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Role-Identity Dynamics in Care and Household Work: Strategies of Polish Workers in Naples, Italy

Abstract Migrant household work is a global phenomenon present across geographical contexts. Employing a household worker, especially a worker coming from another country, is a symbolically complex situation that requires interpretive work and negotiations of role-identities from interactional partners. There has been much debate about how to define the relationship between a domestic and/or care worker and her/his employer. It has been argued that the preferred definition by workers themselves is one that centers on work (Anderson 2000). In contrast, “fictive kinship” appears to be the employers’ almost universal strategy, which is usually portrayed in the literature as an exploitative practice (Romero 1992; Anderson 2000; Parreñas 2001; Constable 2003; Lan 2006; McDowell 2006).

In this paper, I offer a conceptual grid that consists of hierarchy/equality and distance/intimacy dimensions to examine complex relationships between domestic workers and employers, elaborated during the case study of Polish migrant domestic workers in Naples in 2004. Within the investigated site some elements of the traditional model of service culture have persisted. Migrant workers who come from a post-communist country, and who have rather egalitarian attitudes, have been confronted with these elements. The result has been a clash of definitions over the household worker’s role. Polish women developed two contrasting ways of experiencing and coping with it.

The strategies identified in the workers’ narratives are professionalization and personalization, and they refer respectively to emphasizing the professional and the personal dimensions in relations with the employer. They manifest themselves on the levels of action (as narrated by the workers) and narrative construction. The strategies on the level of action aim to shift the situation in a desired direction; the narrative strategies aim at framing the situation in a desired way within a narrative. The text underlines the diversity of migrant response and tentatively assesses the output of different strategies.

Keywords Household Work; Poland; Italy; Women Migrants; Work Relations; Symbolic Interactionism; Role-Identity

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One of the key topics in the literature on domestic work is the problem of power and resistance (cf. Groves and Chang 1999), and more generally, the issue of relationships between the employers and household workers. This paper, as much of the literature, focuses on the relations between household workers and their employers, making the case study of Polish women working in Naples a starting point. Data gathered during the research, and especially workers’ narratives, reveals tensions that emerge when the different ways in which household roles are perceived clash with one another. In some cases, interviewees reported, for example, reading books by the workers as problematic for the employers or wearing a uniform (an apron) as problematic for the workers themselves. Some employers, as it transpires from workers’ narratives, were declaring cordiality, whereas others strong distance and hierarchy. Most of my interviewees did not accept either of the two models (called here fictive kinship and overt degradation). What I found out and present in this paper

were the two fundamental ways of experiencing and acting in an oppressive work environment. I will describe the opposing strategies of domestic workers confronted with the oppressive situation: professionalization and personalization; that is, respectively, emphasizing either the professional or the personal dimensions in their relations with the employer.

Throughout the process of analysis, I have found the framework of symbolic interactionist role-identity theory an apt tool to describe what is happening within the data. I analyze the relationships by placing them on a grid of two dimensions: hierarchy/equality and distance/intimacy. I apply the same grid to review existing concepts of relationships and to highlight similarities, as well as disparities with my approach.

This article contributes to our understanding of the everyday experience of domestic work by systematic analysis of identity strategies in oppressive situations. While there is emphasis in most of the literature on

resistance and strategies, I argue that strategies make part of general ways of experiencing the situation.

The first section discusses the research context of Polish migrant women undertaking domestic jobs in Naples; the second section is devoted to methods of my study; in the third section, I offer a concise description of the phenomenon in study, based on survey data; the fourth section discusses the relevant literature and the theoretical framework; the fifth section depicts the dynamics of defining a domestic worker, one that consists of description of the employer's strategies reconstructed from workers' narratives (fictive kinship, overt degradation, friendly professionalism), and the workers' responses to oppressive employers strategies, namely, professionalization and personalization. The final section concludes that treating the relationships with employers as "game" rather than "drama" or "ritual" is a more safe strategy within the investigated context of oppressive work situation. Throughout this paper, I focus on the workers' perspective as the only one included in this study, and whenever I recount employers' actions, these are reconstructed from the workers' narrative and represent the workers' points of view.

Polish Women on the Move: Migration and Domestic Work

Migrations of Polish women to Italy to undertake domestic jobs form part of the global trend towards the increasing feminization of labor migration (cf. Momsen 1999; Anthias and Lazardis 2000; Willis and Yeoh 2000; Sharpe 2001; Hochschild and Ehrenreich 2004). According to official Italian data, females constitute 70% of all Polish immigrants, and nearly 80% in the

province of Naples (ISTAT 2008). Economic migrations from Poland to Italy in form of tourist trips that also had a political context (especially after martial law was introduced in Poland in 1981) are charted from 1971, with numbers exceeding popular destinations like the U.S.A., France, and the UK in some of the years (Stola 2010:488-489), and they have continued after the end of the Polish People's Republic in 1989 (Iglicka, Barsotti, and Lecchini 1999; Iglicka 2001:42-49). The research reported in this paper, undertaken between March and October 2004, was done in a period marked by the Poland's accession to the EU (May 01, 2004), which meant a change of migrant status of Polish people in Italy, who after the accession no longer had to apply for the stay permit (see more in the section on professionalization strategy [p. 102]). However, the institutional change, as Näre (2012) and Kaczmarczyk's (2008) studies demonstrate, migration to Italy does not seem to have been affected by Poland's accession to the EU in May 2004 as the traits discerned in the 1990s and during my study in 2004 have broadly continued. The recent Italian data reveals that in 2011, there were 109,018 registered Polish citizens in Italy, which makes Poles the ninth biggest nationality group registered in Italy (ISTAT 2014). According to the Polish estimates, there are currently 97,000 Poles residing in Italy (GUS 2013).¹

¹ Poland is a country with long emigration traditions (Iglicka 2001). Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004 was followed by high levels of emigration to those countries that opened their labor markets, mainly the United Kingdom and Ireland (Kepińska 2007; Kaczmarczyk and Okólski 2008). After the accession, migration became a strategy of those people who were younger, better educated, and who came from the larger cities (Kaczmarczyk 2008), whereas throughout the 1990s and until early 2000, it continued to be a choice of the older, less educated, and those who come from small cities or rural areas (Okólski 2001), but for Italy these traits of migrants from Poland persisted after the accession (Kaczmarczyk 2008).

