THE LADY AND THE MAID: RACIALISED GENDER RELATIONS IN GREEK-CYPRIOT HOUSEHOLDS

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Abstract

Over the last decade the Republic of Cyprus has become the destination of an increasing number of migrants from Third World countries and eastern Europe; many of whom are women who earn their living as sex workers or housemaids. The feminisation of labour migration to Cyprus is related to the increasing integration of native women in the national labour market, whereas the gendered ascription of domestic work has not changed. In view of the emergence of new inequalities within the gendered group of women, this paper will look at different notions of gender equality expressed by Greek-Cypriot women who take an active role in politics. It argues that even though many of the women interviewed endeavour to establish gender equality, the androcentric evaluation of gainful labour versus unpaid or at best lowly paid reproductive work, and hence gender inequality, is reproduced on a racialised level.

Introduction

Labour migration has become a structural characteristic of global labour markets. Due to the international division of labour, characterised by multi-layered structures of power and exploitation, more and more people find themselves compelled to leave their country in search of employment. The structural change of labour in favour of the service industries and the informal sector has contributed to a worldwide increase in the number of women being integrated into the labour market. This, however, has not ensured gender equality, as women are mainly found in the lower levels of the employment hierarchy with migrant women at the lowest end.[1] Since they neither belong to a privileged gender group nor to a dominant race or class, they are particularly exposed to discrimination and exploitation. Also in Cyprus the proportion of women migrants who earn their living as housemaids or sex workers has increased significantly. Only a few decades ago a typical country of emigration, Cyprus has now become the destination of an increasing number of

migrants from “Third World” countries and eastern Europe. It is estimated that around 30.000 legalised and 10.000 illegalised migrants currently stay in the Republic of Cyprus (see Anthias, 2000: 2).

This development is related to the increasing integration of native women in the national labour market. Although more and more Greek-Cypriot women have been incorporated into the labour force after the 1974 invasion[2] (see Loizos, 1981 and Stavrou, 1997), there is a continuation of women’s responsibility for domestic work (see Anthias, 2000: 29). Neither are care and services for families adequately provided by state agencies. As a consequence, the demand for women migrants to inexpensively fulfil “traditionally” female and mostly unpaid jobs such as household duties, child-care, geriatric nursing and sexual services has risen.[3]

Whereas migrant women employees are finding increasing attention in recent academic discourse[4], the local employers are hardly focused on at all.[5] My research was designed to determine Greek-Cypriot women’s perceptions of gender relations and gender equality in contemporary Greek-Cypriot society. I conducted a series of interviews with women who take an active role in politics and economy.[6] All of these women were involved in party politics or in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – sometimes in both – and quite a lot of them turned out to be employers of foreign housemaids. Their statements are presented here in order to provide the basis for further research and to raise related issues and questions.

While interrogating the new gendered and racialised division of domestic labour, I will in the following discuss the notions of modernization and gender equality expressed by the women I interviewed. I will then show how they relate to a concept of citizenship, which is based on the ideological construction of separate public and private spheres and produces gendered and racialised forms of exclusion.

The Private and the Public

The discussion of the public/private dichotomy has been central to women’s and gender studies for many years now. According to Hannah Arendt (1958) the private sphere was assigned to women and slaves as far back as in the antiquity. Simone de Beauvoir points out that because of the physiological structure of the female body the woman “is more enslaved to the species than the male, her animality is more manifest” (de Beauvoir, 1953: 239). And Sherry B. Ortner concludes that the domestic/public opposition derives from the pervasive nature/culture division which locates women more in the realm of nature, while men are more associated with the realm of culture. According to Ortner “the domestic unit – the biological family charged with reproducing and socializing new members of the society – is opposed to the public entity – the superimposed network of alliances and relationships that

is the society" whereas "women are associated with, and indeed more or less confined to, the domestic context" (Ortner, 1974: 78-79). Although she weakens de Beauvoir's argument by stating that the opposition between women/nature and men/culture is itself a cultural construct and not given by nature, Ortner fails to give sufficient weight to the understanding of men and women as social and cultural beings. Feminist theorists like Carol Pateman, however, show that the hierarchical division between the private and the public is far from being naturally given because of the physiological structure of the female and the male body, but is an ideological instrument of power which excludes women from the public sphere of politics and economy (see Pateman, 1989).

