

Making and Managing Class: Employment of Paid Domestic Workers in Russia

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Introduction¹

Before, they used to say “everybody comes from the working classes”. I have had to learn these new practices from scratch. I had to understand how to organise my domestic life, how to communicate with the people who I employ. They have to learn this too. (Lidiia, housekeeper)

Social class is a relational concept, produced through financial, social and symbolic exchange and acted out in the market, in work places, and also in personal consumption and lifestyle. The relations between employers and employees constitute one key dimension of social class. Of special interest are the contested interactions that lack established cultural scripts and are therefore prone to uncertainties and conflicts. Commercialised interactions in the sphere of domesticity contribute to the making of social class no less than do those in the public sphere. In this chapter, we approach paid domestic work as a realm of interactions through which class boundaries are drawn and class identity is formed.

We are interested in how middle class representatives seek out their new class identity through their standards and strategies of domestic management, although we also discuss the views of the domestic workers. As the housekeeper Lidiia stresses in the introductory quotation to this chapter, both employers and employees have to learn new micro-management practices and class relations from scratch. The assertion that class is in continual production (Skeggs 2004) is especially true for the contemporary Russian situation, where stratification grids are loose and class is restructured under the pressure of political and economic changes.

We focus on the formation of the cluster of social positions called the middle classes. In Pierre Bourdieu’s words, they occupy the ‘intermediate zones of social space where indeterminacy and the fuzziness of the relationships between practices and positions are the greatest, so that the room left

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open for symbolic strategies designed to jam this relationship is the largest' (quoted in Skeggs 2004: 12). As the Russian middle class is mobile and heterogeneous, it has no universal social script. However, one general tendency is the emergence of real estate and the home as a significant domain of class structuration and distinction. Russia has recently entered the era of commercialisation of privacy and care, and one way to achieve middle and especially upper middle class status is to be able and willing to employ domestic workers.

We study the dialectics of control between employers and the two main types of domestic workers, cleaners and nannies. Both cleaning and child care belong to the realm of caring work typically performed by women. Of course, cleaning work is less valued and differs in many other ways from childcare; here we put these occupational differences into brackets. Private care of the elderly is also of growing importance but remains much less common than paid private child care and will not be discussed here.

The research material consists of in-depth interviews collected in St. Petersburg in 2004–05 through the personal social networks of the researchers and Internet advertisements on sites for paid domestic work. The research sample included two groups of informants, domestic work employers and employees, 67 people in total.²

The chapter is organised in the following way. First, we outline our theoretical framework related to the dialectics of control in care work, followed by a brief historical overview of commercialised homecare services in the Soviet Union and Russia. Based on the research interviews, we then analyse the two main types – the nanny (*niania*) model and the professional model – of employer-employee interactions in relation to the dialectics of control in care work.

Dialectics of Control in Care Work

² The first group of domestic worker employers were recruited from the middle and high middle classes. Sample criteria were higher education, employment in the private sector as professionals and managers of at least one household member, parental education and social status, middle age, and having short- or long-term experience of paid domestic labour (nannies, domestic cleaners, repair service). The 44 informants in this group were 27–40-year-old women. Of these, 15 informants were single career women (with and without children), 16 informants lived in double-career families (with and without children), and 13 women were housewives with children and a breadwinner husband. The second group represented domestic workers, selected on the basis of age (25–60 years old) and having worked in domestic service. These interviewees were much harder to recruit and we ended up with 10 nannies and 9 domestic cleaners. For more details, see Zdravomyslova, Temkina and Rotkirch (2009) and Zdravomyslova (2010).

Caring for children, elderly and the sick is an essential part of social life and at the core of the social contract between men and women and between generations. Care can be defined as the ‘emotional reciprocal link between caregiver and care-receiver, where the caregiver feels responsibility for the wellbeing of those whom s/he cares of and implements intellectual, psychological, and physical work’ (Hochschild 2003: 214). Regardless of whether it is performed by a family member or a paid employee, caring work has some specific features. It is typically part of everyday routines and ‘invisible’, it includes deep emotions related to love, security, and trust, it is difficult to measure in economic terms and often devalued as lowly qualified, and it is typically seen as women’s work. It is also worth stressing that care implies control over the recipient. The person being ‘taken care of’ has less autonomy than and is dependent on the care provider.

