

Nannies that Care. An Emergent Socio-Professional Category between Legal Regulations and Working Arrangements¹

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Abstract:

Drawing on qualitative field research conducted in the Bucharest - Ilfov region in 2013, this article approaches nannies' working arrangements, understood as either formal or informal paid activities carried out as part of the childcare process. First, we focus on the social, political, and legislative context in which nannies' work emerged and developed. This analysis is necessary for a better understanding of the main factors that influence the current social values and practices regarding childcare in Romania (from our interviewees' point of view, but also in close connection with the hegemonic cultural meanings regarding childcare, parenting, and mothering). Second, we examine nannies' individual choices and professional trajectories as important indicators for the social dynamics of current care working arrangements and gender roles. Our aim was to identify, on the one hand, the reasons behind choosing formal or informal working arrangements and, on the other hand, nannies' social practices, values, and cultural meanings related to (paid) childcare. We thus sought to understand the extent to which, in contemporary Romania, there is (or not) a real social need regarding the professionalisation of an occupation that can most often be identified and observed as informal work.

Keywords: nannies, childminding, paid childcare, informal care arrangements, Romania

Introduction

From both an ideological and a political point of view, as well as at the level of public policies, the hegemonic childcare model in post-communist Romania is closer to the neo-familialist model². This model is based first and foremost on long paid parental leave schemes (i.e. until the toddler reaches the age of two or three years old), as well as on an underdeveloped provision of public service infrastructure for children under three. Moreover, this childcare model

¹ This paper is based on our research project entitled "Child minders in Bucharest: a shadowed category between law, employment and social norms", funded by the ERSTE Fellowship for Social Research 2013, available in open access at: <http://social-research.erstestiftung.net/publication/child-minders-in-bucharest/>

² Mahon, Rianne (2002) "Child Care: "Toward What Kind of "Social Europe"?", *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 9(3): 346.

is favourable neither for real gender equality, nor for social and ethnic equality¹. Finding alternative solutions for parents who are both active on the labour market and willing to develop – as equally as possible – their professional careers may be a significant challenge considering the relatively scant options envisaged by the legislative framework in force and by the available childcare provisions. Moreover, given the importance attributed to family home-based childcare (usually undertaken by mothers) and its association with the best interests of the child, parents’ (especially mothers’) decisions can be notably influenced by the dominant cultural meanings attached to family, motherhood, and gender roles. In addition, the employment conditions of nannies have only recently been regulated (i.e. since 2017). Nevertheless, both the legislative framework in force and the current family and social policy tools seem to remain unresponsive to the transformation of the activities associated with nannies’ care work into a formal profession. In the long run, the professionalisation² of this occupation would be very useful not only for parents, regardless of their social status, but also from the point of view of women’s participation in the labour market.

Based on qualitative field research on nannies’ work, understood as either formal or informal activities carried out as part of the childcare process, this article aims to approach the issue of childcare through the lens of nannies’ working arrangements. The analysis of the ways in which these care workers relate to childcare, as well as the assessment of their relationships with both the parents they work for and the children they take care of are very useful in order to understand the economic constraints, as well as the social and cultural factors that contribute to this solution to childcare provision. We also seek to understand the extent to which there is (or not) a real social need regarding the contractualisation of an occupation that can most often be identified and observed as informal work.

After the introduction of our conceptual and methodological framework, we will focus on the social, political, and legislative context in which nannies’ work emerged and developed. This brief overview is necessary in order to acquire a better understanding of the main factors that influence the current social values and practices regarding childcare in Romania (from our interviewees’ point of view, but also in close connection with the hegemonic cultural meanings regarding childcare, parenting, and mothering). Furthermore, the most important part of our article consists of an analysis of the 31 interviews we carried out with nannies living and working in the Bucharest – Ilfov region. In these interviews, we sought to identify and examine nannies’ individual choices and professional trajectories, which could be important indicators for the social dynamics of current care working arrangements and gender roles.

¹ *Ibidem.*

² For a more detailed analysis of professionalisation as a concept, as well as a concrete example related to childcare in France, see Champy-Remoussenard, Patricia (2008) “Incontournable professionnalisation”, *Savoirs*, 2(17): 51-61 ; Aballéa, François (2005), “La professionnalisation inachevée des assistantes maternelles”, *Revue des politiques sociales et familiales*, 80: 55-65 ; Albérola, Elodie (2009) “La professionnalisation des assistantes maternelles : un processus en cours”, *Revue des politiques sociales et familiales*, 97: 71-76.

A brief conceptual and methodological framework

Research related to care and caring analysed through the lens of current societal changes underline the importance of re-assessing the ways in which this universal human need is approached and treated, both at the level of political discourse as well as at that of the public policies, institutions, and social practices within democratic regimes. Joan Tronto proposes a very challenging approach to care as a political concept, assuming that it truly has “a potential in transforming current democratic life”¹. At the same time, care is in fact a multi-layered transversal issue, with very important cultural, normative, and economic dimensions² that have already been tackled by researchers from different areas of specialisation in social and political science.

Childcare thus occupies a privileged place within our field research, having also heuristic value for the analysis of women’s participation in the labour market, of the issue of migration, as well as of the reconfiguration of the family institution, especially through the lens of gender equality: “The relationship between employment, care and gender is still contentious, going to the heart of beliefs about childhood and parenthood, men’s and women’s roles”³. Furthermore, childcare is central for the most recent investigations addressing the European social model and the redesign of the welfare state⁴, as well as for the societal “gender arrangements”⁵, “gender contract”⁶, and “gender cultural models”⁷.

Economic and social factors, migration, and first and foremost the defamilialisation process in the context of the challenges related to gender equality and the transformation of the male breadwinner model, all these issues contributed to the (re)configuration of three models addressing the care deficit in Europe: the neofamilialist model, the “third way” design, as well as the egalitarian model⁸. Obviously, these models are differently articulated in different countries, taking into consideration the nuances, the characteristics, and also the dynamics specific to each national context. Moreover, at the societal level there are always certain needs of particular social actors and social categories that require adequate solutions, solutions that, in fact, the dominant welfare and gender arrangements model is unable to offer. Whenever the neofamilialist model is dominant, childcare is being addressed through long parental leave schemes and the cultural gender contract is conservative and traditionalist, while the services provided by nannies and child-minders represent a rather informal and marginal solution. Nevertheless, they also constitute

¹ Tronto, Joan (2013) *Caring Democracy. Markets, Equality, and Justice*, New York & London: New York University Press, 11.