The global trend towards the increasing feminization of labor migration in Italy can be charted from the late 1970s (Miranda 2002). In the 1960s, the female quota was around 30%, in 2000 and 2008, it was 50% (Marchetti 2001; ISTAT 2008). The rising proportion of women in labor migration is caused by, among other factors, the rising demand for domestic service in the receiving countries, as this sector is the main employment area of migrant women (Marchetti 2001; Miranda 2002; Vianello 2014).²

The institution of domestic help has a long history in Italy, and is part and parcel of Italian social life. Though the domestic sector is characterized by a low level of registration, even official figures prove its significance. According to the Italian social insurance agency (INPS, Istituto Nazionale di Previdenza Sociale), in 2012, there were 999,000 persons registered as household workers, over 80% of whom were migrants, and it is estimated that there may be in fact twice that number if unregistered domes-

² Italy, a country which has a long and rich tradition of emigration, has become an immigration country since the 1970s (Pugliese 2002a). At the beginning of 2011, there were four and a half million registered migrants in Italy, over eight percent of Italian population (ISTAT 2014). Countries like Italy, Greece, and Spain share some characteristics: the emigration tradition, the demand mainly for seasonal workers in agriculture and domestic services, unemployment among the local population, and the presence of an extensive *economia sommersa*—an "underground economy" (cf. Pugliese 2002b; Boffo 2003; Reyneri 2004; also referred to as "Mediterranean migration model" [King 1993]). Those phenomena that are linked to the Mediterranean migration model are particularly applicable to the southern part of Italy, which is known as the Mezzogiorno (cf. Putnam, Leonardi, and Nannetti 1993), and, moreover, the above-mentioned characteristics are particularly true of Naples, where one can also observe an exceptionally high percentage of unregistered migrations (Näre 2012). Italy is regarded as a pioneer of immigration trends in Southern Europe, namely, in the process of forming "the Mediterranean migration model" (King 1993). A poor and rather non-restrictive immigration policy is one of the reasons that make Italy an attractive target country (Anthias and Lazardis 2000; Näre 2012).

tic workers are also included (UIL website 2014). There also exist in Italy elaborate legal regulations regarding work contracts with a household worker³; the presence of active domestic workers' trade unions should also be noted (Andall 2000).⁴

From among the factors accounting for an increase in the demand for household workers in Italy, three can be emphasized. Firstly, the transformation of the Italian family model: the rising employment rate of women (Anthias and Lazardis 2000), and the growing share of nuclear families, which translates into growing share of households composed of elderly people (Scevi 2003). Secondly, the aging of Italian society, which has resulted in an increasing number of dependent persons (who are especially advanced in age) (Scevi 2003; Nanni and Salvatori 2004). Thirdly, the deficiencies of the public sector when it comes to attending to the needs of dependent persons have also been emphasized (Nanni and Salvatori 2004; Sciortino 2004).

Besides the above-mentioned socio-demographic conditions, some authors draw attention to the status dimension of employing a domestic worker, particularly in households where the woman employer undertakes no professional activity (Anderson 2000:14). Employing a household worker would then be a means of creating and reproducing the family prestige. The status dimension is particularly important in the context of Southern

³ The basic regulations are contained in the Civil Code from 1942, Act on the protection of domestic employment from 1958, collective labor agreement from 2001 (Ghera 2003:349), and very recent new collective labor agreement (July 2013).

⁴ A detailed discussion of the legal regulations concerning the work of domestic workers in Italy by Jacek Korniak is included in an appendix to a paper written by Kordasiewicz (2005).

Italy (cf. Miranda 2002; Zanfrini 2004:189). In many areas, the traditional culture of service has persisted, which manifests itself, for instance, in the fact that in some households domestic workers wear a uniform—a special apron. Apart from its practical advantage, it also plays a representative role and visually marks an identity that is different from those of the other household members.

Research Methods and Researcher's Role

While undertaking research on Polish women working in Naples (from March to October 2004), I used in-depth interviews, observations, and a self-administered survey. I collected 220 surveys (these had been distributed at church masses held in Polish in three churches in Naples) and conducted 14 in-depth interviews. Interviews and surveys were prepared and conducted in Polish by the author, who is also of Polish nationality. Qualitative data was analyzed with the assistance of the ATLAS.ti software.

The three methods I have used: observations, in-depth interviews, and surveys allowed me to target three different populations, and were biased in their own ways. I have gathered ethnographic insights about the migrant center milieu, biographic/migrant career information on migrants inside and outside that group, and some general data on the population attending Polish masses, not necessarily making part of the migrant center, and not necessarily representative to the whole Polish population in Naples, as church non-goers tend to be younger and less feminized population. Despite this bias, in the absence of knowledge of total population, the survey allowed me to reach out to the Polish pop-

ulation out of my qualitative sample, include, and learn about migration patterns of more people, including, for example, men, and it enabled me to have a bigger, however biased, picture of the Polish migrants in Naples. In this paper, I will concentrate on data stemming from in-depth interviews, I will also provide some general characteristics stemming from the survey data in the next section.

Throughout my research, I have found the constant comparative method, one of the chief principals of grounded theory strategy, useful (cf. Glaser and Strauss 1967:101-116; Strauss 1987:82-108; Konecki 2000:60-76). I have included and consequently compared living-in and out domestic workers, younger and older migrants, women participating in the migrant center activities and those outside migrant center. My sample was a diverse group: the age of the participants at the moment of the interview ranged from 22 to 54, the age at the first arrival to Italy ranged from 18 to 48. The length of stay of the subjects differed from 7 to 136 months; the year of their first coming to work in Italy was between 1993-2004. They were coming from rural parts of Poland (7), cities below 100,000 inhabitants (5), and two from cities over 100,000 inhabitants. Most of the interviewed subjects were coming from south-eastern parts of Poland (11), most had secondary education, and all of them were working in domestic and care sector as cleaners, housekeepers, nannies, or elderly care workers in Naples and its whereabouts.

At the beginning it was difficult for me to find Polish women in Naples. Natives commonly mistook Ukrainian women—who were more and more present in Italy at that time (cf. Vianello 2014)—for Polish

migrants, and their hints were misleading. Finally, I had managed to contact the milieu concentrated around the Polish church and one of the migrant associations. I also searched for contacts outside this milieu to have a more diversified sample. The interviews were conducted in the Polish migrant center, in parks, at interviewees' homes (in case of living-out domestic workers). I have participated in a twice-a-week gatherings, during the household workers' days-off, namely, Thursday and Sunday, including the festivities, I have participated in tending for the place of gathering, bringing in food for common meals, and helped in adding new books to the list of the center's book collection. I was an overt observer, taking notes and pictures from time to time. I was tending to be a "marginal native" in order to have the access to the research site, but at the same time remain independent (cf. Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). I have helped one woman who was out of job and consequently lived at my flat for a month, and I was asked to prepare a short information paper on how to study in Italy, which was published in the parochial/migrant bulletin.

As a Polish woman, I found myself in a favorable position in regard to access to the group. However, my situation as an international student on a scholarship vividly contrasted with the economic hardship of the members of the investigated milieu. As I observed, my attitude towards the group studied could be referred to as "stratocentric," *per analogiam* to "ethnocentric." I have discovered to be evaluating the migrant women's behaviors according to my social background, for example, silently criticizing some of them for not studying the language of the host country, which in my view was one of the few possible

benefits from the stay in Italy available for them (cf. Kordasiewicz 2005; Bobek and Salamońska 2010).

