

TRANSFORMING FAMILY SPACES THROUGH WORKER COOPERATIVES. A CASE STUDY ON SELF-ORGANISED CARE WORK IN NEW YORK CITY

Nora KOMPOSCH, Berne (Switzerland)*

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Summary

Numerous studies have shown worker cooperatives' potential to reduce the precarity and economic exclusion of marginalised groups. However, less is known about their other social effects. In particular, the impact of cooperative work on intimate scales such as family life and the home has received little academic attention. This article examines how joining a worker cooperative changes migrant women's social position in their intimate spaces: the family and the home.

The research focuses on migrant women who are members of cleaning or care-worker cooperatives in New York City. The data were gathered using a participatory research approach in interviews, participant observations, and a quantitative survey. The findings reveal that worker cooperatives have empowering effects on migrant women beyond the sphere of paid work. Worker cooperatives can transform the family spaces

* Nora KOMPOSCH MA BSc, Research Assistant in Social and Cultural Geography, Institute of Geography, University of Berne, Hallerstrasse 12, CH-3012 Berne, Switzerland. – E-Mail: nora.komposch@giub.unibe.ch.

of migrant women by increasing their resources as mothers, partners, daughters, and sisters. Although the additional unpaid workload as co-owners of cooperatives represents an extra burden for worker-owners, the women who participated in this study have more flexibility, more time off, and more voice in their families after joining a worker cooperative.

Keywords: Worker cooperatives, migrant entrepreneurship, family, home, participatory research, New York City

Zusammenfassung:

TRANSFORMATIONEN DES FAMILIENLEBENS DURCH ARBEITER/INNEN-KOOPERATIVEN. EINE FALLSTUDIE ÜBER SELBSTORGANISIERTE CARE-ARBEIT IN NEW YORK CITY

Zahlreiche Studien haben gezeigt, dass Arbeiter/innen-Kooperativen das Potenzial haben, Prekarität und wirtschaftliche Ausgrenzung von marginalisierten Gruppen zu verringern. Andere soziale Effekte wie die Auswirkungen der genossenschaftlichen Arbeit auf das Familienleben und das Zuhause der Arbeiter/innen sind bisher jedoch kaum wissenschaftlich untersucht worden. Dieser Artikel erläutert, wie sich die soziale Position von Migrantinnen, die Mitglieder von Reinigungs- oder Pflegekooperativen in New York City sind, in ihren Familien durch den Beitritt zu Arbeiter/innen-Kooperativen verändert hat.

Die in der vorliegenden Analyse verwendeten Daten wurden mit einem partizipativen Forschungsansatz erhoben. Sie bestehen aus Interviews, teilnehmenden Beobachtungen und einer quantitativen Umfrage. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass Arbeiter/innen-Kooperativen familiäre Räume verändern können, indem sich die Arbeiterinnen in ihren Rollen als Mütter, Partnerinnen, Töchter oder Schwestern selbstermächtigen. Obwohl die unbezahlte Arbeit als Miteigentümerinnen von Genossenschaften eine zusätzliche Belastung für die Arbeiterinnen darstellt, haben die Frauen, die an dieser Studie teilgenommen haben, mehr Flexibilität, mehr Freizeit und mehr Einfluss auf ihre Familien, seit sie einer Arbeiter/innen-Kooperative beigetreten sind.

Schlagwörter: Arbeiter/innen-Kooperativen, Unternehmertum von Migrant/inn/en, Familie, Zuhause, partizipative Forschung, New York City

1 Introduction

“As a migrant in New York, you experience many restrictions. [...] Discrimination is everywhere. [...] You are not treated the same way as the White people who speak English. Due to your skin colour or your language, you don't receive the services to which you would actually be entitled by law. [For example,] at work, when [the employers] don't give you any break time for lunch. [...] I [also] felt

discrimination for being a woman, by earning less than my male co-workers.”
(Valeria, worker-owner,¹ 46)

“Up until today, there are many people who continue to earn unjust wages and that’s where the cooperatives have a social impact. They create opportunities, especially for minorities [...] In the cooperative, we have the power to change things. And now I feel this [power] even at home. I have the possibility to improve [my life]. Before being in the cooperative I didn’t feel this way.” (Paula, worker-owner, 39)

Valeria’s and Paula’s quotes are illustrative of many worker-owners who have come to self-organise in worker cooperatives in New York City (NYC). Both of them migrated from Mexico to NYC, where they found themselves working for years in poorly paid, hazardous, and discriminatory employment conditions. As their statements indicate, such conditions seem to be the norm rather than the exception for many migrants, and notably migrant women, from the Global South² in NYC. Scientific findings also point in this direction. In global cities such as New York, strong labour market polarisation has created a growing demand for low-paid workers, which is supplied to a large extent by migrants from the Global South (SASSEN 2005). Scholars also argue that neoliberal developments have increased not only the poverty-related international migration (DELGADO WISE 2015), but also the precarity of low-paid labour in the migrant-receiving countries, for example through the dismantling of government regulations protecting workers at their workplaces (HEROD and AGUIAR 2006). Deficient regulations combined with the continuous arrival of new migrants have enabled employers to fill vacancies without being forced to improve working conditions (MAY et al. 2007). In addition, many migrants do not have access to basic resources such as knowledge of their legal rights, union organising, language skills, or recognition of home-country educational degrees, which further complicates access to well-paid jobs in their new country of residence (BAUDER 2003; EVANS et al. 2005; HEROD and AGUIAR 2006; RIAÑO 2011).

Due to gender discrimination in the labour market, access to well-paid jobs is generally harder for women than for men (KUNZE 2005). Therefore, as scholars have shown for various regional contexts, migrant women are often pushed into poorly paid fields, such as cleaning and care work (ANDERSON 2010; FRASER 2016; PAUL 2017; RIAÑO et al. 2015; SCHILLIGER 2015). Furthermore, especially in workplaces that isolate workers by limiting social interactions during working time, migrant women are exposed to exploitative working conditions and risks, including unpaid overtime, inadequate safety precautions, and sexual assaults by employers (YEUNG 2018). As a result, YEUNG has stressed the importance of paying attention to the specific challenges faced by migrant women (ibid.).

¹ A “worker-owner” is a member of a worker cooperative. The notion implies that the person is both worker and owner of the cooperative.

² For reasons of legibility, I will mainly use the reduced term “migrant women” in this article. This refers to migrant women from the Global South. However, this should not negate the diversity of experience of various migrant women from the Global South but should highlight the structural difficulties for this population group in New York City.

At the same time, numerous studies have shown that cooperative work offers a poverty alleviation strategy by reducing income inequality (JONES AUSTIN 2014), circumventing precarious labour (BERRY and BELL 2017) and empowering the workers (SPEAR 2000), particularly women (BACON 2010; ESTEBAN-SALVADOR et al. 2019) and economically marginalised population groups (GORDON NEMBHARD 2014). While gender issues within the cooperative movement and an increase in women-owned cooperatives has attracted increasing attention (BACON 2010; ESTEBAN-SALVADOR et al. 2019; ILO 2015, 2012; MILLER 2011), little research has examined the cooperatives' social impacts beyond the financial realm of paid work, especially for migrant women. Theodoros RAKOPOULOS analysed kinship and social relations within and around cooperative work in South Italy and calls for more studies on the individual cooperative experience: "To re-establish cooperativism as an anthropological concern, we need to return it to the subjective experience of participating in 'it'." (RAKOPOULOS 2018, p. 196). Lauren HUDSON, who examined multiple solidarity economy projects in NYC, also emphasises the importance of going beyond the discourse about cooperatives as a tool for poverty alleviation (HUDSON 2018).

