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## **Gender, migration and the ambiguous enterprise**

### **of professionalizing domestic service:**

#### **The case of vocational training for the unemployed in France**

#### **Abstract:**

This article aims to contribute to current debates about international migration and the restructuring of the Welfare state in Europe, by highlighting the specificities of the French context. It draws on ethnographic research about the training of unemployed migrant women as domestic workers in Paris to address the ambiguities which underlie the enterprise of professionalizing domestic service. The qualitative data presented in the article show how essentialist ideologies operate within training practices of domestic workers. They reveal that the training practices challenge the association of the job with domesticity, but fail to acknowledge the racist organization of domestic service. Hence, they endorse essentialist constructions of cultural difference. Training practices are also consistent with current neoliberal policies and discourses on unemployment and ‘employability’, as they are framed by the normative reference to an entrepreneurial model of society. Finally, the data suggest that migrant women’s experience of domestic service as a prospective job and their scepticism about the enterprise of professionalizing radically differ from the instructors’ views.

**Keywords:** gender, migration, racism, domestic service, vocational training, ‘employability’

This article addresses the ambiguities and contradictions which are inherent in the enterprise of professionalizing domestic service<sup>1</sup>. It aims to contribute to current debates about international migration and the restructuring of the Welfare state in Europe by highlighting the specificities of the French context, which has been seldom taken into account by recent studies of migrant domestic labour<sup>2</sup>. By doing so, it seeks to incorporate the study of neoliberal social policies and discourses on unemployment into the debates about the international division of care. The ethnographic data used for this article concern a six-month vocational training programme held in Paris, where unemployed people were trained as domestic workers<sup>3</sup>.

As Bridget Anderson (2000: 169) has stated, 'it is not as straightforward as it would appear [...] to professionalize domestic work and maintain the current gender and class ideology', as well as dominant racializing thinking. Domestic service has been analysed by several studies in history, anthropology and sociology as a site of reproduction of gender and class (Davidoff, 1974). While the link between migration and domestic service has a long history, it is today closer and more visible (Sarti, 2006). The fact that the domestic service relationship is rooted simultaneously in other power relations such as racism and the inequality between the global North and South clearly appears in the contemporary migration of domestic workers. Is it possible to challenge the social definition of domestic service as a non skilled, non professional activity, without transforming the existing gendered and racialized division of labour and ideologies? By looking at training of domestic workers, it becomes evident that ideas of class, cultural difference and femininity are actually embedded and negotiated within these practices. Both the social organization and the content itself of the job are structured by unequal social relations related to gender,

class and racism. Within the domestic service relationship these unequal relations are displayed and reproduced.

Firstly, several studies have shown how international migration, the economic restructuring that is referred to as globalization, and the restructuring of the Welfare states interplay and create a certain gendered and racialized division of labour (Andall, 2000; Anderson, 2000; Parreñas, 2001; Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003; Lister et al., 2007; Lutz, 2008). Secondly, domestic service can be considered a typical example of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983), to the extent to which the core of the job is immaterial: unlike in classical industrial jobs, the core of the job is working on a relationship, sometimes the mere appearance and simulation of a relationship. Indeed what is sold and bought within the domestic service relationship is not just material work, but also, crucially, the personal experiences of the worker (as a mother, as a member of her own family) (Anderson 2000). Employers (or clients, in the case of associations or companies providing home-based domestic services) often expect domestic workers to love the people cared-for just like their own children or parents. On the one hand, domestic workers mobilize their personal and family experiences at work, providing care for the family of their employers. On the other, hiring a domestic worker is often seen as a symbol of status for the middle classes. In this sense, domestic workers, while cleaning and caring, materialize the social status of their employers. Hence domestic service contributes to maintain the emotional well-being of the employers, but also to validating and celebrating their social status: these two dimensions are likely to be related to one another, as the data concerning the training of domestic workers discussed here will show.

Analysing the professionalization of domestic service entails examining the notion of 'skill' and its meaning. This notion has been central to feminist debates over the

sexual division of labour. 'Skill' can be seen as a social and political construct that is used as a device in the conflict for control over the labour process (Phillips and Taylor, 1986). It is a highly gendered and racialized notion which expresses the state of power relations between social groups regarding the organization of work.

Domestic service is seen as a non-skilled job by definition because the same work is usually carried out by women in the family for free. Thus it tends to be conflated with unpaid care work and femininity.