Another tension point between the subjects and myself was that in Naples there was a widespread opinion on Polish women working there as either household workers or prostitutes. Very often in my interactions with natives (outside the university, and when I was not conducting my research) it was assumed by the Italians that I worked there as a domestic worker. Each time I engaged in explaining what my position was, therefore aligning with the aspect of my identity that clearly distinguished me from the subjects. My research then relied on what Clifford Geertz (2001) called "anthropological irony": the constantly negotiated illusion between the researcher and the members of the studied group that they can be partners—in the research process and in life.⁵

The Characteristics of Polish Migrants in Naples

The self-administered survey conducted in the course of my research revealed a high female predominance (89%). As far as the degree of regularity is concerned, 30% of respondents declared they had obtained a "stay permit" (*permesso di soggiorno*), and 23% said they had a work permit. Respondents of the survey come from small centers or rural parts of the country: besides young female

⁵ Despite the "anthropological irony," I have also made friends with some of the subjects, which confirms the fusion of research and private life in the anthropological practice, stressed by the same Geertz (2001:39): "[t]he outstanding characteristic of anthropological fieldwork as a form of conduct is that...it forces this [occupational and extra-occupational spheres] fusion. One must find one's friends among one's informants and one's informants among one's friends."

migrants there is also a middle-age group (48% are over 40 years old); they have been educated up to the secondary level, and have little experience in the labor market. In most cases, I was dealing with incomplete migrations that are characteristic of the current Polish social landscape: family bonds in Poland remain strong, therefore the money earned as a result of emigration is remitted in order to maintain households in Poland; visits back home to see the family are made relatively often; and a majority of people do not envisage staying in Italy for good (cf. Okólski 2001).

The common occurrence of the two forms of work—live-in, which is blended with living together with a family or a person for whom the household worker works, and live-out, which means that the domestic workers live on their own and work in one or, more frequently, several houses—in the domestic service sector is emphasized in the literature (Momsen 1999:13-14; Anderson 2000). Accordingly, I have found two basic types of domestic work in Naples: live-in work, which is also termed “around the clock” work, “working day and night” (*a giorno e notte* and *a venti quattro ore* in Italian), as well as live-out work, termed “by the hour” (*a ore* in Italian).⁶ Persons working “by the hour” are most often employed to do the cleaning, and less frequently combine this activity with care work. These two types of tasks are most often combined in a “day and night” working situ-

ation. Out of the 14 participants of in-depth interviews, half of them were currently working in the “day and night” mode, and other subjects had experience with this mode at the beginning of their migration.

Live-in domestic work is often the first job undertaken by Polish women in Naples, and usually the worker obtains a fixed monthly salary and is provided with bed and board. None of the subjects could speak Italian at the time of their arrival. At first, they worked without a permit; then, with time, part of them applied for an extended stay and a work permit. The work was associated with significant isolation from one’s social environment (staying in the household throughout the week with the exception of two afternoons off). For new migrants, working “day and night” is the most straightforward working pattern as it ensures employment and resolves accommodation problems. The requisite qualifications are relatively easy to meet, but this is reflected in lower remuneration.

The principal career model for people taking up domestic jobs described in the literature is a transition from the live-in mode to the live-out mode (Anderson 2000; Miranda 2002). This was the most frequent transition scheme marked in the surveys (23 respondents), but the most common (124 persons) path among migrants consisted of preserving the “day and night” model for a considerable length of time, sometimes over a period of several years. It appears from the interviews that not all of the individuals regarded the transition into the “by the hour” working mode as being desirable—stability is a big advantage of live-in work.

The Dynamics of Household Worker’s Role Definition

The domestic service situation is said to entail the intrinsic ambiguity of the blurring of the public/private sphere (Aubert 1956; Momsen 1999; Yeoh and Huang 1999; Anderson 2000; Miranda 2002; Mariti 2003). This ambivalence is reflected in a variety of ways in which interviewees in my study refer to their own and their employer’s social role. The role names can be sorted into those referring to the domain of work (worker, boss, employer), and to the world of servanthood (*cameriera* [housemaid], servant, slave; *signora* [lady/madam]). Apart from that, there exist names referring to the demographical dimension (girl: for the domestic worker, and woman for the employer, grandmother and granny in reference to the elderly person that they take care of), nationality (Pole, Italian, my Italian), and functions (cook, cleaner, girl to clean, to assist, to care, domestic help). In Italy, there is also a term that none of the subjects used, “COLF” (*collaboratore familiare*, family assistant, or collaborator), that has been promoted, among others, by the church-led domestic workers’ union ACLI-COLF, alongside with the traditional vision of subservience to the family, and it has been criticized by the scholarship for minimizing the worker’s agency (Andall 2000:148).

Taking into account the variety of names and the stigma attached to domestic work, I chose to use the names connected with the social world of work that conform with the perception of most of the subjects in the study, namely, “domestic worker” and “household worker” interchange-

ably, and “employers.” I want to underscore that despite the critique of the notion “domestic work” as stigmatizing (Cohen and Sanjek 1990), I apply all the terms in a neutral, descriptive, and egalitarian way.

Theoretical Framework: Applied Symbolic Interactionism

In my analysis, I have been inspired and have systematically applied the symbolic interactionist framework to the world of domestic work. I found symbolic interactionism particularly fit for rendering the dynamics of the role negotiations that take place when a foreign domestic worker is employed. In the analysis below, I mostly use the following terms, which stem from the symbolic interactionism tradition: **symbolic area**: a category of meaning constituting a point of reference for an interaction model, for example, the world of service, the world of work, family, friendship in professional relations; **relational model**: the entirety of relations referring to one symbolic area that manifest themselves in a **set of** characteristic **practices**. Relational models are: *overt degradation*—the world of service; *fictive kinship*—family; *professionalism*—work; and *friendly professionalism*—friendship within professional relations (cf. Kordasiewicz 2008). **Interpretation framework** is a perspective of a social actor interpreting a given situation through the prism of symbolic areas, for example, the world of work, and contains in itself the **definition of the situation**, which includes **role identity** (the way of interpreting a social role by the actor, cf. McCall and Simmons 1966). **Identity strategy** is a set of practices resulting from the

⁶ The types mentioned above are internally diversified forms, the most important factor apart from the domicile is the method of payment: once a week, once a month, daily, predefined sum or hourly wage. In case of live-in work, I encountered a case where it was part time work combined with studies (cf. Kordasiewicz 2005).

adoption of a particular interpretation framework, which aims to define the situation and one's role in a way desired by the actor. Identity strategy is a set of practices that employers and the domestic workers use in order to shift the definition of the situation and role in a desired direction. In the analyzed material, two kinds of identity strategy are present: *professionalization* (which emphasizes the professional aspect of the relationship) and *personalization* (which emphasizes the personal aspect of the relationship). Identity strategies manifest themselves on the **interactional level** (specific actions, e.g., towards employers, as narrated by workers) or on the **narrative level** (in the manner of constructing one's own role in the narration). All of the terms written in italics have been worked out in the course of the analysis or, as in the case of the "fictive kinship," stem also from analysis of other authors (see above). None of the above expressions belong to the interviewees' vocabulary. I refer to a couple of concepts by Erving Goffman: non-person treatment (1961) and game, drama, and ritual framework (Piotrowski 1998), as well.

Relationships Between Domestic Workers and Employers in the Literature

Relationships between employers and domestic workers constitute one of the key themes in literature throughout decades and geographical and ethnic contexts. The two dimensions that, in my opinion, pervade the analysis of various authors are distance/intimacy and hierarchy/equality. Within hierarchy I distinguish between total hierarchy characteristic for the traditional role of servant, and formal or partial hierarchy compatible with profes-

sional relationships. The above-mentioned dimensions constitute a powerful tool to systematically order the analysis. Below, the reader will find a table on which I have placed existing concepts, as well as those proposed in this paper.

The proposed models of "overt degradation," which I understand as a relationship that is distant and hierarchical (in its total mode), have strong similarity with the concepts of deference (Rollins 1985), asymmetry (Glenn 1986), and distant hierarchy (Lan 2006). The "fictive kinship," that in my analysis is a relationship characterized by total hierarchy and intimacy at the same time, has been thoroughly analyzed under this or "one of the family" label by Romero (1992), Anderson (2000), Parreñas (2001), Constable (2003), Lan (2006), and McDowell (2006), among others.