Still, the construction of the private and the public varies widely in different cultural contexts and must not be seen as unchangeable. Ethnographical studies like Jill Dubish's (1991) on gender, kinship and religion in a Greek village, or Jane Cowan's work (1991) on gendered spaces of pleasure in everyday life of a town in central Macedonia, show how the private and the public are contested grounds which are not at all static but constantly questioned and reproduced. Dual models of society tend to obscure the integration of the two spheres and to universalise a division of labour according to the dichotomies public/private and production/reproduction, which is peculiar to capitalistic societies (see Young, 1980). The consequence, however, must not be the complete rejection of these divisions, but the analysis of their historical and ideological context.

In view of current globalization processes such as labour migration and the neoliberal restructuring of the labour market, the ideological gender-specific division of the private and the public as separate realms of reproduction and production has to be once more reconsidered. Even though the number of women integrated in the labour market has increased significantly, a modification of the patriarchal notion of productive and reproductive work has not taken place. The responsibility for reproductive work is still assigned to women, leading either to a double load for professional women or to the employment of domestic servants. While native women are increasingly unavailable for this work, migrant women can often only find employment in this informal private sector (see Lutz, 2000: 18 ff.). Maria Rerrich describes this situation as the coincidence of two structurally caused states of distress which different groups of women face (see Rerrich, 1993: 100).

The question of reproduction, however, is not at all merely a women's question, but rather a question of the different evaluation of productive and reproductive work, which is vital for capitalism. With the employment of migrant housemaids the gender specific division of labour is also determined by aspects of race and class. Against this backdrop, we have to analyse when and how the dichotomy of production/reproduction in relation to public/private is contested or reinforced, in order

to legitimise socio-economic inequalities.

In the following, I will examine the statements of eight socially privileged and professionally successful women between 40 and 60 years of age who take an active role in party politics and who speak about their strategies in handling the multiple load of family, job and political activities. I will explore the discourse of these women – whom I perceive to belong to an older generation of politically active women – on gender equality with regard to the legitimating reference to "private" and "public" and – related to this – to "traditional" and "modern". Then, I will contrast these statements with those of NGO representatives, and explore what implications they may have in view of the exclusive concept of citizenship.

Claiming the Right to Participate in the Public Sphere

The research of Myria Vassiliadou on urban Greek-Cypriot middle-class women "indicates that feminism in Cyprus, even for the self-admitted feminists, is generally not conceived as a way of being and experiencing the world [...], but rather as an active participation in public life and a keen interest for changes in the law rather than in attitudes" (Vassiliadou, 1999: 15). This I also found striking in my own observations. There seems to be an older generation of politically active women in Cyprus who have more or less successfully struggled for their right to participate in party politics and to be recognised in their profession. In part they are also members of NGOs, where they seem to be mostly involved in public relations or are nonactive. They are proud of their personal success, and some consider themselves to be pioneers in the struggle for women's rights in Cyprus. Yet they claim that there is still a lot to be done to reach real gender equality. To emphasise this assertion, they usually refer to the persistent under-representation of women in the public sphere and to the high valuation of "traditional" gender roles in Cyprus.