The commercialisation of intimate life implies that a growing share of domestic tasks is located to the market (Hochschild 2003). When this happens, care becomes differentiated. Part of care is outsourced, professionalised and transferred to different market or state institutions. The professionalisation of care is driven by women entering the public sector and full-time wage work, combined with technological progress. As a result divisions between unpaid versus paid work emerge as power relations – and class relations – between mostly female employers and mostly female employees. On the one hand, it is hard for the employer to regulate activities that are often carried out in her absence. On the other hand, there is a seduction to transform inequality into exploitation of the worker.

During the last decades, paid care work has often been approached through the lens of women’s transnational migration. Many studies focus on the exploitation and restrictions of social rights (Phizacklea 2003, Chang 2000, Anderson 2000, 2002, Lutz 2002, Zarembka 2002) and on the chains of care that, through the work and family ties of the domestic worker, tie the receiving and sending communities together (Parreñas 2001, Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002). Our focus here is on employer-employee interactions and symbolic class boundaries (Anderson 2000a, 2000b, 2002, Constable 2002). We investigate the role paid domestic work plays in ‘servicing the middle classes’ (Gregson and Lowe 1994) and in the making of the identity and lifestyle of the new Russian middle classes and their new servants.

We understand the power relationships between two types of caregivers – female housekeepers-employers, and female domestic workers – in terms of the dialectics of control. This concept suits the relational quality of power in household interactions. As outlined by Anthony Giddens (1984: 283), control here refers to ‘the capability that some actors, groups, or types of actors have of influencing the circumstances of action of others’. All forms of dependence offer some resources, through which those who are subordinate can influence the activities of their superiors. In short, the dialectics of control are the dialectics of dependence and autonomy enabled by the different resources available to the interacting partners.

Housekeepers use their allocative and authoritative resources to control the activities of domestic workers. They structure the timetables and spatial dimension of domestic work, make and revise the daily tasks, and provide material and symbolic rewards. Employers can also resort to various forms of technological control, such as secret surveillance cameras, as well as control the personal behaviour and appearance of workers. By contrast, the resources mobilised by domestic workers are mainly authoritative and based on their knowledge of the employer household. Workers may also gain access to the social network of the employers. The logistic dependency and emotional attachment of employers and care recipients may further serve as a resource for the worker. In our analysis below, we focus on management techniques of the employers and do not discuss the domestic workers’ resources in detail. Through a comparison of more egalitarian versus more hierarchical forms of interaction, we show how class relations are socially and emotionally interpreted and incorporated by workers and employers.

How are the dialectics of control acted out in different cultural models of domestic care? In the analysis below, we distinguish between a traditional model of the dialectics of control, and a second type that is based on a professionalised model. This distinction is one outcome of the commercialisation of care work and also found in many other countries; here, we outline its tensions and characteristics in the Russian context. We will highlight the different expectations, emotions and management strategies involved in the two models and how egalitarian and hierarchical relations are acted out within both of them. First, we locate the roots of these models in different periods of Russian history.

Domestic Work in the Soviet Union

Until 1917, household servants (*sluga*) were an integral part of landowner and bourgeois households, who employed housemaids, cooks, nurses, gardeners and butlers. Many children formed their first attachment to their *niania*, nanny. The iconic image of the Russian *niania* was created by the Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin (1799–1837), who devoted poems to his nanny Arina Rodionova, a peasant serf described as a loving and trustworthy person, capable of mothering, and deeply attached to her master. As we shall see, her memory still symbolises the traditional and often idealised model of domestic worker.

Although most of the traditional way of life was destroyed after the 1917 revolution, servants did not totally disappear (Lebina 2006: 139). However, their numbers and power relations drastically changed, as also mirrored by new words. The term domestic worker (*domrabortnitsa*) was created in the 1920s to illustrate how pre-revolutionary household servants had become honoured working class. During the years of New Economic Policy (1921–1928) special laws regulating domestic workers' labour were adopted (ibid.: 139–140, Spagnolo 2006). Ideological structures, educational institutions and trade unions tried their best to involve these workers in Soviet public life in this first attempt to professionalise domestic work.