A lot of space in the literature has been dedicated to the dynamic and processual character of the phenomenon of negotiating the roles and definitions. However, the names such as "personalism" or "business-like relationship," as well as others, suggest a rather stable model or a constant attitude towards the relationships. I propose to focus on the dynamics itself by analyzing personalization and professionalization, and *not* personalism and professionalism, which at best could be called "target situations" for the strategies I study. The identity strategies that form the focus of the paper are: professionalization, by which I understand aiming at the relationship that is distant and hierarchical in a formal/partial way, characteristic to the world of work, and personalization, by which is understood aiming

Table 1. Relationships between household workers and their employers in the literature.

	Symmetry (equality)	Asymmetry (hierarchy)	
		Formal (partial)	Informal (total)
Distance ↑ ↓ Closeness	Relationships Between Persons (K)	Keeping Safe Distance (L), Distancing (H-S)	Deference (Roll) Asymmetry (G) Distant Hierarchy (L) Overt Degradation (K)
	Personalism (L)	Business-like Relationship (R, H-S) Professionalism (K)	Fictive Kinship / "one of the family" (A, C, K, L, P, R) Maternalism (Roll) / Seeking Patronage (L)
		Friendly Professionalism (K)	
		Personalism (G, H-S)	

Source: self-elaboration.

A: Anderson (2000), C: Constable (2003), G: Glenn (1986), H-S: Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007), K: Kordasiewicz (concepts in bold), L: Lan (2006), P: Parreñas (2001), R: Romero (1992), Roll: Rollins (1985). Not included were: Lan's "highlighting previous positions" and "obscuring previous positions," as they may be used in many relationships of varying degree of intimacy.

at a relationship that is distant but at the same time marked by equality. These identity strategies also have certain affinity with the concept of business-like relationship (Romero 1992; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007) and personalism in the formulation of Lan (2006) respectively.

Despite the nuances, I have decided that some of the concepts share their position with respect to the dimensions analyzed, so I placed them together. I made a distinction between personalism as understood by Lan (2006) and that of Glenn (1986) and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007). Lan's personalism seems

more equality than intimacy oriented, and hence closer to the target situation of the personalization strategy, namely, what I call "relationship between persons." Hondagneu-Sotelo and Glenn's personalism is portrayed as reciprocal intimacy, and asymmetry is viewed as a part and parcel of it.

Employers' Strategies

When working in Italian households as domestic workers, Polish women initially encounter three kinds of employers' practices, which I reconstruct on the basis of employees' accounts. Among these,

two are found to be unacceptable by the majority of the subjects, while one is considered to be acceptable. The not accepted ones are “overt degradation” and “fictive kinship,” both of which fall into the category of total, informal hierarchy, which will be discussed in more detail below. On the other hand, “friendly professionalism” is accepted.

“Friendly professionalism” is constructed as a non-problematic situation. It denotes a relationship model where the professional and personal dimensions of the relationship are balanced. From a professional point of view, this relationship can be characterized as one that contains various elements, such as satisfactory remuneration, and the observance of employee’s rights (as far as working time and breaks are concerned). In the cases described, the migrant is legally employed and has a work contract in which insurance contributions and taxes are paid. The interpersonal relationship is one that is full of respect, appreciation, warmth, kindness, and friendliness. Karolina,⁷ a 36-year-old live-out cleaner, who recently had begun to study at the Neapolitan University and combines work and study, explains:

As I already told you, it is not a prestigious occupation, for sure...I do nothing else but clean, iron, stack up their underwear, wash the water closet, so the tasks that are, maybe not degrading, but that don’t give you any sense of satisfaction or fulfillment. But, they [the employers] are able to treat me in a way that

I don’t feel the burden, I don’t feel degraded. They treat me with respect. And I respect them in turn.

The high importance of both these dimensions of work (professional and interpersonal) becomes apparent when an offer for a “replacement opportunity” was overheard in an informal job center near the church where Polish masses are held⁸:

Giving up on my by-the-hour job, is anyone interested? Salvator Rosa [subway station], five hours daily, 300€ per month. The woman’s very friendly. She’s pregnant with her second child, so she’ll need “day and night” later on. I wouldn’t leave this job... [but I have to go back home].

Apart from information on the location, remuneration, and character of the job, the type of relationship with the employer is also mentioned, and is considered to be important. “The woman” is willing to be on friendly terms with her household worker, and this is viewed as being an asset.

The “friendly professionalism” model in the researched cases is actively co-created by individuals taking up the job of a domestic worker. This type of relationship depends on the good will of both sides and their mutual compatibility, as with other types of work. This kind of relationship applied only to a minority in my study—two out of 14 persons worked in a “friendly professional” relationship. They are linked by the fact that neither belongs to a milieu that routinely congregates

around the Polish center and their migrant biography lacks an episode of oppressive “day and night” work. “Friendly professionalism” is a type of relationship that developed only in the case of household workers working “by the hour.”

The two types of unaccepted relationships occur within the “day and night” work model.⁹ They have common features, mainly, in general terms, poor working conditions: continual demands for work, sometimes for over a dozen hours daily, with no free time, and low pay. This is accompanied by a hardly tolerable “day and night” work mode, which results in feelings of confinement and isolation.

These unfavorable conditions may manifest themselves in two forms: either the employers imbue the chore with an element of degradation (“overt degradation”), or they try to alleviate the hard work by ostensibly accepting the worker into the familial community (“fictive kinship”). Under the term “overt degradation” I would include (as perceived by domestic workers) a tendency on the part of the employer to exclude the household worker from interactions and defining her as a socially inferior being; “fictive kinship,” on the other hand, denotes (as perceived by domestic workers) a tendency on the part of the employer to include the household worker into the network of unreciprocated familial community responsibilities. These strategies constitute sets of practices which will be described below.

Overt Degradation

Employers’ actions that are experienced by Polish women as degrading can be grouped into three categories. Two of them (emphasizing the role and non-person treatment) are actions taken on the employer’s own initiative, while punishing for going beyond one’s role occurs in response to the domestic workers’ actions which I classify as “personalization” and analyze in the section on this strategy.

The first group of actions that serve to highlight the household worker’s role includes: the requirement that a special apron, which socially marks the worker’s function and distinguishes her from the “real” family members, be worn, and the introduction of spatial separation for meals and, sometimes, watching television (the domestic worker in the kitchen).

The apron is an inflammatory element in interactions between employers and household workers. Some of the employers put strong pressure on their employees to wear the apron, and this meets with fierce resistance in return; Olga, currently a 26-year-old live-in part time housekeeper, who combines work and study, refers to one of her previous live-in full-time jobs:

They [the employers] told me to wear an apron, I told them I wouldn’t. [And so?] I told them I wouldn’t stay, that I was leaving. Finally, I stayed and didn’t wear the apron.

The apron is a symbolically marked element which makes domestic workers feel that they are being pushed into a servant’s role. They rebel against be-

⁷ It should be mentioned that the quotations included in this article are to enable an analysis of the described aspects of the domestic workers’ situation and are not intended to introduce the respondents themselves; that is why only selected quotations are present. All the names appearing in the text have been changed.

