
Paid Caregiving in the Gendered Life Course: A Study of Czech Nannies in Vietnamese Immigrant Families*

ADÉLA SOURALOVÁ**

Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Brno

Abstract: Vietnamese immigrant families in the Czech Republic often recruit Czech women to look after their children. Seen in the context of the dominant scholarship, this is quite a unique case in the field of care work where the employers are immigrants, while the employees are women of the host country. Drawing upon fifteen in-depth interviews with Czech nannies, this article analyses the motivations to become a nanny in a Vietnamese family. It employs the perspective of the life course in order to understand what changes in women's biographies lie behind these decisions. The author focuses on the transitions in nannies' life cycles at the crossroads of three aspects of their biographies: the family caregiving role, position in the labour market and the welfare state, and the meaning of paid caregiving. By looking at how women experience and attach meaning to transitions and phases in their life, which lead them to take a gendered job as a nanny, the author sheds light on the dynamics of the complex processes (taking place in families, the labour market, or the welfare state) that constitute these changes. This article—through the analysis of the motivations to become nannies—illuminates the broader issues of how gendered biographies are shaped under particular socio-economic and historical conditions, as well as by particular cultural expectations of caregiving.

Keywords: caregiving, life course, gender, nanny, Vietnamese immigrants, caring biographies

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** Direct all correspondence to: Adéla Souralová, Office for Population Studies, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University in Brno, Joštova 10, 602 00 Brno, Czech Republic, e-mail: asouralo@fss.muni.cz.

Introduction

Vietnamese immigrant families in the Czech Republic often recruit Czech women to look after their children. Seen in the context of the dominant scholarship, it is quite unique in the field of care work to find the immigrants in the position of the employers while the employees are women of the host country. In big cities, as well as in border regions, where there is traditionally a higher concentration of Vietnamese population, it is common to come across Czech women with Vietnamese children—playing in the playground, going for a walk, visiting a doctor, etc. In my research I met 15 of these women, and I conducted 15 in-depth interviews in order to examine the character of caregiving and the ties developed between nannies and children and to understand the meaning of paid caregiving in the women's biographies.¹

This study analyses how the women in my sample make sense of transitions and phases in their lives by becoming nannies in Vietnamese families. Starting with the basic question 'Why do women become nannies in Vietnamese families', I explore these women's motivations and contextualise them in their biographies. To this end I focused on particular life-course transitions and phases at moments of decision-making. I assume that behind these decisions there are critical moments in the nannies' biographies that play an essential role in their considerations and decisions about engaging in paid caregiving work. In this article I argue that all the identified transitions are gendered, given that they are experienced by gendered subjects in a gendered social structure, and that they are subject to normative expectations about, for instance, femininity, caregiving, and breadwinning. In order to answer the above-mentioned question and illuminate the gendered aspects of the nannies' life courses, I examined the nannies' life-course transitions and phases in reference to previous and subsequent events and phases.

At the centre of my analysis is caregiving: both the paid caregiving provided to Vietnamese families and the unpaid caregiving the women who work as nannies also provide to their own family members (children, grandchildren, and even husbands). Caregiving is considered one of the main arenas of 'doing gender' [West and Zimmerman 1987; Lutz 2008]. In the Western world, caregiving work in general, and motherhood in particular, are considered 'a cultural motif that functions to symbolically structure female adult biography' [McMahon 1995: 25]. Women build their 'normal biographies' [Šmausová 2002] in response

¹ These interviews are part of a larger study of Vietnamese immigrant families that hire Czech nannies. Between 2010 and 2012, I conducted a total of 50 in-depth interviews with Czech nannies (15), children of Vietnamese parents cared for by nannies (20), and Vietnamese immigrant mothers (15). The purpose of the research was to illuminate the character of ties and relations between nannies and mothers, nannies and children, and children and mothers. I analysed the developed ties through the lens of mutual dependency, paying particular attention to the emotionality, kinship ties, and mutuality in paid care-giving [see Souralová 2015].

to normative gender orders in which femininity and caring are inevitably entwined. There is a dialectical relationship between care and femininity: care is gendered as a female activity, and femininity is reaffirmed by care. For Dentinger and Clarkberg [2002: 859], caregiving is a role trajectory experienced throughout the life course. It is therefore an essential aspect of many transitions. For example, Moen, Robison and Fields [1994: 176] argue, 'while caregiving may well curtail employment, so too may employment serve as a possible deterrent to women becoming caregivers'. The pathways that lead to or away from caregiving cannot be analysed separately; they must always be interpreted in relation to other pathways, such as women's employment, family relationships, or other personal trajectories.

The case of Czech nannies in Vietnamese families, however, reveals a more complicated relationship between caregiving, paid work, and women's biographies. It is a relationship wherein paid caregiving is a boundary activity [see Lan 2003], characterised by a balance between employment and caregiving for family members. As many scholars acknowledge, caregiving work is never 'just another job' [Anderson 2000; Lutz 2008]. This relationship will be addressed below in an approach inspired by the concept of caring biographies developed by Prue Chamberlayne and Annette King in their book *Cultures of Care: Biographies of Carers in Britain and the Two Germanies* [2000]. Chamberlayne and King suggest understanding caregiving as a 'biographical project, in which past life events and experiences, expectations and aspirations for the future, as well as the present circumstances, are formatively involved in the development of informal care' [2000: 129]. The authors stress that both caring and being a caregiver are actively (re)negotiated and that 'caring is an active and potentially transformative process, in which carers need to adjust their perspectives of their own lives to accommodate caring into their own life perspectives' [ibid.: 130].

Following this analytical perspective, I first identify the critical moments or 'break points' in women's biographies by listening to the nannies' stories and tracing which events in their lives these women stress. I then contextualise these moments within the biography of a particular nanny and examine them from three different angles: in relation to caregiving in general (past, current, and future), to employment, and to paid caregiving. All three angles are approached in the form of memories, interpretations of current situations and events, and anticipation of future changes and developments.

First, looking at a nanny's 'caregiving' raises questions about her family and intergenerational relationships. I consider how a particular life change is experienced in relation to a woman's understanding of her family caregiving role. This question opens the door to analysing the meaning of childcare in a nanny's biography in relation to her experience, expectations, and future aspirations (mothering and grandmothing). Second, the focus on the nannies' (structural) 'position in the labour market and welfare state' raises the question of how these women harmonise their breadwinning and caregiving responsibilities. This means focusing also on how nannies themselves both in financial terms and in terms of self-

perception and subjectivity (what it means to be a worker, unemployed, or retired). And third, illuminating the meaning of 'paid caregiving' in the context of a person's biography compels us to ask the following questions: What did these women get out of paid caregiving? What kind of needs did caregiving satisfy at the given time? What did nannies expect to receive from caregiving work? And how were their expectations met (or not met)?

The life-course perspective is rarely employed in the scholarship on paid (child) care work. It appears in transnational motherhood research, where we can observe how migrant mothers harmonise their own caregiving and paid caregiving responsibilities [see Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Parreñas 2005; Erel 2009; Lutz 2011]—and in motivation analyses, where the transition to unemployment is identified as a catalyst for care work (see, e.g., the research on Slovak elderly care workers in Bahna [2014]). This article seeks to contribute to the scholarship on paid care work by addressing the dual role of caregiving in caregivers' biographies. On the following pages, caregiving is addressed both as an activity that introduces profound changes during particular life phases (when *it is* enacted—in the case of parental leave—but also when *it cannot be* enacted—in the case of distant grandmotherhood) and as a response to those changes. Looking at how women experience and attach meaning to the transitions and phases in their life (which lead them to take a gendered job as a nanny) also illuminates the dynamics of the complex processes that constitute changes occurring in families, the labour market, and the welfare state. By analysing the women's motivations for becoming nannies, this article illuminates the broader issue of how gendered biographies are shaped by particular socio-economic and historical conditions and the cultural expectations of caregiving.

The article is organised as follows: I first provide a brief introduction to the main conceptual framework of my analytical strategy and then describe the empirical material—data collection and analysis—followed by a discussion of the limitations of my sample that need to be taken into account when reading the article. I then present the findings of my analysis and classify the women who become nannies into five groups according to the kinds of transitions they experienced when becoming nannies. I contextualise these transitions with the nannies' gendered biographies and relate them to their caregiving, family, and intergenerational ties; to their position in the labour market and the welfare state; and to the aim and meaning paid caregiving has for them. In the concluding section I summarise the findings and discuss them in the context of the general framework of gender studies, care-work studies, and life-course studies.