To understand the social situation of migrant women working in and owning worker cooperatives, it is not enough to focus only on workspaces. Feminist activists and researchers have long argued for overcoming the dichotomy of the work and the home or the private and public spheres (BONDI 1992; PATEMAN 1989). Instead, connections and interrelationships between work spheres, friendships, family life, and leisure time should be at the forefront of analysis. Cooperatives' entanglements with everyday spaces such as the home and the family is therefore of great societal relevance (see also RAKOPOULOS 2018).

NYC provides an interesting place for this research, because the number of worker cooperatives has strongly increased in the last decade, not least since the municipality began to subsidise the cooperative movement in 2014 (WCBDI-NYC 2016). Most of these worker cooperatives in NYC can be found in the cleaning and care sectors (PAVLOVSKAYA et al. 2016). Scholars call this the "feminised space" of labour, because this kind of work is mostly attributed to women (HUDSON 2018, p. 3). In fact, women represent 98 percent of all worker-owners in NYC, almost all of them People of Colour (99 %) and 70 percent of them Latinx.³ These numbers further underline the relevance of focusing on female experience.

To examine possible changes in social positions and agency of migrant women beyond the financial sphere, I work with Naila KABEER's (1999) and John FRIEDMANN's (1992) writings on self-empowerment. Inspired by Pierre BOURDIEU's notions of capital (BOURDIEU 1983, 1985), I elaborate more closely how different types of resources change over time, and I analyse the changes in the social positions and agency of migrant women. This theoretical framework provides the basis from which this article discusses the ways that worker cooperatives can transform migrant women's social position and therefore agency in their everyday lives and notably how their family lives are transformed through such labour organisations. Building on previous work (KOMPOSCH et al. 2021), this article examines more deeply various changes in the intimate spaces of

³ I use the gender-neutral term "Latinx" to refer to people who identify with an ethnicity from Latin America.

the home and the family after migrant women join worker cooperatives. As observed by multiple scholars in other research on cooperative work, kinship and social relationships are salient aspects of experience in a collective enterprise (ASHWIN 1999; RAKOPOULOS 2018). Because kinship is closely linked to intimate spaces in the home, this paper focuses on the intimate sphere of the everyday lives of worker-owners.

Spaces in the family and at home have increasingly attracted interest in the social sciences and human geography, especially with the rise of feminist geographers (BLUNT and VARLEY 2004; BOWLBY et al. 1997; BRICKELL 2012; DOMOSH 1998; NOWICKI 2014; PINK 2020). BLUNT and VARLEY argue that “rather than view[ing] the home as a fixed, bounded and confining location, geographies of home traverse scales from the domestic to the global in both material and symbolic ways. The everyday practices, materials cultures and social relations that shape home on a domestic scale resonate far beyond the household” (BLUNT and VARLEY 2004, p. 3). Acknowledging that the home is “a scale that is thoroughly implicated in wider social, political and economic processes” (MARSTON 2000, p. 232), I deem it important to examine the interrelations of the organisation of labour and familial relations. By focusing on the intimate space of home and the family, I analyse changes in the worker-owners’ relationships with their children, their partners, and other family members as a result of joining a worker cooperative.

The findings presented are based on seven months of fieldwork in NYC, during which time I studied the experiences of migrant women in nine cleaning and care cooperatives. By using mixed methods and a participatory research approach (CARETTA and RIAÑO 2016; KINDON et al. 2007; RIAÑO 2015), I combined qualitative and quantitative methods and included the research participants in the process of knowledge production. The insights gained from this article should therefore be of interest not only to an academic audience but also to the individual research participants and to the cooperative movement as a whole.

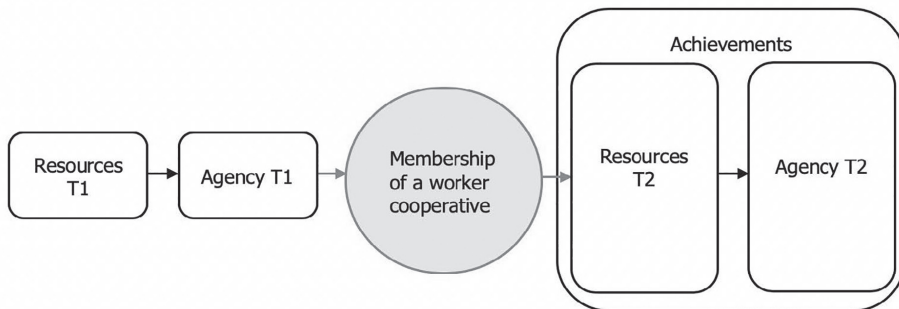
The article begins with a presentation of its theoretical framework (section 2) and a description of the methodological process of the research (section 3). These sections are followed by the presentation of the findings by first situating them within the broader context of worker cooperatives in New York City and the United States (section 4) and then detailing the changes in the everyday lives of migrant women after joining a cooperative with a special emphasis on their family lives (section 5). The article finishes with a conclusion section, where I discuss the main findings and propose recommendations for further research and policies.

2 Conceptualising the Transformation of the Social Position and Agency

To grasp the changes of the social position and agency of the research participants in their family lives, I applied the concept of self-empowerment. Naila KABEER defines three interrelated dimensions for assessing empowerment: resources, which are preconditions; agency in the process; and achievements or outcomes (KABEER 1999).

The first dimension includes material resources, such as money and land, and immaterial resources, such as social relationships and knowledge (ibid.). However, KABEER does not provide a more precise explanation of the various types of resources. Working from Pierre BOURDIEU's distinction between economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital (BOURDIEU 1983; 1985) I distinguish between economic resources, material possessions of all kinds; cultural resources such as knowledge, know-how, education; social resources of relationships and networks; and symbolic resources of prestige and reputation.⁴⁾ Because a person's social position is always shaped by societal structures of discrimination due to gender, race, sexuality, age, and other identity factors (CRENSHAW 1989; 1991), it is important to recognise that the economic, cultural, social, and symbolic resources that define the social position of individuals are also shaped by intersecting patterns of discrimination.

The second dimension, agency, is described by KABEER as "the ability to define one's goals and act upon them," but she stresses that it involves much more than observable actions (KABEER 1999, p. 438). KABEER also emphasises the importance of a third dimension, which she calls achievements. In this third dimension, she summarises all well-being outcomes that result from the actions of individuals (ibid.). While asserting that "external agents are critically important" for empowerment, John FRIEDMANN suggests the notion of "self-empowerment" to emphasise that empowered actors are the driving force behind these processes (FRIEDMANN 1992, p. 71). In this research, the cooperative members are the prime movers behind the changes in their lives, so I also use the term "self-empowerment" to discuss how the social position and agency of migrant women evolves after joining worker cooperatives.



Source: Own elaboration

Figure 1: Migrant women's self-empowerment through membership of a worker cooperative

⁴⁾ Referring to BOURDIEU's symbolic capital (BOURDIEU 1985), I understand symbolic resources not as a separate form of resource but as the form in which the various forms of resources are "perceived and recognized as legitimate" (BOURDIEU 1985, p. 724). Every form of resources can therefore become symbolic resources. Cooperative ownership, for example, is an economic resource in material terms, but when referring to the prestige and respect that workers receive socially through this co-ownership, I speak of symbolic resources.

In Figure 1, I show the process examined in this research. I assume that before working in a cooperative (time T1) the migrant women already owned a certain quantity of resources (T1), which provided a basis for agency (T1). With a specific social position, which stems from Resources T1 and Agency T1, migrant women become members of a cooperative (gray circle). Membership of a cooperative, in turn, is expected to affect subsequent levels of resources and agency (T2). My hypothesis is that resources and agency increase through a self-empowerment process triggered by the membership of a worker cooperative. However, this model is a simplification of more complex processes: Although the visualisation of the process is linear, the changes in social position and agency can be multilayered and take several directions. Moreover, what I describe here as time point T2 should in itself be considered as an ongoing and open-ended process, which can reverse and whose dimensions can change.