⁸ Replacement opportunity denotes working as a substitute for a temporarily unavailable household worker during her absence (vacations), usually over one to three months. In close proximity to the church, the church-attending group came into direct contact with outside-church population.

⁹ It is possible to have an oppressive live-out situation, as is the case of some Ukrainian women working as domestic workers in Poland (Kordasiewicz 2009). By definition, though, live-out work offers more independence because it separates the dwelling from the workplace.

ing required to wear one in a more or less open manner.

The separation of dining tables and resting rooms is also interpreted as a symptom of being treated as a servant. Teresa, a 22-year-old, currently a care worker for an elderly woman, referring to a previous live-in housekeeper job, said:

[At the previous job] I was always eating alone, they were eating separately, I was eating in the kitchen. And now this is a different story: I eat in the dining room, together with “grandma” [the elderly woman she is taking care of], and everything is fine. There, where I was eating alone, I was simply a servant.

An escalation of behaviors that underline the role of a household worker takes place in the presence of third parties (like guests), and takes the form of more rigorous requirements concerning their attire, adopting a supercilious tone of voice, and having the domestic worker do things that the “madam” normally takes care of herself.

A second set of practices, which can be described as non-person treatment, denotes treating household workers as socially transparent. It is reflected in the following practices: quarreling in the domestic worker’s presence, making the household worker serve breakfast in bed, not reprimanding children for insulting the domestic worker. That is how Krystyna, aged 27, working as a live-in housekeeper, describes her first day in Italy:

During the first day of my stay in their house, the married couple quarreled, and they were yelling at

each other God only knows how loudly. And it was then when I decided I wouldn’t treat them seriously as they don’t treat my person seriously. I wasn’t prepared that in a guest’s presence, because, potentially, I was a guest in their house, one can quarrel to that extent, not paying attention that you are watching it, that you don’t understand a single word.

Household workers faced with such practices report feeling embarrassed and excluded. The *non-person treatment* phenomenon was worked out by Erving Goffman (1961:45; 1969:151). A non-person is “a person who is not there,” for whom “no impression need to be maintained” (Goffman 1969:151). Judith Rollins (1985:209-211) rightly calls upon the fact that it is in congruence with the vision of an ideal servant—subservient and invisible (cf. Glenn 1986:157). Such role was assigned to, among others, former servants and slaves in the presence of their lords (cf. Elias 1983:48). In the conclusions section, I further develop an interpretation of the non-person phenomenon in the investigated site.

Fictive Kinship

Fictive kinship encompasses a set of actions on the part of the employer: a declaration that they will include the domestic worker within the family community, informal awards instead of remuneration, allowing the worker to have an afternoon off as if it were a gift (and as though the employees were not entitled to a rest), as well as giving her gifts of items that are no longer needed in the household (for example, garments). All these practices make more distant the formal, contractual definition of the situation. Polish women in any case believe that the kinds of

statements these employers make (such as: “you are a part of the family,” “we’re your friends”) are essentially false (ostensible) and instrumental, as exemplifies Lucyna, a 54-year-old live-in housekeeper:

They play a game with our feelings. And we say to ourselves: “I will stay with the ‘grandma’” because we feel pity for her, because she says she is unwell, so we stay longer with no extra pay...and there is a method of employers: “*Tu sei brava persona, bellissima, brava* [you are a wonderful person, beautiful, wonderful], they flatter you, it lends us wings, and we toil more and more. Or, even they tell us: “You are part of the family, you are like family,” and we, Polish women, are easily taken in, so she treats me as family... We will never be “family!” It is just business, you are needed, you are *brava* [wonderful], if they don’t need you anymore, you are no longer “part of the family.”

The “fictive kinship” practices essentially serve as a tool to psychologically extort the greatest amount of work without proportional remuneration (among other things, working with no rests or waiving one’s time off is required) (Kordasiewicz [2008] extensively describes the types of practices used by employers). “Fictive kinship” is employers’ strategy often described in literature (Romero 1992; Anderson 2000; Parreñas 2001; Constable 2003; Lan 2006; McDowell 2006). It is worth noting that in certain contexts household workers also employ the (fictive) kinship strategy, for the purpose of entering into social networks of employers, as is the case of Ukrainian women working in Poland (Kindler 2008), or as an identity strategy, protecting them from the degrading “servant” label in the case of migrants from the former USSR in the U.S.A. (Solari 2006).

Practices of “overt degradation” and “fictive kinship” sometimes occur simultaneously in one employer’s actions. The interviews I conducted revealed cases of “sweetening,” a general degradation by means of familiarizing gestures; or familiarization is exposed by pointing to elements of open oppressiveness (this is the most commonly referred case in the literature, cf., e.g., Anderson 2000:122).

Domestic Workers’ Responses

In response to oppressive work, a series of strategies undertaken by the household worker may come to the forefront. The subjects occasionally decide to give up their job and move to another job, either within the live-in system or transfer to a live-out system. Abandoning a live-in job without first finding another job is, however, risky: the domestic worker relinquishes not only her work but also her accommodation. It also happens in certain cases that after an initial negative experience, a person may abandon the migration project and return to Poland. A graph is included at the end of the article that represents possible actions on the part of household workers in an oppressive work situation (see: Figure 1).

In two cases, there was an acceptance of an oppressive work situation in a “fictive kinship” variant. Both of the women mainly worked for aged people, and in elderly care, most of the times, the employer of the care worker is the child or child-in-law of the elderly person, and therefore the relationship between the care receiver and care worker is not based on the power of the employer over the employee; as such this was excluded from further analysis. Out of the remaining 12 cases, eight respondents appeared

to adopt a professionalization strategy, another two a personalization strategy, while the remaining two found themselves in a situation that I diagnosed as being unproblematic; that is, “friendly professionalism.” The article analyzes professionalization and personalization strategies as contrasting ways of experiencing and coping with the problematic situations of live-in work. The professional framework is the type that predominates in the studied context. I give consideration to the personalization strategy despite its significantly lesser presence in the analyzed material because of the theoretical importance of this phenomenon, as it constitutes deviant case (for a summary on the deviant case, see: Silverman 2004:180-184), or even contrasting cases (Schütze 2008) in relation to the professionalization strategy that predominates (theoretical sampling, see: Glaser and Strauss 1967:45-78; Silverman 2004:105-108).

Household Workers’ Strategies: Professionalization

The professional framework constitutes the most frequent way of interpreting relations with the employer, and appeared in 8 of the 14 cases that are analyzed. The features women under study had in common were participation in the Polish center and having experienced harsh labor conditions at the beginning of their migrant career. The latter feature suggests that the professionalization strategy is a defensive strategy against oppressive work forms. Participation in the Polish center seems also to be important when it comes to developing the strategy. Some of the women in the study regularly met with other migrants during their time off; this perpetuated the conviction that their situation was

one of “economic migration,” which helped to prevent them from becoming completely immersed in the oppressive interpersonal environment. During these meetings, they shared with each other their personal experiences and the strategies they used in difficult situations, and one of their approaches was the professionalization strategy. For example, photocopies of regulations concerning domestic work contracts translated into Polish were distributed. Some of the respondents told me that they were trying to persuade other migrants to adopt an approach which I call “professional.” Only those from outside the Polish center circles developed another interpretation framework, that of “friendly professionalism.” The material gathered does not contain, however, enough documented cases to allow for a systematic comparison of the groups, the interpretations being of a hypothetical character.

