accompanied by a relaxation of border regimes facilitating international mobility. Thus, the next step some women took was labour migration. Estimates from the early 2000s ranged from below two to above five million Ukrainians working abroad (Malynovska 2004: 14). Exactly how many Ukrainian women are working abroad in domestic service can only be guessed at, due to the fact that the work they carry out remains largely undeclared.

As implied in the migration systems theory, migration between countries emerges from pre-existing cultural and economic ties (Castles & Miller 1999). Poland has had a long history of ties to what is now Ukraine, starting as early as the fourteenth century (Snyder 2003; Szporluk 2004; Motyka 2000; Motyka & Wierzbicki 1997; Kersten 1993; Hałagida 2002). The ties continue to exist today, with Poland supporting (so far with little success) the cause of Ukraine's accession to the EU (Barburska 2006). According to the estimates, after Russia, Poland was and continues to be the second most popular destination for Ukrainian labour migrants (Malynovska 2004; Prybytkowa 2004). Migration to Poland is characterised by a feminisation of the flow of immigrants from the former Soviet Union, primarily from Ukraine (Kępińska 2007). At the time this study was carried out, no official recruitment policy had been implemented to regulate labour migration between Ukraine and Poland. In view of their mobility, many of the Ukrainian women who work in Poland in the domestic sector fit into the definition of so-called incomplete migration. In contrast to what can be understood as 'complete' migration (that which leads to long-term settlement), incomplete migration refers to intense circulation between the country of origin and the country of migration. A person engaged in incomplete migration spends the majority of the year in the country of migration and the income earned abroad constitutes an important part of the overall household's income in the country of origin (Okólski 1998: 7). This, together with trans-border

mobility of persons engaged in petty trade, was the main emerging migration pattern of Ukrainian nationals to Poland in the 1990s (Okólski 1997, 1998, 2001; Wallace & Stola 2001; Wallace, Bedezir & Chmouliar 1997). The movement of Ukrainian women to work in Poland in the domestic sector is based on informal networks. These women can also be said to engage in temporary or short-term migration. As early as at the end of the nineteenth century, Ravenstein (1885) claimed in his migration laws that women constitute the majority of those engaged in short-term migration. Stola (2001: 95) defines short-term migration as 'international income-oriented population movements lasting no longer than one year'. According to the definition developed by the United Nations (1998), a short-term migrant is:

a person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least three months but less than one year (12 months) except in cases where the movement to that country is for purposes of recreation, holiday, visits to friends or relatives, business, medical treatment or religious pilgrimage.

All of the above concepts define the temporary character of Ukrainian women's migration to the domestic work sector in Poland.

1.3 Demand for domestic service: The term and the phenomenon

In order to adequately analyse Ukrainian women working in the domestic sector in Poland it is necessary to understand not only the context of labour migration from Ukraine, but also the reasons behind the demand for workers providing domestic services in Poland. Domestic work can be defined as services concerned with housework, i.e. cleaning, cooking, washing clothes and care for dependent persons, such as the elderly, children, the sick or persons with disabilities. The term was introduced by the feminist movement in the 1970s. Until then, domestic services were not generally seen as productive labour (Humm 1995). The scope of paid domestic services has also changed as the concepts of household and family have transformed and the new technologies and equipment have mechanised housework. However, remunerated domestic work should not be associated solely with services sustaining the physical existence of the employer's household. Employing domestic help allows the employers to lead a particular lifestyle; in that sense, domestic work upholds the employer's social status. Thus, domestic work is also 'a role which constructs and situates the worker within a certain set of social and economic relationships' (Anderson 1999: 120).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, many people in Europe believed that, with the coming of modernity, services of domestics would soon be a thing of the past (Momsen 1999; Sarti 2006). However, the demand for care workers and cleaners not only continues into the present, but seems to be increasing. What are the reasons for this? There are at least three main causes: ageing population, women's entrance into the labour market and the state's inadequate provision of welfare services.

The first and most crucial of these causes is the ageing population. In 2003, the EU had 450 million inhabitants, 80 million (approximately 16 per cent) of whom were over 65 years old. Of these, 50 million were unable to care for themselves, thus needing to be cared for. These demographic trends are a result of the declining fertility rate (which is below replacement level in most developed countries), combined with the growing life expectancy. According to estimates, people over 65 years of age will constitute 28 per cent of the population of Europe in 2050 (Eurostat 2005). Poland is experiencing a similar trend: between 1950 and 1999, the number of people aged 60 and over tripled, to reach 17 per cent of the country's population (Frątczak 2002: 7).