3 Mixing Methods in Participatory Research

Since one objective of this research was to produce insights that are not only of scientific interest but also to the nonacademic research participants, I worked with participatory forms of ethnographic research inspired by the “Minga workshops” (RIAÑO 2015). Proponents of participatory research approaches have criticised the frequent hierarchisation by academics between “researchers” and “research subjects” (CARETTA and RIAÑO 2016, p. 259). “Minga” means “building together” in Quechua and suggests that knowledge should be produced through collective participation without neglecting the fact that such an approach also emerges from power relations (RIAÑO 2015, p. 6). Feminist researchers in particular highlight the power position of academics in defining the research design, the questions asked in interviews and surveys, and the structure of written texts (CARETTA and RIAÑO 2016; McLAFFERTY 1995; STAEHELI and LAWSON 1995). The ideal of a participatory research approach is a close collaboration between researchers and participants at all stages of knowledge production (CARETTA and RIAÑO 2016).

During the whole research process, I tried to seek a constant dialogue with the research partners in order to follow the “key principle of creating inclusionary knowledge-producing spaces” (RIAÑO 2015, p. 12). This consisted of co-defining the survey form and the interview questions and discussing the data collected and preliminary results together with cooperative members and staff members of the “Center for Family Life” (CFL), an NGO supporting worker cooperatives in NYC.⁵⁾ However, as other scholars working with participatory methods in cooperative research have already shown, research partnership development is not necessarily a straightforward or linear process (HANSON and TERSTAPPEN 2009). Hence, the participation of the research partners in this research was re-evaluated at each methodological step.

⁵⁾ The “Center for Family Life” (CFL) is an NGO based in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, which provides social services to families in need. Among other programs, the CFL helps mobilise low-income community members and other organisations to launch cooperative businesses and supports the development process of such new worker cooperatives (CFL n.d.).

Not all methodological stages included participation of all research partners. Most of the work and thus the greatest power over the choice of methodology and the interpretation of results remained in my hands. Yet even if only partially implemented, a participatory approach offers great potential, especially in migration research. Migration scholars rarely pursue a participatory research approach despite the fact that it can be especially “useful for immigrant communities as it democratizes science, research, and knowledge, the very fields that are used to quantify and make statistics about [immigrant communities’ effects on] society” (FRANCISCO 2014, p. 88). And because democracy is a key element of worker cooperatives, this approach aligned perfectly with my topic.

In this research, mixed methods, a “combination and integration of qualitative and quantitative methods in the same research project” (KUCKARTZ 2014, p. 33, own translation), were used in both the data collection and data analysis phases. The aim was to constantly articulate and integrate the findings obtained through the multiple methods and therefore allow them to complement each other. By “selecting and then synergistically integrating the most appropriate techniques from a myriad of QUAL[itative], QUAN[titative], and mixed methods to more thoroughly investigate a phenomenon of interest,” this research entails what scholars call a “methodological eclecticism” (TEDDLIE and TASHAKKORI 2010, p. 8). I argue that the combination of a quantitative survey, in-depth interviews, and participant observations provide a solid basis for a sound analysis both of more general changes in migrant women’s everyday lives and the family spaces from quantitative data and of more subtle and subjective individual experiences from qualitative data.

Data Collection

The survey was elaborated and conducted in collaboration with the two staff members of the CFL.⁶⁾ The main reasons for excluding the worker-owners from this step were their lack of time and language barriers. This example demonstrates how, despite a participatory research approach, the power to decide on participation was not equally distributed among the parties involved in the research. The online survey reached approximately 223 worker-owners from nine cleaning and care worker cooperatives⁷⁾ either in English or in Spanish, depending on their preferred language. Some 71 members, about 32 percent of all the worker-owners who received the survey, participated between January and March 2019.

⁶⁾ Aware of the potential biases that a strong collaboration with gatekeepers can entail (DAHINDEN and EFIONAYI-MÄDER 2009), I still decided to collaborate closely with the NGO to make the research data directly available for civil society. Because the interests behind a scientific and a civil society survey might differ in some details, the scope of the survey questions was expanded so that all questions desired by the various parties were included, even if the questions were not equally relevant for all of the parties.

⁷⁾ The survey was sent to all cooperatives supported by the “Center for Family Life” (CFL). While this limitation to CFL cooperatives limits the scope of this study, it also helps to ensure that the research findings can be used directly by a civil society organisation.

My research focus on female worker-owners who work regularly in worker cooperatives led to the retention only of those completed by female worker-owners who worked more than five hours per month: 58 questionnaires out of the total of 71.⁸⁾ Questionnaires that were only partially completed were taken into account in the analysis. This also explains the high proportion of “no answer” responses in the survey data. Many of the cooperative members have a challenging everyday life with paid work, cooperative management, family, and little free time. It is thus understandable that the completion of a survey might not be among their priorities. The big differences in school education, which became apparent in the interviews, can be another reason why some worker-owners experienced more difficulties completing the survey than others. These difficulties and possible errors in completing the survey show the importance and value of combining quantitative data with qualitative data. For example, information from the survey that was unclear to me provided a basis for questions in the qualitative interviews.

The research participants were members of the nine worker cooperatives, which each offered either private cleaning and commercial cleaning (5), childcare (2), elderly care (1), or pet care (1). With membership numbers between seven and approximately 120, the cooperatives under study vary considerably in their size. Six of the nine cooperatives have only female worker-owners, and the other three are mixed. Eight cooperatives are owned by Latinx migrants, and one cooperative is owned by migrants who come from the Philippines. In parallel with the preparation and completion of the quantitative survey, 20 interviews were conducted between November 2018 and April 2019. Of these, 17 were biographical (RIAÑO 2015; ROSENTHAL 2007) and problem-centred (WITZEL 2000) interviews in Spanish or English with cooperative members of the same cooperatives who also collaborated in the survey.

The interview participants were chosen on the principle of diversification and saturation (PIRES 1997, pp. 159–160). This means that the sampling was based on diversification by origin, age, cooperative, service sector, time as a cooperative member, and the role of the person within the cooperative (e.g., president). To saturate my sample, I used the snowballing method (FLICK 2009) by asking the cooperative members that I already knew whether they could put me in touch with further worker-owners. Additionally three expert interviews (MEUSER and NAGEL 2002) were conducted with staff members of two NGOs: CFL and the “New York City Network of Worker Cooperatives”.

Prior to the interviews, the focus of the interview questions was discussed with two representatives of the CFL. Shortly after, a revised version of the interview questions was discussed with seven worker-owners from various cooperatives. Their ideas and comments helped greatly to further improve the interview questionnaire. To complement the data from the survey and the interviews, several participant observations were conducted (HESSE-BIBER and LEAVY 2011, p. 204). These observations included cooper-

⁸⁾ The remaining 13 questionnaires were excluded for three reasons: First, male worker-owners were excluded. The survey was sent to both female and male worker-owners because it was also intended to be of use to the CFL, which was interested in a general picture of the cooperatives’ social impacts on worker-owners. Secondly, only the questionnaires of worker-owners who worked more than five hours per month in a cooperative were considered. Third, two more questionnaires were excluded because there was strong evidence that these survey participants had misunderstood several survey questions.

atives' meetings, the leisure activities of cooperative members, and courses at the CFL during which cooperative members received leadership and administrative training. The combination and integration of quantitative and qualitative methods in the data collection allowed first general results to be obtained through the survey, which could then be complemented by interviews and observations, thus adding depth and individual nuance.