² Pfau-Effinger, B. & Rostgaard, T. eds. (2011) *Care between Work and Welfare in European Societies*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2.

³ Kamerman, Sheila & Moss, Peter eds. (2011) *The politics of parental leave policies. Children, parenting, gender and the labour market*, Bristol: The Policy Press, 5.

⁴ Mahon, Rianne (2002) *art. cit.*

⁵ Kamerman, Sheila & Moss, Peter eds. (2011), *op. cit.*, 38.

⁶ Pfau-Effinger, Brigit (1993) “Modernisation, Culture and Part-time Employment: The Example of Finland and West Germany”, *Work, Employment and Society*, 7(3): 390.

⁷ Le Feuvre, Nicky & Andriocci, Muriel (2005) “Employment opportunities for women in Europe”, in Gabriele Griffin ed., *Doing Women Studies. Employment Opportunities, Personal Impact and Social Consequences*, London & New York: Zed Books, 17.

⁸ Mahon, Rianne (2002), *art. cit.*, 346.

certain social practice that can have heuristic value for understanding the tensions and the dynamics related to the dominant welfare and childcare model, especially in relation to the transversal issue of gender equality.

Research on childcare is underdeveloped in Romania, and it is also a significant gap in the comparative studies conducted on a European level. There are however numerous publications that, without being focused explicitly on the issue of childcare, certainly contribute to the understanding of the social and political processes intertwined with the dynamics of childcare in post-communist Romania. These publications generally tackle the following issues: the political dimension of the domestic familialism and maternalism; public policies and the design of public structures, regulations, and provisions for childcare; societal and cultural meanings and stereotypes regarding childhood, parenting, mothering, and gender roles. In our reading, these studies can be grouped into four main categories:

a) research on childcare and education through the lens of the normative influences of parenting as a concept¹, allowing us to acquire a better understanding not only of the social and cultural construction of parenthood and parenting, but also of the childcare constraints and educational responsibilities that the current public policy design assign to the parents. The findings of these studies also reveal that, while emphasis is being placed on parental responsibilities (for children's health, education, and welfare) as well as on children's rights, childcare remains limited to the parents' 'duty' to address the complex needs of their children.

b) research on childcare ideals and childcare arrangements through the lens of parents' choices and solutions². For example, Borbála Kovács developed a grounded theory approach regarding the structural, institutional, and societal factors that influence parenting, childcare, and financial earning at the level of family life. More precisely, the author argues that, while childcare arrangements generally depend on both parents, mothers feel more responsible than their partners for concrete daily childcare activities (they are more likely to change their working schedule or their work place, or even to give up on it).

c) research on family policies, in relation to the issues of gender equality and childcare³. This strand of publications shows that current family policies and provisions for care are very significant for the local familialism in Romania, promoting essentialist gender roles and conservative family relations. Moreover, a bottom-up perspective on family policies reveals, among other issues, the cultural tension between the ideal regarding women's professional and

¹ Cojocaru, Daniela (2011) "Attending parenting education programmes in Romania. The case of the Holt Romania Iasi programme", *Revista de Cercetare si Interventie Socială [Review of Research and Social Intervention]* 32: 140-154; Cojocaru, Daniela (2008) "Foster Care and the Professionalisation of Parenting", *Revista de Cercetare și Interventie Socială [Review of Research and Social Intervention]*, 21: 90-101.

² Kovács, Borbála (2018) *Family Policy and the Organization of Childcare. Hierarchies of Care Ideals*, Palgrave-Macmillan.

³ Dohotariu, Anca (2018) "Parental Leave Provision in Romania between Inherited Tendencies and Legislative Adjustments", *Symposion* 5 (1): 41-57; Dohotariu, Anca (2015) "Family Policies, Gendered Norms and Cultural Meanings in Post-communist Romania", *Analele Universității din București. Seria Științe Politice*, XVII (1): 119-137.

financial autonomy and the widespread idea that women have to be the primary caregivers for their children.

d) research on the social construction of gender, as well as on gender equality, gender roles, gender beliefs and values, through the lens of childcare and women's participation in the labour market¹. On the one hand, these studies emphasise the dynamics of the redefinition of gender roles in relation to gender equality – the latter being promoted especially as a result of the influence that European policies have on the Romanian legislation and public policies. On the other hand, it casts light on the difficulties of this reconfiguration, which are related to: 1). ideological factors (e.g. the influence of the communist past and the association of gender equality with neo-Marxism and left-wing ideology); 2). the current configuration of family policies; 3). the hegemonic conservative regime that shapes cultural meanings related to gender, family life, mothering, and parenting; 4). the gap introduced by the communist regime between promoting an egalitarian model on the labour market and in the public sphere in general, and the economic constraints and important gender inequalities visible at the level of the domestic sphere.

To our knowledge, nannies' work has not yet been addressed by any social science research in post-communist Romania. The emergence of this occupation may be approached through the lens of the agency theory developed in the field of gender studies, and thus can be understood as a response of social actors to a need that remains ignored by the public policies currently in place.

Starting from this approach, in 2013 we conducted a qualitative field research, consisting of 31 in-depth individual interviews with nannies working for both high- and medium-income families living in the Bucharest-Ilfov region. While Bucharest is the largest city in Romania, Ilfov is a county that surrounds the capital city, and which has registered a specific development over the last decades.² More precisely, an increasing number of middle- or high-income families with children settled in the region, while daily commuting to the capital city for work, reducing thus parental time available for childcare activities. Overall, Bucharest and Ilfov county are an area characterised by an important variety of family childcare arrangements. Whenever parents cannot rely on places in either public or private nurseries and kindergartens³, or on their extended families'

