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Title:

A short summary of research in the United States.
Deliverable D4.1 within the MAJORdom project¹

The study of household workers and their activism in the US and Italy (2018 – 2021), carried out within the framework of the project titled “Intersections of Class and Ethnicity in Paid Domestic and Care Work” was guided by the following research questions:

- (1) What is the situation of white non-migrant citizen workers in paid domestic work in comparison to migrant and minority workers?
- (2) What is the experience of class position of white non-migrant citizen workers in paid domestic work?
- (3) What are the policy measures applied to domestic work sector?
- (4) Under the pandemic, I added a 4th question about the impact of COVID-19 related crisis on the sector.

While the study of organizations and policies was an important and somewhat independent part of my research, within the project, and especially in the part dedicated to workers, I aimed to understand the position of white, non-Hispanic, non-Latinx and US-born workers specifically, to address a gap in the scholarship. The specific focus of my project (on white, non-immigrant workers) is atypical for the mainstream research, which centers on immigrants and people of color. It is also not congruent with the demographic profile of the organizations active in the sector.

¹ This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 799195. The title of the project was ‘MAJORdom. Intersections of class and ethnicity in paid domestic and care work’, it was a European Commission Global Fellowship within the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action Project ID: 799195, August 2018 – July 2021, at the Department of Sociology and Center for Women and Work, the University of Massachusetts Lowell, supervisor prof. Mignon Duffy, and at the Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, supervisor prof. Sabrina Marchetti.



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A methodological note

During my fieldwork, I often felt I was conducting two separate research endeavors: one centered on the activism led by immigrants of color; the other on white non-immigrant workers, the majority of whom were nannies. These two worlds did not coincide. However, I also believe that this unusual focus has shed new light on the campaigning and organizing in Massachusetts and in a somewhat serendipitous way.

The focus on white workers has posed a number of challenges for this project. My positionality as a white CEE scholar visiting the United States, studying white American workers and organizations of immigrants of color, influenced the field of study. I am a researcher from outside the US and may be considered a representative of a country (Poland) that can be associated with immigrant workers and specifically with migrant domestic workers (who are numerous in Chicago and New York City, for example). At the same time, I worked for an Italian university and had a privileged status as a visiting scholar, so my class position with respect to the domestic workers was usually very different and privileged. Unlike many immigrants of color overrepresented in the sector, I have white privilege; moreover, it is a white academic privilege that combines race and class.

I sometimes found myself managing these aspects by explaining to the interviewees, colleagues, and activists (mostly from movements led by immigrants of color) that I respect their existing activism and critical scholarship. While interacting with leaders and members of the organizations I would often mention that I wanted to learn about their activism because there are no workers' initiatives like this in my home country, Poland, but I hope to inspire some activity in the sector.² For the sake of transparency, I ensured everyone knew what my other focus was. Generally it was met with some suspicion because white workers are considered more privileged, and I sometimes felt an implicit assumption that they are not worthy of attention because other groups remain more vulnerable.³ Although the organizations (and other actors) were somewhat surprised by my focus at the beginning, gradually, by showing up, volunteering, and amplifying their work, I believe I built a working relationship of trust with them. In the end, I attended the National Domestic Workers Alliance assembly in February 2020 as part of the Massachusetts delegation. When I switched the focus of my research during the pandemic to all workers, the MA-based organizations then made their contacts and fora available to me to reach

² Such a dissemination was envisaged within the project; thanks to a partnership with Marta Romankiw and Our Choice Foundation, I am currently involved in a networking initiative between Ukrainian domestic workers in Warsaw and Polish workers in Chicago, which was envisaged within the project.

³ I was receiving a different kind of reactions from the white people, ranging from incredulity that white workers are present in these jobs (from casual conversations with people not involved in the field) to sometimes very problematic applause I would get for this angle of study from white organizers in whose opinion white workers' perspective is 'neglected'.



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out to their members with the online survey, and I continued the relationship by sharing the results (Rosińska 2021; see Rosińska, Pellerito, forthcoming).