Data Analysis

The first stage of the data analysis consisted of a global analysis (FLICK 2009) that included a review of all the survey data, interview transcripts, observation notes, and memos. The initial ideas and insights acquired through this global analysis enabled some preliminary findings to be elaborated. These preliminary results provided a basis for three group discussions with worker-owners and representatives of the CFL.⁹⁾ The group discussions were inspired by the "Minga workshops", in which the research partners discussed the preliminary results presented by the academics (RIAÑO 2015). To suit the varying language skills of the participants, two discussion workshops were held in English and one in Spanish. These discussions helped to define the notions and categories that were central to migrant women's experiences in their family lives, which were included in the later qualitative content analysis.

The final analytical step was the in-depth analysis. The survey data was analysed to depict general changes in social positions and the agency of migrant women since their joining cooperatives. As suggested by SCHREIER, deductive categorisation, the theory-driven composition of categories, was combined with inductive categorisation, the composition of categories from data (SCHREIER 2012). The mixed-methods approach of the entire research process enabled the methods to complement one another. It allowed the research topic to be illuminated at different levels and a more holistic understanding to be developed of the processes under study.

4 Standing Up to Precarity and Marginalisation through Worker Cooperatives

Before presenting the concrete findings about the transformations of the family life of the worker-owners, I include this section on historical data about worker cooperatives in the United States and demographic data on members of today's worker cooperatives in New York City. Furthermore, I discuss the extent to which these historical and demographic data provide some indications about the social position and agency of cooperative members.

⁹⁾ All worker-owners from the nine worker cooperatives under study and all staff from the cooperative initiative of the CFL were invited to these workshops. A total of fifteen staff members and sixteen worker-owners joined the discussions.

Worker Cooperatives in NYC as a Response to Economic Marginalisation

Worker cooperatives are businesses that serve the needs of their members and curtail the maximisation of profits of individuals. According to the “International Cooperative Alliance” (ICA), the primary goal of cooperatives is not profit but realising the “common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations” of their members (ICA 2018). As with any other business, cooperatives must cover their costs and compete in the market. Yet cooperatives “modify capitalist principles” by the fact that workers simultaneously hold ownership and control and are the beneficiaries of the business (GORDON NEMBARD 2014, p. 4). In cooperatives, democratic decision-making is secured by the rule of “one member, one vote” which means that “[m]embers share equal voting rights regardless of the amount of capital they put into the enterprise” (ICA 2018).

In the US, worker cooperatives have been and still are particularly popular among African-American and migrant communities, as they offer a way of reducing economic marginalisation due to racial discrimination (GORDON NEMBARD 2014). Historically, the cooperative movement has mostly flourished in economically difficult times, such as after the Great Depression of 1929, during the 1960s and 1970s due to rising unemployment, and in the aftermath of the Great Recession in 2007–2008 (GUPTA 2014; JACKALL and LEVIN 1984; PAVLOVSKAYA et al. 2016).

New York City is one of the richest municipalities in the world, yet almost every fifth inhabitant of this metropolis lives in poverty¹⁰ (NYC 2018). Common explanations for the inequalities in the city include the strong polarisation of the labour market in NYC into a decreasing number of middle-class jobs contrasted by increasing proportions of both low-income jobs requiring few qualifications and elite jobs requiring greater qualification levels (SASSEN 2005; 2018) and the effects of computerisation of many labour sectors (AUTOR et al. 2006). It is above all the low-paid workers, often migrants, who can be argued to keep global cities such as NYC working (MAY et al. 2007). The continuous arrival of new migrants enables employers to fill vacancies without having to improve working conditions (ibid.). Therefore, working conditions in low-income areas often remain poor.

The cleaning and care sectors in NYC provide employment for many migrant women from Latin American and Asian countries under precarious working conditions (FRASER 2016). In NYC, 70 percent of all cleaning services, 53 percent of all healthcare work, and 51 percent of childcare is carried out by foreign-born workers (NYC Comptroller 2020). In addition to poor wages, isolated workplaces make conferring with colleagues difficult and often expose workers to arbitrariness and abuse from clients (YEUNG 2018). The fact that care and cleaning are regarded as “typically female” activities (SCHILLIGER 2015, p. 161) that women should perform without remuneration and for which no qualifications are required leads to a further devaluation of this work. In addition, such work usually involves long working days and inadequate equipment.

¹⁰ The NYC poverty rate is defined as the percentage of the population “whose NYCgov income is less than the NYCgov threshold” (NYC 2018, p. 1). This threshold is based on national spending on “food, shelter, clothing and utilities” and it varies by size of family. However, it differs from the national threshold by including the higher housing costs in NYC (ibid.).

In NYC, the number of worker cooperatives has increased sharply over the past decade (NYC NoWC 2020). Since 2014, after the election of Bill de Blasio as mayor and under the pressure of a growing cooperative movement, the municipality has started to support NGOs financially, and these for their part support the creation of worker cooperatives and help cooperative members to develop their businesses, for instance with administrative support and training. All the cooperatives involved in this study collaborated with the CFL, which recruits members in local, mostly migrant neighborhoods to create new cooperatives and provides them with support, especially during the establishment phase.

The Worker Cooperatives and the Social Position of their Members

Every person's social position in society and therefore their agency is closely related to ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality and other identity categories (CRENSHAW 1989; 1991). To understand how migrant women can empower themselves through cooperatives and which implications this brings for their family life and the intimate spaces of home, it is therefore crucial to analyse their demographic data. Furthermore, to assess the extent to which the findings of this research can be generalised to other workers of other cooperatives in NYC, it is important to understand how the worker-owners involved in this research differ from the general population of worker-owners in the city.

In 2019, New York City had almost 50 functioning worker cooperatives (NYC NoWC 2020). The largest number of cooperatives in NYC can be found in sectors such as cleaning, healthcare, and childcare (PAVLOVSKAYA et al. 2016, p. 4). Women represent 98 percent of all worker-owners in NYC; most of them (99 %) are People of Colour, and 70 percent of them are Latinx (ibid., p. 9). The great majority of all worker-owners (97 %) have no more than a high school degree, and most of them are between 31 and 65 years old (ibid., pp. 7–8). Geographically, most worker cooperatives (77 %) are located in Brooklyn (ibid., p. 10).

The cooperatives studied in this research fit well into the city-wide image of cooperatives. All of the nine cooperatives studied are in cleaning or care work, and most of them are led by migrant female worker-owners. Most of the research participants were between 26 and 45 years old, had been living in NYC for 10 to 29 years, and had two to three children. Their school educations ranged from primary school to a university degree¹¹⁾ and most of them were married or in a partnership. The number of hours worked in the cooperative by the workers varies greatly due to their diverse private care commitments and customer requirements. However, most of the workers work several days a week. Furthermore, the worker-owners also work many unpaid hours managing the cooperative in regular meetings,¹²⁾ advertising campaigns for the cooperative, and in individual functions such as presidents, vice-presidents, cashiers, and keepers of minutes.¹³⁾

Even though such demographic data and organisational details provide information about the background of the worker-owners, it does not allow conclusions to be drawn

¹¹⁾ Higher degrees are often devalued through migration or not recognised in the destination country (RIANO 2015).

¹²⁾ The regularity of meetings varies between the cooperatives, from weekly meetings to sessions every two months.