Most of the older women I interviewed are sure that a better representation of women in politics and economy should lead to fundamental changes. Especially with regard to the Cyprus problem, many are convinced that more women in politics should contribute decisively to a peaceful solution. *"Men are always in favour of war. We are not. We want peace,"* is what one woman said. The reasons for the peacefulness of women are given on the grounds of an ascribed natural difference. One female politician, for example, stated that *"women are peace lovers by nature"* and another woman explained, *"We are keen on peace because we are all mothers."* Regarding the above-mentioned exclusion of women from the public sphere due to their ascribed role as potential mothers, these assessments have to be more closely scrutinised. The political theorist Mary Dietz points out that maternal thinking in politics actually reinforces the hierarchical division of the private and the public spheres. As it emerges from a relationship between unequals – mother and child

– it is “intimate, exclusive and particular“. Consequently, it is inconsistent with the ideal of democratic citizenship that is “collective, inclusive and generalised“. Thus motherhood does not at all provide women with the requisite capacities for citizenship. According to Dietz, if we look to the family as a model of democratic citizenship, we are looking in the wrong place. ”Not the language of love and compassion, but only the language of freedom and equality, citizenship and justice, will challenge nondemocratic and oppressive political institutions“ (Dietz, 1985: 34).

Often the older women in politics I interviewed argue that even though women are still underrepresented in the public sphere of politics and economy, the younger generation of women is already profiting notably from the preceding struggle for gender equality. One woman said: *”We are at the stage when the new generation is enjoying our efforts.“* Therefore, younger women unfortunately did not see any necessity in continuing the struggle for gender equality and had no interest in assuming an active role in politics, the older women stated. Many of the older and experienced women in politics were therefore involved in cross-party campaigns to promote women in key positions in public life. Moreover, they demanded more information about women in politics so that Cypriot women would become aware of the possibility and necessity to vote for women. Female politicians were said to be much less visible in the media and therefore less well known than their male colleagues. Hence, fewer men and women were voting for them.

On several occasions my interview partners emphasised the difficulties women are confronted with when they try to be accepted in the male dominated world of politics. Some of the older women related from their experiences how women in politics have to be prepared for nasty rumours concerning their private life. Against this backdrop, the reluctance of many women to take an active role in party politics is often traced back to the discrimination that confronts them. In addition, women are considered to be afraid of moving in the public sphere because they are said to be unfamiliar with it. Apart from this, the sole responsibility of women for household duties and child-care is cited as an obstacle to the political participation of women.

What it Means to be a “Modern” Woman

In her essay “One Leg in the Past, and One Leg in the Future“ (2001) Gisela Welz examines the modernization discourse of Greek-Cypriot opinion leaders and decision makers. According to Welz, the predominant majority of her interview partners have no doubts that Cyprus is witnessing a rapid transformation process, which is frequently named “modernity“ or “modernization“. “They either consider Cyprus as not yet truly modern, or, conversely, as far too modern already” (Welz, 2001: 12) while “modern” is usually associated with “Europe“ or the “West“. To Vassos Argyrou “modernity“, “Europe“, “the West“ or “the civilized world“ are ex-

changeable terms, which in public discourse describe the destiny of a journey that Greek-Cypriot society embarked on sixty years ago. Still, the reference to these terms actually serves less to describe a destiny toward which Cypriot society is proceeding than to legitimise and reproduce socio-economic inequalities (see Argyrou, 1996: 111 ff.).

I believe that both observations can be applied to the modernization discourse of the older women I interviewed regarding gender relations in Cyprus. Like the social actors whom Gisela Welz refers to, they consider gender relations in Greek-Cypriot society to be in a transitional state between "tradition" and "modernity": *"There is confusion in Cyprus about women's equality. We look like a modern society but we still have in mind all the tradition,"* a politically active woman stated. Gender relations in Cyprus are considered to be "still" backward, meaning "still" based on inequality, but well on the way to ensure gender equality as in western European countries or the USA, which are considered to have set standards pertaining to gender relations. But doubts are also expressed about the orientation of Greek-Cypriot society "to the West". A politically active journalist says*: "It's difficult to be a woman in a society like the Cypriot society today because you are supposed to be a modern person, and at the same time you are supposed to close your eyes and accept all the bad influences from Europe and the States."* In her eyes, due to the gender specific division of labour, women had been much better off in former times since they were far more respected for their work than today. And she ironically wonders whether a whole day in the office and all the housekeeping duties after work have really meant a gain in power for women.