The formation of professional framework may sometimes be the result of a sudden conversion. Lucyna managed to endure daily twelve-hour shifts of hard work, which was coupled with a familiarization attitude from her employer that “gave a big boost” so “you worked until you dropped.” She reported that such a turning point occurred when she saw her employer throwing into the dustbin an unread Christmas card from a former domestic worker:

It was a Polish girl [one of the previous cleaners]... [the employer] praised her work...but when the girl sent a Christmas card, I found it in the dustbin. It was unopened, with best wishes inside, so they weren’t interested in it at all, she didn’t even care how I might feel seeing this. And I said to myself: “No more! I’m done with my work, and that’s the end of it!”

The throwing out of the Christmas card is interpreted by Lucyna as conflicting with friendly or, even more generally, human-to-human relationship (the importance of Christmas in Polish culture is particularly significant). By this gesture, the employer contradicted the existence of any real ties she had created with her former household worker, and those that she currently had with Lucyna. Lucyna formulated a new action plan: a lack of personal involvement, and defined her relationship with the employer solely on a professional basis (“I’m done with my work, and that’s the end of it!”). The expression “I’m done with my work” also relates to completing daily tasks and the beginning of the time off—until Lucyna’s conversion this spare time had been systematically filled up by the employers. It conveys a resolution to make a clear distinction between working time and time off (the question of spare time is an important point in the negotiations with employers).

The professional framework can be seen in the women’s narratives in several ways. The framework manifests itself on the level of interactions related by the respondents, and in the narrative itself (Kordasiewicz 2008). The significance of the professional framework on the narration level becomes apparent in a number of different ways. Firstly, when the economic reasons for coming to Italy are emphasized (“I came here to work”). Secondly, the migrant women use the professional world’s formal vocabulary (such as overtime, employee’s rights, professional experience, working time, trade union regulations, earning for one’s pension, or expressions that describe one’s own role and the role of the partner with whom one interacts as a pair—employee-employer).

Thirdly, they critically assess, from the perspective of the present professional framework, behaviors prior to the conversion. Fourthly, they make an attempt to present oppressive working conditions as professional duties (through statements: “that’s what the job is like,” “these are my duties”), like in what Aneta, a 25-year-old live-in nanny/housekeeper, says:

That’s what the job is like, that’s what the people are like, if I had a *cameriera* [housemaid], I suspect I wouldn’t be a better madam, I am very demanding. But, it is true, they have their Italian ways [of dealing with servants], like, I will just throw it here because I feel like it, I won’t go there because I am too tired, because I have a maid to do such things, I won’t put the jug back in the kitchen because you are to do it, I pay you for this...however, I must admit I didn’t have major problems like scarcity of food or exploitation. Well, maybe there is some exploitation, but I don’t treat it this way, I take it as part of my duties.

Once “some exploitation” is named “part of my duties” or “that’s what the job is like,” the employer’s demands stop being experienced as degrading and exploitative.

On the level of interaction, I would include among the professionalization practices negotiating work conditions and aspiring to regularize one’s stay and work in Italy.

It is interesting to note that “formal professionalization” is a strategy employed to counteract, on the one hand, generally poor working conditions and “fictive kinship” practices (as in Lucyna’s case),

and on the other, degrading practices, as in the case described below. Here, Katarzyna, a 42-year-old live-in nanny/housekeeper, considering switching to a live-out work, speaks of the process of battling for the observance of employee's rights:

I tried to claim my rights, and step-by-step I reclaimed everything...the rights to have a rest...to have two hours of rest time every day and...that my night time rest is also respected, so I must have at least that minimum of eight hours rest at night time. In the house that I work in, my employee's rights are respected.

Katarzyna alludes here to formal regulations concerning the work of domestic workers. Those regulations constitute for her something to aim at in the long process of negotiating work terms and conditions (even in the case of irregular work). Her interview also serves to illustrate a work situation which is characterized by a considerable distance between the family members and the household worker (the presence of degrading practices), which Katarzyna summarizes in the following way:

I must know my place, the children are of the greatest importance, then their parents...I can't expect to be treated the way they treat their children, or their equals, their Italian friends. I'm a Pole, and I'm a servant, after all. They don't usually get in my way, and I don't engage in their family life; these are simply our two [separate] spheres, our lives, we just take care of formal issues.

In the above example, we deal with an oppressive, overtly degrading situation. Nonetheless, Katarzyna is focused on the professional dimension of the relationship with her employers. In her account, she expresses

an acceptance of the permanently lower position she occupies in the household that is epitomized by her referring to herself as a "servant." The professionalization strategy is used as a defense against degrading practices: all of her attention was focused on enforcing her employee's rights—a strategy that ultimately proved to be successful. It can also be noted that the strategy essentially rules out the possibility of creating a close personal relationship between the worker and employer.

Regularizing one's stay and work constitutes the crowning achievement of the professionalizing strategy. It is a means of restricting the power employers can exercise over domestic workers by subjecting it to external law regulations (Anderson 2000:169). The process of regularization takes long time and requires a great deal of determination. One of the respondents described it in this way: "bit by bit I struggled, I went to places, I begged, I talked, and I got this legalization last year" (when the interview was conducted, she had been staying in Italy for five years, and the regularization took place in her third job there). Małgorzata, a 30-year-old woman, currently cleaning live-out for many families, whose migrant career began with an exceptionally oppressive work situation where she also had to deal with the threat of sexual harassment, speaks of obtaining extended stay and work permits in this way:

And then moving to work "by the hour," I realized that, first of all, this is the kind of job where you don't get abused, because I met some really wonderful people who got those papers for me.

Małgorzata implies in her account that the "live-in" job is a job where "you get abused." It should also

be noted as well that "getting papers" is ascribed to the fact of "meeting wonderful people"; that is, exceptional kindness on the part of employers is necessary in order to obtain legal status.

In the studied context, professionalization through the regularization of one's stay and work seems to be, on the one hand, the only secure defense against oppressive employers. On the other hand, however, the regularization of one's status is due mostly to friendly employers, for whom legal regulation is not an unnecessary defensive mechanism. The present legal status of Polish women as citizens of the European Union, and after the opening of the Italian labor market in 2006, means they no longer have to depend on employers in obtaining the stay permit because they are entitled to stay and move freely as EU citizens, and that regularization of the work contract is no longer dependant exclusively on the employer's will, as the employer does not have to apply on their behalf for the work permit. However, as also later studies show, these changes do not translate into greater regularization share (Kaczmarczyk 2008; Näre 2012).

Professionalization: A Summary

The professionalizing strategy is generally characterized by an active attitude. This means that the household worker might resign from an oppressive job, decide to change the work mode by choosing one that provides more freedom and allows for integration. Domestic workers may also aspire to regularize their stay, and negotiate their work terms (see: Figure 1). Apart from this, it also manifests itself in a wide range of narrative practices that are supposed to confirm, in a symbolic way, that the

household worker and her interaction partner are in a situation that is defined as "work."

Within the bounds of the professionalization strategy one may observe that a professional definition is given priority over a personal one in a situation where women are threatened by degrading or by familiarization practices used by employers in oppressive work situations.