This article will only marginally address the experience of unemployed migrant women. The data presented here however prompt questions such as: what is the place of 'professionalization' in the agenda of the migrant domestic workers' organizations? What are the linkages between their struggles and antiracist and feminist politics? What kind of actions can connect the issues of sexism and racism, instead of targeting them in separated ways? Within the perspective of defending the rights and improving the working conditions of migrant domestic workers, what is the role of associations and other agencies providing training, tutoring and legal advice? The ambiguous enterprise of professionalizing domestic service needs to be related to the individual as well as collective strategies of migrant domestic workers.

### **Domestic service, social policies and migration in contemporary France**

Since the 1980s French governments have promoted employment in the domestic service sector. These social policies have aimed primarily at dealing with unemployment by creating jobs which in France are usually referred to as 'family-oriented jobs'. These policies, based on cash subsidies for care and tax exemptions for the employers, have generated temporary insecure jobs. Besides direct employment, that is traditional household-based domestic service between a private employer and

an employee, other actors operate in the French domestic service sector, such as non-profit associations (cleaning, care for the elderly and the children) and companies (cleaning, gardening and home maintenance services). Some non-profit associations are the employers of domestic workers and providers of home-based domestic and care work for their clients. Other associations are not employers of domestic workers. It is private employers who pay them to carry out the administrative work connected with the hiring of a domestic worker. Finally, some non-profit associations aim specifically at the inclusion of unemployed people into the labour market. These constitute often the most precarious and lowest paid sector for declared domestic workers. However, most of the jobs recently created are based on the *Chèque Emploi Service Universel* (CESU), a form of payment designed for short term domestic service relationships between a private employer and an employee. The CESU can also be used to remunerate a single intervention in the household. As a result, direct employment relationships have become more precarious and individualized.

While contributing to the normalization of undeclared employment in the sector, these policies did not challenge the association of these jobs with feminine unpaid domestic work. 'Family-oriented jobs' are mostly taken over by women and are on a part-time basis (Martin and Debrouse, 2002). Moreover, these interventions have reinforced class and ethnicity/nationality divisions, based on families' differential access to commodified care services (Bloch and Buisson, 2003). They have also resulted in an increased segmentation of the labour market on the basis of a racialized and gendered organization of work (Angeloff, 2000). In 1990 foreigners constituted 16 per cent of all workers in domestic services; 77 per cent of these workers were women (Merckling, 2003). In 2000, 23 per cent of the domestic workers hired by a private employer were foreigners (Ministère de l'emploi et de la solidarité, 2000), but

many other migrants work in the informal economy. In 1981, a massive regularization showed that domestic service was the most important employment sector for undocumented migrant women (Marie, 1984). Those few studies which mention the presence of migrants in the sector suggest that they are concentrated in Paris and other large cities (Windebank, 2007). Unlike other European countries, in France the state does not recognize domestic service as a sector of employment for migrants. There is not a specific permit for domestic workers and little governmental control on the nationality of such workers. Besides, French institutions apply a ban on 'ethnic categories' in producing statistics. As a result, very little data are available concerning the nationality or origin of the workers, and the role played by racism in the organization of domestic labour is difficult to appreciate. The picture is complicated by the fact that a number of French domestic workers are naturalized migrants or French citizens coming from the overseas regions of the country such as Guadeloupe and Martinique: thus they belong to racialized groups. A recent qualitative study (Doniol-Shaw et al., 2007) suggests that there is a polarisation in the sector between, on the one hand, French white as well as European migrant workers, and, on the other hand, racialized employees. The latter seem to be mostly occupied in the lowest and most informal echelons of the sector, where cleaning chores are combined with care work. Conversely, French white workers tend to occupy the most formalized and highly qualified jobs, which are associated with care work.

Relatively little has been done in order to promote care services as professional jobs. This serves to associate such jobs with unpaid domestic work and traditional women's volunteering activities for the sick and the elderly. For example, no qualification is needed to work as a care-giver for the elderly, neither for working with children. Vocational training focused on care work for the elderly is provided for

domestic workers who are already employed (DEAVS, *Diplôme d'Etat d'Auxiliaire de Vie Sociale*). Various other courses exist, which do not entail any specific benefit in term of pay rise, and which are not focused on care work, such as the one that I attended as an observer. Training provision for the unemployed is often designed *de facto* for migrant women, as job centres often steer migrant women towards these courses. In the Paris region, the majority of the unemployed people attending vocational training for domestic workers are migrants (Doniol-Shaw, 2005).