Caregiving as a life contingency: gendered aspects of care

In this section I will briefly outline the framework that inspires my understanding of caregiving and paid caregiving in the context of gendered biographies. The main starting point here can be summed up in the words of Moen, Robison

and Fields, who argue that ‘a life course approach [to caregiving] encourages a view of *caregiving as a life contingency*, a consequence of the interdependence of life paths of family members and the situational imperatives concomitant with family crises or ongoing family strains’ [1994: 177; emphasis added]. Following this statement, I will highlight three images of caregiving (and its relation to paid work) that appear in the scholarship on caregiving and are essential to understanding the experiences of the nannies in my sample.

Caregiving as non-paid work

Feminist sociology and philosophy are particularly interested in the issues of gender division in unpaid reproductive labour, that is, labour performed out of love [Bock and Duden 1977] and usually without due recognition [Uhde 2012]. Unpaid caregiving is present in different stages of women’s biographies and is the indicator of successful womanhood. This is especially so in the case of motherhood, which in Western societies is entwined or even equated with womanhood. This equation is widely criticised by black feminist scholars [e.g. Collins 1993]. In addition, mothering is not the only phase in women’s biographies where unpaid caregiving comes to the fore. A few decades after giving birth to their own children, women find themselves in the role of grandmothers. And grand-motherhood is usually considered to be the continuation of previous mothering. This assumption—which clearly demonstrates the presence of caregiving in different life stages—has been confirmed by many scholars in reference to Czech society [Možný, Přidalová and Bánovcová 2003; Hasmanová Marhánková 2009; Hasmanová Marhánková and Štípková 2014; Petrová Kafková 2014]. However, intergenerational caregiving also operates in the opposite direction. As the Czech population ages, there are growing numbers of elderly people who need caregivers. These caregivers are often women who take on the responsibility of caring for their elderly parents [Brody 1981; Finley 1989]. The need for caregiving emerges in two generations (the youngest and the oldest one), while the ‘burden of caring’ is transferred to the generation in between, the ‘sandwich generation’, whose caring capacities must be equally distributed between their still dependent children and parents already in need of support [Brody 1981, Grundy and Henretta 2006].

Caregiving versus paid work

As noted in the introduction above, there is a dialectical relationship between employment and caregiving: employment can deter or at least postpone caregiving and vice versa. However, in the majority of cases the relationship could best be described in terms of work-life balance. How women balance family and work life has been a topic of many research studies. In her well-known study, Arlie R. Hochschild described the emergence of the ‘second shift’ in the United States

[Hochschild 1989]. Comparing the American labour market in the 1950s and the 1980s, Hochschild examined the feminisation of the workforce and the ways in which couples share housework. She concluded that only 20% of couples share housework equally; most women start their 'second shift' of work when they arrive home, where they end up doing the lion's share of the housework.

In her article on non-paid housework in Czech households, Marta Vohlídalová [2012] argues that, despite the growing individualisation of society, the traditional division of gender roles in families is maintained. Similarly to what Hochschild found in the 1980s in the United States, today in the Czech Republic working mothers continue to perform most of the housework. Using quantitative data² Vohlídalová shows how domestic and caregiving work is divided among partners in the household: working women spend an average of 27.6 hours per week on domestic tasks—17.9 hours on housework and 9.7 hours on caregiving; men, by contrast, spend only 14.9 hours on domestic tasks—8.8 hours of housework and 6.1 hours of caregiving. This situation is not new to Czech society. If we look back to post-war Czechoslovakia, when the feminisation of the workforce began, we see that at that time women were (fully) responsible for the household chores. Men did not participate in housework at all. It was the state, rather, that began to assume responsibility for caregiving and domestic work by supporting collective solutions such as nurseries or, for instance, the Liberated Household organisations [Jechová 2008; Hašková 2007; Láníková and Souralová 2015].

Caregiving as paid work

While women have entered the masculinised labour market and, as Cameron Lynne Macdonald writes, have passed 'the test of manhood' there [Macdonald 2010], the feminised private sphere remains assigned to women, outside men's interest [Lutz 2011; Bikova 2010]. Since the 1970s we have witnessed an explosion in paid domestic work service [Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003], most of which is supplied by immigrant women. The racial division of reproductive labour [Glenn 1992], stratified reproduction [Colen 1995], care chains [Hochschild 2000], and the international division of reproductive labour [Parreñas 2000] are all terms that have been used to describe the newly emergent interdependencies and inequalities between women of distinct ethnic and/or class backgrounds. These analyses illuminate the inner logic of the class- and ethnic-based delegation of domestic work, which is often criticised by scholars as inherently unequal and exploitative [Rollins 1985; Romero 1992; Anderson 2000]. As Rothman [1989: 43] pointedly states: 'When performed by mothers, we call this mothering ... when performed

² The survey 'Life and Work Trajectories 2010' included 4010 respondents in the age of 20–65. The question asked: 'How many hours on average do you spend on caregiving and housework every week?'

by hired hands, we call it unskilled.’ In paid caregiving work, ‘women are linked by gender and differentiated by race and class’ [Parreñas 2000: 562; see also Lan 2003; Andall 2003].

All above-mentioned forms of caregiving—unpaid care, care harmonised with paid work, and paid care—are discussed in my study. The women in my study made their decisions to become nannies when they entered a particular stage of the life cycle. Who are these nannies, what do they have in common, and how do they differ? The next section describes the basic characteristics of the nannies in my research sample.

Study design: researching care biographies

My findings are based on data collected between spring 2010 and autumn 2012, when I conducted interviews with 20 second-generation immigrant children (ages 16–25), 15 nannies, and 15 first-generation immigrant mothers [Souralová 2015]. During the interviews, I searched for answers to the following questions: What are the motivations for having or becoming a nanny? What ideas about childcare are persistent in the relationship, where do these ideas come from, and how they are articulated and practised in everyday care? How is paid childcare contextualised in post-migratory family resettlement? How is it contextualised in relation to family and kinship ties? How is the continuity of these ties achieved? In answering these questions, my research illuminated how the relationships between Vietnamese parents, their children, and nannies are narrated, constructed, and understood as a part of (1) post-migratory biographies; a redefinition of kinship life; resettlement; and the struggle for belonging, in the case of the (Vietnamese) families (mothers and children); and (2) the caring biographies and personal trajectories of the nannies.

In this study, I mainly analyse the interviews I conducted with 15 nannies. In these interviews, I sought to examine the dynamics of the relationships between nannies and children and nannies and mothers, and the continuity and changes in the life course of the women in the sample. It is obvious that paid caregiving is a time-bound activity, in the sense that it establishes a set of responsibilities and relationships that change over time as the children grow up and their needs evolve from dependence on adults (nannies and mothers) to self-sufficiency when they no longer need a nanny. Therefore, in my research I looked at two forms of relationships: (1) the relationships that are formed during paid caregiving, and (2) the relationships that are maintained and reproduced after paid caregiving ends. In order to trace these two forms of relationships, I had to precisely define my sampling design. I created a list of criteria for my sample that reflected my main objectives. In the case of the nannies, the essential criterion was that the woman be in contact with a cared-for child—she was either currently taking care of a child (7 nannies in my sample) or had taken care of a child and maintained some type of relationship with him/her (8 nannies in my sample).

Table 1. Profiles of the study participants

PSEUDONYM	POSITION IN WELFARE STATE*	NUMBER OF FAMILIES	FAMILY STATUS
Ms Špačková	Parental leave	5	married, 2 children under the age of 15
Ms Brhlíková	Disability pensioner	1	divorced, 3 children between the ages of 22 and 28
Ms Křepelková	Unemployed after parental leave	5	married, 2 children under the age of 18
Ms Kosová	Pensioner	1	married, 1 great-grandchild, age 2
Ms Zezulková	Pensioner	1	married, 1 grandson, age 8
Ms Orlová	Pensioner	2	living with a partner, 4 grandchildren between the ages of 17 and 27
Ms Dudková	Pensioner	1	living with a partner, 3 grandchildren between the ages of 19 and 28
Ms Andulková	Pensioner	1	widowed, 3 grandchildren between the ages of 20 and 27
Ms Lelková	Pensioner + care for husband	1	married, 2 grandchildren, ages 17 and 20
Ms Jestřabová	Unemployed after parental leave	2	married, 2 children, ages 15 and 19
Ms Zvonková	Unemployed + care for husband	1	married, 1 child, age 16
Ms Kolibříková	Pensioner	1	married, 3 grandchildren, between the ages of 10 and 16
Ms Havranová	Pensioner + care for son	1	married, childless**
Ms Rorýsová	Employed	2	married, 2 children, ages 13 and 16
Ms Čápková	Unemployed	2	divorced, 2 children, ages 10 and 13

* Position in the welfare state at the time of recruitment.