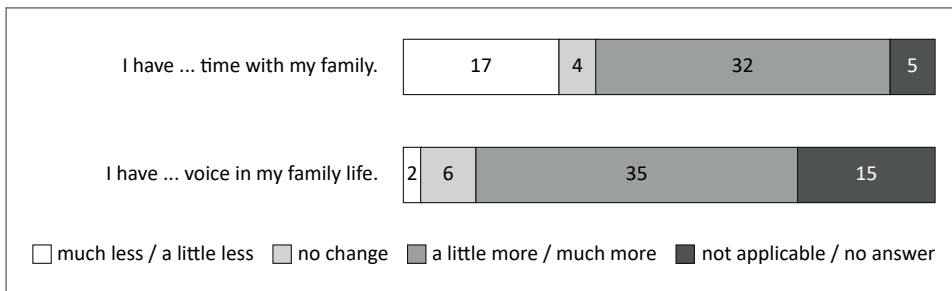
¹³⁾ Beside the "one member, one vote" rule, the cooperatives try to enable democratic decision-making by regularly rotating the individual functions.

about the empowerment process of an individual’s social position and agency over time. Grasping these changes requires a diachronic perspective.

5 Changes in the Family since Joining a Cooperative

I begin this section with the discussion of two issues that are crucial to better understanding the transformation of family home life that women undergo when they have joined a worker cooperative: first, how much time women have for their families, and second, their voice, here meaning their power to influence or make decisions within the family. Using the survey and interview data, I present the general trends on both issues within the group of research participants who joined a worker cooperative. In the following three subsections, I address these topics in more detail by showing how they have changed in the different types of family relationships.

Of the 58 women participating in the survey, 32 reported that they had a little more or much more time with their family since they joined the cooperative (Figure 2). Seventeen women said they had a little less or much less time since becoming a member of a cooperative, and four women reported no change. There seem to be two reasons for these widely divergent responses. The better wages and increased flexibility provided by the cooperative enable most of the worker-owners to work fewer hours than in other jobs. In interviews, women who had been fully engaged in paid work prior to the cooperative generally report that they can now spend more time with their families. However, those women who had not previously been in paid work, or only to a very limited extent, reported that they now had less time for the family.



Source: Own elaboration

Figure 2: Transformation of the family life sphere

This appears to be one plausible explanation for the relatively high number of individuals who reported having less time with their family. Another possible explanation relates to the extra unpaid work linked to the management of a cooperative. In particular, meetings and management functions such as the presidium require substantial additional time. Elena explained that “being in the cooperative is very time-consuming and sometimes stressful. We have to organise our time: the cooperative, the work, and the family” (Elena,

worker-owner, 38). The time a worker-owner can spend with her family thus also depends on how deeply she becomes involved in the democratic processes of the cooperative.

Voice in the family increased for 35 out of the 58 survey participants (Figure 2). Six women reported no change, two women observed a decrease of their voice in family life, and 15 survey participants evaluated the question as “not applicable” or did not answer.¹⁴⁾

Mother’s Role Being Transformed

Having children is very common for the worker-owners of the cooperatives examined in this study. Of the 58 women that answered the survey, only four have no children. Most of the respondents (32) have two or three children. However, the children do not always live with their mothers in NYC. Certain interview participants reported that their children live in their countries of origin or in other countries. The women’s relationships with their children, and consequently their social positions and agency as mothers, are accordingly very diverse due to these family-related geographical circumstances.

As shown in Figure 2, a majority of the women who participated in the survey had more time for the family due to better hourly pay, but about a third reported having less time. In the responses of the open questions of the survey, several women highlighted this advantage too: “I can spend much more time with my children now due to the cooperative” (worker-owner, between 26 and 35). All interview participants who talked about their children valued the time they could spend with them. For instance, Maria said: “The time I have with my family, especially with my children, is most important to me” (Maria, worker-owner, 40). This time seems to strengthen their relationship with their children. Having less time for children was described in different ways. Anna, a very dedicated worker-owner who takes a lot of responsibility for the cooperative and whose children are all adult and live in her home country, reported:

“Before [my membership of the cooperative] I called one of my daughters every night. Now, I don’t have so much time for my family anymore. [...] Once my daughter had problems and told me ‘How can you help me if you are not talking to me anymore?’ And then I thought that I focus too much on the cooperative.” (Anna, worker-owner, 64)

Less time for children can weaken the relationship of a mother with her children. As Anna’s daughter’s question implies, this can change social support among mother and children and the way mothers are perceived by their children. However, having less time can also strengthen relationships between mothers and children. Elena is one of the worker-owners who reported having less time with her family since joining the cooperative. In

¹⁴⁾ As explained in the methodological section, lack of time and different educational backgrounds are general reasons for the high number of missing responses. For this question, the very open and therefore possibly imprecise formulation of “more voice” could also have been a reason why several people did not answer.

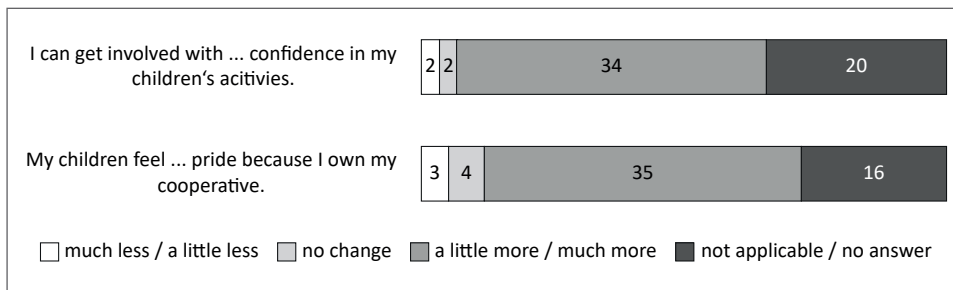
the interview, Elena described how the quality of the time she spends with her children has changed since joining the cooperative:

“Even with my children, my relationship has changed. Before [becoming a member of the cooperative], we spent time together, but it wasn’t that we were talking or that we were making a connection. Everyone was doing their own thing. Now, when we go out, we talk about what is happening at the moment. [...] I know them better. We take more advantage of the time we have together.” (Elena, worker-owner, 38)

Elena’s example shows that, besides the availability of time, worker-ownership can transform parenting in other ways. Like Elena, several worker-owners mentioned to me that they had learned to apply cultural resources such as the skills and knowledge they had acquired within the cooperative to the education of their children. Maria, for instance, noted that the type of communication she learned through democratic discussion in the cooperative changed the way she talks to her son:

“Since I am in the cooperative, I have learned how to better communicate. And I feel that I communicate better even with my children. My son is in the middle of his teenage years, so I have to negotiate with him: ‘If you do that, I’ll give you this.’ And he says, ‘Where did you learn this way of talking, mom?’.” (Maria, worker-owner, 40)

Acquiring skills and knowledge about communication and work collaboration and about the English language, computer technology, and business management through cooperative work increases the cultural resources of worker-owners. This in turn seems to positively influence their agency in their family. Of the 58 survey participants, 34 reported that since joining the cooperative they could become involved in their children’s activities¹⁵⁾ with a little more or much more confidence (Figure 3). Only two women reported that their confidence had decreased, and two women noted no change.



Source: Own elaboration

Figure 3: Transformation of the relationship with children

¹⁵⁾ This includes school activities but also activities in their children’s leisure time such as sports or additional education.

Similar to the relationship between worker-owners and clients, being an owner of a cooperative can also change the children's perception of their mothers. Although three women reported that their children felt a little or much less pride in them as a mother and four women indicated no change, 35 out of 58 women participating in the survey said their children felt a little or much more pride in them as mothers because they own their cooperative (Figure 3). Valeria said she observed a change in how she was perceived by her daughter:

“Once I wanted to go [to my home country] and I asked my husband if he was okay with it. And my daughter said to me: ‘Mum, you have your own money now, you don’t have to ask for permission.’” (Valeria, worker-owner, 46)

Valeria's statement shows how the economic resources are closely linked to symbolic resources, even from a child's perspective: With her own money, Valeria was perceived by her daughter as an independent woman with more agency.