The second reason behind the growing demand for remunerated domestic work is the entrance of women into the labour market. In Western Europe and in the United States, women began to enter the labour market on a regular basis in the late 1960s. Although many women were employed during World War II, there was a strong post-war trend among women to leave what was regarded as 'unnatural' industrial work for 'domesticity' and 'natural' family duties as the men returned from war (Fidelis 2004: 304). Introduction of institutionalised child and elderly care had a huge impact on women's presence in the labour market. This is especially the case in Northern European countries, where the number of women in the labour market has doubled in the second half of the twentieth century. In Central and Eastern Europe – mainly due to high war casualty figures among men – women started to join the labour force right after 1945 (Fidelis 2004). In the Communist bloc, women were expected to handle both domestic chores and paid employment outside the home. Employing domestics was rare, primarily because of the low purchasing power of individual households. However, the state also pressured people to regard work as a social duty contributing to the development of socialism, which effectively discouraged informal labour arrangements that characterise domestic work. The demand for domestic services came after 1989, when the introduction of capitalism intensified work relations and created new possibilities for women to have professional careers (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions 2007). These new work relations made it difficult to balance the time spent engaged in paid employment with the time spent outside of work, including the time spent on domestic chores.

The third explanation for the demand for remunerated domestic services is the inability of the state to provide adequate public social services to satisfy this growing need. Several countries, such as France, Spain and the United Kingdom, attempt to facilitate the provision of care by granting allowances, instead of providing the care itself (Anderson 2006). Some states create special programmes, like the *au pair* programme, where young, usually foreign, women care for children in return for the opportunity to live abroad. Their work is compensated by getting to practice a foreign language, lodging and 'pocket money' (Anderson 2001: 5). In Poland, privatisation of many of the social care services, such as residential homes for the elderly, meant that many people could no longer afford them. In addition, the Polish recipients of domestic care services had little trust in institutional solutions; they preferred to use the services of someone recommended by a trusted informal source (Frąckiewicz 2002: 18).

The construction of a demand for cleaning services is different from that of care services. Here, the motivating force is the changing lifestyle of people in developed countries. With regard to cleaning, one can argue that supply creates demand: if a person has the capacity to pay someone a relatively small amount of money to carry out domestic chores on their behalf and the individual can spend that time involved in more enjoyable (or lucrative) activities, it is highly probable he or she will do so. The cleaners help keep up what is seen as proper living standards and their employers' particular social status.

Apart from the direct causes of the demand for domestic services, there are also financial, legal and sociocultural reasons for wanting to buy the services of foreigners. In financial terms, the work of foreigners is generally cheaper. According to some of the studies, migrant women in care work are generally paid the least of all care workers (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Misra, Merz & Woodring 2004; Romero 1992). When it comes to legal reasons, foreigners are more willing to agree to work without a proper contract than native workers. The irregular status of the foreigner gives the informal employer additional power over the migrant. The socio-cultural reasons are twofold. On the one hand, domestic work is not a prestigious job, so there simply may not be enough native workers willing to do that job at a given price. In the dual labour market theory, Piore (1979) claims that migrants separate their work status from their social status, because the status remains, together with their group of reference in the country of origin. That is why, Piore argues, it is easier for a migrant to accept work of a low social status. On the other hand, according to some studies, it is psychologically easier for employers to demand such low-status, 'dirty' service from someone who belongs to an 'out-group' (in contrast to 'in-group'), thus differing from the employer in terms of, for example, nationality or ethnic background (Arendt 2000). In that sense, domestic work of foreign women reproduces social, ethnic and gender inequalities.

1.4 Ukrainian domestic workers in Poland from a risk perspective

The migration of Ukrainian women to the domestic sector in Warsaw is part and parcel of the global trend whereby women from poorer countries migrate in order to undertake domestic work in Europe's developed countries, as well as in other parts of the world. Together with Filipina women working in Hong Kong, Polish women working in Rome, Zimbabwean women working in London or Dominican women working in New York, Ukrainian women have joined the ranks of the global domestic workforce.

Analysing the migration of Ukrainian women to Poland's domestic work sector from a risk perspective, focus falls on the women's evaluation of potentially undesirable events and their response to these risks. The risk evaluation and response is influenced by the character of migration to the domestic work sector in Poland, which is determined by four processes. The first factor corresponds to developments in the Ukrainian labour market throughout the 1990s. As women's employment declined and the living conditions deteriorated, some Ukrainians decided to look for alternative employment opportunities abroad. The second aspect is Poland's changing migration policy regarding the entry, stay and work of foreigners as it influenced the legal conditions under which the Ukrainian women migrated. The third factor is the perception of domestic work as a gendered occupation. Finally, the fourth aspect shaping the character of this migrant job is the demand for domestic workers due to Poland's institutional care solutions in the context of the ageing population.

This thesis is divided into seven chapters, moving from theoretical and methodological concerns to the analysis of the research material. Of interest to this study is the role of the notion of risk in understanding the process of migration. This analysis approaches the case of migrant women working in the domestic sector from a risk perspective, which has not yet been applied to this research subject. In all of this study's chapters, I analyse the social, political and economic processes that shape migrant domestic work.