Professionalization is a strategy used when dealing with both degrading practices and fictive kinship-based practices. In the table below, the strategies are shown on a grid created by two dimensions: distance and hierarchy (arrows signify professionalization). Both oppressive work forms are based on a total asymmetry and a construction of distance ("overt degradation") or a construction of closeness ("fictive kinship").

Table 2. Migrants' strategies and the dimensions of the domestic work situation: professionalization.

		Asymmetry (hierarchy)	
		Formal (partial)	Informal (total)
Distance	Work		Overt degradation
	Friendly professionalism		Fictive kinship

Source: self-elaboration.

In order to free oneself from an oppressive situation, the domestic worker has to push the definition of the situation towards a restricted, formal asymmetry which is characteristic of superior-subordinate relations, and—additionally—in the

case of “familiarization,” the household worker has to introduce a degree of distance between oneself and one’s employers.

Domestic Workers’ Strategies: Personalization

The degradation of the household worker originally manifests itself in the exposure of their role and in the non-person tactics discussed above. Part of the truth about the degradation model is that it manifests itself in the interaction with the personalization strategy; that is, a strategy of introducing a personal dimension into the relations between employers and domestic workers, in the form of punishing household workers for exceeding their roles.

As argued by Parreñas (2001; cf. Vianello 2014), in many cases of migrant domestic workers we deal with occupational downward mobility. The women who are educated and experienced on the labor market in the host country undertake a job below their qualifications. Household workers engage in activities that belong to their role-identity of the domestic worker and which seem to belong, from their point of view, to a repertoire that is available in a work situation in an Italian house. Judging by the related reactions of Italian employers, one can conclude that, from the employers’ perspective, these kinds of behaviors mean “exceeding one’s role.” These are mainly symmetrical interaction initiatives, independent of the function that is fulfilled by being a household worker. Such behavior might include a willingness to learn Italian, speaking to the male host in a foreign language (English), a willingness to watch television together, answering questions

in quiz shows watched by the family, and reading books. These attempts are met with negative reactions on the part of the employers: a refusal to help in the study of the language and anger, turning off the television, a refusal to take part in the interaction, and astonishment.

And when they noticed that I dedicate a lot of time to reading books, it became a problem. It got on their nerves that I, even after long working hours, still have time to read books, so they began to introduce new chores, to invent new tasks. (Katarzyna)

Apparently, this sort of behavior is treated by the employers as incongruent with the role of the domestic worker. The “penalties” that are imposed on household workers may be severe. Krystyna, at the beginning of her stay in Italy, tried to learn basic Italian:

They didn’t want me to learn Italian, to understand, they were surprised to find I wanted to learn it. The woman, when I asked her how you conjugate “to do,” spilled coffee on the marble and told me: “Clean this up”...and absolutely not! Because I hadn’t come here to learn, I had come here to work, and you can naturally understand such things [connected with cleaning], even if you don’t speak the language.

Most employers’ reactions are, however, more subtle and range from surprise to suggestions of giving up such an activity (the motif of reading books often creates tensions between domestic workers and their employers).

Polish women working as household workers, having realized that certain behaviors are not welcome,

deploy two tactics: either they deliberately continue these activities, or they abandon them, but with a feeling of psychological discomfort; this was sometimes expressed during the interviews. The dimension of personalization can thus be examined on two planes: the plane of interaction and narration. I will discuss the cases of two persons whose strategy may be described as “personalization”: one of them makes attempts to introduce a personal dimension to her work; the other one abandons it, but brings it up in the narrative.

Personalization in Interactions

Krystyna is an example of a person who made repeated attempts to bring in a non-professional plane in interactions. She claims that her employers reacted angrily to her attempts to learn Italian; then, in turn, she engaged in activities that seemed ordinary and casual to her, but were not welcome by her employers. They were surprised she read books, were astonished that she answered questions in a quiz show, and turned off the television when she tried to join in, despite their verbal declarations of friendly bonds: “They repeated: ‘We’re your friends’ [and when I came to watch TV with them] they switched off the television.”

The above quotation illustrates the apparent tension between a false and a genuine feeling of closeness. The employers’ declarations are presented as void because when it comes to an attempt to “draw conclusions” from their declarations on the level of interaction, Krystyna was met with rejection. For Krystyna, it meant living with a constant feeling of degradation and exclusion from symmetrical non-professional interactions.

She was interviewed during an untypical period: at that time she was in search of work, her previous replacement having come to an end. At the same time, for about a month, she had been taking advantage of an opportunity to live with some acquaintances, and she had visited the surrounding areas of Naples and was resting.

Personalization in Narratives

Iwona, a 26-year-old live-in housekeeper, a person for whom the personalization strategy manifested itself on the narrative level, was also in a specific migration moment: the interview was conducted just before she returned to Poland for good. She intended to return to her home country with the goal of taking up Italian studies in Poland, after three years spent in Italy. She had worked with one family as the cook’s assistant, and—after the cook’s death—as the cook herself. She was obliged to wear an apron during work hours; two years after she began working for the family, she attempted to negotiate this requirement:

At one time after two years of work I dared to ask the grandma [who was a member of the older generation in the house she was working in] if I might take off the apron ‘cause...I felt uncomfortable in it. “*O, per piacere, non mi domandare queste cose, un'altra cosa è aprire la porta con una bella camicia e bel grembiolino*” [Oh, don’t ask such things, it looks quite different when you open the door in a beautiful shirt and a beautiful apron]...That’s the way it is with them, there’s no other way, and that’s the end of it. Just one small tunnel [she shows the perspective of a blinkered horse]; they look in a single direction,

and that's the end of it. There's no such thing as a leap sideways; no, no such thing that I might rebel, or come back later, or take off the apron, or anything like that.

Indeed, the above account relates to an attempt to negotiate a working condition, and not strictly the personal dimension of the relationship (although for both parties the apron has a symbolic meaning—for workers it means degradation, for employers, as we see in the above quotation, it underscores the visible status role of the worker), but it is important that Iwona concludes from this story that her situation cannot be changed. It is also significant that she “dared to ask” about the apron only after having worked in the household for two years. Iwona sees no opportunities to express a personal dimension in that Italian house, and that is why she feels permanently degraded. She feels like a servant, and she declares: “I don't want to be a servant all my life.” She is a person who represents those with an attitude that is “set on Poland.” She is coming back to Poland with the

intention of taking up Italian studies. Iwona lacks any positive auto-identification that is possible to realize within the Italian house, such as an employee's identity in the case of women with a professionalizing attitude.

Personalization: A Summary

The alternation of social roles is an ordinary part of everyday life in contemporary societies; it is necessary for the normal social functioning of an individual (Goffman 1961). The punishment for “exceeding one's role” makes it impossible for domestic workers to perform different social roles, and such a possibility might still be present in a somewhat attenuated form even within the live-in job. They are reduced to only one social role—the role of a household worker, and that is why it starts to resemble a total institution (Goffman 1961), and it is experienced by them in such a way (see: Kordasiewicz [2005] for more detail on the domestic work as a form of total institution; cf. also Motsei 1990).

Migrants applying a personalization strategy do not pay attention to the professional dimension of the work. They do not develop a positive auto-definition of a domestic worker as an employee or that of any other. This is visualized in table 3.