The women I interviewed considered themselves to be "modern women" because they were no longer "merely" housewives but also professionals and politicians. This situation has often been described as a conflict between "traditional" and "modern" gender roles. With regard to the exploitation of migrant women for "traditionally" female housework, Vassos Argyrou's thesis about the modernization discourse of Greek-Cypriot society seems to be true for the gender discourse of the older generation of Greek-Cypriot urban middle-class women, too: They appeal to "modernity" or "gender equality" as "higher authorities", in order to legitimise their own participation in the prestigious public sphere of politics and economy whereas migrant women take care of the private sphere of housework and child care.

The "Modern" Double Load

The rearrangement of reproductive labour is hardly discussed as part of the "modernization" of gender relations. Rather, it is regarded as "modern" when a woman succeeds in the balancing act between job and family. A woman candidate for the coming elections said: *"A modern women who is well educated and who*

thinks correctly will put priorities in her life, and the first priority is our family. Perhaps you will have to work double, but if you can put things together, then I think you can do anything you like without leaving behind your family or your career.“ In this statement the ”modernization“ of gender relations is expected one-sidedly of the woman, and is measured by her ability to cope with the double load of job and family. An NGO activist named the difficulties of this multitasking and the twinges of remorse she had experienced: *“I was full of guilt because I was spending so much time on my work, and I had my children at home. It took a long struggle with myself to feel comfortable with it and to see that I can cope with both.”* In contrast to the politician quoted before, who represented the double load almost as a question of female strength of character and placed it on the personal level, the NGO activist designated the unequal distribution of reproductive labour in society as the cause of her guilty conscience. Consequently, she explicitly expanded the demand for equal rights to the area of housework, in which she represents an exception among the women of her generation: *”My husband helps me with the housework and I accept it because we belong to an older generation but when the husbands of the new generation say: ‘I help my wife’, I do not accept. ‘I share the work with my wife’, that I can accept.”*

Indeed, the combination of job and family becomes increasingly difficult for many Greek-Cypriot women because they can no longer rely on intergenerational care chains. A PR manager, whose daughter works as a lawyer, stated: *”My mother was still able to help me with my daughter because she was not working. She was a housewife like most Cypriot women. Now in our generation, because we are working, our daughters don't have the same facilities.”* Changing family structures also left a deficit in geriatric nursing. A woman who runs a law office claimed: *”As women who are working, we don't have the traditional family of the grandparents living together and taking care of the children and so on. The grandparents live in their own house now, and they don't have the daughter to take care of them when they are old.“* This problem is intensified by the fact that the social contributions of the state only offer an insufficient back-up for the “traditionally” unpaid woman's work.

Against this backdrop the attitude of my interview partners concerning the changes of “traditional” family structures were rather ambivalent. On the one hand, a progressive disintegration of the “traditional” family model was diagnosed and regretted as a loss of values. On the other hand, the dissolution of patriarchal family structures was welcomed, especially with regard to the discussion about domestic violence, which only recently has attracted public attention. However, almost all of the older women interviewed proudly stressed the great importance of family cohesion in Greek-Cypriot society. Because of this, it is probably more difficult to make inequalities within the family visible, which probably helps to exclude the question

of reproduction from the dominant equal rights discourse. Discourse about “modern“ gender relations primarily revolves around equal participation of women and men in the public sphere. Thus, to the older generation of my interview partners, equal rights meant first and foremost: more women in high positions in politics and economy.