In France, a minority of qualified care workers are, as Clare Ungerson (2003) argues, engaged in a 'reflexive perspective on the work they undertake' (392). They seem to value their emotional labour and would expect it to be recognized. Non-profit associations could indeed play a key role in professionalizing these care-related jobs. In reality, however, most of those working in associations as well as for private employers do not hold any qualification (Aizicovici, 2004). Moreover, in non-profit associations, practices of management as well as recruitment are often inspired by charity work and domesticity (Angeloff, 2000). In this sense, non-profit associations providing care services in France function according to both market and social criteria. They strive for achieving professional quality of care while at the same time they act as providers of charitable support to precarious female workers, often migrants. As I noted, a large number of associations have as a primary objective the inclusion of unemployed people into the labour market. Moreover, many volunteers work in the associations, as care-givers but also in administrative positions. The following analysis of training practices of domestic workers will show this contradictory orientation of care services associations in France.



## **The case of vocational training for domestic workers in Paris: challenging sexism...**

The course where I carried out participant observations was organized by a small private company specialized in consulting and training in the sector of the 'family-oriented jobs'. Its activities include training courses for managers of care service associations and consultancies which aim to support the establishment of new associations and companies operating in the field. These activities are largely funded by public subsidies. This company defines the professionalization of the sector and the improvement of service quality as its main objectives. It also emphasises the 'intercultural' dimension as a distinctive trait of its activities. The thirteen unemployed women attending the training were sent by the national job centres. Thus following the course was compulsory for them, as they would have lost their unemployment benefits if they had failed to attend the sessions. Only four of the women were French: two were naturalized migrants and one was a French citizen from Réunion Island. The group included people from Morocco, Algeria, Serbia, Niger, Zaire, Cameroun, Senegal and Ivory Coast. All the instructors were French women.

This vocational training, while not granting any official qualification, was intended to prepare the unemployed women to work as care-givers, nannies and cleaners mainly in direct employment and associations, but also in residential homes. Thus the course did not focus on care-related jobs: it included modules concerning cleaning and laundry chores, care for the elderly and for the children as well as tutoring on writing CVs, application letters and the recruitment process. It involved a period of internship in an association or residential home for the elderly. The training addressed both the technical and the relational dimensions of the job, in an attempt to

overcome the divide between material chores and immaterial relational labour. However, most of the technical skills provided were related to cleaning, laundry and home maintenance chores: little specific technical training was provided on health care of the elderly and the children. Training practices and discourses were clearly oriented towards making the domestic workers' emotional labour visible. The instructors constantly urged the women who attended the course to look at domestic service as a proper job, thus attempting to challenge the idea that it is a job of last resort and a non professional activity that everyone can carry out. They also encouraged them to look at the unpaid domestic work that they accomplished in their own family as real and important work. Thus the strategy for professionalizing domestic service was based on the recognition of the feminine domestic work's social value, as well as of its economic value, once that work is transferred into the market. However, according to the instructors, professionalizing a generally unpaid and private activity is not a mechanical shift: there is more going on than the simple commodifying and remunerating of women's domestic work. The core of the training concerned the development of a 'reflexive' approach to one's work. Emotional labour was hence made explicit.

Firstly, this was realized through the simulation of the interactions that employees are expected to have with clients and employers in their house. Migrant women were taught some relational techniques. In these simulations, a professional actress joined the instructors and worked with the women on their body attitudes and expression. Professional domestic workers are then expected to control their bodily attitudes. On the one hand, they are asked to express that they have an equal relationship with the clients/employers. On the other, they have to express deference and respect for the employers'/clients' domestic space. These sessions also enabled domestic workers to

practice simulating patience, interest and personal involvement in the employers'/clients' problems.

Secondly, the instructors recommended that the domestic workers avoid carrying out unpaid extra work for their elderly clients/employers. In fact, because of the organization of working time in non-profit associations, it can happen that the elderly clients/employers are left without care services during unsocial working hours, for example at the week-ends or in the evenings. As a result, some employees do extra work for free because they feel personally responsible vis-à-vis the people cared-for (Dussuet 2005). In the training course, these forms of volunteering were stigmatized as, it was argued, they contribute to the view that domestic service is 'servile' non productive occupation. The instructors incited the women to keep an emotional distance from their clients/employers and not to identify them with their parents or relatives. Also, the women were advised to address openly the issue of pay during the first meeting with a potential employer. By legitimating issues of money and stigmatizing the definition of domestic service as an activity inspired by altruism, the training aimed at making clear that domestic service is not a feminine 'labour of love'. This idea was reiterated by the instructors' emphasis on the technical aspects of the job. The trainees were encouraged to ask the employers/clients to keep some cleaning tools, such as a pair of gloves and an apron, at their house. Also, the women were trained in evaluating the amount of time necessary to carry out the requested domestic chores, in order to resist unrealistic requests by the clients/employers. The course also aimed to prepare the trainees to refuse to take over care work if they considered that it was psychologically challenging for them, such as in the case of elderly people with mental health problems.