¹ Pološki Vokić, Nina et. al. (2019) "Gender Inequality: Specific Areas of Gender Segregation" in Pološki Vokić, Nina et. al. *Gender Equality in the Workplace. Macro and Micro Perspectives on the Status of Highly Educated Woman*, Palgrave Macmillan: 37-60; Voicu, Mălina & Constantin, Andreea (2016) "Couple's Status on Labour Market and their Attitudes towards Gender Roles" *Revista de Cercetare și Intervenție Socială [Review of Research and Social Intervention]*, 54: 7-22; Crusmac, Oana & Köhler, Isabel (2016) "Gender Mainstreaming and Work-Family Reconciliation. An Analysis of Family Policies in Romania and Germany", *The Romanian Journal of Society and Politics*, 11(2): 49-74; Băluță, Ionela (2014) „Child Care in Post-communist Romania between Familialist Ideology, Labour Market and Gender Roles”, *Revista de Cercetare și Intervenție Socială [Review of Research and Social Intervention]*, 46: 227-242; Marinescu, Valentina (2002) "Muncile casnice în satul românesc actual. Studii de caz", Iași: Polirom; Voicu Mălina & Tufiș. Paula (2012) "Trends in Gender Beliefs in Romania: 1993-2008", *Current Sociology*, 60 (1): 61-80; Gal, Susan & Kligman, Gail (2003) *Politicile de gen în perioada postsocialistă. Un eseu istoric comparativ*, translated by Delia Răzdolescu, Iași: Polirom; Miroiu, Mihaela (2004) *Drumul către autonomie. Teorii politice feministe*, Iași: Polirom.

² For example, in 2019 Bucharest registered a population of around 2.1 million people: <https://www.bucuresti.insse.ro>, and Ilfov had approximately 444.000 inhabitants: <https://www.ilfov.insse.ro>.

³ Different reasons, often juxtaposed, can contribute to parents' decisions to avoid specialized childcare services, ranging from the limited availability or perceived poor quality of these services in their area, to the idea of home-

(usually grandmothers') help, paid childcare taking place in their own home¹ seems to be the most adequate solution. Qualitative homogenous through saturation sampling and the snowball technique were the most effective ways of building up our sample and getting in contact with the interviewees, although more than 40% of the women we identified as nannies refused to participate in our study. Their reluctance appears to have been based on the negative perception with regard to journalistic investigations, which usually emphasise extreme cases of domestic violence (either abusive nannies or abusive parents making use of paid care services). Interviewees were aged between 24 and 65 years old, as follows: 6 nannies were under 29 years old, 10 nannies were aged between 30 and 49, and 15 nannies were over the age of 50. More than half of them were born in rural areas, and they had low or middle levels of education, except for one nanny, which had attended university. Our field research was based on an interview guide, seeking above all to follow the personal stories of women who chose to work as nannies in the homes of parents paying for their services. The interviews were structured following some central themes, such as: a) the individual (care) work experience on the labour market; b) the relationship with the parents/employers who were paying for their childminding activities; c) the relationship with the child or the children they were taking care of.

In the course of our investigation, we sought to identify, on the one hand, the reasons behind choosing formal or informal working arrangements and, on the other hand, nannies' social practices, values, and cultural meanings related to (paid) childcare. Furthermore, in order to understand the complexity of the social relationships involved within and also influenced by this type of practice, our inquiry was driven by several preliminary research questions: who are, in fact, these nannies? (i.e. we have not identified any men providing paid childcare services in parents' homes!). To what extent can one talk about a possible professionalisation of these services? What are the motivations driving women to work as nannies and how do they perceive their professional status? As for their relationships with parents and the children they take care of, do they contribute to the contractualisation of this occupation and to the reinforcement of its formal aspects, or, on the contrary, do they regard these paid services as belonging more in the informal and domestic sphere of childcare activities?

Legal regulations and social context: a neofamilialist model of childcare

The *Gender Barometer. Romania 2018*² is the second quantitative inquiry conducted at a national level on the perceptions, values, attitudes, and social practices related to the dynamics of gender roles after the fall of the communist regime. In addition to the importance of this research

based childcare as fitting best to children's interests and needs. For some details regarding the availability of formal day-care services, see Dohotariu, Anca (2015), *art. cit.*: 128.

¹ A clear definition of "home-based childcare" is available in Ang, Lynn et. all (2017) "A Review of the Research on Childminding: Understanding Children's Experiences in Home-Based Childcare Settings", *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 45: 261-270.

² *Barometrul de gen. România 2018 [Gender Barometer. Romania 2018]*, Laura Grünberg (coord.), Andreea Rusu, Elena Samoilă, FILIA (Centrul de Dezvoltare Curriculară și Studii de Gen) and CENFORM (Asociația Centrul de Suport și Formare pentru Dezvoltarea unei Societăți Echitabile): https://centrulfilia.ro/new/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Barometru_de_gen.Romania_2018.pdf

for a better understanding of the (re)definition of gender values and roles and of the cultural gender contract that is dominant at the macro level in Romania, unlike the previous similar research conducted in 2000¹, the 2018 Gender Barometer also contains specific questions regarding parenting and the work-life balance. More precisely, from the point of view of gender roles, the belief according to which “the man is the head of the family” remains salient (70% of the respondents in 2018, compared to 83% in 2000), as well as the idea that “it is more men’s duty to financially sustain the family” (61% of the respondents in 2018 and 70% in 2000). Hence, although one can observe certain dynamics favourable to the redefinition of gender roles, from more traditionalist relationships towards a cultural gender contract more conducive to gender equality, the Barometer’s results nevertheless emphasise the persistence of gender conservatism, especially in the private sphere, whereas more modern attitudes seem to be associated more with the gender contract in the public sphere². As for childcare, most respondents believe that both parents should look after their children (80.3% of the sample: 80.7% of women and 79.7% of men); however, at the same time, 48.9% of women and 49.2% of men participating in the study are convinced that men are not as good as their female partners in being the primary caregivers for children³. These responses could be interpreted as resulting from the influence that the current parenting ideology has upon the general opinions of the Romanian population. This ideology persists, however, in being in accordance to the generally accepted conservative approach related to women’s and men’s qualities and activities at the level of the domestic sphere, according to which biological differences between women and men are undeniable, and thus women’s destiny remains closely linked to motherhood. Furthermore, when questioned about childcare, 52% of the respondents declare that they prefer to make use of their extended families’ help (usually grandmothers), and only 2.9% of the entire sample indicate a preference for nannies’ care work paid services⁴. Hence, childcare paid services seem to be a marginal practice at the macro-societal level, which is generally characterised by still dominant traditional gender roles and values, in spite of the most recent changes favourable to gender equality.