The unequal distribution of reproductive work was mostly omitted from the equal rights discourse of the older women I interviewed. Rather, they saw themselves forced to fall back on migrant women to perform the domestic work: *”If you are primarily responsible for the children and the house and you are a career woman, you definitely need an assistant, otherwise you cannot cope,”* said a government employee. The employment of a housemaid makes it possible to spend the remaining time with the family ”meaningfully”. *”When I go home, I am glad that the child is there and I can spend two or three hours with him and don't have to think about doing any other work.”* Since men are considered to be ”not yet” ready to participate equally in reproductive work, grandmothers are available less to look after their grandchildren, daughters are no longer in a position to care for their old parents around the clock, and native women demand better payment to undertake these jobs, the employment of women migrants as housemaids is seen as a necessity without alternative. One woman put it as simple as this: *”We cannot find Greek-Cypriots doing this kind of work. So it’s a necessity for us to have women from abroad.”*

In order to legitimise the employment of housemaids on the basis of exploitative and insecure employment contracts, the work relationship is reinterpreted on the part of the employers as charity or even development aid. *“Of course, they work for less money than a Cypriot woman would get, but for their country it's a lot of money, and they have to work for their children. I have one in my house. She is married with six children and she is working and sends the money home because she wants to educate her children. She is very happy to do that,”* said a barrister-at-law. The structural disadvantages that women migrant workers face were omitted from the legitimating discourse of their employers. They rather referred to good treatment and hospitality, which, however, is dependent on the individual employer: *”The general feeling is that they are really happy. They get quite a lot of money for their standard but also, I mean, they live as family members.”* Still, the fact that the work relationship is located in the private realm of the family is a main source of conflicts and creates problems for the employees because it prevents public monitoring and regulation which e.g. trade unions provide.[7] Therefore, the employees find themselves to a large extent at the mercy of their employers, who may or may not treat them fairly.

Challenging the Private/Public Dichotomy

For quite some time now, women in the Republic of Cyprus have been politically active outside the conventional way of political participation in party politics. Among many other political activities, they were involved in the EOKA's anticolonial struggle with the aim of *enosis,* and as "Mothers in Black", they have been publicly demanding information about their missing sons for many years now. Many women also take an active role in bicommunal activities or do charitable work in Christian societies. Also, a lot of women are involved in civic action groups or in other NGOs, which speak out for various objectives.

My NGO interview partners were members of the following three associations: the *Family Planning Association*, the *Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family* and the *Association for Single Parent Families and Friends*. I chose them because they all dealt with conflicts arising from current changes in the "traditional" hetero-patriarchal family structures. Concerning the work of the female Members of Parliament, the NGO activists were all rather dissatisfied. Also, the activities of the conventional women's organizations of political parties - largely made up by older women - were sharply criticised*: "They would like to be active but they are not. Also how do they define active? They get money from the government to go on conferences but they do nothing for women,"* I was told by a young NGO activist. In contrast to the way the women in party politics allegedly tackle problems, the women in NGOs expressed a very pragmatic attitude. A single mother for instance said*: "Until things change, my children have to live."* And another NGO activist expressed her aversion to party politics as follows: *"Party politics are male-dominated, unfriendly if not hostile to women, there's nepotism, patronage and definitely an old boys' network including sexist remarks, opinions etc. MPs are involved in many scandals, hang out at strip joints, tell sexist jokes in parliament and so on. I personally am very interested in politics but would never be involved in a party which is sexist and slimy."* And this is why many younger women would prefer to be active in NGOs and not in political parties. Furthermore, she stressed that party politics were not the only way of struggling for gender equality: *"Top-down is one strategy, what about bottom-up like NGOs?"*

Another NGO activist summarised the position of the three above-mentioned NGOs in Greek-Cypriot society as follows: *"They are naming the illness of the classic Cypriot family. What is the opinion in Cyprus of the family? It's a healthy family. Everything is okay and there is no violence. We have children because we like them, and nobody divorces. This is the traditional family that every Cypriot has in mind. Anything else is not ours. We don't want to accept it as part of our community. But in fact we have children that we do not want, we have violence in the family and we have divorces. So we have to deal with it."* Questioning the usual as-

signment of what is private and what is public a representative of the *Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family* said: *"I think family violence, especially in Cyprus, is something that has been around for tens, hundreds maybe, of years. But I think, because the issue is becoming more public, people are gaining awareness in the sense that they are realizing it's not a private problem, it's a public problem."*