As mentioned, to a certain point I felt I was doing two separate studies: one on white workers, and one on domestic workers' activism. As far as I could tell, while present in Massachusetts, white non-migrant workers were absent from the activism conducted under the umbrella of the Massachusetts Coalition. This being said, while studying the organizations and interacting with their members I would sometimes engage in exchanges concerning white workers. I would sometimes ask questions that might have not been asked had I had a different focus. This part of the research shed more light on the complexities of collective identity, framing, claims, and how to strategically navigate the political climate and I explored these issues in the paper "Whose rights?" under revision in *Social politics*.

Participants in the study and data analyzed

In the course of my research, I conducted interviews with experts, participated and watched the relevant events,⁴ analyzed the IPUMS 2017 and 2019 data, and examined the websites, legislation (DWBR, DWBR Act, House Bill from 1970), and social media presence of the National Domestic Workers Alliance and the Massachusetts-based organizations. The fieldwork was conducted between March 2019 and September 2020; three interviews with experts were carried out during the pandemic (April-September 2020) and ten before the pandemic (March 2019-January 2020). Among the interviews with experts, all of the participants were Massachusetts-based, but some were involved in activism at both the state and national level (through the NDWA).⁵ The interviews have been transcribed and analyzed with the aid of the Maxqda software.

⁴ My research began in Fall 2018, and until this day I have followed these events so far: Matahari general assembly, 11.11.2018, Free "Roma" movie (directed by A. Cuarón) screening for domestic workers, on the 20.02.2019 <https://www.facebook.com/events/330699407544869/>, Public Hearing in Connecticut 21.02 around the DW bill of rights (bill 6931 public hearing) https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&which_year=2019&bill_num=6931, workers' training by the Massachusetts Coalition of Domestic Workers, 30.03.2019, in Spanish and Portuguese. (Facebook album with pictures from the training: <https://tinyurl.com/yxor76d4>), International Nanny Training Day, Matahari, 13.04.2019 (translation services in 5 languages). MCDW digital media campaign [the workshop earlier – focus group 7.09.2019] 16.10.19, [16.11.19], 16.12.19 (the live show). I also took part in a radio show 'Estação Mulher' to talk about my research https://m.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=655443544897754&id=576943716081071b TBC

⁵ Interviews with experts: representative of single immigrant groups organizations (1 interview), mixed immigrant groups organization (3 interviews), umbrella domestic workers organization (3 interviews, incl. a rep. of single immigrant organization), agencies (PCA 1 interview, nannies 1 interview); alternative training organizers (2 interviews), employers' organization (1 interview), trade union organizer working with PCAs (1 interview), academic expert on labor studies (1 interview).



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In the period March 2019-September 2020 I carried out **61 qualitative interviews (60 interviews were envisaged): 44 with workers, 4 with employers and 13 with experts.**

Among the **44 workers:**

- 41 women,
- 3 men (one cleaner, one babysitter and personal care worker, one PCA).

In terms of ethnic background:

- 41 white non-Hispanic, non-Latinx, US-born domestic workers,
- 2 naturalized US citizens born in the UK,
- 1 Asian worker.

44 workers in terms of jobs:

- 26 nannies
- 7 babysitters
- 3 personal care workers
- 2 house cleaners (one of them with personal care experience)
- 6 personal care + nanny/babysitting.

Altogether, 39 people had childcare experience, 10 people personal caregiving experience and 2 people house cleaning experience.

4 employers:

- 2 of nannies
- 1 of cleaners and nannies
- 1 personal care assistance receiver.

13 experts:

- 1 representative of single immigrant group organization in Massachusetts,
- 3 representatives of mixed immigrant groups organization in Massachusetts, also active on the national level.
- 3 representatives of an umbrella domestic workers organization in Massachusetts (incl. a rep. of single immigrant organization, that one is counted double),
- 2 representatives of agencies (PCA agency 1 interview, nanny agency 1 interview) in Massachusetts;
- 2 alternative training organizers in Massachusetts,
- 1 representative of employers' organization active in Massachusetts and on the national level,
- 1 interview with trade union organizer working with PCAs in Massachusetts,
- 1 interview with academic expert on labor studies in Massachusetts.