Thirdly, the women attending the course were constantly urged to adapt themselves to the domestic styles of life of the different employers/clients they were going to work with. While inviting them to recognize and value the ‘invisible’ skills and work they carry out in their own family, the instructors also insisted that they become aware of the distinction between the two: unpaid domestic work for one’s family and paid domestic service for others. In this view, being the domestic worker is not simply about replacing the wife/mother/daughter in the house. According to the instructors, this was the main condition for professionalizing the job. The crucial requirement that makes a domestic worker ‘professional’ is the ability to adapt oneself by questioning one’s reflexes and domestic habits. For instance, domestic workers were expected to satisfy the clients/employers who have the right to tell them *how* to clean the windows. In the sessions concerning laundry, the women were trained in different ways of ironing and folding men’s shirts. Flexibility was considered as the primary quality of a professional domestic worker in that it enables her to dissociate the public professional practices from the same tasks she carries out daily within her family. In the instructors’ view, this was also justified by the fact that most employees deal with multiple employers/clients who can express very different requests and needs.

### **...And reproducing racism**

It is at this point that the enterprise of professionalization shifts from formalizing emotional labour to reproducing racism. The effort of flexibility that was required from the migrant women attending the course is twofold. On the one hand, the reproduction of the employers’/clients’ social status appears to be at the heart of the enterprise of professionalization. In this sense, flexibility as a ‘professional skill’

merely corresponds to the performing of deference rituals. In fact, according to the instructors, the professional domestic worker must be ready to adapt to the employers'/clients' personalized requests and to carry out domestic chores in the way they require. On the other, professional skills are racialized. In the instructors' discourse, the clients/employers' household was assimilated to the national society, and vice versa. As in colonial discourse and practice, the domestic space is intended as both the private sphere and the national community (Lewis, 2006). The trainees were urged to adapt their domestic practices to those of the clients/employers, especially because these are French. The instructors described the ways in which migrant women perform domestic chores, cleaning the floor for example, as traditional, not functional nor rationally organized. The trainees were asked to give up these supposedly 'traditional' domestic practices: they were taught other ways to perform the same chores, deemed more effective, less time-consuming and less harmful for their health. As shown by the following interviews, the instructors' descriptions of migrant trainees recalls the dualisms associated with the private/public divide, such as passive/active, irrational/rational, corporeity/abstraction, primitive/civilised, etc.

'They lack an abstract thinking. On the day of the final test, at the end of the course, there was a household appliance which was not the same one on which they had practiced, so they did not know what to do. But on the other hand they are endowed with good sense when it comes to practical things, for example they know that they must not wash woolly clothes at ninety degrees' (instructor).

‘They all do it like that in their villages in Northern Africa, and it is bad for your back. They think that if you don’t crouch to scrub the floor with a cloth, then the floor is not properly cleaned. It is another culture, another way of doing the cleaning’ (instructor).

Contemporary forms of racism and racialisation tend to posit cultural difference as a natural basis for antagonism against ‘undesirable’ outsiders (Guillaumin, 1997; Miles, 1993). Migrants as well as nationals of immigrant origin are constructed as representatives of different cultures. In Europe, the construction of migrants as undesirable outsiders is crucially based on essentialist gendered definitions of cultural difference (Lutz, 1999). The dualisms associated with the public/private divide are thus mobilized to reproduce gender at the interplay of racism. More particularly, the training reflected the French ‘universalistic’ discourse on integration, where cultural specificity is stigmatized. This secularist ‘republican model’ of integration and citizenship requires that migrants avoid displaying their supposed cultural and religious specificities in the public political arena, which is seen as neutral, by confining them to the private sphere (Lemière, 2008). In the case of domestic workers, the public and professional sphere corresponds with the employers/clients’ private space. Thus the women were expected to leave their supposed cultural specificities at the door of the employers/clients’ house.

However cultural specificities were sometimes idealized and seen as a potential asset in the workplace. For instance, during the sessions the instructors often addressed the African women by commenting on their supposed cultural predisposition for care work and for dealing with children and elderly people. These stereotypes render the nannies’ and care-givers’ emotional work invisible, by

conflicting with the logic of professionalization. According to the instructors, the training was necessary in order to moderate these so-called 'natural' skills, by domesticating them. The training is supposed here to transform 'cultural predispositions' into 'professional skills' by emphasising the difference between the private and the public sphere.

'They are naturally... culturally... endowed in everything that has to do with the body, with which they have a much closer relationship than we have in the West. They have a generosity, because of their culture, which makes them always share everything with the others. Those who work in residential homes for the elderly bring home-made cakes to the workplace, so they are reprimanded by their supervisors. In the course we want to teach them to make a difference between the personal and the professional, because we are in the West and here you don't go to work by bringing cakes!' (instructor).