At the same time, 'mass liberation from kitchen slavery' (Kollontai 2003 [1923]) was promoted as a part of the envisaged radical transformation of everyday life. This utopian experiment, advocated especially by Aleksandra Kollontai and the women's section *Zhenotdel* of the Soviet Communist Party, did not succeed. The state did take responsibility for much care work by providing free nurseries and day care, schools, higher education and health care. Domestic work was also facilitated by cheap canteens, cafés, laundries, and other social services in the 1920s. However, it was not possible to fully delegate household work to the public service sector, and traditional housework and cooking largely remained confined to private homes. Stalin closed the *Zhenotdel* and silenced the early revolutionary calls for a radical rearrangement of gender and domestic relations, including the outsourcing of domestic work (Goldman 1993). The forced industrialisation of the late 1920s also

focused primarily on the development of heavy and defence industries, while services and production of consumer goods were less emphasised.

During Stalinism, the Soviet gender contract of a 'working mother' became the dominant formula for family arrangements. Soviet ideology now stated that women should be engaged in full-time wage work, motherhood and household chores (Rotkirch and Temkina 2002). The double workload was a stereotype of femininity normalised by the state, but it was also embraced by many generations of Soviet women (Zdravomyslova and Temkina 2004: 312).

In most urban and rural households housework and care of relatives were performed along the principles of domestic moral economy (see Fadeeva 1999, Steinberg 1999). Mothers were helped by kin along with friendly, collegial and neighbourly support. Particularly, *babushki* (grandmothers) firmly secured their position in family care and household services (Semenova 1996). Female and kin solidarity thus compensated for the often underdeveloped social infrastructure and lack of household goods, as well as for the mistrust experienced toward public institutions. All our informants recalled lifelong intergenerational and horizontal family support in household chores, while they had very few childhood experiences of paid domestic workers.

Although in contradiction to the Communist idea of equality, hiring short- and long-term paid domestic helpers was permitted and this was common among the families of the political establishment and cultural elite. Aleksandra Kollontai herself lived with a maid during most of her life. In the 1950s, paid domestic labour was typically little formalised. It served as a bridge occupation for women moving from the countryside to the cities, or as a job opportunity amongst women with limited civil rights, for instance, members of politically repressed families who could not be officially employed. In the late 1960s and 1970s, the demand for domestic workers diminished due to the expansion of preschool child education and day-care centres.

The New Demand for Paid Domestic Work

Since the transition to capitalism in the early 1990s, the Soviet care model of extensive state services combined with kin aid has been supplemented with commercialised private care. Hiring domestic workers quickly grew into a mass phenomenon in the well-off social groups. However, egalitarian

Soviet values still influence the attitude to paid domestic labour. Many feel that working as a maid is shameful and also that it would be unthinkable to employ somebody to work in one's home.

Nevertheless, modern middle-class women try to change the typical image of the Russian wife, who cooks three course dinners, does thorough house-cleaning on Saturdays and does most of the childcare along with her wage work or other public responsibilities. A new image is emerging, where the ideal and well-organised wife and mother delegate part of the domestic chores to paid helpers. This striving is apparent in very different types of households: single women, double earning couples, and families with stay-at-home wives.

The function of paid domestic workers varies with social group. For the very wealthy, hiring a cleaner allows the woman to exhibit a suitable standard of living and to maintain her feminine role as a spiritual and moral helper, freed from providing 'ground service' (see Ratilainen in this volume). For the middle classes, however, the reasons are quite different. Harsh competition in the labour market and the difficulty of finding good public child care make it increasingly difficult for working women to balance professional and domestic chores. Housewifery or part time employment provide one solution, but since it implies a male breadwinner it is unrealistic but for a select few. Most Russian women remain oriented towards economic independence and professional realisation and may therefore hire domestic labour to facilitate the daily logistics. In such cases, paid work is an additional help alongside the traditional assistance from spouse, friends and kin.

The professionalised market of paid domestic work – the gradual establishment of recruitment agencies, Internet sites, training courses and cleaning companies – emerged in the mid-1990s during a period of economic involution and unemployment (Evdokimova 2004). At that time, several of the domestic workers we interviewed had recently lost their old work place and were looking for alternative occupations. The dearth of available jobs in the public sector combined with age discrimination pushed them towards the informal job sector. Amongst our respondents were also women of (pre)retirement age unable to cope with their small pension, recently immigrated women, and students. In search of new ways to make a living, these respondents valued their caring skills as 'natural' female knowledge. Care work also saved them the costs of retraining while helping them to avoid the least attractive forms of unskilled physical labour.