If foreign housemaids become victims of violence, however, they find themselves in a paradoxical situation. The trade unions don't feel responsible for them because they are not considered to be regular employees and the *Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family* can only conditionally take action to help them because the domestic servants are in a work relationship and do not have family ties to their employers. The representative of the association stated: *"There is an increase of foreign women using our help hotline. But because we deal with domestic violence, it's kind of difficult for us to help women who are in abusive work relationships. We might be able to give them psychological support but in terms of legal measures we can't really help. Now what happens with the foreign workers who come to Cyprus is that they end up marrying Cypriots. Unfortunately again, we have instances of these women ending up in an abusive relationship or marriage. Both groups of women are stigmatised in Cyprus. Women who work in the nightclubs as well as women who work in the homes. I think racism as well as sexism is on the increase in Cyprus."*

A member of the Cypriot Immigrant Support Group stated: "The work contracts that these women sign are completely biased in favour of the employer who can dismiss them at any moment, which means they are immediately deported." Moreover, employers would often exploit and sexually harass them (quoted in The Cyprus Weekly, 17th of December 1999).[8] Obviously, the depreciation of unpaid reproductive work that housewives experience is extended to the lowly paid work of housemaids. Herewith the hierarchical gender specific division of private/public and reproduction/production is reproduced on a racialised level.

Racism and Sexism

The employment of foreign housemaids is not only a way out of the double load for local women. For many Greek-Cypriot families, a ("black") housemaid seems to be also an important status symbol. *"People in Cyprus are no poor people. The standard of living is high. There are women who have housekeepers although they are not working. Maybe they play cards,"* explained a journalist, who allegedly needed to employ a housemaid because she couldn't cope with the double load of job and family. In his examination of racism in Greek-Cypriot society, Nicos Trimikliniotis states that "domestic workers/servants are seen as a 'necessity' for every household that can afford them" since they signify a gain of prestige for Cypriots

(Trimikliniotis, 1999: 154). Whereas racist ascriptions because of skin colour are not the only reason for discrimination, the preference of Asian women for caring jobs in the house is linked to stereotyped notions of the “black (or dark) maid”, Trimikliniotis assumes. Moreover, it is remarkable that women from different geographical areas are preferred in different segments of the labour market. Whereas Filipino and Sri Lankan women are predominantly found in the households, eastern Europeans numerically dominate the sex industry.

A politician, who employed a Sri Lankan woman for housework and babysitting by the hour, deplores the racist attitude of Cypriots against foreign housemaids: *”Unfortunately, all over Cyprus these women are labelled as black the same way we were labelled as black by the British colonialists.”* At the same time, however, she expressed her concern about the influence of migrant women on her own culture. *”You will have a new generation of young children being brought up entirely by women who know nothing about our culture, about our environment, about our language, and this is a problem.“*

This fear of “foreign infiltration” is rather common in Cyprus. Among other things this can be traced back to the dominance of the national problem in political discourse and the public arena. Because of the importance given to this issue, all other problems of contemporary Greek-Cypriot society are subordinate to the solution of *the* Cyprus Problem (see Welz, 2001: 14). This attitude goes along with racism against migrants, which affects women migrants in a special way. Referring to state measures against foreign sex workers for example, an English speaking newspaper called the immigration of these women a ”silent invasion“ and hence invoked associations with the 1974 military invasion of Turkey (see The Cyprus Weekly 27th of August 1999).[9] Greek-Cypriot nationalists regard demographic and cultural changes caused by migrants as a danger to the national project (see Trimikliniotis, 1999: 159 ff). According to Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, foreign women face special discrimination due to the reproductive character of the work they are expected to perform. They rear children, prepare food, or offer sexual services, and are thus considered to be the direct transmitters of ethnic and national identity (see Anthias/Yuval Davis, 1992). Against this background, women migrants (and also female tourists) are particularly feared as importers of foreign cultures and values. Therefore, migrant housemaids are on the one hand exploited for reproductive work, but on the other hand feared as a threat to “native” culture precisely because of the kind of work they perform. “In other words, economic interests legitimise foreign workers whereas nationalist discourse sees them as undesirable” (Anthias, 2000: 35).