The racializing construction of cultural difference as an element that jeopardizes professional domestic service relationship allowed for exceptions. Cultural difference was sometimes seen as a welcome and exotic addition to the professional skills of the domestic workers. For example, migrant women were invited to prepare, from time to time, traditional dishes of their country to please their clients/employers. This kind of instructions recall those addressed domestic workers migrating from former Caribbean colonies to France in the 1950s and 1960s (Condon, 1991).

### **Racialization and 'personal autonomy'**

Hence, in the training, domestic service and the care-giving relationship were represented as a conflict between radically different cultures. Accordingly, the title of a symposium organized by care service associations and training organizations in Paris was entitled '*A domicile. Le choc des cultures*' (In the household. The clash of cultures)<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, the flexibility required from the women attending the course was not simply a matter of technical skills in cleaning and laundry chores, which must accommodate the French employers/clients: it was rather about personal management and transforming oneself in one's private life. Some training sessions seemed intended to improve the women's qualities as mothers (rather than as nannies): for example, the instructors recommended that children are brought regularly to the dentist for check-ups. The instructors I interviewed mentioned that during the training programme some women ended up questioning unequal gender relations in their family and achieved personal autonomy.

'The training course enables the women to affirm themselves as persons, and their husbands are not happy about this. The idea they have about themselves changes, they find out that they can take care of themselves on their own, that they can be economically independent' (instructor).

One instructor presented the story of a woman giving up the Muslim headscarf at the end of the course as an example of successful training. The wearing of the Muslim headscarf was seen in racist terms, as a mark of subordination to a patriarchal culture and radical difference from the French society. Recent public and political debates in France indicate that the idea of 'gender democracy' is used as a means of racialisation: French society is portrayed in terms of gender equality and women's



autonomy, while migrant men are cast as oppressive patriarchs and migrant women as the victims of pre-modern traditional cultures (Scott 2007).

These examples show the ambivalence of training programmes for the unemployed and, more generally, of recent French policies on domestic service. This tension is particularly evident when looking at how the idea of ‘autonomy’ is mobilized in the training sessions. These aimed at developing autonomy as a professional skill, necessary for those professionals who are in charge of children, elderly and sick people. According to the instructors, these workers must be able to read and speak French, and they must have a good knowledge of health services: in short, they need to be reliable in case of an emergency. On the relational level, they must also be able to reassure the people cared-for in difficult situations. At the same time, however, the training is intended to develop the personal autonomy of the migrant women, as there were perceived as dependant and passive. During the training, practical information about transports, public services and emergency numbers was provided. As several scholars have pointed out, migrant women’s employment has often been approached through a ‘psycho-culturalist perspective’ focusing on the positive effects of migration to Europe (Morokvasic, 1983). Women’s migration is seen as a means of gender emancipation and shift to a ‘modern’ style of life both in the public and private sphere. The underlying assumption of such analysis is that migrant women did not work in their home country and therefore did not have any autonomy. Migration to France and insertion into the domestic service sector were seen as an opportunity for these women to promote themselves. The limited autonomy of the women attending the course was essentialized and attributed in general to ‘Third World women’. These forms of dependency (not being able to find one’s way around the city or accessing public services and institutions, for example)

are instead the result of gendered migration and the racist social context with which unemployed migrant women find themselves confronted. The gendered and racialized difference of migrant women was opposed to the French gender regime in a negative way: migrant women were constructed as needing help from French women (the instructors, the employers/clients) in order to improve themselves.

In doing so, the training practices simultaneously challenged the gendered construction of domestic service as worthless work and reaffirmed it by legitimating its function as a symbol of status within a racist society. The instructors asserted the value of women's domestic work by mobilizing a common gender identity that they shared with the migrant women. At the same time, they racialized these migrant women and failed to recognize the role of racism in reproducing their dependent status. They reclaimed autonomy for women while naturalizing the migrant women's economic, social and personal dependency. This vocational training for domestic workers is an example of how social practices can question essentialist thinking about gender while at the same time naturalizing cultural difference and producing gendered Otherness. The racialization inherent in the professionalizing enterprise is inscribed within the organization of the domestic service sector which is, as we have seen, caught between professionalization and the insertion of the unemployed, between market criteria and volunteering, non-profit activities.