After 1989, family policies were attributed a marginal place on the political agenda, except for parental leave regulations, which had changed more than five times between 1990 and 2011. Although designed for both working parents since 2005, leave entitlements are mixed rights, which depend first and foremost on parents’ participation in the labour market. Moreover, they are relatively generous in terms of length and payment (i.e. one of the two parents can choose between one- and two-years parental leave, or even three years in the case of sick children), thus being relatively attractive for a large segment of the population. On the one hand, current parental leave provision is a welfare instrument that largely corresponds to the dominant cultural meanings related to family relationships, maternity, gender roles, or even the idea of the child’s best interests. On the other hand, in 2014 Romania registered among the lowest ranks at European Union level from the point of view of average gross hourly wage income in EUR (i.e. €2,03 per hour) and was

¹ *Gender Barometer. Romania 2000* (2000), Bucharest: Fundația pentru o Societate Deschisă and Gallup România.

² Văcărescu, Theodora (2018) “Introductory study”, in *Ibidem*, 21.

³ *Ibidem*, 20.

⁴ *Gender Barometer. Romania 2018, op. cit.*, 78.

also among the countries with the highest percentage of workers with a low income (i.e. 24.4% as compared to 15.9% in the EU area)¹, as well as with earning disparities². In addition, the public institutional infrastructure for children under three years old is inadequate and underdeveloped: the total number of nurseries decreases from 840 in 1990 to 286 in 2011; in rural areas, nurseries do not exist at all. Consequently, the choice for parental leave provision is also conditioned by financial factors: whenever the family's income is too low and there is no other alternative solution offered by the public system, the option for private nurseries or nannies' paid services is practically unaffordable for a significant part of the population.

The legislative framework is also not very friendly with respect to the development of nannies' professional trajectories and the formal aspects of their occupation. This profession has not been legally regulated until 2014, when Law 167/2014 entered into force. More importantly, this law has not had any legal effects until 2017, when the methodological norms of its application have finally been adopted (H.G. 652/2017). The "Nannies' Law" 167/2014 defines the main professional responsibilities related to this occupation, among which three refer to the child's best interests and needs (art. 2, paragraphs a, d and e), and one refers to the primordial place given to the responsibility of the legal guardian of the child to respect and guarantee the child's rights (paragraph c). There is also only one general reference to the principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination (paragraph b), without specifying whether it refers to children, parents, or nannies. Nannies' childcare services also depend on a professional qualification certificate obtained "in accordance with the Governmental Ordinance no. 129/2000 regarding the vocational training of adult persons, amended, completed and approved by Law no. 375/2002, republished" (chapter 2, article 5.2.a), or on some similar professional qualifications. More importantly, the legislation in force stipulates that nannies' activities can take place under two main contractual forms: either an "individual employment contract between the nanny and a legal person", or "providing childcare paid services under the regulations of self-employment" (in Romanian the law refers to "persoană fizică autorizată" – "PFA", which is equivalent to self-employment) – chapter II, art. 7.b.

As for the methodological norms of application of the law (H.G. 652/2017), it is very interesting to notice that it specifies in its first article that nannies' services "fall into the category of work-life balance social services regulated by the Law on social assistance no. 292/2011, in its art. 73, paragraph (2), letter b), and its subsequent amendments", but, at the same time, there is no reference to the extent to which these childcare services, usually paid by parents, could also be financially supported by the State. H.G. 652/2017 also stipulates the necessary conditions for the accreditation of the employment contracts related to childcare: agencies or self-employed nannies are allowed to provide childcare services only under specific conditions of accreditation regulated by the Law 197/2012 (art. 1.2.b), which stipulates the necessary documents for concluding the

¹ According to *Eurostat. Statistics Explained*, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Wages_and_labour_costs/ro#Lucr.C4.83torii_cu_venituri_salariale_mici, last consulted on August, 12th, 2019.

² According to *Eurostat. Earning Statistics*, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Earnings_statistics#Distribution_of_earnings, last consulted on August, 12th, 2019.

employment contract, as well as the control procedures and possible sanctions related to nannies' childcare activities as a formal occupation.

Overall, if we limit our analysis to the content of the two legal regulations mentioned above, we can easily notice the emphasis placed on the child's best interests, overlapping with the absence of any kind of concern for stimulating the consolidation of this occupation as a real professional option. The legislation in force does not insist too much on the nannies' social and professional rights, whereas the self-employment option remains complicated and often inaccessible to the social categories having a low educational and economic background.

Nannies that care, between formal working arrangements and informal responsibilities

Our qualitative field research reveals that nannies' working arrangements are far more diverse and far more complex than we expected them to be, in terms of strategies for finding employment, payment, working programme, or motivations related to the option for formal/informal working arrangements. First, there is not only one, but two distinct situations of nannies working under an employment contract: 1) nannies employed as such¹, their real childcare activities, income and taxes being stipulated in their working papers, and 2) nannies who have an employment contract as cleaners or other jobs, but work out of it, as nannies². Second, the large majority of our interviewees are nannies working without a contract – i.e. either 3) retired women who perceive their child-minding activities as an 'extra' occupation, or 4) nannies working with no contract at all. Our analysis follows this classification, which is relevant for our preliminary questions, although paid domestic work arrangements constitute a very complex research object that needs to be tackled from an intersectional perspective – for instance, noteworthy differences in building professional trajectories may be encountered due to the different age groups involved³.

a) Nannies' childcare work experience

A few subthemes are significant for the ways in which nannies shape their professional trajectories: their strategies for finding employment and motivations to work on a legal contract or to avoid it,

¹ Only 5 out of 31 interviewees worked as nannies providing formal paid childcare services. These were nannies employed by Little Red Riding Hood, an NGO created in 2011 by the Romanian Red Cross: <http://scufitarosie.org>. To our knowledge, this social economy micro-enterprise is the only one of its kind, at least in Bucharest, that employs nannies and babysitters after offering them free professional training courses. Unlike recruitment agencies, Little Red Riding Hood not only intermediates the relationship between parents (i.e. the 'clients' who pay for childminding services in their own homes, on a horary based program) and nannies or babysitters (who provide childminding services), but it trains and then employs care workers under real employment contracts. Hence, both parents' and care workers' rights and obligations are being negotiated as well as granted through Little Red Riding Hood.