** At the time of the interview the son the woman had cared for had already passed away.

All of the nannies (except one) shared a basic characteristic: they were dependent on the welfare state. As to family status, four of the women lived by themselves (either divorced or widowed), and were thus the exclusive breadwinners in their household. Most of my nannies-interviewees had worked for one family; if they had worked for more than one family (see the third column of Table 1), this refers to work for families in succession, not simultaneously. When I was finishing my research, I learnt that a new model of delegated childcare had emerged in the Vietnamese 'community': one Czech woman taking care of more than one child from more than one family. This model was not included in my sample; therefore, all the nannies I interviewed were working or had worked as a nanny for just one family/child at a time.

Dependence on the welfare state is the most important characteristic shared by (all) the nannies in my sample. Why are women who are dependent on the welfare state the most appropriate candidates for a job as a nanny? How does this characteristic relate to the practice of paid caregiving for Vietnamese children? And what does it mean to be a nanny in a Vietnamese family? These questions are addressed in the sections below.

Being a nanny in a Vietnamese family

Vietnamese immigrants are the third-largest group of immigrants in the Czech Republic. Approximately 60 000 Vietnamese live in the country and account for 16% of the immigrant population (out of around 440 000 immigrants) and 0.6% of the country's total population of 10 million. While there are no official statistics on the numbers of families hiring nannies, my interviews suggest that having a Czech nanny has become a norm within the community (some interviewees suggest that approximately 80 or 90% of families hire nannies). This is in sharp contrast to the majority population, where only 1–2% of families use private nannies [Hašková 2008; see also Hašková 2011].

Demand for nannies must be viewed within the context of post-migratory family settlement. These include three changes that the families must deal with: a change in work life, in the sociocultural organisation of care, and in the family network. Upon coming to the new country, Vietnamese parents find themselves in 'a new economic world and labour market'. Most of them become part of the migrant economy—normally as entrepreneurs in wholesaling and retailing (i.e. owners of small shops and/or open-air markets [see Baláž and Williams 2007]). The roots of such occupational concentration can be found in the early 1990s, when obtaining a business license represented a way in which migrants already in the country under the terms of agreements between the previous regime and other countries could formalise and legalise their residence in the Czech Republic [Brouček 2003]. This choice typically requires an enormous investment in time, and at the expense of a private life. 'If we close the shop, we won't earn anything',

many of my interviewees stressed when pointing out the lack of time spent with their families and children.

A second dimension that shapes the demand for nannies is 'the balancing between two cultural worlds'. The differing arrangements for care and state support in Vietnam (four months of paid maternity leave and a network of childcare facilities) and the Czech Republic (up to four years of paid parental leave and a decline in state support for public childcare) put parents in an awkward position, where the preferred ideals from one country cannot be fulfilled in another one. Living in a transnational social field, the parents have at their disposal multiple referential frames, which provide them with often contradictory idea(l)s about child care and its arrangements. This means a return to the workplace when the child is a few months (rather than years) old. This again is closely connected to the third issue: 'the absence of kin (more precisely grandmothers) to whom child care is usually delegated in Vietnam'. Hiring a Czech nanny for many parents is a reaction to the post-migratory disconnection from the kinship network. By employing Czech nannies, the home-country model of care can be imitated: the Czech nanny supplements the mother and takes the place of the child's grandmother. Finding a Czech nanny is a simulation of a pre-existing family model, adapted to the post-migration reality. In other words, the game does not change; in both the pre-migration and post-migration context, the mother and father both work, and the children are looked after by someone else. Under the new rules in the new country, only the players change—instead of a grandma, the nanny steps in.

Under these conditions, the Vietnamese parents seek out nannies. In the majority of the cases in my sample, it is the Vietnamese parents who actively looked for Czech women, not the other way round. Two Czech women in my sample found work as a nanny through a friend who had already worked as a nanny. Two other women were looking for a job where they could earn some extra money. When one of them, Ms Křepelková, saw an advertisement in a 'Vietnamese shop' that read 'we are looking for someone to watch', she assumed that the owners needed somebody to guard the clothes in the shop. When she inquired, they offered her a job looking after a child. Eleven nannies in my sample described how they had been contacted 'out of the blue' and been asked to become nannies. The offer usually came from networks of friends and the women's reactions varied between immediate consent to initial doubts and worries followed by the consent. My research findings suggest that caregiving jobs are usually not actively sought out by potential nannies, but rather are offered to women through a personal contact.

Being a nanny in a Vietnamese family is an activity that could best be described with the following adjectives: time-consuming, demanding, paid, and fulfilling. First, it is time-consuming because nanny's 'work hours' match and frequently even exceed the work hours of parents. There are four patterns of organising caregiving, each of which impacts the nanny's involvement in a child's

life in different ways. There are 'live-out' nannies (3 in my sample), who usually enter the household (their workplace) in the morning and leave in the evening. The nannies only perform caregiving functions and are not responsible for household chores. They work between 8 and 12 hours a day, sometimes including weekends. There are also nannies who care for children in their own household. Either the child is dropped off at the nanny's home in the morning and picked up in the evening (live-out child, 7 nannies in my sample), or the child may even live with the nanny (live-in child, 4 nannies in my sample). While in the first case the work hours resemble those of live-out nannies that go to the family's home, in the case of a live-in child, a nanny's work hours can extend to 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It is obvious that for nannies of live-in children, caregiving extends throughout the entire day, and the borderline between caregiving work and leisure time is blurred. The nanny's life is subordinated to the child's life. In addition to the three patterns already mentioned, there is also a fourth pattern, which is the least common: that of the 'live-in' nanny, where the nanny lives in the household of the cared-for child. In my sample, only one nanny had such an arrangement, and it was only for a limited period of time. The investment of time on the part of the nanny in this case is very similar to that in the 'live-in' child arrangement.

Second, caregiving is a demanding activity, as it entails caring for toddlers as well as school children. Among families seeking nannies, the age of the child can range from several months (in case of children born in the Czech Republic) to several years (in the case of migrant children). It is quite common for Vietnamese mothers to return to the workplace when the child is six months old, from which time most childcare responsibilities fall on the nanny. These responsibilities include not only caring for the child's physical and emotional well-being, but also assisting in activities outside the household—such as going to the doctor or attending parent-teacher meetings. Nannies also take part in making decisions affecting the children. Such decisions include not only relatively minor issues, such as what to eat or what to do, but also significant issues such as selecting a kindergarten or school. This is especially true in the case of live-in children who live with nannies and see their parents only once a week/month. Under this caregiving arrangement—where the parents lose daily contact with their children—it is inevitable that many parents temporarily lose control over their child's up-bringing.