It seems, therefore, that what Vassiliadou describes concerning urban middle-class women in Cyprus also applies to the older women in party politics: ”All of

these women, however, devise methods of coping with the contradictions they face on an everyday basis and in their effort to do so, they often create 'others' amongst women whom they exclude from the in-groups they form. These 'others' could be members of separate ethnic groups, social classes, or sexual orientations, and so on" (Vassiliadou, 1999, 202). I will conclude now with some thoughts on the exclusion of "others" with regard to the gendered and racialised concept of citizenship.

The Exclusive Concept of Citizenship

According to Carol Pateman, citizenship is historically an androcentric concept which is essentially based on the hierarchic division of the private and the public. Whereas men were constructed as the "individuals" and "citizens" of political theory, women were considered to be subordinate to men and to belong to the private sphere. They were thought of as by nature lacking the characteristics required to participate in the public sphere of economy and citizenship. The natural difference ascribed to them, in particular their capacity for motherhood, was presented as the reason for their exclusion. Thus, women were to be the subordinate companions of the public male citizens, while their own political duty was to give birth to new citizens (see Pateman, 1988, 1992). However, citizenship is not only a gendered but also a racialised concept which may lead to various kinds of racism against migrants who are considered to be outside the national community. "The ways in which the public and private spheres are constructed, and the relationship of women to them, is in fact not only diverse in relation to ethnicity, but itself is dependent on the exercise of racist exclusions which intersect with those of gender" (Anthias/Yuval-Davis, 1992: 127-128).

Proceeding from Carol Pateman's argument that the "ascriptive domestic sphere" is "forgotten" in the theoretical distinctions of the private and public spheres of civil society, the culture theorist Homi K. Bhabha concludes: "By making visible the forgetting of the 'unhomely' moment in civil society, feminism specifies the patriarchal, gendered nature of civil society and disturbs the symmetry of private and public" (Bhabha, 1994: 11). This may be true for a younger generation of Greek-Cypriot women who are active in NGOs. For the older women in party politics I interviewed, however, this assessment has to be differentiated. On one hand, they question the public/private dichotomy with their own professional and political activities, but on the other hand, they contribute to a reinforcement of this hierarchical dichotomy by delegating the reproductive work to migrant women who are denied Cypriot citizenship and who are therefore excluded from the public sphere of politics. Thus, the private sphere of reproduction is reinforced as the domain of women where men do not have to take over responsibility.

"Feminist women [...] were found to be more aware of not only gender but also

class, ethnic, and sexual discrimination and divisions in society and less prone to create those 'others'", Vassiliadou argues in respect to her research on urban, middle-class class women in Cyprus. She further concludes "that awareness of one type of oppression was strongly related to awareness, and tolerance of other types and levels of oppression and 'otherness'" (Vassiliadou, 1999: 202). This assessment, however, cannot be confirmed by the results of my interviews. Quite on the contrary: The concentration of politically active Greek-Cypriot women on gender inequalities in politics and economy, the overcoming of which is connected to a gain in prestige to themselves, seems to rather contribute to the ignorance of other inequalities. Thus, what Birgit Rommelspacher considers to be the central problem of the feminist debate seems to apply more to the older women I interviewed: The analysis of power relations is cut off as soon as one's own dominances become visible (see Rommelspacher, 1995: 37).