² To simplify the reading of our analysis, we refer to these two situations through the distinction between: 1) nannies who work with a real employment contract, with their rights and obligations stipulated as such, and 2) nannies working on a bogus employment contract, which does not make reference to any childcare activities; although these contracts are real and valid from a legal and fiscal point of view, they correspond to different working situations.

³ Sekeráková Búriková, Zuzana (2018) "Choosing the Right Age Group?: Intersectional Analysis of Demand for Paid Domestic Workers in Slovakia", *Slovenský Národopis*, 66(2): 239-252; see also Sekeráková Búriková, Zuzana (2016) "Exploring the Demand for Paid Domestic Workers in Slovakia through the Intersection of Welfare and Gender Regimes", *Laboratorium*, 8(3): 28-51.

salaries and the working hours as carers, as well as the ways in which nannies perceive their work (as a long-term profession or as a temporary occupation).

All nannies employed by Little Red Riding Hood have relatively similar stories regarding their decision to work as a nanny: after a period of unemployment they attended a free childminding training course which, in fact, opened a path for them to obtaining a real employment contract. In other words, working as a nanny was not an objective in itself, but more of an opportunity that occurred following a period of joblessness. At the same time, they invoke similar motivations for choosing a legal employment contract. Despite the fact that the salary is not too attractive (approx. €200 per month after tax), their employment contracts provide them with work continuity and stability, as well as all related social and health insurances. Whenever they feel their working environment is not acceptable, they have the possibility to be replaced and to move forward to another family paying for childcare service. Furthermore, although their own families do not truly value their care work activities, belonging to a professional group under the auspices of the Red Cross is an important symbolic incentive legitimising their childcare activities. As for their working programme, it is also a matter of choice: it varies between 8 and 10 hours a day, but they also have the possibility to share this amount of time between working in the homes of different families, as well as to opt for, or to add to their daily working schedule a 4 hours ‘voucher’ – i.e. ‘bon respiro’ (usually taken during evenings or weekends).

Nannies having an employment contract but working out of it seem, in turn, to have a larger variety of strategies for finding employment: through newspaper advertisements or through informal networks (neighbours, church, etc.). Furthermore, they mention two different situations: they either have a legally registered employment contract on their own (e.g. being fictitiously listed as being employed by the private company of a relative), or the family they are working for offers them the possibility to sign an employment contract which, in fact, does not correspond to their real working conditions. This situation is suitable for both nannies and parents who pay for childcare services, as it allows them to avoid both the difficult tax system and the very complicated formalities required for self-employment. In these cases, salaries are more generous (e.g. €250 for 4 hours per day, or even €600 per month, compared to the net average monthly salaries registered in 2013¹), but neither nannies nor parents have any interest in declaring them. Furthermore, the nannies’ working hours correspond to the generosity of the pay they receive: they have to be more flexible and available whenever their services are required. For instance, one nanny working for “Mr. and Mrs. Doctor” has to spend the night over at their house once a week, in their absence, taking care of their three children. Another nanny is a sort of an ‘internal’ domestic worker, essentially living in her employers’ house and getting some days off only every two or three weekends. She accompanies the child she is taking care of and the family everywhere, including on holidays, but her duties are not limited to childcare activities – she is also the main person responsible for all the housework.

¹ In 2013 the net average monthly salaries ranged from approx. €350 to €390 per month, for full-time working contracts: see <http://www.insse.ro/cms/ro/content/căștiguri-salariale-din-1991-serie-lunară>, last consulted in January 2020.

The two categories of nannies working out of any sort of employment contract mention two main scenarios regarding their recruitment. Some of them prefer to find work only through informal networks (they work with “people they know from people they know”) and would never resort to advertising their childcare services (e.g. in a newspaper). Others, in contrast, assume the ‘official’ position of working as nannies and very often prefer to make use of recruitment agencies that intermediate their relationship with their potential future employers. Nevertheless, apart from getting the two parties in contact, recruitment agencies do not take any kind of responsibilities related to the declared (or not) subsequent working conditions that nannies engage in. Furthermore, older women who are already retired and yet decide to continue working as nannies usually have no interest in declaring their salaries, which, in fact, they do not perceive as an undeclared salary but rather as an ‘extra’ income. They benefit from social and health insurances related to their retirement, but the very small amount of their monthly pension allowance is usually referred to as a legitimization of their negative reactions toward the state: *If I mock the state, that’s it! The state also mocks me! ... so what should I do? That’s it! If I had a decent pension allowance, I wouldn’t do this, but with 759 lei I have no other choice ...* (F., aged 58).

As for younger interviewees (i.e. under 29 years old), they often talk about themselves as ‘babysitters’ having this occupation only on a temporary basis: *For me it’s just like a summer job!* (A., aged 23). Consequently, they are very interested in a relatively generous but undeclared payment, in exchange for a “free, flexible, and not at all stressful job” (C., aged 27). In contrast, women between 30 and 50-years old working with no contract at all represent the most vulnerable category of nannies. Some of them began working as childcare workers for the families that had first hired them as cleaners for a period of time. These women’s earnings for childcare activities would become too low after taxes, so declaring them does not really constitute a viable option. Furthermore, they do not have the necessary skills to become self-employed and, whenever they exceed the state-provided period of unemployment, they do not benefit from any kind of social or health insurances. Consequently, undeclared income for childcare services is, in their case, a financial short-term rescue option, but it makes these women even more vulnerable in the long run for several reasons. First, the informal full-time working programme entails limited options for further training and potential employment reconfiguration; second, these nannies do not eventually benefit from any retirement scheme, which is granted only in the case of formal work.