Third, caregiving is a paid activity, as nannies receive a salary from the Vietnamese parents. As mentioned above, all the nannies (with one exception) were dependent on the welfare state when contacted to become nannies. This means that all the nannies were receiving regular, guaranteed income (from the state), and caregiving offered them some 'extra cash'. These nannies were working entirely in the informal sector, and without a contract or labour law protection. In other words, caregiving of Vietnamese children was not the sole breadwinning activity for any of my nanny-interviewees. And, as many nannies reported, care-

giving could never be an exclusive source of income, as the pay is insufficient to live on. Ms Křepelková (unemployed, nanny in her fifth family) described the pay for her work in the following words: 'You can't count it as an hourly wage. That's simply impossible. You're getting less than 20 CZK (0.75 EUR). And deal or no deal. But if you like doing it, then why not?' Ms Křepelková is referring here to two essential aspects of being a nanny in a Vietnamese family that other nannies also frequently mention: the financial aspect and the emotional one. The first is the economic side of 'paid' childcare. All the nannies agreed that taking care of Vietnamese children is an activity that can rarely be done just for the money. In 2012, when I conducted my research, the average salary in the Czech Republic was just over 24 000 CZK (889 EUR).³ The minimum wage at that time was 8000 CZK (296 EUR) per month or 48 CZK (1.8 EUR) per hour.⁴ The average pay of the nannies in my sample was 7000 CZK (259 EUR), while the most common salary for a nanny was 6000 CZK (222 EUR) per month. With regard to worktime requirements, they vary widely between nanny jobs. Given that being a nanny in a Vietnamese family is a full-time activity, the income earned is often not comparable to that earned in the regular labour market.⁵

The second issue referred to in Ms Křepelková's quotation is that of *wanting* to become a nanny and *liking* being a nanny. (Paid) child caregiving holds a special meaning for nannies; it assumes a prominent place in their lives because it requires emotional engagement [Hochschild 1983; England 2005; Uttal and Tuominen 1999]. This leads us to the fourth attribute of being a nanny in a Vietnamese family: that it is a fulfilling activity. The intensity of contact between child and nanny creates close ties that are characterised by emotionality, reciprocity, and intimacy. In some cases these ties are temporary, and contact between the child and nanny ends when the family no longer needs the nanny (which is usually when the child enters kindergarten, primary school, or when he/she is old enough to take care of him/herself). In many cases, however, the relationship between nanny and child is permanent and the contact is maintained into the child's adulthood.

³ Czech Statistical Office.

⁴ Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

⁵ Although nannies in Vietnamese families are paid much less money than nannies in Czech families, they usually do not do anything to improve their salary (they neither complain nor negotiate it with the parents). In the narratives, the nannies emphasised other benefits they have from paid caregiving (above all the emotional interaction between them and the children). This is true especially for nannies who start their caregiving job after retirement and who find in caregiving a meaningful hobby. The parents probably rely on the fact that the money that the nannies receive from them is not their only income so they can pay less than the standard amount.

Table 2. Nannies' transitions in relation to aspects of their biographies

TRANSITION	CAREGIVING, FAMILY AND INTER-GENERATIONAL TIES	LABOUR MARKET/WELFARE STATE POSITION	PAID CAREGIVING AND ITS AIM
MATERNITY LEAVE	Current motherhood	Temporary exclusion/parental leave benefits	Diversification of income, doing present motherhood
POST-MATERNITY LEAVE RE-INTEGRATION	Chain caregiving, including motherhood	(Voluntary) exclusion/ unemployment benefits	An activity with a special gendered meaning, diversification of income
RESPONSIBILITY FOR FULL-TIME CAREGIVING	Dependence of a family member	Retirement or unemployment/ care allowance (to care for a family member)	Diversification of caregiving practices
DISABILITY RETIREMENT	Passed motherhood, missing grandmotherhood	Uncertain and limited participation/ disability pension	Transitioning between the period of mothering and grandmothering
RETIREMENT	Missing intensive grandmotherhood	Exclusion/pension	Fulfilment, active ageing, inter-generational relations

'And then everything changed': care work as a response to ruptures

Having described the general characteristics of caregiving arrangements, I will now turn to an analysis of the nannies' biographies. In what follows, I identify five transitions in my interviewees' lives that motivated my interviewees to become nannies. Consistent with the analytical strategy described in the introduction of this study, I here pay close attention to the nannies' decisions in relation to their caregiving, family, and intergenerational ties; their position in the labour market and the welfare state; and the aim and meaning of paid caregiving. Table 2 provides an overview of the nannies' transitions in relation to the aspects of their biographies analysed and further elaborated below.

In the table, and in the text below, the transitions are sorted chronologically, according to the typical or average age at which these nannies entered a particular phase. In each of these phases the women's role in the family changed (they became mothers, started taking care of a dependent family member, and became grandmothers) and, simultaneously, the nannies deal with the transitions to and from the labour market. Some of the transitions are expected and predictable

(leaving the labour market, going on parental leave, and taking retirement); others are independent of the woman's age and are totally unexpected and unpredictable (caregiving for an ill family member, disability pension). Nevertheless, as this section will demonstrate, caregiving appears to be the 'steady rock' in these women's lives despite the diversities in their biographies and transitions.

From labour market to motherhood: caregiving as diversification of income

Browsing websites with advertisements offering childcare, I found one placed by Ms Spáčilová. She wrote that she was on maternity leave and was offering to 'take care of children, including Vietnamese ones'. I called her to ask her if she had already found a family. In a short phone call, Ms Spáčilová explained why she had decided to place this advertisement: 'Mothers who are on maternity leave do this frequently. It's normal for them to take in other children when they are at home with their own. I wanted to try it too.' To fully understand Ms Spáčilová's motives we must first understand the current conditions of family leave. In the Czech Republic (and in other CEE countries) there are two kinds of paid family leave. First, there are maternity leave benefits available for 28 weeks with a wage replacement rate of 69% [Sirovátka and Saxonberg 2006]. Parental leave is available for a longer period (up to four years). Since 2006 parents (most often mothers) can choose the length of parental leave and the amount of the wage replacement rate as spread over the selected leave duration.⁶

For the first two categories of women, there are three critical issues in current family leave arrangements that shape women's decisions to become nannies. The first is the long duration of parental leave, which allows women to stay at home with a child for up to four years. Second, parents often choose to take four-year parental leave for a variety of reasons: nannies with experience of long parental leave usually say that they took long leave because they wanted to enjoy their children, who they felt grow up too fast. Another reason may be the lack of nurseries and kindergartens for children under 3. The lack of state support for childcare leads women/parents to stay home (longer) with their children. Third, if women opt to take the maximum length of parental leave, they receive a social wage that is only about one-fifth of the average salary.⁷ This often leads mothers to look for a part-

⁶ The amount of money for four years is 220 000 CZK (8148 EUR). This means that a parent can draw the money for 19 months (a monthly amount of almost 12 000 CZK, 444 EUR) up to 45 months (at around 5100 CZK, 189 EUR a month). The choice of the parental leave length is not free for all women—it is administratively limited by the previous income and health insurance [see Dudová 2008].

⁷ In addition, the mothers who choose four-year parental leave do not have the certainty of reintegration into the labour market because employers only have to guarantee mothers a job if they return after three years.

time job to earn extra money for the family budget. For this reason, paid caregiving seems to be a suitable solution for women who want to stay at home with their children for as long as the state enables them to by paying them social benefits.

'I wanted to stay at home with my children but we needed money', said Ms Špačková, when she recalled the beginning of her paid caregiving. Ms Špačková was in her mid-twenties when she gave birth to her first child and was on parental leave when she was asked to become a nanny and take care of two Vietnamese boys. This first experience with paid caregiving eventually developed into a 'career' as a nanny in various Vietnamese households. Ms Špačková took care of children from five different families during her two parental leaves. Despite the fact that the initial motives for becoming a nanny had to do with improving her family's income, Ms Špačková did not consider her paid caregiving work strictly as a job. As noted by Hodnagneu-Sotelo [2001: 9–10; see also Lutz 2008; Anderson 2001], domestic work is regarded as 'something other than employment'. There are several reasons for this: the stigma attached to domestic work; the fact that domestic work is performed in private homes; the association of domestic work with 'women's "natural" expressions of love for their families'; and the personal, idiosyncratic nature of the activity [Hodnagneu-Sotelo 2001]. All these factors are present in Ms Špačková's description of caregiving. There are three key reasons why she—as well as almost all the nannies in my sample—did not think of caregiving for Vietnamese children in terms of employment.

First, Ms Špačková and the other nannies disregarded the role of money in their narratives about caregiving. This may be due to the efforts the nannies made (in the interviews) to emphasise the personal ties that often developed between them and the children. The fact that these 'pure', close, and kinship-like nanny-child relationships are conditioned by financial transactions between the parents and the nanny is often ignored or omitted in interviews. This reluctance to mention money may also reflect the particular nature of the pay received from Vietnamese parents, in particular that the pay is low (see above), irregular (money is paid under the table), and non-exclusive (it is extra money for the nanny on top of the regular social benefits she receives from the state). Second, the nannies provided caregiving in their own or in the families' private homes and it involved activities that require proximity and intimacy. Ms Špačková looked after the children in her apartment, because there she doesn't have to answer to anyone else. 'I can do what I want and need whenever I want', the nanny said, when explaining why she appreciated the physical arrangements of caregiving. The fact that she was providing care in her home made her feel comfortable and her home became a temporary home for the cared-for Vietnamese children.