The increase in symbolic resources that comes with the title of cooperative owner, combined with the increase in economic resources through higher wages, influences the social position of women as mothers in families. Being worker-owners of a cooperative not only allows mothers to better support their children financially but also support them with the knowledge and skills they have acquired through cooperative work. At the same time, most women can spend more time with their children, which fosters and improves their mother-child relationships.

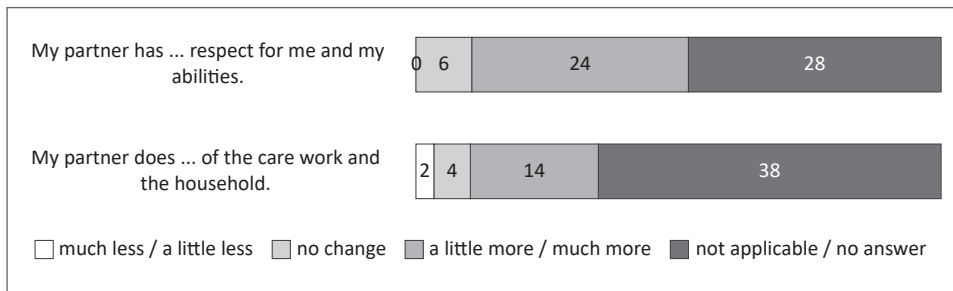
Empowerment in Couple Relationships

The analysis of the couple relationship is crucial for the investigation of changes in the social position of migrant women in their everyday lives. In traditional patriarchal and heterosexual partnerships, women are at least informally subordinated to men (MILLET 1970). The home can therefore be a place of reproducing or disrupting patriarchal structures (BOWLBY et al. 1997). As various scholars have shown, gender relations in migrants' lives can be transformed and reaffirmed by migration and entry into paid work in the receiving country (MENJÍVAR 1999). Some authors argue that migrant women can enjoy more autonomy (HUGO 2000) through migration whereas others stress that those women who come as family migrants experience a loss of equality in gender relations (RIAÑO 2011, 2015). In line with MENJÍVAR, I argue that changes in gender relations in migrants' lives not only depend on earning a better wage in the new country of residence but also on the kind of work the migrant women do (MENJÍVAR 1999, p. 619). In this subsection, I therefore outline the extent to which cooperative work can transform pervasive patriarchal structures in partner relationships and provide women with more agency as wives or partners in their homes.

The vast majority of research participants live in heterosexual partnerships, and most of them are married.¹⁶⁾ Similar to the children the partners' places of residence vary.

¹⁶⁾ Out of 15 female interview participants, 10 women were married, three were separated, one woman had a partner without being married, and one woman had no partner. Since no interview participant mentioned a homosexual relationship, this section only discusses heterosexual partnerships.

Most of the worker-owners from the Philippines that I interviewed reported that their partners live abroad. The Latin American interview participants' partners live in NYC in most cases. Almost half of the survey participants reported a change in their couple relationships since becoming cooperative members. Some 24 out of 58 women participating in the survey responded that their partners had a little or much more respect for them and their abilities since they became members of a cooperative (Figure 4). Six women answered that there was no change, and no woman reported decreased respect from her partner. A peculiarity of the relationship-related questions is the high number of “not applicable” responses or missing answers. This is even more surprising if one takes into account that almost all interview participants had addressed such changes in their lives within a couple. The analysis of the interviews helps to better understand these numbers in the survey.



Source: Own elaboration

Figure 4: Transformation of couple relationship

The issue of who is the main wage earner is of crucial importance to gender relations in a couple, also in migrant couples (MENJÍVAR 1999; RIAÑO 2011). Scholars have shown that women’s financial autonomy can disrupt patriarchal structures by enabling them to make choices about their everyday lives (BASTIA 2013; MENJÍVAR 1999). Processes of empowerment in couple relationships were also reported by various interview partners. Valeria reported:

“Through the cooperative, we as women are empowered in the family. [...] He [the husband] used to see me as subordinate because he made all the money. That’s how I saw myself too. I saw myself so small and thought I had to respect everything. He brought the money, so I had to respect what he said. Now, I no longer see myself that way. I take my own decisions and they – my husband, my children and my mom too – they all see this part of me. [...] He [my husband] has changed: he is nicer and takes me into account. He’s like: ‘What are we going to do?’ It’s not like [before when] he used to decide everything. [...] We get along together very well, much better than before. [...] Because he sees how I have changed. I am no longer the obedient girl. I now look for alternatives and contribute because I am independent.” (Valeria, worker-owner, 46)

The example of Valeria illustrates the extent to which the social position in a couple relationship can change. Through her higher income and status as a co-owner of a business, Valeria receives more respect from her husband, her children, and her mother. This, in turn, lets her see herself in a different light. The extract also shows how the quality of couple relationships can improve by dismantling patriarchal structures. More generally, many women in the cooperatives have been able to equitably balance financial dependencies with their partners, and sometimes, they have even reversed them. Thus, they expand the ability to take decisions on their own. By being more aware of alternatives, the women's autonomy and agency in their partnerships and family lives increase.

Carina, another worker-owner of a cleaning cooperative, experienced a similar change in her couple life after joining the cooperative. In the interview, she reports how the increased salary from the cooperative allowed her to pay some of the costs of her husband's vocational training:

"My husband likes cooking. So, I told him, 'I will support you, I can pay the expenses of the family.' So, he went studying and got his certificate. I supported him, so that we can get ahead together." (Carina, worker-owner, 38)

However, not all of the research participants' husbands reacted positively to their female partners' increased earning capacity. At least at the beginning of their time in the cooperative, many women were strongly criticised by their partners. Apparently, their men were particularly skeptical about their partners' involvement during the founding processes of cooperatives, when the worker-owners did substantial voluntary work but little to no paid work. Many husbands feared that their wives would not make any money with the cooperative. However, the perceptions of several husbands and partners changed over time. Maria explained how her husband's sympathy towards the cooperative evolved:

"At first, my husband was not happy at all to see that I was working and spending so much time away from home. [...] 'Only meetings and lectures, but no work. You're losing your time', he said. [...] But now, that he sees the fruits of my work [...] I have more money than he does. If he doesn't have money, I can help him. And that makes him think. Last weekend, for example, I could invite the whole family to have dinner at a restaurant, and I paid for everything. This changes a lot the balance between us." (Maria, worker-owner, 40)

Maria is not the only one who experienced reluctance from her partner at the beginning of her cooperative membership. However, the time spent away from home and the little money earned during the founding periods seem only partially to explain men's criticism. Various scholars have observed men's unwillingness to accept their loss of authority as a consequence of women's increased economic independence (MENJÍVAR 1999; RIAÑO et al. 2015).

Similar to these studies, several interview participants told me about conflicts linked to husbands or partners' fear of losing their power. As one founding member of a cleaning cooperative reported, "it [the cooperative] almost ruined the marriages [of lots of my col-

leagues]” (Ximena, worker-owner, 59). Ximena mentioned other women who, after years of problems with their husbands, had finally found the courage to leave them thanks to the cooperative. Researchers have shown that women’s financial contribution to their family’s household strongly influences their decision to stay in or leave conflictual relationships (BALDERRAMA and NIJENHUIS 2016). Being financially autonomous and having a strong social network facilitates the decision to leave a husband.