Last but not least, nannies’ working programme differs significantly: while some of them work part-time (a few hours a day, especially when the children they take care of also attend kindergarten), others work around ten hours per day. Some of these nannies also refer to the possibility to leave their workplace (i.e. their employers’ household) and continue their care work activities at home, with the families either informed about it or not. Therefore, informal childcare services can be a source of vulnerability not only for nannies, but also for families making use of this type of services, as from a legal point of view parents are the only responsible for exposing their children to potentially dangerous situations, although they might not even be aware of it.

b) *The relationship with parents paying for child-minding services*

The contractualisation of the relationship between nannies and their employers (either the parents paying for childcare services or Little Red Riding Hood) is also hard to assess, considering at least two aspects: first, nannies work in the homes of the parents who pay for their services, and second, childcare can hardly be limited to a formal activity. In other words, the borders between the formal and the informal aspects of childcare work are often very fluid and hard to clearly demarcate, which is rather an impediment to the contractualisation process of this occupation.

The main aspect that comes up in all narratives of the nannies employed on a real employment contract (i.e. by Little Red Riding Hood) is that these childcare workers are trained to focus on the formal and contractual nature of their job. For instance, they may have meal breaks, but they have to bring their own food every day, although the family's refrigerator is at their disposal. At the same time, their professional duties remain strictly related to childcare activities – unlike the other categories of nannies, those from Little Red Riding Hood do not have any obligation related to housework (cleaning, cooking, ironing, grocery shopping, etc.). Moreover, the contractualisation of the relationship between nannies and parents does not always mitigate their asymmetric positions. For instance, one of the interviewees perceives it to be very difficult: *It has always been very easy for me to work with children, but with their parents, it's really hard. [...] The worse thing is that, if something happens, of course you are the one to blame!! Because, after all, you are a sort of an intruder in their home. [...] For example, when the child has a fever, parents get very anxious, especially if it's their only infant... And I do understand their fears, but I am not the one to blame, after all, I do my best to take care of their child ... So, of course, all these things bother me...* [S., aged 36]. Another interviewee from Little Red Riding Hood suggests that a formal relationship does not necessarily obliterate class differences: *I think that the other family [where I used to work] had a higher rank ... they looked down on you. They used to say, 'you'll do this and this and this for the child'. But now the parents see me more as a grandmother, and they also trust my advices.* [N. aged 45].

The formal and distant nature of the relationship between nannies and parents may also occur in the case of the childcare workers having an employment contract but working out of it. Although from a legal point of view they do not have any rights and obligations to each other, nannies evoke the respectful but also distant relationship they have with their de facto employers. Moreover, their narratives are very relevant for the familialist discourse that nannies incorporate and reproduce, blaming especially mothers for being too involved in their professional lives and spending too little time with their own children. For example, one of the interviewees declares: *The child feels. She feels that mommy spends little time with her [...] (Personally,) I wouldn't have left my children so much time. [...] I appreciate her for what she does [...] but because of her daily programme ... she doesn't want another child that much ... she spends very little time with the child. But it's her choice.* [G., aged 48]. Another nanny emphasises the same idea: *The mother is quite busy, she started a new PhD now [she is a surgery doctor and she also teaches at the university]; it's not easy to deal with all that and, in addition, to be a mother and a wife, I think it's too much ... I don't know. She doesn't have enough time for her children and you can feel that*

in the children's behaviour. [...] They are a kind of 'weekend-parents', and that affects the children, in my opinion. [L., aged 36]. In turn, the 'internal' nanny who lives in her employers' home underlines the fact that she "respects" the parents and she considers them as if they were her own children, but, at the same time, they use a distant official form of address (the second person, plural) whenever they communicate.

Nannies who are already retired and who are not interested in the legal aspects regarding their working arrangements seem to be more relaxed in relation to the parents they are working for: *We call each other using our nicknames. Right from the very beginning I suggested to leave the formalities aside, as if we were part of the same family. [...] Every day it gives me real pleasure to come to their place. And if something bothers me, whenever it might happen, I'll just stop coming. [...] Right from the very beginning I wanted to know what my duties were, what they expected from me. We have to be honest with each other. If something doesn't suit you, very well, that's it, we have to talk about it, but if there isn't any way out of it, that's it as well, it's better to say 'Goodbye'. [F., aged 58]* At the same time, retired nannies working without a contract mention that they prefer a more "stable" working environment, which can be interpreted as being related to their older age (e.g. one nanny declares that she would not leave for more money, and that she feels "at home" whenever she is at her working place – M., aged 63). Moreover, these nannies' professional life usually started before the fall of the communist regime, at a time when they graduated from a vocational school allowing them to get a "safe and stable" job (e.g. footwear-makers, stocking-makers, management distributor, labourer and head of department in a packing factory, accountant in a state enterprise, etc.). After the fall of the former regime interviewees experienced different strategies of re-professionalisation, alternating with periods of unemployment, which often makes them nostalgic for the hassle-free life experienced during the communist period, and which also influences them toward appreciating a more "stable", long-term job.

Nannies who work out of any employment contract also emphasise that parents spend much too little time with their own children. Nevertheless, whenever they are completely dependent on their undeclared salaries, they are aware of their vulnerability and they usually have colder relationships with the parents they work for. Furthermore, colder relationships transform sometimes into really distant or patronising ones, and class differences reinforce the visibility of the power relationship between nannies and parents: *I always do what I'm told to do ... if anything happens to the child, I don't want them to put the blame on me!! I come from the countryside, and, of course, I have a more rural conception about how to take care of a child. She never agrees with me, she raises her daughter strictly according to what she is reading in different books ... [...] She [the mother] told me that, if I'm interested in a working contract, I have to handle it myself ... and that I'm free to do whatever I want, because anyway, they do not agree to pay more for my services... But I really cannot afford to pay the tax. [E., aged 43].* Such situations are less likely to appear in the case of young babysitters, who usually feel like being "adopted" by the parents they are working for: *She taught me everything, just like a mother, she showed me every single detail regarding childcare. I had absolutely no clue about it, as I hadn't worked as a nanny before. But*

one of the twins was more sensitive, and also very selective, and didn't allow anybody to be around her ... but she easily accepted me. And I think that's why she [the mother] chose me to take care of her twins. [I., aged 24].

c) Nannies' childcare activities: between taking care of children and caring about them

Last but not least, our field research is relevant for nannies' social practices, values, and cultural meanings regarding childcare, the contractualisation process of this occupation depending either on the duration of the relationship with the child they take care of, or on the different ways in which nannies think of and put into practice their ideas regarding raising and educating children. More specifically, longer childcare activities with the same child (or children) tend to become less formal and less contractual. At the same time, child-minding also depends on children's ages: regardless of the legal aspects of their working arrangements, interviewees are usually employed full-time for children under 3 years old (with a daily programme of at least 8 hours), and their working time decreases once toddlers grow up and become pre-school children. As such, nannies taking care of children enrolled in kindergartens or even in primary schools are generally asked for more flexible working arrangements.