For the employers, the new agencies provide help in recruiting persons with the right professional and individual qualities. The agencies select their candidates on the basis of psychological tests and may offer qualification courses. Child care can be performed daily by a certified nanny, babysitter or *gubernantka*, while cleaning work can be performed every second week or daily. We will not here dwell on these specialisations, which mainly characterise upper class employers. Middle class families tend to have one or two workers for basic cleaning and child care. Alongside official agencies, there also exists a broad informal market of domestic workers from which to recruit.

This burgeoning new profession is often featured in the Russian media. Issues typically include abusive maids and nannies, the health of children and security of property. Trust and fear are at the very heart of the public discourse surrounding paid domestic work. Trust is represented by giving the keys to the employer's apartment, while lack of trust is exemplified in secret cameras, background searches or other surveillance of domestic workers. The perspective of the domestic workers themselves is rarely present in these media discussions.

How, then, does the inequality inherent in employer-employee relations manifest itself in paid domestic work? As we shall see, there are traditions and shared understandings of domestic care which are being referred to by both employers and employees. Sometimes these cultural models – which are the models of how social class is made – are openly and spontaneously referred to by the respondents, while in other cases we detected them from the patterns of described interactions.

The Traditional Model of Domestic Helpers: *Niania*

Niania is the cultural model of employer-worker relations that relies on tsarist and Soviet traditions. Caring for children on a permanent basis reveals this model in its most distinct form, although it can be detected also amongst other forms of domestic work.

Our informants made a sharp distinction between 'true nannies' and baby-sitters. The former are called *niania*, while the latter are called *bebisiter*, a new Anglicism. *Niania* is involved with the family on a permanent basis. Not much professionalism is needed, and the level of job standardisation is low. Formal contracts are seldom signed. Instead, trust is the key category in this relation. The

nanny's work presumes informal, close relations and can be provided only on the basis of deep personal trust. Employers regard traditional nannies as a part of their families and refer to them as a friend (*podruga*) or kin (*rodnaia*).

In describing the traditional *niania*, our respondents often mentioned Pushkin's verses about his nanny Arina Rodionova, poems which are to this day learnt by heart as part of the secondary school literature curriculum. They also referred to the Soviet nannies who arrived from the villages to cities, initially making a living as domestic workers in well-off urban households. One nanny compared contemporary babysitters and 'real' nannies in the following way:

Nannies in previous Soviet times and today – these are two very different statuses. In Soviet times all nannies were traditional, all were like Arina Rodionova. All of them came from the villages. All of them lived in the households and were family members. (Mirra, 57 years old, nanny)

Other employers looked for a surrogate mother or grandmother. Our informants remembered how important their own grandparents had been in their childhood. One young mother looked for such a *babushka*:

In fact I had a model [for my nanny]. I wanted to find a *babushka* (laughs). *Babushka* not in the sense of old person but more like a substitute for my own mum or my mother-in-law, who live far away from us. ... She need not educate my child – I can do this myself, I need my small daughter to be loved, to be pampered. (Iuliia, 31 years old, married with a four-year-old daughter)

The work-load and tasks of the nanny are not clearly defined and may include, in addition to child care, cleaning, cooking and other everyday household chores. Employers are flexible and ready to understand if the nanny asks for extra days offs or changes the time schedule. Domestic workers receive presents on public and private holiday occasions (including birthdays), and other gifts such as old and extra clothes are passed on. Employers may also lend them money, sometimes involving quite large sums. Many employers mentioned that they helped their workers in solving family problems, for instance by helping them to access a suitable doctor, lawyer, or school. These rewards form an integrated part of the nanny's earnings. Both parties consider them as an expression of gratitude for

their valuable work. By contrast, both parties feel uncomfortable about money, which risks interfering with their close relationship. A nanny explains how she did not dare to ask for her salary:

In 1997–98 I lived in a family ... The man was always at work ... that is why I could live there, it was a two room apartment. We became friends, almost relatives, I just couldn't take money from him. Even more so because he gave me presents; when I had an anniversary he gave me a very expensive perfume set. And I ate together with them, had dinner ... Well, our relations gradually became like friendship, like relatives ... and in principle from the very beginning I came to help them and not for money. (Oksana, 40 years old)

Neither are the workers entitled to social benefits due to the lack of formal contracts. However, workers themselves only seldom recognised these drawbacks.