Finally, paid caregiving is linked to ideal and actual mothering strategies and ideologies. Ms Špačková recalls: 'I was already looking after my children so I decided to take on other children.' Here the nanny appears to say that paid caregiving does not imply any extra burden in her life, it is rather an activity that she is already doing—with or without salary—while mothering her own

children. As a nanny, a woman can be at home without violating her primary social role and responsibilities as a mother [see also Tuominen 2003]. As many scholars have noted, the reasons for becoming a nanny are related to traditional motherhood [Armenia 2009; Neslon 1990, 1994]. In Nelson's study [1990], 85% of the daycare providers she interviewed stated that they started providing this service because they wanted to stay home with their own children. Nelson [1994: 193] also points out the following paradox: 'family day-care providers ... provide family day care in order to enact a "traditional", at-home, mothering ideal. In doing so, they inevitably offer a service in which they do not believe.' In other words, while mothers who provide paid caregiving are not violating their actual mothering, they inevitably compromise their ideal of good mothering. In order to balance this tension, the nannies in my sample usually employed what Uttal [1993] called 'moral hierarchies'—judgements about a mother's mothering. The nannies usually reported that they would not have been able to leave their children and return to workplace as early as Vietnamese mothers do. Ms Zvonková (see the third category), for example, said: 'I wouldn't have the heart and stomach for that'—where 'that' means delegating mothering to other people. These moral hierarchies help nannies (mothers who work as nannies) to define themselves as superior to working mothers (mothers who work outside the home).

These moral hierarchies only make sense when paid caregiving is not coded as a job (inherently incompatible with intensive mothering), but rather as a part of a mothering strategy. That is why the nannies highlighted that all their decisions regarding paid caregiving, were made according to what they, the nannies, considered best for their own children. These nannies viewed paid childcare as an activity that does not challenge a woman's role as a mother. Ms Špačková said that she always made her decisions to work as a nanny by taking into consideration the needs of her own children. Ms Špačková sought to reconcile the inherent tensions between paid caregiving and caring for her own children by emphasising the well-being of her own children and the benefits to her children of being cared for in the company of the other mothers' children.

I took children whose ages were similar to those of my kids so that they [the children] understood each other. ... My kids were very fond of the Vietnamese children. When we ended caregiving for Tony, my younger daughter was two years old. She was so upset, she kept saying 'I want Tony, I want Tony'. So sometimes they were really unhappy without these kids.

The case of Ms Špačková, and her view of paid caregiving as 'something that I just do when I do mothering', shows the close connection between the nanny's mothering and paid caregiving. Becoming a nanny offers a pathway to the practice of good mothering. Paid childcare work enables a woman to intensify her role as mother by giving her the time, space, and money to be an intensive, stay-at-home, caring mother. This role is temporary, and usually lasts only until the

end of the woman's parental leave from work. The end of caregiving is inevitably determined by the date on which a nanny's parental leave ends and the nanny re-enters the labour market. At that point the woman's caring biography and work biography are again separated. For the nannies in the following category, however, the role of caregiver extends over most of her biography.

From motherhood to labour market: chain caregiving as an escape from employment

When I first met Ms Křepelková in 2010, she was a nanny working for her fifth Vietnamese family. When the number of children cared for and the length of time being a nanny were added up, Ms Křepelková was definitely the most experienced nanny in my sample. Also, she was proud of being a caregiver, and during the interview she presented herself as 'a very good' caregiver. When describing the roots of her caregiving career, Ms Křepelková referred to early childhood when her gender socialisation shaped her personality—through caregiving:

I have always had a very warm relationship to children and liked them. I am not educated in childcare or being a teacher, but I have plenty of experience. Since my childhood, it was like a kindergarten in our household ... I was looking after my siblings, then some children of my relatives and friends. I just liked it.

This quotation further supports the argument presented in the preceding section and acknowledged by many scholars: that the skills required for childcare and household management elude or resist evaluation according to meritocratic principles because they are considered to be everyday skills that do not require formal training [Lutz 2011; Bakan and Stasiulis 1995; Murray 1998]. For Ms Křepelková, caregiving is the most natural activity she could ever do and does not require any formal training. Caregiving—from childhood, when she looked after her siblings, to motherhood and her work history as a nanny—shaped her personality and significantly structured her biography. Similar experience was depicted by Ms Jestřábová. She also started her career as a caregiver soon after her parental leave ended. When her parental leave finished, she found herself unemployed. Then, ten years ago, some Vietnamese parents living in the same area contacted her and asked her to become a nanny. Neither Ms Křepelková nor Ms Jestřábová had been active in the regular labour market since giving birth to their children (both of them had two children when I interviewed them, their oldest children were 16 and 18 years old, respectively). While for women in the preceding category, taking care of a Vietnamese child meant a temporary intensification of caregiving, for nannies in this category this form of caregiving constitutes an extension of caregiving across their biographies.

To contextualise such caregiving experience, we must fully understand the broader context of the women's transition from parental leave to regular employ-

ment. Both Ms Křepelková and Ms Jestřábová are from the generation of mothers that was able to take advantage of four-year parental leave and also witnessed the rapid decline in the number of nurseries in the country (see above). As Hašková has shown in her analysis of working mothers, over the last five decades working mothers have altered their strategies for achieving an acceptable balance between work and home life. While in the 1960s 75% of mothers stayed home with their children for up to two years (61% of them for a maximum of one year), in the 1990s only 22% did (in addition, 51% of women stayed between two and three years and 27% stayed even longer than three years) [Hašková 2005⁸]. The trend towards the 'refamilisation' of government policies (a process in post-communist countries that has been described by many scholars, such as Sirovátka and Sax-onberg [2006] and Szelewa and Polakowski [2008]) is reflected in changing daily parenting practices. The model of 'parental leave chaining' became important in the 1990s. Hašková [2011] reported that mothers more often continue their first parental leave with a second pregnancy and they return to the labour market when their second parental leave ends.

Having chosen to use the maximum period of parental leave and to chain their parental leaves, Ms Křepelková and Ms Jestřábová are examples of the above-mentioned trend. Simultaneously, their experience mirrors the difficulties women face when returning to the labour market after a long break. These women find themselves in the stage of the life cycle which is supposed to be dedicated to productive activity. But even if they want to find a job, it is hard for them to do so because of how long they have been out of the labour market. For these women, turning to the irregular labour market to continue performing an activity they have been doing over the last couple of years is a simple and readily available solution.

Like the previous group, Ms Křepelková and Ms Jestřábová pursue their trajectories as nannies in conjunction with their mothering. Providing paid care for a Vietnamese child enables the two women to continue the intensive caregiving they experienced during parental leave. When faced with the crisis of the end of parental leave, these nannies jump at the opportunity to lengthen their caregiving and postpone or even altogether avoid returning to the regular labour market. Within the context of their caregiving biographies, such an opportunity is (again) rarely understood as a strictly money-making activity, but rather as a form of emancipation. Paid caregiving is emancipating in two respects:

First, paid caregiving frees these women from having to enter an unsatisfactory or demanding labour market and enables *the emancipation of their work biographies*. By not being 'just another job' [Anderson 2001] or 'perfectly normal job' [Lutz 2011] performed in 'just another labour market' [Lutz 2008], the shadow work of caregiving gives these women an alternative space where they can create their work biographies. Despite being demanding and time-consuming, provid-

⁸ The number of years spent on maternity/parental leave with the first child.

ing paid caregiving for Vietnamese families is more enjoyable for these nannies than any other activity in the regular labour market. Moreover, the nannies welcome the irregularity and invisibility of this work because it allows them to 'stay in the shadows' and to enjoy the best of both worlds—official and stable income from the welfare state⁹ and the extra money received under the table from the Vietnamese parents.

Second, paid caregiving enables the *emancipation of their caring biographies*, which are supported and nurtured, and the critical role of caregiving across the stages of a women's life cycle is thereby strengthened. Chained parental leave evolves into chained paid caregiving. These nannies are freed from the problem of how to balance work and personal life, as paid caregiving provides nannies with the perfect conditions for providing their own children with unpaid caregiving. Becoming a nanny at the end of parental leave allows these women to continue caring for their children while at the same time contributing to family income. This is not last-chance or undesirable work but, on the contrary, a chosen opportunity and a chance to do work they like and prefer doing in the productive phase of life.