A personalization strategy denotes a withdrawal from a situation of total asymmetry into a sphere of equality and distance, such as in the case of two persons who do not know each other, but respect their equal status (“relationships between persons”).

The two respondents' lack of success when it came to using this strategy, and their persistence in sticking to it, might be linked with their atypical situation: at the time of the interviews they were either unemployed or were going to return to Poland in the near future. Further research would be needed in order to ascertain whether this connection is systematic.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed several models and strategies pertaining to relationships between household workers and their employers. I have presented a conceptual grid consisting of the hierarchy/equality and intimacy/distance dimensions to order the relationships as analyzed in the existing scholarship and in this paper. The main findings were the strategies of opposing migrant domestic workers: professionalization, which aims at a business-like relationship, and personalization, which aims at a relationship that is equal and distant at the same time. Both of these target models are difficult to achieve in the investigated context. Not

all Polish migrants in Naples are lucky enough to be hired by employers who offer them good working conditions and who respect them as persons. Among the strategies used by Polish women in oppressive situations, one can discern both direct and symbolic actions. Direct actions include leaving their job, striving for regularization, opposing their employers' oppressive practices. Symbolic actions might consist of playing the definition game in such a way that would enable them to obtain a more advantageous situation.

One of the main limitations of the study was not including the employers of the domestic workers, so it offers only a one-sided picture. The cultural factors may play a crucial role. Polish women experience certain actions on the part of employers as degrading; for instance, the non-person treatment. But, that does not necessarily have to be the intention of Italian employers. The non-person treatment, moreover, is said to have both mortifying and functional aspects, when it enables certain people to perform their tasks smoothly (photographers, bodyguards, interpreters) (Goffman 1969:132). It may be that employers, who are better acquainted with the ways of coping with household workers, apply customary practices that allow strange people to coexist with each other under one roof, without necessarily producing close bonds; this behavior, in turn, is interpreted by domestic workers as social exclusion. Future research on domestic work in Italy should include domestic workers, as well as their employers in order to explicate also their perspective, and currently the literature on Italian employers is scarce (to the best of my knowledge some information is included only in Anderson

Table 3. Migrants' strategies and the dimensions of the domestic work situation: professionalization (solid arrows) and personalization (dashed arrows).

	Symmetry (equality)	Asymmetry (hierarchy)	
		Formal (partial)	Informal (total)
Distance	Relationships between persons	Professionalism	Overt degradation
Closeness	(Friendship)	Friendly professionalism	Fictive kinship

Source: self-elaboration.

2000; Miranda 2002).¹⁰ There are also prospects to make the analysis of the relationships in the world of domestic work more systematic, and the conceptual grid proposed by this paper is one of the ways to achieve it, however, it requires further application to different contexts.

To summarize, I would like to refer to three basic analytical frameworks in Erving Goffman's work, as identified by Andrzej Piotrowski (1998): social reality may be seen in terms of "drama" (like in the *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*), "game" (e.g., *Strategic interaction*), or "rituals" (*Interaction ritual*). The ritual aspect of the interaction consists of showing respect and of being shown respect, of "being a person among other persons" (Piotrowski 1998:99). The "drama" consists of creating and controlling impressions through which a process of creating and expressing identity takes place. The "game" is a strategic and goal-oriented action, and the aim is to fulfill one's objectives through all the available means.

The strategy of personalization—introducing extra-situational elements, attempts to take part in symmetrical interactions while maintaining some independence—may be interpreted in terms of ritual and dramatic dimensions of interaction. Polish women working as household workers want to be "persons among other persons" and to express the non-professional aspects of their identity. Professionalization, on the other hand, is a strategic action, a game that serves to obtain one's goals.

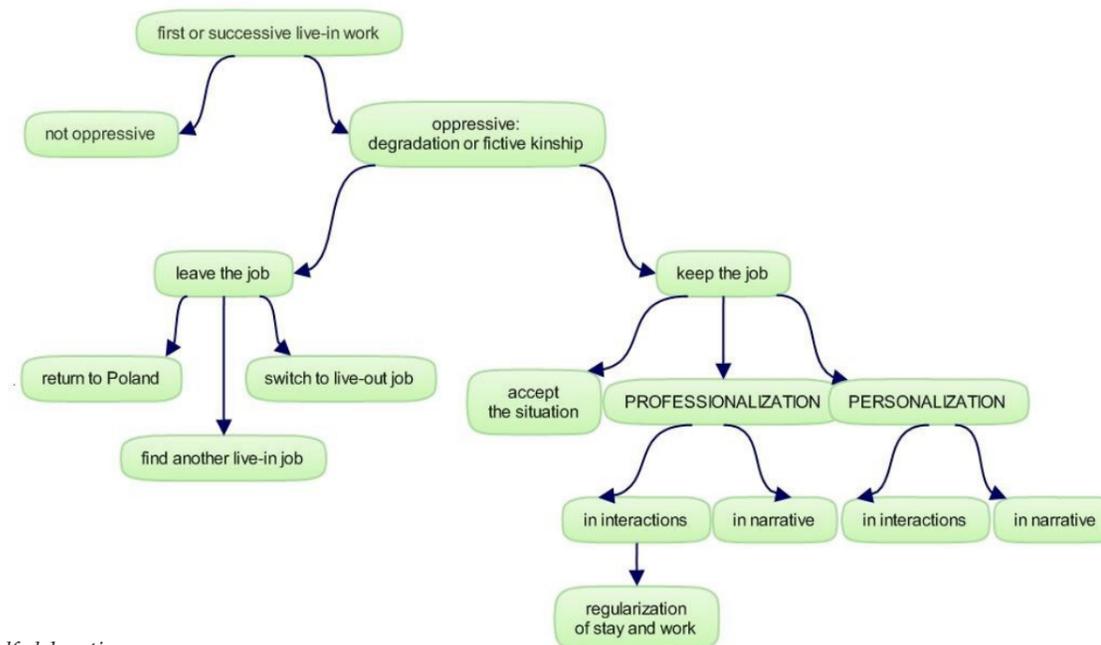
¹⁰ In my next study on domestic work in Poland, I included both workers and employers, and put an emphasis on the employers as under-researched (cf. Kordasiewicz 2009; forthcoming).

A majority of domestic workers, in a situation where both the personal and professional aspects of identity are threatened by the oppressive work situation, focus on the "game": this is a battle for a professional dimension and introducing a definition of work (professionalization); the ritual and expressive aspects of work are renounced, or the struggle in the personal field as well. A minority of household workers in the study, however, did not develop a positive auto-definition of the "employee." They rather concentrated on the personal dimension by taking the initiative, with the aim of presenting themselves as persons (personalization). On the basis of the gathered materials, it is possible to conclude that defining the relationship with one's employer as a game where professional definition is at stake (while abandoning the personal definition of that relationship) more often than not leads to a successful end in the investigated site. On the other hand, concentrating on the relationship as a ritual and a drama, if auto-identification is lacking in the professional field, usually fails as it is not confirmed by the interacting partners, and so results in a feeling of degradation that is experienced in silence.

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Figure 1. A tree of possible actions of a household worker in Naples in an oppressive work situation.



Source: self-elaboration.

Comment: The starting point is placed in upper-left "first or successive live-in work," and the tree unfolds the possibilities top-down. The tree of possible actions includes actions actually recorded during the research in many individual cases.

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