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The expert interviews were carried out between March 2019 and September 2020, 3 after the pandemic (April-September 2020), 10 before the pandemic (March 2019 – January 2020).

Statistical data analysis and policy analysis:

I analysed the 2017 IPUMS statistical data of the American census and studied and reviewed the Federal and state-level policy initiatives and activism of the organizations of domestic workers. In particular, I studied the process leading to passing the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights in Massachusetts in 2014 and the initiative to pass the National Domestic Workers Bill of Rights Act.

Emerging themes

So far, the analysis of the expert interviews has brought insights into **how intersectionality operates on different levels in domestic work** activism (see Marchetti et al. *forthcoming* for the theoretical framework), and the complex position of white American workers who are mostly absent from the activism, but also operating on the margins, separately and pursuing their own agenda.

The interviews with workers revealed:

- the dimensions of **white privilege** in household based care work in the US;
- The internal **diversity of white American workers**, some of whom are privileged, and others seem to occupy a similar class position as marginalized immigrant workers;
- Complexities of **paid in-home childcare** with an array of options between professional nannies to casual babysitters, against the background of lack of public support for child rearing.

White care and domestic workers whose presence is significant in the sector and according to data and estimates is between 25% to half of the workers are not very active in workers' activism. White non-Hispanic non-Latinx US-born workers are an internally diverse category with different levels of white privilege. There are workers whose position is secured by a contract, have access to health insurance and entertain relatively high earnings, above the average salary in the US (\$40 000 for a full time job per year). Most of them are professional or career nannies. There are also workers who work without a contract, without health insurance and make considerably less than the national average, and these workers are among babysitters, personal care givers and cleaners who often juggle a couple of jobs to make ends meet.



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As it turned out, my research question about white US-born workers provided me with a very particular angle to approach the topic and allowed me to reveal aspects that would have otherwise remained hidden, as the dominant scholarship does not highlight the participation of white workers in the campaign to pass the bill in Massachusetts. The main narrative centers on the immigrants of color who led the process and glosses over the racism in the ranks of the movement so as not to expose divisions.

Research during the pandemic

In the light of COVID-19 pandemic, in July 2020 I have added an additional objective, **generating new insights on the situation of care and domestic workers under the COVID-19 crisis**. The current public health crisis related to the COVID-19 pandemic has a great impact on the care and domestic sector. Therefore, I decided to include this impact in my study. It means adding another sub-topic of study: COVID-19 impact on the care sector, using an additional tool – an online survey, and including all domestic workers in the online survey (so workers beyond the white non-Hispanic American workers).

The survey was carried out in the period 08.08. – 31.12.2020. Over the course of 5 months, it yielded 101 complete responses. 77 people used the English version, 14 people used the Spanish version, 6 Polish version and 4 Portuguese version. 55 participants were born in the US, 44 elsewhere, among them, 10 in Central and South America, 3 in Mexico, 8 in the Caribbean, 2 in Asia, 10 in Europe. 28 people identify as Hispanic or Latinx.

When it comes to race, 59 people identify as white, 18 as Hispanic or Latinx, 5 as African American or Black, 5 as Afrolatinx or Afrohispanic, 7 as of mixed racial background, 2 as Asian. The biggest number of participants lived in the state of Massachusetts (53 responses) and from the Northeast in general (71 responses), although workers from 22 states took part altogether.

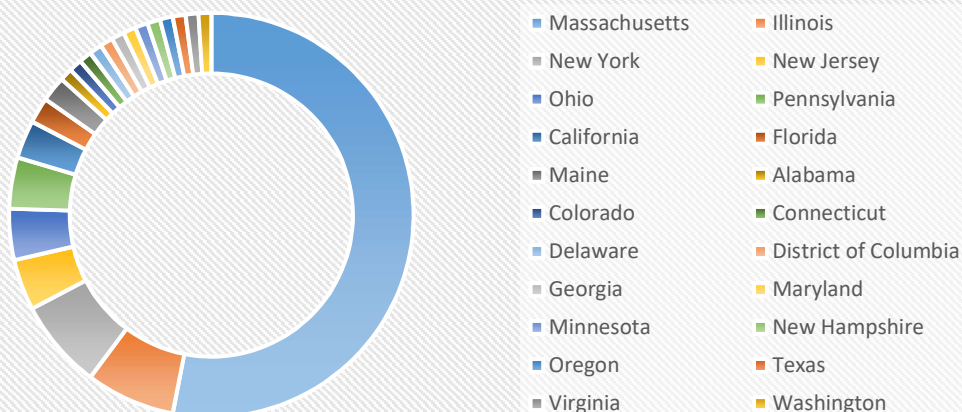


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State of living of survey participant