Although the nannies talk about paid caregiving as though it were an ideal job with no negative side to it, it is important also to consider the risks that working in the informal labour market holds for their current and future lives. In the beginning these women appreciate this work as a temporary solution to their situation [see also Dudová and Hašková 2014] and as a strategy that enables them to create caring biographies and do intensive mothering—and this is what they prefer for the time being. They turn to the informal labour market because the regular labour market does not provide them with opportunities that can be suitably combined with their intensive mothering strategy. And they are stuck in the informal labour market, which offers no security and only low income because the road back to the regular labour market and its benefits becomes more and more difficult the longer they stay at home as caregivers. The nannies surely know that doing this work will affect their financial situation later in life (their pension entitlement), but they brush any potential risks aside and consider them irrelevant and subordinate to their caregiving decisions.

From caregiving to multiple caregiving: care as a gift

There were three women in my sample who were caring for a dependent family member at the time they decided to become a nanny. All of them mentioned caring for a dependent as the main motivation for becoming a nanny. Ms Lelková

⁹ When the women started their careers as nannies they were collecting an unemployment benefit, and when they were no longer eligible for that they began to collect a disability benefit.

was already a pensioner when her husband had a stroke and became dependent on her. Ms Zvonková was in her early forties when her husband developed cancer. Ms Havranová was a pensioner when her son suddenly became seriously ill. The women were taking care of their loved ones full time and around the clock and one of them had to leave the labour market altogether. All of these women found themselves isolated in their own households in the role of caregivers.

Each of these women was confronted with a traumatic and unexpected situation and that provoked a crisis that was not directly related to the woman's age or stage in the life course (unlike family leave or retirement). Despite being in different life stages, these three nannies shared a common view on the meaning of caregiving. The motivation for providing paid caregiving to Vietnamese children was their need for a job. In the interviews, that need was manifested as two-fold. On the one hand there was the need for money, and on the other the need for an enjoyable activity. As Ms Zvonková concluded in her interview: 'I needed the money and I was happy to have these children.' Her short statement must be understood in the context of her relationship with the children she cares for. I met Ms Zvonková in her apartment and while we sat and talked in her kitchen I could see various objects that the girl she cared for had made for her 'Aunt Jana'. There were pictures of hearts and flowers on the fridge dedicated 'to my auntie Jana', and there were ceramic figures, again made by the girl, on the counter. Ms Zvonková pointed to these objects when stating how much the girl's presence had helped her during a difficult period in her life.

Among the nannies in this group the need for money was the result of constraints on their time and movement because they had an ill member of the family. The nannies were receiving financial support for caring for an ill family member. However, that sum of money received was often insufficient. This was the case of Ms Zvonková, who was of productive age, and needed money for herself, her husband, and her son. Her opportunities to increase her earnings, however, were limited to within the four walls of her household, as she had to care for her husband 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. Ms Zvonková therefore asked her friend, Ms Jestřábová, to find her a Vietnamese family. Soon after, she started looking after a little Vietnamese girl. Ms Zvonková took care of the girl in her own apartment so that she could balance the (unpaid, family, and out-of-love-done) caregiving for her husband with the paid caregiving for the girl.

Nevertheless, it was not the need for money but the need for enjoyment that the nannies repeatedly cited in the interviews as the main factor behind their decision to become a nanny. The nannies wanted to take their minds off the emotionally exhausting work of caring for their family members (all of whom eventually passed away) and focus their attention elsewhere. Taking care of a little child at the beginning of life was a suitable activity for these women. The decision to become a nanny was also widely supported by the family members the women were caring for. Ms Lelková told me during the interview that her husband had encouraged her to accept the nanny job and remembered how he was cheered up

by the presence of the little boy, who spoke with him and brought new energy into their home. Ms Havranová reported a similar experience when her son's health was bad, and her husband needed to find psychological help. One day, her husband told her: 'you know, when the little boy puts his arms around me and hugs me, that's better than a thousand pills'.

The nannies see their paid caregiving as a form of escape from their hard everyday reality and as a way of getting through that reality. The nannies diversify their caregiving roles because they are seeking a release—a hobby—that makes caregiving for an ill family member more bearable. 'Care' becomes 'cure' when the women become embedded in the care relationships, which are both a burden, and a release. Taking care of a Vietnamese child is not merely an intensification of their caring biographies (see the first category), it is rather a creative process that provides them with the opportunity for emotional investment but also to be the recipients of the children's emotions and affection. Caregiving is not a one-way dynamic—going from the nanny to the child—but rather a mutual activity, requiring reciprocal giving and receiving. This notion of reciprocity suggests that caregiving that involves an exchange of emotions can be experienced as a gift [Mauss 1990 (1922)], and—as the next two categories make clear—this is linked to the nannies' gender and family identities.

From labour productivity to disability and uncertainty: caregiving as transitioning

Ms Brhlíková is on disability leave. She is the mother of three adult daughters and the sole breadwinner in her home. When faced with her new situation, she started looking for a job (in the informal labour market). She lives in an area with a large number of Vietnamese residents, so she went to a Vietnamese shop and applied for a position as a shop assistant. The owner of this shop, Ms Pham, said that she did not need any help in the shop, but she did need someone to take care of her baby. She recalled: 'I told her, "she's too young". She was peeking out of the pram and staring at me. Well, we made an agreement, and that was that.' For Ms Brhlíková, the pay she received for looking after three-year-old Than (6000 CZK¹⁰ per month for five days of caregiving per week) doubled her monthly income.

When she started caring for the little girl as a nanny, she transitioned from being a 'full-time mother' to being 'not yet a grandmother'.¹¹ While this period is usually taken up with some type of breadwinning activity, for Ms Brhlíková it was marked by a feeling of emptiness—both in terms of a lack of economic productivity, and weak intergenerational relations with other family members. A few years earlier Ms Brhlíková's daughters had all moved out to live with their

¹⁰ 222 EUR.

¹¹ Ms Brhlíková had spent twelve years on maternity and parental leave with her three daughters. Caring for her children was one of her main activities for several years.

partners and Ms Brhlíková had welcomed this as promising the future growth of her family; she could hardly wait to become a grandmother. She was therefore very disappointed when one of her daughters started traveling around the world, the second focused more on her career, and the third found a partner who was not interested in immediately having children. During the interview Ms Brhlíková complained several times that she longed to be a grandmother, and was sad that her daughters were 'slow' to have children. Evidently she often expressed her complaints to her daughters. When I met the daughter that often helps to take care of Than, she explained:

Now she [Ms Brhlíková] is happy because she has someone else to take care of and who depends on her. She is happy about this relationship. We all grew up, we moved away, and she used to feel alone and wanted to cuddle up to somebody. And she found it in this. So this kind of compensates things for her.

In this statement paid caregiving is directly described as a rite of passage from being a mother to being a grandmother (see Williams and Baláž [2004] for a similar observation on the experience of au pairs). The daughter also makes it clear that little Than helps her mother (the nanny) overcome the 'caregiving gap' between two life stages by bringing emotional fulfilment into her mother's life. Paid caregiving satisfies Ms Brhlíková's emotional needs and caring biography by providing her with an activity she values. The value of caregiving in a particular life stage is apparent when the nanny recalls her morning routine with the Vietnamese child:

She comes and calls 'granny, granny'. And I can't help myself, I would give her anything. Well, and I have this complex since I don't have my own grandchildren, so I have to come here to snuggle. She's our baby.

The discontinuity in the caring biography that is experienced during the passage from intensive mothering to (hoped-for) intensive grand-mothering is interpreted by Ms Brhlíková almost as her own failure ('complex'). Moreover, it is not only a failure in her caring biography, but in her gendered subjectivity. The explicit link between the loss of the intensive mothering experience and the need to be needed—which is fulfilled through paid childcare—suggests that for Ms Brhlíková, taking care of Than is inseparable from her negotiation of gendered subjectivity. Caregiving becomes a core activity of and key resource for doing and displaying gender [West and Zimmerman 1987; Goffman 1976]. Ms Brhlíková defines herself through caring for children—in the past her daughters, at present the Vietnamese girl, and in the future her grandchildren. Taking care of this child allows Ms Brhlíková to feel like a 'complete' person in a period when her caregiving role is challenged. Consequently, paid caregiving provides her with a way of *transitioning* between two life stages in which women are usually involved in caregiving.