### **Racialization and 'employability'**

The case of vocational training for domestic workers in Paris suggests that training provision for the unemployed reproduces a psychologizing view of work relations and insertion into the labour market. This view fails to acknowledge the role played by racism in organizing the domestic service sector. Training activities insisted

on the idea that the women should develop social and moral qualities such as personal autonomy and dynamism. Firstly, this focus on the workers' relational skills is linked to the importance of emotional labour in domestic service. As the training intended to prepare the unemployed for insertion into the labour market, instructors insisted on relational skills because personal and private criteria are central in the process of selection and recruitment in domestic service. Secondly, the emphasis on the necessity of developing relational skills and autonomy is also related to a racializing view of the unemployed migrant women as passive and dependent.

However, this psychologizing and individualizing view of the labour process, displayed in the training, also needs to be located within the context of current neoliberal ideology and policies on unemployment and 'employability' (Mauger, 2001). European governments have recently sought to create non-standard jobs, intended as a means of training and insertion for the young and the unemployed. These forms of poorly regulated employment, as well as the promotion of the demand for labour through tax exemptions, have subsequently been generalized. Since the 1980s, insertion into labour market has been increasingly used as a means to deal with social exclusion (Hobson et al., 2002). Unemployment benefits and programmes have been matched with individual responsibility to train or work. These 'activating policies' indicate a general change in the political philosophy of social citizenship which is at the basis of the Welfare state. Citizens who are given support by the State are expected to engage in personal development activities, believed to favour insertion, in order to 'deserve' those entitlements. A study of the agencies for the insertion of the unemployed in France (Ebersold, 2001) shows for example that potential workers are urged to analyse their own weaknesses and resources from the point of view of the employer. Being able to acknowledge one's weaknesses from the

point of view of 'employability' through this introspective exercise is considered central to a successful job search. The unemployed are considered responsible for creating the conditions of their own employment. They need to demonstrate their capacity for self-promotion and self-management on the labour market. In this sense, these programmes are framed by the normative reference to an entrepreneurial model of society. Behavioural skills and personal qualities associated with entrepreneurial activities are valued while those associated with execution and dependent work are stigmatized. Within these programmes, the unemployed person is advised on the techniques to be adopted in the job hunt. There is an expectation that the potential employee interiorizes the criteria and values dictated by the employers, and that this consensus is expressed, for example, during the job interview. Training and insertion into labour are seen as a question of socialization: in this view, the unemployed are those who have not been properly socialized from a professional point of view. Unemployment is pathologized and the unemployed are stigmatized as incapable of socially relating to others. Much of the advice given to unemployed people focuses on bodily attitudes and expression, on dress codes, as well as on communicational, relational and moral qualities that should be displayed during the job interviews and letters. Subjective qualities, rather than formal skills and professional experience, are legitimated as the primary condition for employment (Ebersold, 2001).

This focus on individual responsibility contributes to the naturalization of social inequalities in the labour market. Successful insertion into the labour market is associated with social qualities and skills that are considered to be defined by gender, nationality, origin and educational level. This reinforces the idea that some social groups naturally lack the qualities necessary for insertion and that they are likely to be at the margins of the labour market. The centrality of bodily practices in tutoring and

training for the unemployed is also related and contributes to essentialist thinking about the labour process. In the vocational training for domestic workers in Paris, for example, advice was given to the migrant women on strategies of self-presentation (including clothing) while dealing with potential employers and clients. The instructors discouraged the women from wearing the Muslim headscarf and traditional West African clothes such as the *boubou*, as well as perfume, jewels and miniskirts. The underlying assumption of such recommendations was that, in order to enter the labour market, migrant women needed to transform their appearance and their bodies and make them 'neutral'. They were expected to eliminate any reference to ethnicity but also to desexualize their appearance. In this respect, training discourses and practices are consistent with those of the job centres and the employers in the sector. For example, a study commissioned by the national job centres agency and by training organizations in Paris in 2001 identified two main problems encountered in relation to migrant domestic workers: language skills and the fact of wearing the Muslim headscarf (Doniol Shaw, 2005). My interviews with managers of non-profit associations showed that they gave the same kind of instructions to their employees. Thus, the training programme functions as a site where the employers' point of view and expectations are expressed and conveyed to potential workers.

### **Migrant women's voices**

The migrant women's opinion on domestic service as a prospective job and the enterprise of professionalizing it radically differed from the views of the instructors. Indeed, some women viewed the course as an opportunity to do the job in a more satisfactory way and as part of a more general demand for dignity and respect for their paid work. However most women were not keen on the training: the instructors were

sometimes irritated by the trainees' attitude, which was sceptical vis-à-vis the training course. Most of them in fact seemed to think that everybody can do cleaning and ironing. They used to show little interest in the course, especially in the sessions concerning such chores. For example, a Moroccan woman complained about the ironing sessions, arguing that she could not see its usefulness as she had been doing that at her own house for twenty years. These doubts were expressed particularly by those women who had other professional experiences in their home-countries, such as a Serbian woman who used to run a small family-owned business and a former secretary coming from Nigeria. Some other women seemed to be willing to take part in the cleaning sessions because they could learn some 'tricks' which they could use while doing domestic work in their own house, rather than at work.