One employer proudly described her refusal to make a formal working contract as serving the best interests of her child. The benefit of a possible contract for the nanny was not taken into account:

I did not sign any contracts with my nannies because it's all about my child. If the nanny will behave irresponsibly towards the child I'll spit on any contract. That paper won't help. What is important are the personal characteristics of the nanny and our relationship to her. The only thing I do is to make a copy of her passport and keep it. (Natasha, 32-year-old employer with a one-year-old son)

The traditional nanny should be culturally close to the employer. Indeed, cultural proximity in understandings of childcare and housework is seen to guarantee appropriate attitudes and behaviour of the employee. Russia has an influx of migrants, whose status as domestic workers varies with nationality and citizen rights, a shared Soviet past and shared knowledge of 'the rules of the game'. Immigrants from the economically less-developed regions of the Russian Federation (such as Buryatia, Kalmykia and the Caucasian Republics) are privileged compared to immigrants from CIS countries, although the former may face more ethnic discrimination.

The well-known Russian journalist Elena Hanga emphasised in a talk-show about paid domestics how one should proceed to find a suitable nanny by stressing the advantages of using social networks.

I believe that one has to look for a nanny amongst acquaintances ... in your own milieu ... In that way you can get certain guarantees that you won't get when you

employ a domestic worker from an agency. Our society is highly stratified. If the nanny comes from far away, or even from Ukraine or Moldova, she has a very different understanding of the childcare expenses. (Ekho Moskvyy 2006)

As Hanga stresses, the traditional nanny is recruited amongst acquaintances: relatives, neighbours, even old friends. In this way she saves employers from the risk of inviting a ‘foreigner’ into their intimate domain. Neither do they need to look for somebody else to help with other tasks. The mother of a small boy explained to us:

We do not need a cleaning woman. We do not need a stranger that would mess around. It’s better to pay the nanny for cleaning when the child is asleep. ... For her it’s better to earn more money than just to sit reading. (Nadia, 29 years old, married with a two-year-old son)

Hanga also pointed out that nannies from socially distant milieus may fail to understand even the economic aspect of child care. Employers complain that employees preferred traditional nannies to modern Pampers, or home-made porridges and juices to conserved child food, because the traditional ways are cheaper. A socially close nanny can more easily help the employer maintain the desired new lifestyle appropriate for successful middle and upper middle class families.

Crucially, traditional nannies do become quasi-family members or friends in the sense of emotional closeness. They are companions of the female employers, sharing with them the caring work and domestic problems. This female bonding often excludes the men in the family.

Our nanny is like a friend to us. She can call us when she wants, to find out how we are doing, to congratulate us on holidays. When she gave birth to her child I took her out to a restaurant ... This is more like friendship. (Marina, 29 years old with a five-year-old daughter)

Personalised relations also create a specific kind of exchange between employers, who mobilise their own friends to find trustworthy help: ‘The last one, Katia, was sent to me by my friend’, ‘My friend spoke in her favour, she’s a local’, ‘My acquaintance had recommended her housecleaner’s friend for this work’, ‘I know the [worker’s] children’. These ‘shared’ nannies and cleaners may commute from one house to another or move from one household to another, becoming insiders and a link within a certain circle of well-off women. Knowing and recommending nannies and being able to discuss and compare their qualities can thus serve as a specific form of social capital for middle class women.

Equality and Abuse in the Traditional Model

There is a tension between the personalised nature of the traditional model and the actual social and economic distance between employer and employee. Employers ranged from those minimising that distance to those that liked to emphasise and maximise it. First, some employers were oriented towards a symbolically egalitarian relationship. They stressed that they employed workers because of necessity and time constraints, and that the current gap in income may be related to life stage rather than to social class. Indeed, several of these employers had themselves worked as nannies and cleaners in their youth. They would never call the worker a ‘servant’ (*sluga*) and rarely a ‘worker’ (*domrabortnitsa*) but use the terms ‘helper’ (*pomoshnitsa*) and nanny. Trust was emphasised and the degree of control minimal.