Consequently, divorce or separation is seen as a way for women to achieve “economic citizenship” which equates to “the right to equal access to spaces of economic participation” (RIAÑO 2011, p. 1532). Giovanna, a worker-owner of a childcare cooperative, suffered intense conflicts and domestic violence at the hands of her husband until she decided to leave him. In an interview, Giovanna explained how her husband blamed the cooperative for their problems:

“My husband did not like the cooperative. He said that it helped me to say that I did not want this [kind of relationship] anymore. He always said: ‘With the cooperative, she feels comfortable.’ He did not work. And he felt bad because of that. Because my salary is not bad. [...] With the cooperative, I felt more able to take decisions in my life.” (Giovanna, worker-owner, 33)

Women suddenly earning more money than their male partners or men not working at all are realities that do not correspond to the traditional family image in most societies.¹⁷⁾ Giovanna’s example shows that breaking through such traditional gender patterns can increase a woman’s social position and agency, but it can also lead to conflict and relationship breakdowns if men are not willing to tolerate women’s empowerment. Scholars have shown that this phenomenon occurs not only in NYC but also, for example, in Switzerland, where migrant and non-migrant women experience similar challenges (RIAÑO et al. 2015).

Membership of a worker cooperative not only requires women to do their paid work but also to spend a great deal of time doing administrative tasks. Various interview participants reported that these tasks affect the time these women can spend working at home as care givers and housewives. Research suggests that the effects of migrant women’s paid work on the division of labour in a household can vary from a consolidation of traditional gender relations in the household to partial renegotiations to achieve greater male participation in household labour (MENJÍVAR 1999, p. 615). In the survey, 35 out of 58 women either did not answer or answered “not applicable” when asked whether there had been any change in the distribution of care work and household labour (Figure 4).

Various factors seem to account for this high proportion: some women maintain long-distance relationships with their partners abroad, and a few others are single. However, comparing the number of responses to this question with those regarding relationships shows that at least 10 women with a partner did not respond or responded “not applicable.” Among those who provided an answer, 14 stated that their partners do a little more or

¹⁷⁾ As feminists have repeatedly shown, patriarchal structures are present in the vast majority of societies around the world, even if they can be manifested in diverse ways (MILLET 1970).

much more of the care work and the household labour since they became worker-owners. Four other women reported no change, and two women reported a decrease in their partners' contribution to care work and household labour.

In the interviews, various women reported that they and their husbands helped each other with their responsibilities. Guadalupe, for example, stated: "At home, my husband and I have the same tasks. He helps me with the washing, the cleaning, the cooking, with everything" (Guadalupe, worker-owner, 52). Many other women also describe their partners' contribution to the household as "help". Conversely, the same women report that they can now help their husbands pay the bills. Such statements indicate that the household-related division of labour has become more balanced. Many women can assume more financial responsibilities in their family, and their male partners do more household and care work. However, the statements also suggest that the main responsibilities remain tied to traditional gender roles: the woman is responsible for the household and the man for family's economic subsistence. All work that is done not in line with traditional gender roles is thus treated as "help" for the respective partner. Many research participants apparently took the traditional gendered division of labour for granted, a phenomenon that BOURDIEU identifies as the social power of the "doxa" (BOURDIEU 2013 [1997], p. 166).

During the presentation of my preliminary findings, I raised this issue with the group of women by asking them if they could imagine helping their husbands to do the household or care work. Several women who had made similar statements to Guadalupe's said that their cultural background explained such a view. In their culture, they argued, women were seen as responsible for the household.¹⁸⁾ The possibility of a household-related division of labour independent of gender identities – the "alternative" in KABEER's (1999, p. 437, pp. 441–442) words – in which women's main responsibilities would not have to involve housework and care seemed inconceivable for the women who made these statements.

This section has shown that most research participants experienced empowerment within their partnership after becoming a member of a cooperative. Increased economic resources from higher wages and increased symbolic resources as co-owners of the cooperative places them in a higher social position within the relationship. This link between economic resources and symbolic resources also indicates a certain convertibility of these resources. Their higher social position, in turn, has resulted in more egalitarian relationships. The division of labour in the household has become more balanced, yet the traditional gendered attribution of responsibilities, with the woman taking responsibility for the household and the man for the family's economic subsistence, remain effective.

Greater Responsibility and Recognition in Family of Origin

In addition to changing the women's social position and agency as mothers and partners, membership of a worker cooperative can also have an impact on their relationships with

¹⁸⁾ It should be noted that reproduction work has historically been associated to women not only in certain cultures but in all patriarchal societies (FRASER 2016).

members of their family of origin.¹⁹⁾ Several research participants reported changes in their positions vis-à-vis their parents, grandparents, siblings, or other relatives, which I elaborate on in this subsection.

The places of residence of the family of origin's members vary greatly among the research participants. Some research participants, especially some of those with Latin American origins, migrated to the US with their siblings and parents. However, most research participants said their parents and siblings were in their home country. For these more distant family members, the cooperative can be an important source of revenue too. Some 21 out of 58 female survey participants stated that the cooperative enabled them to support their families in their home country financially.²⁰⁾ Some even reported that their parents and/or siblings in the country of origin depend entirely on the worker-owner's money transfers. For instance, Paula stated in an interview that "my parents live completely from the money I send to them" (Paula, worker-owner, 45). Alvin, a male worker-owner of a cleaning cooperative, explained how his increased income from the cooperative has changed his position in his family of origin:

"I can now help my family with money. I financially support 25 people in [my home country]. Here [in the US], I can save money to help my family. That way, I am the one who manages everything. [...] The relationship with my family is now very different: [...] Because I pay them school, the cellphone, and the house loan. Some of them don't have a house, that's why I want to help them. [...] But I also feel really responsible." (Alvin, worker-owner, 56)

Alvin's statement shows how increased economic resources have given him more power and more responsibility in his family of origin. However, because the statement is from a male worker-owner, it is not possible to draw direct conclusions for female worker-owners. However, what he summarises in this statement has also been indicated by some female worker-owners, even if not expressed so clearly. Like Paula, many female worker-owners send money to the relatives living abroad. In line with YEOH et al.'s (2013) findings, which stress that remittances are crucial to migrant women as "transnational acts of recognition" (ibid., p. 444), it can reasonably be assumed that this also transforms the position of female worker-owners in their transnational family relationships. Economic resources can give them more influence over family matters.

At the same time, a relationship of dependence emerges in which the worker-owners are assigned more responsibility, such as Paula, who is the sole breadwinner for her parents. The way in which relatives' views of the worker-owners can change is evident in a statement by Valeria, mentioned in subsection 4.3.3: "Now, I no longer see myself that

¹⁹⁾ In this research, I include parents, siblings, grandparents as well as other more extended relatives of the worker-owners as members of the "family of origin". Partners and children of the worker-owner therefore do not count as "family of origin".

²⁰⁾ It can be assumed that the number in fact would be higher than 21 because many survey participants misunderstood this survey question; instead of marking all true statements, many survey participants thought that they could choose only one of the many options.

way [subordinated to my husband]. I take my own decisions and they – my husband, my children, and my mom too – they all see this part of me” (Valeria, worker-owner, 46).

