

(Dis)comfort in domestic and care practices:
historical and contemporary perspectives in a
transnational and local Croatian context

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Introduction

- ▶ *Historical Perspectives on Transnationalism and Intercultural Dialogue in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (TIDA)*
- ▶ Project: funded by Croatian Science Foundation
- ▶ Aim: to counterbalance the historiographic approach to the Austro-Hungarian Empire in Croatia based on national canons and national identity

Introduction



- ▶ dynamic space of communication
- ▶ Rapid socioeconomic transformation
- ▶ Widespread migration
- ▶ Intensive cultural contact

- ▶ **Focus:** transnational practices, multiple allegiances and belongings

Introduction

- ▶ Ongoing PhD research on transnational and national paid domestic and care work in two coastal cities – Pula and Rijeka - of contemporary southwest Croatia
- ▶ Research questions:
 - change and continuity in paid domestic and care work
 - definitions of domestic work in different historical and cultural context

Methodology

- ▶ Archival data, newspapers, police records
- ▶ Participant observation within households -
narratives and practices of domestic and care work
- ▶ *Agency* of domestic space in care practices – home
as a process

Historical perspectives – long term phenomenon

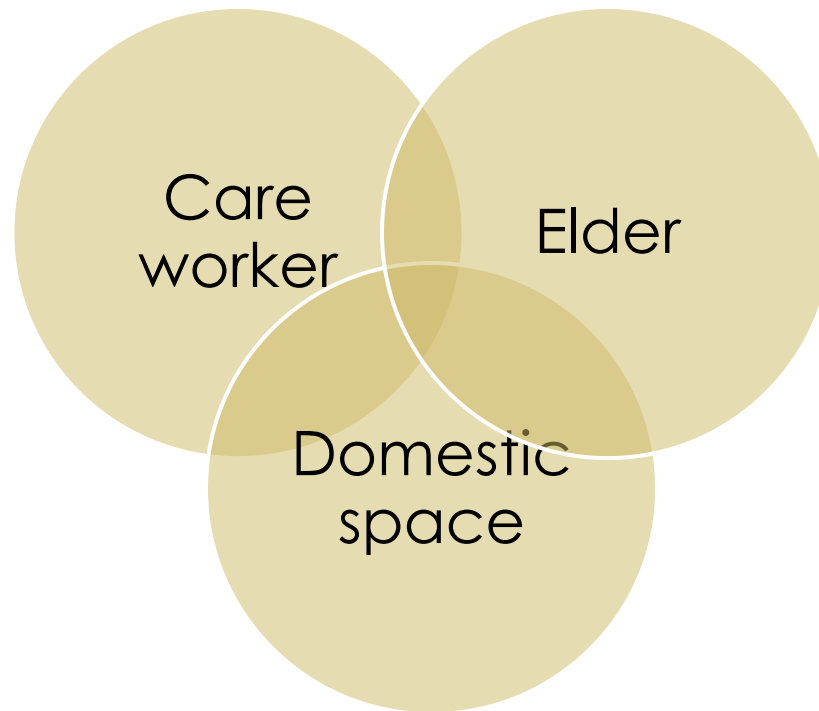
- ▶ Paid domestic work served as a „necessary form of economic sacrifice” for the majority of families (Urban 2009: 279)
- ▶ women who served in urban households (*dekle* or *serve*)
- ▶ Lack of visibility of female domestic workers due to „gendered and class obscurity” (Sharpe 2001)
- ▶ vulnerable social stratum with an obstructed voice

Historical perspectives

- ▶ Comfort in the confinement of the private realm by exercising influence and power over the domestic sphere
- ▶ Home as a site of social tension and an instrument of creation and validation of class and gendered distances

Contemporary paid domestic and care work

► TRIADIC RELATIONS



Contemporary paid domestic and care work

- ▶ „each house is a kingdom for itself”

(K.A., 76 years old, Rijeka)

- ▶ Consciously limit the engagement with the material surroundings

- ▶ „I never unpack, I am always prepared to leave ... I use my own bed linen, my towels and so on ... I like the smell of **my** detergent”

(M.R., 58 years old, Pula)

Double movement of transformation

- ▶ „ In the bathroom I threw everything in the bin with an already expired date, all the creams, bandages, everything, everything. Then I reordered it with some **logic** ... same thing in the kitchen ... you cannot live or work like that.”

(B.R., 63 years old, Rijeka)

„ It is really incredible ... but if I misplace a certain tea cup, use a wrong pot or saucepan she (the elder in care op.a.) will get furious”

(Lj. M., 62 years old, Pula)

Fictive daughters

- ▶ „There is not much work here (elders home op.a.), the only important thing is that I am around and she is not alone”


(I. J., 52 years old, Pula)

- ▶ „ she is alone and I am alone ... we are both **united in our solitude**”

(K.A., 76 years old, Rijeka)

Conclusion

- ▶ Care as a result of intertwined practices
- ▶ social and cultural values of individualised home care of the elders – comfort by replacing and securing emotional relations, gender and generational practices of care
- ▶ Care as familiarity with the surroundings and an appropriation of domestic space



Thank you for your
attention!

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