From labour market to pension: caregiving as a new source of fulfilment

Late 1997 and early 1998 marked a turning point in Ms Orlová's life: On 1 January she became a pensioner. Approximately two weeks later she brought home a one-year-old Vietnamese girl named Diu. Ms Orlová had lived her entire life in a small village, not far from the large Czech city where she used to work. Upon finishing her studies, she began working as an accountant in a big factory. When her two sons were born, she stayed home 'for a while' (as she put it) on parental leave. After parental leave ended, she continued to work until her retirement. Her employment history, like those of the other nannies in my sample, was accompanied by a lack of time spent with her children, and later on, with her grandchildren. As she said during the interview:

I couldn't spend time with them because I had to work. I left in the morning and came back from work in the late afternoon, so I could not take care of them. My grandchildren went to kindergarten because, with my job, I couldn't help.

The nanny eventually retired and found herself in need of a new daily activity and regimen. The nanny described this transitional period in her biography in terms of a shift from productive activity to passivity and boredom.

We [her generation of women] were used to going to work our whole lives. So if I had stayed home in my fifties, I would have been bored. I didn't want to stay home.

What this quotation makes clear is Ms Orlová's negative view of retirement, which she associates with passivity ('staying' home). Other nannies in my sample expressed a similar attitude towards transitioning to retired life. Most of them initially welcomed the new situation (they were usually burnt out from the workplace), but later felt emptiness, loneliness and boredom. Ms Dudková, the nanny of an eight-year-old girl, reported in the interview:

She stared at me from her baby bed, I can see it like it was today. And I stared at her, and said to myself—we need each other. I was going through a kind of big personal crisis those days. Well, it was amazing.

Ms Orlová's and Ms Dudková's reflections reveal that retirement can usher in unwelcome changes, which paid caregiving can reverse or at least postpone. When paid caregiving comes into their lives, the nannies' time is suddenly filled with full-time activities and responsibilities. During the interviews, the nannies constantly articulated the reason for becoming a nanny as: 'getting something that they miss and need'. It was obvious from their narratives that paid childcare is 'self-consciously linked to [their] sense of self and identity' [Chamberlayne and King 2000: 131]. Tracing what the nannies emphasise in their narratives, we can

detect two interpretations of paid caregiving. Both revolve around the issues of emotion-sharing, self-actualisation, and self-definition, and both hinge on a perception that becoming a nanny is a means of making the passage from 'being a worker' to 'being a retiree' more tolerable.

The first interpretation of this transition period is found in the nannies' emphasis on maintaining an *active life after retirement*. Taking care of a Vietnamese child here means keeping active. In this sense, nanny work is a path to active ageing. Caring for a Vietnamese child slows down the process of becoming unproductive, and offers these women more time to adjust to a new phase of life [see also Souralová 2014]. This adjustment can mean two things: first, it is an adjustment to the new economic circumstances brought on by retirement. Ms Zezulková, who worked her entire adult life as a primary school teacher, describes her initial decision to become a nanny as a consequence of the decrease in family income caused by her retirement:

In the beginning I did it mainly because I saw money. I knew that I would be able to save money for a holiday. From my pension, I would have had to tighten my belt a lot.

Caregiving enables the nanny to maintain the living standards she had enjoyed before retiring. The average monthly pension for women in 2012 was 9777 CZK (while for men it was 11 947 CZK [ČSÚ 2013]¹²). When Ms Zezulková adds the 6000 CZK she receives from her employers each month to her monthly pension, she can earn almost as much as she had as a teacher.¹³ The period spent working as a nanny allows her to postpone the negative economic impact of retiring. However, Ms Zezulková's claims about the financial motives for caregiving were partly contradicted when she said that she liked the boys she cared for so much that she couldn't imagine not having them. This statement relates to the second adjustment, which is the nannies' need to keep active with daily activities or hobbies. The following quotation from my interview with Ms Dudková provides particular insight into how caregiving permeates the nanny's entire life, and how the nannies' and children's everyday life merge.

I just want to push her, so that she becomes a successful person. We play the piano and other things; we do gymnastics and she goes skiing with us. Well, she has no other choice than to go to the mountains because we ski as a family. And she couldn't experience skiing with her parents because they don't have time and don't know how to ski.

¹² 362 EUR and 442 EUR, respectively.

¹³ According to the web portal www.platy.cz, the average monthly salary for primary-school teachers is around 22 000 CZK (815 EUR gross wage).

The recurring use of the word 'we' (*we play piano, etc.*) indicates two aspects of the nanny-child relationship. First, it indicates the interdependency of nanny and child—Ms Dudková spoke several times in the interview about a 'dependency that is not even healthy'. We can see here how they mutually accommodate each other's hobbies and make sacrifices; Thuy 'has no other choice' but to go to the mountains and engage in other educational and sports activities that Ms Dudková's children had also been 'encouraged to do'. Thuy's hobbies ('imported' into her life by her nanny) thus become the content of the nanny's life, as she supports the child by taking her to classes or practising the piano with the girl. The second important meaning of the word 'we' is that it serves as a boundary marker. By using it the nanny builds a barrier between what *we* (the nanny and child) share and *they* (the parents) do not. Mr Vašek, Ms Dudková's partner, who was present at the interview and who from the outset supported Ms Dudková's decision to become a nanny, gave me an example of their role in Thuy's life. Thuy's parents had bought the girl roller skates. 'They, the parents, bought them. But I was the one who held her hand when she was learning to skate!' He said this to emphasise the central role he and Ms Dudková have played in the girl's upbringing. 'We taught her everything', Ms Dudková added, and said that she would never stop looking after the girl: 'How can I stop [looking after her] now? I'll stop when I die. And Thuy says that she will take care of me when I am old and I need it.'

Ms Dudková's comments bring us to the second meaning of caregiving: the *capacity of caregiving to create inter-generational ties* enshrining the ideals of intimacy and reciprocity. For many nannies, taking care of a Vietnamese child represented the second or even third chance to become a full-time caregiver—which is the role the nannies valued most. Some nannies had not taken full-time parental leave because of work and social conditions (the short parental leave and a dense network of nurseries that used to exist). Both Ms Orlová and Ms Dudková gave birth to their children in the 1960s and 1970s, when 61% of women remained at home with a child for just one year¹⁴ (see above and Hašková [2005]). Two or three decades later these women were unable even to be full-time grandmothers because of their employment. Even though they were mothers and grandmothers, these women missed (and needed) the role of being a caregiver. For these nannies, the absence of grandchildren was a crucial formative aspect in their decision to become a nanny. Their taking care of a Vietnamese child is not a merely a way to pass the time in retirement, but rather gives them the chance to experience what they could not experience with their own grandchildren, either because they had to work when their grandchildren were young (as reported by Ms Orlová) or simply because their grandchildren live far away so they do not seem them very often.

While women in the first two groups chose to become nannies to fulfil their ideals of good mothering, nannies in this group turned to paid caregiving to

¹⁴ In addition, in the 1970s paid parental leave lasted only until the child reached the age of one, i.e. one year [Dudová 2008].

fulfil their ideals of intensive grandmothering. After retirement, Ms Orlová and Ms Dudková were able to be full-time grandmothers by caring for Vietnamese children, and quickly developed kinship ties with those children. These women became the children's 'grandmothers' and the children became the women's 'grandchildren'. Ms Dudková had love and pride in her voice when she spoke about how clever and beautiful Thuy was, and how all the skills the little girl has are thanks to her—the nanny. Ms Dudková also spoke of her own emotional dependence on Thuy. 'I am dependent on her', she told me, and kept expressing the worry that one day Thuy would no longer need her. Ms Dudková's narrative reflected an important aspect of paid caregiving—that caregiving is a reciprocal activity which involves the 'reciprocity of self' [Baldassar 2010]. This reciprocity leads to the creation of mutual dependency between the caring nanny and the cared-for child [Souralová 2015], and makes paid caregiving—despite its low valuation and little financial and social recognition—a valuable activity for the nanny, and one that provides the nanny personal happiness and self-actualisation as a woman and grandmother.

Conclusion: the formative role of paid caregiving

Drawing upon a study of Czech nannies caring for children of Vietnamese immigrant parents, this study illuminated the broader issues of the roles and meanings of caregiving over different stages of life. The life-course perspective served as a useful tool for analysing women's gendered biographies, women's responses to biographical transitions, and the value of caregiving in women's life stages. I argued that paid caregiving is by no means understood as merely a breadwinning activity. What, then, is the meaning of caregiving? What is the role of caregiving in nannies' lives? And how does this particular case contribute to our knowledge (in gender studies, care work and life-course scholarship)?