US region	Number of survey participants
Northeast	71
Midwest	12
South	9
West	6
TOTAL	98

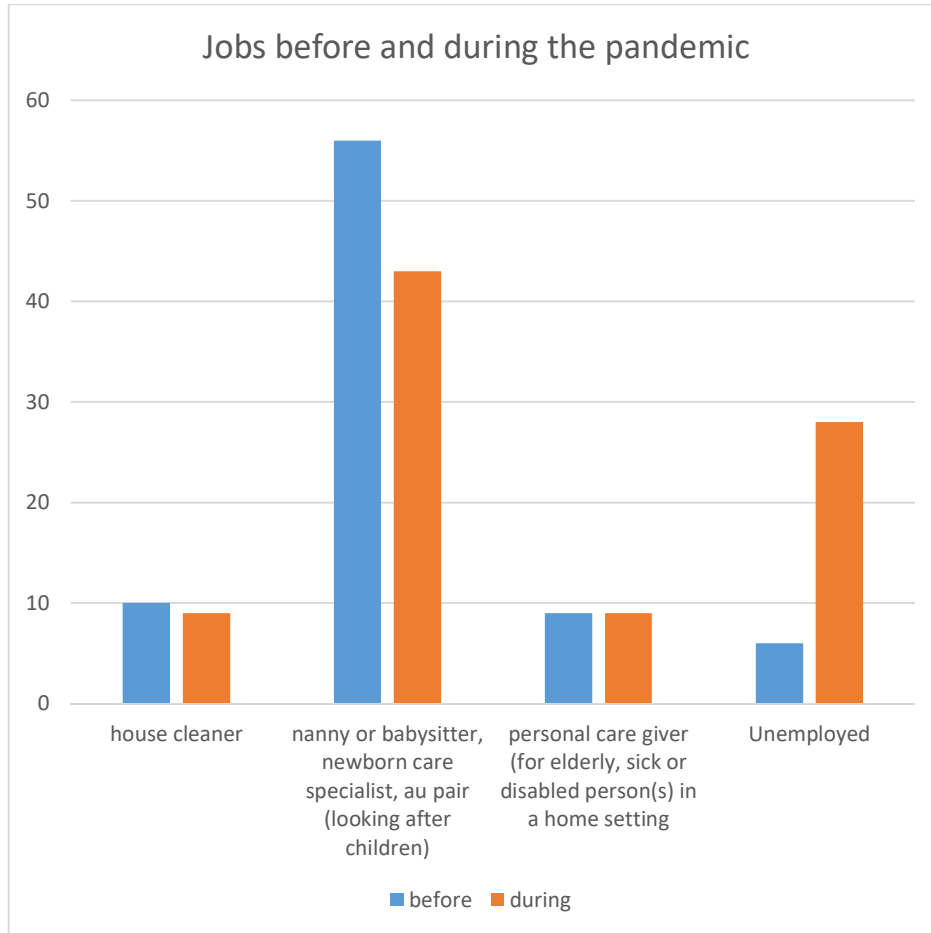
Many people held multiple jobs within and beyond the domestic sector, especially before the pandemic. The number of all jobs held by the workers dropped during the pandemic and the number of unemployment instances rose:



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The issues of the impact of the pandemic on domestic workers have been developed in the report: Rosińska Anna (2021) “Damned If You Do, Damned If You Don’t (Work). Domestic Workers In The Covid-19 Pandemic Double Bind. A report based on an online survey in the United States” <https://iris.unive.it/handle/10278/3740150#.YLckCfkzYac>.