Just as political theory has created women as "others" and has denied their participation in the public sphere of politics and economy for a long time, migrants are categorised as "others" and excluded from citizenship. This construction of "others" occurs in a multidimensional way: Cypriot women doubtlessly experience oppression because of their gender. Yet they are also members of an ethnic group and a social class which enjoys certain privileges compared to women and men from other population groups. Reflecting on the common basis of gender and ethnic divisions, Floya Anthias states that both divisions utilise implicit assumptions about the naturalness not only of difference but also of inequalities. "Both divisions involve practices of exclusion and the structuring of disadvantage in favour of the dominant ethnic and gender group" (Anthias, 1992: 111). Thus, structures of class, race, gender and sexuality are no independent variables. The oppression of each is inscribed within the other. It is constituted by and constitutive of the other (see Brah, 1996: 109). Therefore one-dimensional efforts to establish gender equality by focussing on the hierarchical polarization of women and men bear the risk of reproducing asymmetrical power relations without questioning their very basis.

The new racialised and gendered division of labour in the households must not be reduced to the relationship between the native and the migrant woman, the lady and the maid, but has to be analysed as an expression of the international neo-liberal division of labour, which does not work in favour of women. Capitalistic globalisation processes cause an increase of socio-economic inequalities but by the meaning they ascribe to the different spheres of productive and reproductive work they also offer new possibilities of self-realisation for some. To be integrated in the labour market is very positively connotated and has become a central and meaningful dimension in women's biographies. At the same time, domestic work is devalued as unpaid or lowly paid work, which does not even entail prestige. It seems to be forgotten as an integral part of the society's responsibility and can now be del-

egated to migrant women, at whose expense native women and men secure their own access to the prestigious labour market. Whereas gender roles in the public sphere might become more flexible, the private sphere of housework and child-care remains the domain of women. The androcentric evaluation of gainful employment versus reproductive work is reproduced on a racialised level.

Notes

[1] See e.g. Altvater/Mahnkopf, 1998; Le Breton Baumgartner, 1998; Sassen, 1998; Wichterich, 2000; Young, 1998.

[2] In 1999 women constituted 39,2 percent of the gainfully employed population (see Department of Statistics and Research, 2001). For a statistical representation of the progress in women's participation in the labour market from 1976 to 1994 see Stavrou, 1997: 61 ff.

[3] In a middle-class neighbourhood in Nicosia that Floya Anthias visited, 24 out of 26 families had a foreign maid (see Anthias, 2000: 30).

[4] See e.g. Lazaridis on women migrant workers in Greece, Andall on domestic workers in Italy, Escrivá on migrant women in Spain (all in Anthias/Lazaridis, 2000), Weyland, 1997 on Filipino housemaids in Turkey and Thiessen, 2000 on eastern European migrants in Germany.

[5] For an exception see Hess, 2001 on Slovakian Au Pairs and their German employers and Hess/Lenz, 2001.

[6] The interviews were conducted during a fieldwork excursion to the Republic of Cyprus in October/November 1999. It took place in the framework of the student research project "Cyprus: Contemporary Culture and Society" under the direction of Professor Gisela Welz from the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology of the University of Frankfurt, Germany. Information on the project is available at: www.rz.uni-frankfurt.de/FB/fb09/kulturanthro/e/projects/cyprus/intro.html

[7] Only recently trade unions discuss to take action to support foreign housemaids. Still, their main interest is to minimise the presence of migrant workers on the island (see Trimikliniotis, 1999: 156 ff.).

[8] The situation of migrant housemaids nowadays reminds in some respects of the treatment of Greek-Cypriot housemaids in the first half of the 20th century. It is estimated that about twenty percent of houses in town employed domestic servants from rural areas who were sometimes as young as eight years of age (see Surridge, 1930, quoted in Anthias, 1992). "They were often brought up by their employers and expected to work long hours, doing heavy work. Some girls were provided with dowries but other girls were ill-treated or sexually abused" (Anthias, 1992: 86).

[9] For an extensive discussion of racism in the media see Trimikliniotis, 1999.

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