In one case, a woman who had successfully embarked on a new career in the 1990s employed her close friend since childhood who had become ill and unemployed. She described this as mutual help in a tough situation: the employer manages to balance her career and parental duties, the unemployed woman gets a livelihood. However, the economic inequality also risks contaminating friendship. Another example of social levelling is when employers do cleaning work together with the workers, or when child care is presented as extended mothering implemented by two women. Some employers discussed the difficulties involved in managing social distance in the employer-employee relations:

When I got these two women (cleaner and nanny) I realised immediately that I encounter two awful problems: the first is not to become friends with those who work for you and the second is not to become like, you know, I’m rich, I have everything and you are just a flea and so on ... It’s very difficult to keep this boundary. (Alina, 32 years old with a three-year-old son)

On the other hand, certain employers took as much advantage as they could from their social superiority. Actual abuse was discussed by some of the workers we interviewed, if not as personal experiences. The cases included rude employers treating their domestic workers as serfs, providing an intolerable amount of work tasks, meticulous control over their work, being ungrateful and impolite, and employing domestic servants even when they do not need their help:

Sometimes I hear such strange fantastic things! For instance, a nanny who came to work for five hours but had to stay overnight. Additionally the attitude is really bad and rude. Or a person is working but never paid ... (Katia, 57 years old, nanny)

The Professional Model of Domestic Workers

The second main type of employer-employee relations is the professional model, exemplified by the babysitter and the paid cleaner (*uborshchitsa*). Compared to traditional nannies, babysitters have more business-like relationships with the family, they are less attached to it emotionally and their work load is clearly defined and fragmented into tasks. The middle class family performs as a consumer of professional services, taking a pragmatic and instrumental approach in recruiting the worker. The cleaning woman or babysitter are not 'attached' to one household only nor emotionally involved in family life. Workers never eat together with employers or attend family events, even if they do appreciate invitations to have tea or coffee. Small gifts are also given within the professionalised model, but are not as emotionally loaded as in the traditional model. For instance, one employer gave the cleaner empty beer bottles so that she could exchange them for money.

The professional model works best when the relationship between employer and employee can be based on mutual autonomy:

What I need is a clean flat, nothing more. And yes, it's better when it is being cleaned in my absence. I return home, pay her and we're done. I never interfere, I never say: "Take this duster, put the pail in this corner". I don't care how she is doing her work, the important thing is that she does it quickly. ... I used to have another domestic worker, we were mutually happy with each other, she had keys to my apartment, we even did not meet, either I or my husband paid her and she left. (employer Ira, 42 years old, with a nine-year-old daughter)

The professional model is strongly promoted by hiring agencies and the media. Workers are presented as professionals with detailed lists of their personal and professional qualifications, certificates, uniforms, and housecleaning equipment. The duties are clearly defined and the salaries standardised (e.g. counted per square metre of cleaning). Nevertheless, written working contracts are not always signed, nor are taxes and social insurances necessarily paid. Typically, all parties involved also

complain about the lacking professionalism of the others. For instance, according to one director of a domestic employment agency,

Our main problem is the inability of employers to state their requirements clearly so that we could choose a domestic worker for them. We organise absolute castings, but the Zodiac sign is not appropriate, golden teeth do not look good, she is too obese, she has no husband and will gaze at mine, she lives too far from our place; that one speaks dialect, another one looked hostile, the twelfth one dresses weirdly ...

(Kadrovoe agentstvo 'Assistant' 2010)

Interestingly, professional agencies overtly criticise the traditional model. For instance, one of the websites warns that 'Child psychologists recommend that you prohibit the nanny from kissing your child. The baby should know that the deepest caressing and love come from the parents only (Feya agency 2010)'.

Testing and Teaching Professionalism

Since the professional relationship between employers and employees is not formed between acquaintances, there is a lengthy period of employer testing and teaching in order to overcome distrust towards the stranger in the house. Employers estimate their candidates by a number of criteria and apply rigid, meticulous control over job performance and personal behaviour.

I make an appointment in the office – preliminary talk first. Then I go to their home with my child to take a look how they live. What about their flat, is it clean, and who are these people? This is to be sure that they definitely live at this address. (Tatiana, 29 years old with a two-year-old son)

Both direct and distant technological control is widely applied by housekeepers.