Many interviewees said that they would have liked to move to other jobs in the same sector, particularly to care-related jobs, which are not directly associated with domesticity. One Moroccan woman refused to take an ironing test at the end of the course because, as she explained, she intended to work only in child-care jobs, where ironing is not involved. The course did not establish hierarchies between care work and cleaning chores. The trainees however did make this distinction, as they would have liked to receive more teaching concerning the techniques oriented to health care. They wished to obtain a formal thus economically rewarding qualification in health and care related jobs, such as the DEAVS (*Diplôme d'Etat d'Auxiliaire de Vie Sociale*). Moreover, while the course oriented them towards jobs in the domestic sphere, some women expressed a preference for working in public settings such as residential homes and hospitals, where hierarchies and the division of labour are embedded in impersonal structures (Glenn, 1992). This is illustrated by the following interview:

‘We have the choice to work where we prefer, and I don’t want to do home-based work, because elderly people have their personalities. I want to work in a team in a public environment. As a care-worker in a residential home, I do the cleaning, I feed the patients, I make the beds: my colleagues do their own job while I do mine. Instead, in home-based jobs, elderly people tell you to do the cleaning and then the shopping, as well as other chores for which you are not paid’ (Senegalese woman).

As a matter of fact, in France many of those who attend the courses prefer to move to jobs in residential care rather than in home-based care services (Labruyère, 1996). Finally, the women criticized the lack of language classes, which, they felt, would be more useful to them in looking for a job. The instructors did not seem to take into account the frustration that these women felt due to downgrading social mobility that migrants undergo through migration. Also, they seem not to understand their attempts to resist humiliating treatment associated with personalistic work relationships in the traditional organisation of domestic service, where employees are subordinated to individual employers. Instead, they saw these attitudes as the result of arrogance and lack of motivation for work.

Another criticism expressed by the trainees was related to the problems which they experienced in combining the course with their domestic responsibilities. They all had young children, except for one: child-care was a very common subject of conversation during the breaks and over lunch. Quite often someone had to miss a session because she could not find a nanny, or because she had to pick up her children from school. The women received a monthly compensation of 400 to 600 euros (355 to 535 GBP) to pay for transports and meals while attending the course. They needed

however to spend 5 euros (4,5 GBP) per day for each child they placed at the crèche. These places however were limited. Those who did not obtain a placement for their children had to pay 300 euros (266 GBP) per month to hire a nanny or 6 to 10 euros (5 to 9 GBP) per hour for single baby-sitting jobs in the informal economy. In France they could not rely on informal unpaid care arrangements which would have been available in their home-countries, such as relatives. Some of the jobs towards which the trainees were oriented are also difficult to combine with the women's private responsibilities. While cleaning jobs can fit well with caring for their children, child-care jobs can involve long working hours, as nannies need to cover for the absence of working parents during the whole day, from 8 or 9 am to 6 or 7 pm. While struggling to reconcile vocational training and employment with unpaid care and domestic work, migrant domestic workers support the strategies of French privileged women who aim at securing their own work/family balance. This impasse reflects the tensions which underlie the project of professionalizing domestic service, as these 'professionalized' 'family-oriented jobs' contribute to maintaining the current gendered and racialized division of labour.

## **Conclusion**

My research points out that training practices challenge sexist assumptions and stereotypes about so-called 'feminine qualities', but fail to acknowledge the racist organization of domestic service. Hence, they endorse essentialist gendered constructions of cultural difference. In doing so, the training practices end up reproducing the view that domestic service is a non professional activity; these result in a stigmatization of unemployed migrant women. These data recall earlier analyses of institutional racism. Programmes based on the concept of the 'special needs' of



specific populations reproduce discrimination, as the ‘needs’ are attributed to cultural difference. These actions focus on the ‘cultural deficiencies’ or ‘handicaps’ of black and migrant people rather than on the racism of employers or of the education system (Solomos, 1985). My ethnographic data also revealed the gendered and racialized dimensions of neoliberal policies and ideologies concerning unemployment. The production of Otherness was based on both the idealization of so-called ‘cultural predispositions’ and the stigmatization of naturalized cultural specificities, with a certain emphasis on the integration of Muslim women. Thus training practices reflected contemporary forms of Islamophobia as well the French colonial legacy. The case of vocational training for domestic workers in Paris examined here suggests three concluding remarks.