Chapter 2 reviews migrant domestic work literature, analysing the demand and character of the domestic work sector as well as the extent to which risk can be used as an explanatory tool. I discuss the definition of risk, the role of risk in migration theories and different risk theories, focusing on theoretical approaches to sociocultural risk. I follow this up with selected migration concepts and theories that address the notion of risk.

Chapter 3 presents the approach to the analysis of risk adopted in this study. It draws on the preceding section and concerns the research methodology applied. Here I discuss the theory of structuration by Giddens. In my research I use qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews

and participant observation, which are reliable tools to analyse the strategies of irregular migrants, who are generally a rather hard group to access. Risk in this study is not treated as quantifiable, as in the positivist tradition of technical research into risk; rather, the qualitative methods I employ allow me to show particular sociocultural constructions of risks and the mechanisms involved in these processes. I also introduce the following notions that can serve as a useful framework for the analysis of risk: the imagined opportunity structure, the migrant institution, patron-client relations and the hidden transcript.

In chapter 4, I present the notion of the imagined opportunity space and use it to analyse the migrant women's evaluation of risk in Ukraine before leaving for Poland, their experience of having to part from their families, as well as how they envisioned risk during migration. I analyse the migrant women's attitude to migrant work (specifically to domestic work) within the context of the increasing material risks these women faced before leaving for work abroad, as well as their social status in Ukraine. Of interest are the stories that the migrant women had heard about successes and failures during migration, as well as information they had received before becoming migrants themselves. I also analyse how the women reconcile images of risk during migration with their own experiences.

Chapter 5 focuses on the issue of legal risks stemming from the migrants' irregular entry, stay and work in Poland. In the first part I shall address changes in the legal conditions under which women from Ukraine migrate. With changes in migration policy – primarily the introduction of a visa requirement for Ukrainian citizens in 2003 – it has been made more difficult for them to enter Poland as tourists. More ingenuity and resources were needed to enter Poland and stay there. The barriers to mobility have created risks to which the migrants respond by developing particular migrant institutions. However, these institutions have also introduced new risks to the migration experience. With regard to work, the main risks result from its undeclared character, the possibility of receiving no payment or too little, as well as getting ill while lacking health and/or social insurance.

In chapter 6, I analyse the risks related to the character of migrant domestic work. The first part of the chapter outlines the development of a niche for migrant domestic work in the context of Polish institutional care. I continue with an analysis of how work relations between the migrant domestic worker and the employer affect the migrant's exposure and responses to risk.

Chapter 7 draws final conclusions of the thesis and develops ideal types of risk responses in the migrant domestic work sector.

The background analysis for investigating the migration of Ukrainian women to the domestic sector in Poland from a risk perspective is based

on a huge body of the existing migrant domestic work research, as well as risk and migration theories. The analytical section of this study is based on the following empirical research, conducted in 2005 and 2006, concerning women who work in the domestic sector in Poland. My research comprised two major components: 1) in-depth interviews with the women and 2) participant observation carried out in their households in Ukraine and en route to Poland, as I accompanied them while crossing the border.

2 Risk, migration and migrant domestic work: Selected theory and research review

In the vast body of research on risk, it is rare to encounter a study on migration risks. The notion of risk has not been used extensively in migration studies, either, and even less so in research concerning migrant domestic work. This is surprising given the fact that migration very often is a gamble on a vector of unknowns. Migrants have to cross an international border, face the set of employment opportunities and work conditions in the destination country, and prove that they are capable of withstanding separation from home. Migrant domestic work seems to be especially risk-loaded due to its largely undeclared character, low wages, low social status and no upward occupational mobility.

2.1 Analysing migration through the risk lens

Why analyse migration from a risk perspective? The notion of risk has already been used in migration theories and research, but the work done so far has almost solely focused on economic aspects of migration. It is therefore of interest to use the notion of risk as an analytical tool, on the one hand, to understand the aspects of migration experience that go beyond financial considerations and, on the other hand, to find out what risk means for migrants. Is there potential 'space' for risk analysis in the current research on migrant domestic work? To find an answer to this question I provide an insight into the notion of risk, sociocultural risk theories as well as the role of the concept of risk in migration theory.

2.1.1 The notion of risk

When the notion of risk was first used in the late Middle Ages it was a spatial concept, related to voyage and maritime insurance. At that time, risk was understood as a phenomenon beyond human control: a natural disaster or a divine act. The meaning of risk changed with industrialisation in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when it came to be seen as a result of human action, an event that is calculable and therefore manageable. The twentieth century saw a redefinition of risk and attempts to control it, largely due to new scientific and technological