It is thus reasonable to assume that the female worker-owners’ increased economic resources improve the migrant women’s social positions in their relationships with parents, siblings, and wider family, but it also creates new dependencies. Both increased remittances and the recognition the women gain through their financial independence change the way they are perceived by the members of their extended family. Furthermore, although beyond the scope of this article, these findings show that the improved income of migrant women working in worker cooperatives has a social impact that transcends national boundaries.²¹⁾

6 Conclusion

As several studies have shown, worker cooperatives can help circumvent precarious labour conditions (BERRY and BELL 2017), reduce income inequality (JONES AUSTIN 2014), counter economic marginalisation (GORDON NEMBHARD 2014), and empower the individuals involved (BACON 2010; ESTEBAN-SALVADOR et al. 2019; GORDON NEMBHARD 2014; SPEAR 2000). The novel contribution of this paper lies in its ambition to venture beyond the financial realm and the sphere of paid work, notably by analysing the transformation of the families of migrant women when they join worker cooperatives. To provide a fuller picture of the worker cooperatives’ potential for increasing the social position and agency of migrant women, I focus on this intimate sphere of the homes and families of worker-owners.

Membership of a cooperative entails numerous changes in the family life of migrant women. The increased resources of higher wages, knowledge acquired about their rights as migrants, and the broader social network gained through the cooperative give the migrant women more independence from their partners. The greater independence, in turn, often leads to a more balanced partnership. Even though many women continue to bear the main responsibility for care and household work, most of the study participants reported a more egalitarian distribution of this unpaid work since they joined the cooperative. However, self-empowerment of migrant women and their increased self-confidence was often met with resistance by their male partners, especially in the initial phase, when women had just joined the cooperative. Many men seem to have struggled with the disruption of traditional gender roles.

The negotiation and communication skills that migrant women increase within democratic forms of organisation, combined with better English skills, can also have positive effects on the parenting of children. Furthermore, their increased economic resources enable them to better support their relatives in their home countries, which in some cases led to more recognition from their parents or siblings but also to greater interfamilial dependencies. Ultimately, once migrant women have overcome the resistance of their partners, they increase their symbolic resources in their family life sphere.

²¹⁾ There is extensive literature on the impact of remittances (see for example ANTÓN 2010).

This study shows that the migrant women who participated in this research generally increased their resources in their family spaces, which consequently provided them with more agency. Even though they received support for their businesses from “external agents” such as the CFL, the driving force behind this process of “self-empowerment” (FRIEDMANN 1992) were the women themselves, who self-organised their businesses and transferred these organisational skills and knowledge into their family spaces. Considering the structural hurdles that migrant women face due to their gender, ethnicity, class, and other identity categories, their increase in agency through membership of worker cooperatives is particularly remarkable. Nevertheless, many worker-owners also experienced an increase in unpaid work since joining the cooperative, which was often characterised as time-consuming and stressful – challenges that deserve further attention from scholars.

Ultimately, membership of worker cooperatives enables migrant women to gain power, exercise greater agency, and therefore reduce the discrimination they experience on the basis of their origin, gender, class, and other identity categories. However, structural challenges such as global inequalities, on the basis of which wealthy classes can outsource their reproductive work to migrant women, and the reproduction of the image of care and cleaning work as typically female work remain. Even if cooperative labour is not yet capable of transforming the capitalist power structures of society as a whole, this study has shown how self-empowerment of marginalised groups such as migrant women can begin at cooperative workplaces but has impacts far beyond the sphere of paid work, such as in the intimate space of family life.

The findings of this research are not only of importance for academia but may also show a path for new policies about democratic workplaces and the inclusion of migrant women in our society. Considering worker cooperatives’ potential to create democratic workplaces and empower migrant women, the support of municipalities for cooperative developments such as that from New York City (NYC) is very important and thus advisable. Worker cooperatives should therefore not only be included in policies about poverty alleviation but also in policies about gender equality, the inclusion of migrants, and democratic participation.

A critical perspective on my results will note that this study has mainly described general trends and selected individual narratives about the worker cooperatives’ impacts on their members’ lives. Some nuances of individual worker-owners’ realities are inevitably somewhat lost among such tendencies. Even though the methodological approach chosen has been fruitful in many respects, I need to address some caveats in this regard. The combination of a quantitative survey, in-depth interviews, and participant observations provided a solid basis for a sound analysis of broader changes in migrant women’s everyday lives with quantitative data and of more subtle and subjective individual experience with qualitative data. In many cases, observational and interview data helped to better understand the more general statements made in the survey. However, the combination of multiple data sources also limited the level of detail accorded to each data source.

The participatory approach of this research also proved to be scientifically useful because the exchanges with worker-owners and with staff members of the “Center for Family Life” (CFL) allowed a deeper understanding of the empowering potential of worker cooperatives. The group discussions were especially helpful in collectively reflecting on

both the cooperative members' perceptions of their everyday lives and my own first interpretations of them. However, the main share of the work, the responsibility, and most of the power to define the results remained in my hands. A similar conclusion can be drawn regarding the unequal rewards obtained through participating in this research. Even though the study certainly benefits all parties involved, the individual benefits of participant research are mostly greatest for scholars, who can use the research to promote their personal careers (POHL 2016). Despite the many benefits of a participatory approach, I deem it important to acknowledge the power structures that permeate even such participatory research settings.

The retrospective data and the short duration of the fieldwork of just seven months entail further limitations. The analysis relied mainly on autobiographical information provided by the research participants. However, such retrospective accounts come with their specific biases (CONWAY 1990; SCHWARZ and SUDMAN 2012). These biases were reduced by triangulating the findings with information gathered through expert interviews, participatory observations, and group discussions. The consideration of the perspectives of other family members would certainly have helped to provide a more complete and more substantive analysis. While too resource intensive for the present study, a longitudinal study with control groups could further increase the soundness of the scientific findings. Long-term comparisons with control groups in non-cooperative companies, for instance, would help to specify the effects of cooperative work on the family spaces of female workers.

There is indeed much need for further research in this field, which is why I want to present some of the most promising issues for future research. Although this paper focused on the impact of cooperative work on family spaces, less attention was paid to converse processes: the influence of workers' social environments and families on cooperative work. Literature on producer cooperatives in southern Italy has shown that the social lives of cooperative members can heavily impact relationships within the cooperatives (RAKOPOULOS 2018). It would thus be promising to analyse such processes for migrant-led cleaning and care worker cooperatives in the US.

Another aspect that is merely touched upon in this paper is gender relations in cleaning and care cooperatives. The literature shows that gender relations are key to a better understanding of cooperative structures. A focus on gender helps to understand the ways in which different gender identities participate in decision-making within cooperatives (ILO 2012; MILLER 2011), processes of "gender solidarity" that can turn cooperative workplaces into "second families" (ASHWIN 1999, p. 146), and gender-specific differences in ratios of labour costs to operating income that indicate a greater focus on the welfare of workers in female-led cooperatives (ESTEBAN-SALVADOR et al. 2019). In particular, the gender-specific relations between work processes and home and family would be promising fields of research to explore in greater depth.

The concept of self-empowerment used in this paper may have directed attention to the more positive achievements of worker cooperatives rather than prompting reflection on the individual disappointments, collective controversies, and social conflicts that may also occur. One way to explore these topics in more detail would be to examine the processes of disengagement (FILLIEULE 2010). Several worker-owners reported that a number of people had left the cooperatives, but the exact reason for their departures remained un-

known. Research on these processes could be useful for cooperatives to improve their organisational structures and procedures. Finally, another interesting research topic may be the connection between worker cooperatives and political activism. Two questions may be asked: What role do social movements play in worker cooperatives and how do worker cooperatives affect these movements? As this article has shown, cooperatives are not merely tools for overcoming poverty: worker cooperatives provide space for living democracy, social cooperation, self-empowerment, and the unravelling of dominant structures within family spaces. It remains to be seen what implications these changes in the social position and agency of marginalised groups can have on a larger scale in our society. According to one survey participant, at least, there is reason for optimism:

“I like the cooperative world. I don’t know how far we’re going to get. But I can imagine us going very far.” (worker-owner, between 46 and 55)

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