Interviewees employed by Little Red Riding Hood are the only ones who invoke the possibility to choose between taking care of the same child for 8 or 10 hours daily and working for different families at the same time. Nevertheless, either of these options is perceived as having both advantages and disadvantages from the point of view of the childcare activities: *It's a special job, because [...] it's extremely difficult to have a high-quality routine with the same child, every day. So, it is very hard. It is very difficult because you are put to the test all the time, you must have a lot of imagination, you can't do the same things every day, the child has to always learn something, and this is very hard. If I would go every day to another family, for me it would be perfect, it would be easier. (...) It's more difficult, although there are also advantages ... you know the child, you know his/her habits, you know what to expect when the relationship lasts longer. But, as time passes, it's becoming increasingly difficult, you have to put an increasingly higher effort. This is ... my opinion. [S., aged 36].*

Regardless of the legal aspects of their working arrangements, all nannies have to provide both care and educational services. For instance, one nanny employed by Little Red Riding Hood sustains that: *One is always aware of his/her success or failure in life, so I don't disregard myself in any way because I work as a nanny. I consider I'm doing something very important for them, taking care of their child. And in the end, I do more than just staying with the child, I also educate him, and I give his parents the opportunity to leave in peace to work. [A., aged 52].* Another interviewee working out of her employment contract underlines her efforts in combining informal and formal education activities with caring duties: *You have to have a lot of patience, and always to give her [to the little girl] explanations for everything ... For example, we were on the street, and she wouldn't listen to me, she just wanted to roll on the ground. So I let go of her hand, and she replied 'Why are you yelling at me!?'". "Well, I'm not yelling. I'm just telling you to listen to me and to behave properly!" So the key is to have a lot of patience and to make her understand,*

you see? [...] Yesterday evening I tried to teach her letters and numbers and ... she told me I was malicious. So I said "But why?", and she replied "I'm mad at you!" "That's OK, I'm also upset at you!", and I turned my back on her. Immediately she said "It was just a joke, please don't be upset at me!". And so we continued with the letters ... [...] Let me tell you something: she speaks extremely well for her age! Ever since she was 4 or 5 months old, I used to stay near her little bed, and I was reading her fairy tales for hours ... she was gazing all over, while I was reading to her ... Maybe for my own children I hadn't had the time to look after them while doing all the housework and everything ... But with her, I was always keeping an eye on her ... and never let her unattended!" [G., aged 48]. Furthermore, one retired nanny working out of an employment contract declares that she would love to work abroad, for a Romanian family, as that would give her the opportunity to provide more educational activities for the children she would take care of [M., aged 60]. Another retired nanny underlines that all activities related to children (either care and medical care – managing them when they have a fever, for example, or education) have to be done through playing, which is, in her opinion, the best way to make children acquire different skills [F., aged 58]. Overall, the higher their level of education, the more nannies value and also place emphasis on educational activities. Otherwise, these activities can also depend on parents' requests – some of them simply prefer nannies to look after their children, while paying further for specialised educational services or activities (e.g. foreign language lessons, piano or music lessons, sports, etc.).

One of the main issues that emerges from our interviewees' narratives, regardless of the characteristics of their employment status, is related to the emotional attachment to the children, which also plays a very important role in the way nannies relate to their occupation: *We [nannies] are a 'mother to loan'. While under our observation, the concerns are the same ones ... I behave with the child just like a mother does ... [I., aged 51].* The many hours spent with the child, as well as the repetitive nature of this occupation, contribute to building an emotional attachment between the nanny and the child, irrespective of the contractual nature of the job. This emotional attachment is being reinforced by both the dominant discourse of "the best interest of the child" (according to which children are best cared for by their mothers or close relatives), and by the familialist cultural meanings that are hegemonic within contemporary Romanian society. Consequently, depending on their age, all nannies state that their work is "just like" mothering or grand-mothering, the reference to family relationships being, at the same time, a way to valorise as well as to legitimise their care work activities: *I raised her and took care of her since she was three and a half months old ...so I don't feel the difference between her and my own children! [...] I love her very much! I told you and I'm telling you again: I love her as if she were my own child!" [G., aged 48].* A similar example is the one of a nanny working out of her employment contract, who states that she clearly does not consider herself as part of the family she works for, but who declares the opposite when talking about the three children she looks after: *I don't know, I often wish they were my children. I am very attached to them. [...] Whenever I thought I would give up on them, I realised I would really miss them. When I come back from vacations, I miss them so much, sometimes also on the weekends ... Sometimes I look through the door eye, I see them coming down, I hear them*

... *they are very sweet!* [L., aged 36]. The different age categories do not account for any difference related to nannies' attitudes toward the children they take care of. For example, a 24 years old girl, in her first job as a nanny (out of any employment contract), calls herself an "adoptive mother". Similarly, older nannies declare that they behave as if they were children's grandmothers, and they even ask to be called "granny". Moreover, the nannies' emotional attachment also prevails whenever they have to take care of "difficult" children: *Previously I had to take care of two brothers, a boy and his younger sister, and the boy literally sucked my soul out of me! Unlike his sister, whom I truly loved, he used to make me extremely mad at him ... he was very beautiful, and very smart, but also very naughty and insolent! [...] He used to call me 'you stupid nanny', or 'bring me that, you're just a servant' ... But I knew that it was not his fault. His parents didn't know how to raise him, his mother used to slap him, he told me he hated his father because he was not as highly educated as his mother was ... So I was feeling so sorry for him ...* [F. aged 58].

At last, in contrast to the rest of our qualitative sample, there is only one exception of a nanny talking about feeling "affection from a distance" for the child she takes care of. Nevertheless, this attitude is not one of her own, as the children's parents were very keen from the very beginning to maintain a certain distance, although their requests were not legally stated in any employment contract: *I like the child, he became close to me but ... as I was banned from the beginning, 'don't do this, don't do that ...' I normally ... kept my distance. So, I truly like the child, yet from a distance. He's not like my grandson, to hug him, to kiss and to play with him ... no. There is a limit between the two of us: we do this and that and that's all.* [E., aged 43].