We absolutely install hidden cameras to reveal how she communicates with the child. ... Maybe she abused him ... I can't leave my child with anyone! (Tatiana, 29 years old with a two-year-old son)

First we tried to install a tape-recorder and to listen to the tape afterwards ... Well, in the very beginning we were very afraid. (Sveta, 32 years old with a three-year-old daughter)

First I controlled her ... When we started to employ a nanny I used to call home every five minutes, really: I wanted to check if everything was OK, has my baby

slept well, how did they get home after a walk, if she cried in the subway. (Marina, 29 years old with a five-year-old daughter)

It takes time to train cleaning personnel. After faulty performances, employers provide detailed instruction, specify the tasks, or demonstrate the right way. As one of the employers aptly remarked, ‘It is necessary to make their “cleanliness” coincide with my “cleanliness”’. This period of learning is the toughest one. Employees often perceive their suspicious employers as socially stigmatising and emotionally abusive:

Dust can be left under the bedside table or in the corner. You may overlook it during vacuum-cleaning. And when the mistress comes, she may notice that something is wrong there. And then she says: Lenchka, you did not clean there and there. I answer her submissively: OK, I’ll be more attentive, OK, I’ll be more attentive. (Lena, 40 years old, domestic worker)

However, the dialectics of control is by no means one-sided. Sometimes a cleaner uses her expert authority and sets her standards of cleaning, which are at odds with the perception of the employer.

Class boundaries are also revealed through practices of domestic consumption. The employers’ apartments are often full of expensive brands that are unknown to women from the lower classes. Some domestic workers compared their own old and unfashionable Soviet flats and interiors with the new, expensive and post-Soviet ‘Euro-standard’ apartments that can feature a huge Jacuzzi, two-metre wardrobes with mirrors, fridges with glass doors and other unfamiliar surfaces and machines. Some workers panicked and preferred to clean for less wealthy households. They were scared to ruin expensive equipment and to be punished for this:

I had this situation with the Bosch washing machine ... The water poured on the floor up to the ankles ... The machine was broken ... Imagine how I felt! Awful situation – emotionally, physically! (Oksana, 40 years old, domestic cleaner)

In this quotation, the domestic worker recalls how her incompetence was not only social and professional, but also an emotional and physical embarrassment, a deep stigma. Other workers get used to the consumption practices of the rich. In the interviews they list the devices of their employers with pleasure and would love to have similar effective machines in their own flats.

The class divide is being enacted also by the very distribution of domestic responsibilities. For instance, in our data employers do much of the shopping themselves, explaining this through class differences in consumption: domestics are expected to economise too much on food and cleansers.

Equality and Hierarchy in the Professional Model

Also in the professional model relations come under strain and the dialectics of control balances between two modes – quasi-egalitarian relations and overtly hierarchical relations. After a successful testing period, communication is limited to the formal procedures of giving the keys to the worker and approving the result and, for the employee, performing the tasks and receiving her payment. Minimal emotional involvement and personal contact is perceived as a time-saving, rational strategy for both sides and a sign of mutual respect and trust.

These talks that have nothing to do with work are eating up my time ... When a cleaning woman tries ... to share with me certain things, well, I'm trying to limit this time because one can sit in the kitchen endlessly, drinking tea and talking, chattering about private life and problems ... (employer Lida, 34 years old, married with two children)

Another employer still felt she had to listen to her domestic worker, in order to maintain good relations. However, this kind of politeness is different from the real personal exchange typical for the traditional model.

Well I'm not interested ... in her stories because I understand how boring her life is. I listen to her stories about her grandson or something, of course it's not interesting to me but I maintain this dialogue to be polite. (employer Larisa, 39 years old, married with three children)

Minimal personal relations can be of advantage to the worker as well, especially if she is simultaneously working for several households.

I told her right away: "I'm coming here to work, not to chat". It's in her interests as well as in mine – not having me hanging about the house all the time ... I get along with her perfectly this way. But I never go deep into their problems ... (Elena, 50 years old, cleaner)

In this way, domestic workers may actively resist involving their feelings, when ‘emotions are bought as one of the aspects of the labour force’ (Hochschild 1979: 569). This approach is more easily available to cleaning women, but more difficult for nannies due to the emotional character of their work. However, some employers do expect that the work of the nanny or babysitter will be emotionally neutral and reduced to the implementation of concrete tasks.