Firstly, social policies about unemployment seem to play an important role in defining the connections between international migration and the Welfare state in France. In this country, the interventions aiming at promoting and formalizing the demand for domestic workers, as well as at professionalizing the ‘family-oriented jobs’, are associated with policies intended to reduce unemployment. Since the 1990s, in fact, part-time workers have often been formerly unemployed women rather than full-time female workers who choose to switch to part-time (Angeloff, 2000). These policies are located within a more general shift towards the individualization of social contributions, based on the ‘adult worker model’ where both men and women are expected to be active in paid labour. The shift in policy logic, throughout the EU, from the traditional breadwinner model to the new model is of course highly problematic for women who are responsible for unpaid domestic and care work, and are often employed in low paid jobs as part-time or precarious workers. This shift also has important implications for migrant women, as the policy turn calls for an

increased demand for migrant domestic workers (Gottschall, 2000). In the French context, we need to grasp a complex interaction between migration, unemployment, care provision, domestic labour and the public policies. It is on this interaction that the new arrangements on the gendered and racialized division of labour are based in France. As my data showed, these are associated with specific ways of constructing Otherness and the 'universalistic' ideology about the integration of migrants.

Secondly, the research shows that the French government's attempt to cope with unemployment and care provision at the same time exacerbates the ambivalence of domestic service, caught between professionalization and the insertion of the unemployed, quality standards and charitable work, work and family, public and private. As a result, domestic workers are more than ever subordinated to conflicting expectations, as it is never clear whether the interventions, such as the training, are aimed at addressing the needs of carers or of the people cared for. That accounts for the fact that the notions of autonomy and dependence are constantly displayed and manipulated in training practices. The racialization which is inherent in the professionalizing enterprise is inscribed within this ambivalent organization of the sector. 'Autonomy' and 'dependency' are gendered and racialized notions which are central to the social organization of employment, the Welfare state and the sexual division of labour. They are also activated in the management and control of migrant domestic labour, as migrant domestic workers are constructed as vulnerable people in need of help from their employers; at the same time, employers are constructed as women in need to hire domestic help because of the unequal division of domestic work (Andall, 2003). These notions are particularly relevant to my case study because the training is focused on care for the elderly. Indeed, elderly people who benefit from allowances constitute the majority of clients for non-profit associations.

Thirdly, the data suggest that the idea of professionalizing domestic service acquires different meanings for the different social actors involved in the reorganization of the sector. The French employers' organizations praise the possibility that is offered to the public by the marketization of care to choose individualized care and domestic services on the market. Also, both the employers and the governments present the recent interventions on domestic service as a means of improving gender equality and the combining of family and work responsibilities for women. The non-profit sector tends instead to insist on the social function of care services and the opportunity to restore social integration and solidarity. Care-givers working in associations are seen as actors playing a key role in the struggle against social exclusion, in a world where community ties are breaking down. Finally, for some of the women who work as instructors in the training programme, professionalizing domestic service is also an opportunity to reclaim visibility for women's unpaid domestic work. As I have noted, however, this attempt to make emotional labour visible is biased by racializing assumptions. For all these actors and institutions, the professionalization of domestic service is desirable, necessary or is already happening. They all share an emphasis on the modernization of domestic service, which, it is argued, is being emancipated from its history of servitude. Often the focus is on the shift from individual privilege to public necessity, and from the past servitude of domestic workers to their current social function. It is argued that through the enterprise of professionalization domestic service is shifting from the obligation to be at the service of one class to the opportunity to be at the service of the whole society. With regard to the French case, however, Bridget Anderson (2000) points to the paradoxical overlapping of specialization and professionalization in domestic service. Applying 'industrial' categories to activities constructed as

belonging to the private sphere produces a situation where 'while workers at the bottom may well be multi-skilled, that militates against their being considered specialized professionals' (Anderson, 2000: 170). In this sense, I see the professionalization of domestic service as largely ideological.

20<sup>th</sup> January 2010

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<sup>1</sup> A first version of this article has been presented at the workshop [...]. Some observations have been presented in [...].

<sup>2</sup> With the exception of some comparative studies, such as Anderson (2000) and Ungerson, (2003) in France the issue of migration and domestic labour has been raised by very few scholars and political actors, at least until very recently. See for example Fougeyrollas (2000), Doniol-Shaw et al. (2007) and Kergoat (2009).

<sup>3</sup> Interviews (with domestic workers, instructors, job centres' counsellors and non-profit associations) and participant observations in workplaces and training centres were carried out between 2002 and 2005. The data used for this article are part of a larger ethnographic and comparative study [...].

<sup>4</sup> IFRAD, Institut régional de Formation et de Recherche en Aide à Domicile, 'A Domicile, le Choc des Cultures', 1998, Paris.