Concluding remarks

The different aspects of nannies' care work – their working arrangements, the ways in which they perceive themselves in relation to their activities, the relationships with the parents they work for and the children they take care of – are influenced by several factors. These factors include: the age category they belong to and their overall work experience, their professional interests and their previous insertion in the labour market, but also cultural values and practices. The latter are reflected both in the ways in which parents are influenced by the dominant values and norms regarding parenting and childcare, as well as the ways in which nannies, in their turn, are being influenced by the hegemonic cultural meanings regarding childcare and mothering.

Nannies' relationships with the parents they work for seem to depend mostly on their professional trajectories: those working under an employment contract, who have also been trained to work as nannies, value more the formal dimension of their activities, which also contributes not only to a more contractual relationship with the children's parents, but also to a more 'legitimate' professional status. Nevertheless, this trend can hardly be generalised. Notwithstanding their occupational status, nannies often feel that their work is not properly valued, and that they are not being treated in accordance with their professional expertise related to childcare. As for the rest of the nannies working without a real employment contract, their relationships with children's parents are also described as being "difficult", as their practical childcare experience is often considered as being problematic and inconsistent with "what has been written in the books". In all situations

identified within our field research, nannies seem to appreciate the relationships with the parents they work for, as well as to feel valued for their childcare activities only when they attempt to distance themselves from the formal and contractual dimension of their work, thus entering the more informal and familialist logic of their occupation (e.g. whenever compared to children's grandmothers). Nannies who have received at least basic training and who are closer to the idea of being professionals in the field of childcare (i.e. nannies employed by Little Red Riding Hood) place a greater emphasis on their knowledge and skills acquired through their formation. However, although these nannies consider that their training gives them more professional authority, parents do not always recognise and/or appreciate it. In this regard, existing research on the professionalisation of childcare activities underlines the difficulties and the ambiguities produced by the fact that this occupation unfolds in the family environment, both spatially and relationally, being thus intrinsically linked to the hegemonic cultural meanings related to mothering, parenting and the ideal of child's best interests. In other words, both nannies and parents are under the influence of these cultural meanings that play a very important role within the professionalisation process of home-based childcare activities.

As for nannies' relationships with the children they take care of, they also depend on their age and level of education, as well as on the ways in which both nannies and parents perceive and reproduce the current practices and values regarding parenting and childcare (in both its caring and educational dimensions). Nannies with a higher level of education usually emphasise the educational dimension of their childcare activities (through games, or fairy tales, etc.). Nevertheless, in all situations, nannies develop a strong emotional attachment to the children they take care of (i.e. one close to mothering), although it seems to be stronger and easier to identify this type of relationship in the cases of older nannies and of those having a less formal and contractual relationship with children's parents.

The professional trajectories of our interviewees and the extent to which they are (or are not) keen to develop the formal dimension of their occupation seem to be influenced mostly by their age, as well as by their social, educational, and financial status. Younger interviewees (under 30) do not perceive themselves as being professionals in the field of childminding: they work as nannies only temporarily, as if this occupation were not part of their professional trajectories. Furthermore, nannies who are between 30 and 50 years old usually consider that there is not enough social recognition attributed to their occupation, mostly because it is either underpaid (i.e. whenever under a real employment contract), or because, when it is undeclared in the long run, it becomes a source of social, financial, and professional vulnerability. Finally, the older ones (i.e. nannies over the age of 50 who, within our sample, are already pensioners) have no interest in professionalising their occupation, which is motivated only by their need for an extra income apart from pension benefits.

More precisely, all the financial implications presented above clearly indicate a low interest, at least from nannies' perspective, for a strict contractualisation of their work, which would imply tax payments and the implicit decrease of their net income. Younger nannies provide childcare services only temporarily, mostly for quick-earning reasons, and without being interested

in the rights related to the contractualisation of their work. Those who are pensioners do not need a proper contract as they already benefit from social and health insurances related to their retirement, so they have no interest in submitting their “extra” earnings, for home based childcare activities, to the tax system. Finally, the only ones who are interested in the contractualisation and the professionalisation of their occupation are middle-aged women, who are also very concerned about the social rights deriving from a formal occupation.

In a nutshell, one cannot stipulate the existing of a general need for professionalisation in the case of all women working formally or informally as nannies, as the need for building professional trajectories and the related perceptions differ widely from one group of age to another. Overall, our field research reveals that nannies are not directly concerned with professionalization issues that entail vocational training for childcare and education services, as well as the whole process related to grounding home-based childcare activities into the formal economy. Our interviewees do not claim for higher regulatory mechanisms for their activities, which suggests that the need for professionalization is a possible solution to avoid multiple overlapping vulnerabilities at the macro level, rather than an individual choice. Although they generally perceive their work as being of a high emotional, educational and social importance, our interviewees do not claim for more social recognition of their occupation. Moreover, they do not spontaneously speak of the idea of building a long-term professional career as a nanny, but they work as such in the absence of better alternatives. Furthermore, our interviewees are closer to the ideal of “nannies that care”, rather than the one of “professional nannies”, which can be explained by the local maternalism that nannies reproduce as social actors.

Our inquiry could be further developed according to at least three research directions. First, a detailed overview regarding nannies’ working arrangements at the macro level would be very useful for understanding to what extent this type of paid childcare activity has become a widespread social fact, or, in contrast, it represents only a limited social practice which emerges in specific socio-economic environments. Second, parents’ perspective should be taken into consideration in order to properly tackle the need for contractualisation and professionalisation of home-based childcare activities. For instance, an in-depth analysis of parents’ recruitment strategies and expectations related to nannies’ skills would certainly allow us to acquire a better understanding of the factors underpinning the formal and the informal dimensions of this occupation. Third, expanding our field research (e.g. by conducting in-depth interviews with the personnel working in specialised recruitment agencies that intermediate the first encounter between parents and nannies) could also make an important contribution to our analysis related to the contractualisation of childcare practices in contemporary Romania.

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