As in the traditional model, trust remains a key element of the business-like relationships:

I have been employed with them for two years, they became accustomed to me, and they trust me. I hope they trust me. They wouldn't let me be alone in their house if they didn't trust me. (Vika, 40 years old, domestic cleaner)

The worker feels vulnerable if she is treated as a servant with no rights in the household. Although she may attempt to keep her professional distance, she is still often sensitive to any demonstrative dominance from the side of the employer. The feelings and self-respect of the workers were especially hurt when children took the position of a superior. The following worker felt abused by the employer's child who did not keep the expected distance:

Sometimes there is such a psychological feeling, when I understand that I am nobody to this child. She talks in a disrespectful manner to me, she throws things on the floor when I'm cleaning ... I can't make reprimand her. I only do my cleaning work. (Lena, 40 years old, domestic cleaner)

For employers, problems may arise when a cleaner attempts to push their relationships towards a less formal mode in order to gain access to the social network of the employer or to be able to gain flexibility in her working conditions:

Although we had agreed to have the flat cleaned by my arrival, I came and found out, for example, that it was half cleaned or that nothing had been done. The cleaner told me: Oops, you have so much to do here; I have not managed to finish. I said: Well, I cannot manage to pay you then. So I'm paying you just a part... She rushed away shouting. (employer Ira, 42 years old, married with a 9-year-old daughter)

Conclusion

Domestic work has become diversified and commercialised in today's Russia and includes a wide range of public and private arrangements, from state institutions and formal markets to informal and

traditional resources. Regardless of these changes, the domestic realm of childcare and daily cleaning remain the responsibility of women. The emancipation of middle class women from domestic chores is made possible by local women of lower economic status and by female immigrants.

We have shown how the paid domestic work being performed in Russian middle class families oscillates between two major models that structure the interactions of employers and employees. The traditional model relies on personal social networks and involves personalised and informal job arrangements, while the professional model presumes a formal and clear contract between two former strangers. The division into two separate models is analytical and they often overlap in actual households. Each model presumes different power relations that we have described as oscillations between quasi-egalitarian and overtly hierarchical dialectics of control.

When a woman from a close network is employed, it is not necessary to formally control her behaviour. Indeed, formal recruitment and contracts are deliberately avoided in the traditional model. Inequality is understood in economic and temporary terms and is often disguised by gift-giving and other social practices and rituals aiming at surpassing social distance. Friendship or quasi-kinship relations are promoted by both sides.

By contrast, recruiting a professional domestic worker in Russia is characterised by mistrust and misunderstandings. This is explained by the high levels of social inequalities and the short history of employment agencies, and results in a lengthy period of tests and surveillance that is demanding and frustrating for both parties. In the professional model, social inequality is impersonalised and takes the form of a labour contract.

We have argued that the new middle classes emerge through these different strategies of hiring of domestic workers and interactions with them. Female employers reinforce their class position as they construct or dismantle the boundaries between their workers and themselves. The dialectics of control is a power relationship presuming an active impact of both employer (e.g. meticulous control) and employee (e.g. abuse of trust).

In our interviews, only employers described abuse by nannies and housecleaners, while only domestic workers described abuse on behalf of housekeepers. This is a perfect example of emerging

new class solidarity. The circulation of 'good workers' amongst middle class employees can also become a specific social capital in their circles.

Domestic workers enable a lifestyle, whether it is the luxury and conspicuous consumption of the very wealthy or the everyday logistics of the middle class mother. Both employers and workers had experiences of social mobility and were now adapting to their new social positions. Both stressed the specific skills this involved relating to communication, work supervision, and finding the right personal balance. Both also gave ample evidence of the emotional work, illustrating the affective dimension of class. Workers could feel humiliated, exploited and ashamed but also pleased and appreciated, while employers could feel betrayed and insecure, or supported and helped. The fears of both workers and employees illustrate the symbolic class distance: domestics understand that they could be exploited; housekeepers that they may be cheated.

What is the future like in paid domestic work? Although traditional domestic workers are still in demand, the professional market is advancing rapidly. The trend of professionalisation and standardisation of homecare is visible. Personal networks are also less and less effective in recruiting old-type workers. The internal supply of domestic workers may become exhausted, and the Russian market of domestics is probably going to be increasingly reinforced by migrants from peripheral Russian republics or from CIS countries. If this is so, the employment of migrants as domestics will probably escalate the inequality inherent in the relationships between employers and employees, the middle and the serving classes. Poor migrants have few ways to protest against possible exploitation and abuse. Without visible protests and a broad public discussion of the vulnerability of domestics, more abusive relations may easily prevail.

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