This paper contributes to the care work scholarship by showing how paid caregiving is defined as a formative activity that shapes nannies' views, relationships with others, their self-perception, and their self-identification. It provides the women with the means to relate to (1) ruptures and transitions in their biographies (a contribution to life-cycle scholarship), (2) other people, especially the children they care for and their parents, and (3) themselves as gendered human beings (contribution to gender studies). The particular case of native nannies working for immigrant families illuminates some general aspects of paid caregiving which might be less visible in the case of immigrant nannies, for whom care work is a breadwinning activity, and as the second and third points show, it is highly relevant for our understanding of care work itself. The first point is probably more rooted in the specific nature of the studied case; nevertheless, it provides evidence of the crucial role of caregiving in various phases of life cycle.

First, paid caregiving figures in the lives of these nannies as a *gendered answer to biographical ruptures*, providing them with an alternative space in which to

redefine their everyday lives. This redefinition seeks to strike a balance between two life stages and adjust to a new living situation. For some nannies paid caregiving is primarily an opportunity to contribute to the family budget (nanny-mothers on parental leave, or nanny-wives who are simultaneously taking care of an ill family member). For other nannies, paid caregiving is an activity that can be performed outside the regular labour market. In the case of these nannies, paid caregiving either prevents re-entry into the regular labour market (after parental leave in productive age), or enables them to be active after retirement when the participation on labour market is terminated.

The Czech nannies who work for Vietnamese families are women who in various stages of their lives are looking for an activity to give structure to their everyday life, and they find this in caregiving, which structures above all their biography [Nelson 1990; McMahan 1995]. This is even truer for those women whose caring biographies override their work biographies and for whom caring for a child represents a primary activity in life. The analysis therefore contributes to life-course scholarship because it shows the role of caregiving at milestones in a gendered life course. The women adopt the culturally and institutionally embedded scenario of 'normal female biographies' in which particular stages are devoted to caring for other people, typically children or grandchildren. When transitioning between stages they may have many other options available to them, but they turn to caregiving because it is an activity that they have already done, they feel confident in it—or at least they are expected to feel this way. From this point of view, we can see how much one caregiving stage (meaning a phase usually devoted to unpaid caregiving, such as mothering, grandothering) creates a path for the emergence of another one (this time dedicated to paid caregiving). And both of these stages are dependent on each other and provide nannies with an explanatory framework for their caregiving decisions—women become nannies in order to be a present mother, to become a present grandmother, and to be caregivers after mothering and before grandmothering.

Second, paid caregiving is also a *bonding activity which (re)produces interpersonal, interethnic and intergenerational ties*. These ties develop out of a cont(r)act, which is initially made in order to establish—on the basis of a verbal agreement—an exchange of money for caregiving. However, shared intimacy and emotions lead to the formation of strong kinship ties between nannies and children.¹⁵ These ties usually last beyond the time of the actual paid caregiving. Nannies commonly stay in touch with the children they took care of long after paid caregiving duties have ended (for the opposite to this model, where caring jobs have unhappy endings, see, for example, Hondagneu-Sotelo [2003]). This is especially true for nannies who are roughly the same age as the children's grandmothers. Paid caregiving brings intergenerational satisfaction into the lives of these nan-

¹⁵ The ties between nannies and the children's parents tend to remain distant, based on the employment logic. Only in some cases they can be described as a friendship.

nies, and with their 'Vietnamese grandchildren' the Czech 'grandmothers' can experience intensive grandmothing and be part of an intergenerational contract. While they are the grandmothers of their children's children, the nannies also voluntarily participate and actively create relationships that do not require a common ancestry or 'blood ties'. These relations are based on daily caregiving that step by step leads to loving a stranger, and here 'stranger' means both 'another mother's child' and an 'ethnically different child'. Simply put, caregiving has the capacity to connect and establish a bond between people from different ethnic backgrounds and make them part of one family.

Finally, paid caregiving is *a core activity through which nannies negotiate their gendered subjectivities*. Czech nannies in Vietnamese families always reflect upon paid caregiving in relation to their roles as mothers and/or grandmothers. Paid caregiving is always explained or justified by the nannies' unpaid caregiving responsibilities or absence thereof. These nannies turned to paid caregiving either because of the absence of unpaid caregiving (the woman had no intensive grandmothing experience with her own grandchildren), or as a result of the intensity of unpaid caregiving (in the case of the intensive mothering). The idea of 'loss' is present in the nannies' narratives; either the nannies missed out on intensive caregiving while they were employed in the labour market and want to make up for this with Vietnamese children, or the nannies want to avoid re-entering the regular labour market where they will no longer be able to stay home and care for their children. These nannies' personal stories are stories about the gender division of labour and the gendered labour market, which, in the nannies' views, does not provide them with the necessary conditions for a work-life balance. These women's stories shed light on how the 'normal biographies' of women are built on caring for others, and how different caregiving arrangements impact women's work biographies and family relations.

This study therefore contributes to gender studies scholarship in which the issue of care becomes an important topic through which the gendered (classed and ethnicised) relations are seen [Glenn 1992; Andall 2003; Parreñas 2000; Lan 2006]. The narratives of these Czech nannies illuminate the double gender logic of paid caregiving. On the one hand, the caregiving work is perceived as an activity requiring and linked to femininity. As noted by Murray [1998: 15]: caregiving is 'something that women naturally do; it is an extension of their culturally-sanctioned caregiving roles as mothers'. The nannies do not question their qualifications for caregiving and rely on a 'special combination of "natural" characteristics' [Bakan and Stasiulis 1995: 310; see also Lutz 2011]. That is why the interviewed women do not consider caregiving a job, but rather an extension of an activity that women normally and normatively have done, now do, and will do in the future. They do it *normally* in various stages of the life cycle—as mothers, grandmothers, or caregivers of other family members—out of love, and without pay. And they do it *normatively*—i.e. they feel they are expected to do caregiving, according to the normative expectations assigned to female subjectivities (in the

Czech society). The recruitment decisions of the nannies must always be seen in the context of a gendered labour market and gendered social policies which mark out the directions of their possible actions. Navigating such a space, the women choose the epitome of a gendered activity, which brings them both satisfaction and (unarticulated or even unrealised) risks.

The nannies themselves with their reflections on child care contribute to the re-definition of gendered aspects of caregiving. Their testimony sheds light on the value of care—both generally and in the lives of caregivers. No matter whether they were teachers, accountants, or shop assistants, the women in my sample chose to become nannies and to perform an activity that is neither financially nor socially recognised enough. These nannies have to deal with many comments and questions from people around them, such as ‘How can you do it?’ People often point out how unusual it is to see a Czech nanny and Vietnamese child. These kinds of questions spring from the fact that the delegation of childcare is not very common in the Czech Republic, and that these women are working as nannies for *immigrant* families. The nannies are aware that paid childcare is not socially recognised and, paradoxically, they often further contribute to the profession’s low social status by denying that they view their work as a real ‘job’. This is apparent in such statements as ‘I was caring for my children so I *just* picked another kid’, or ‘I didn’t want to work after retirement but I wanted a *hobby*’ and so on. Simply put, the nannies perceive paid care work as an intensification of mothering or grandmothering. The nannies are not involved in a ‘global battle’ for the improvement of the social status of paid caregiving and for its social recognition. They are quite happy with their current position, despite the obvious risks attached to it. However, they are very concerned about their personal battle in the sense of gaining recognition of their emotional investment and of their importance and irreplaceability in the lives of the children. For most nannies, this is the only recognition that can make paid caregiving meaningful as a personally valuable activity and a part of their gendered selves. In sum, caregiving is considered an activity essential for their gender identity work, an activity through which nannies can feel themselves to be fully women. Paid caregiving satisfies their need to feel needed, and feel ‘complete’ gendered human beings that define themselves through interdependence with other people.

ADÉLA SOURALOVÁ is an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology and the Office for Population Studies at Masaryk University in the Czech Republic. She specialises in research on paid care and migration and in particular on the family relationships of Vietnamese immigrants in the Czech Republic. The findings of her research on Vietnamese immigrant families that hire native Czech nannies were published in a book titled *New Perspectives on Mutual Dependency in Care-Giving* by Ashgate (2015).

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