

in process

Karen Packebusch

Doing the dirty work

(Clean up the dirty)

Since 2016

I hope that all that students would use the toilet brush for themselves from time to time. 700 euros a month to wipe away other people's shit! Sometimes students tap me on the shoulder and say that they appreciate what I do there. They still don't use the toilet brush though!

J., cleaner, Faculty of Arts, Dresden, 2014

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My artistic examination focuses on the subject of the global migration of women and its influence on local developments in the public service sector and private so-called care work. Care work includes activities such as caring for and raising children, nursing those requiring care and house-keeping in family environments (cooking, cleaning, maintenance) along with cleaning work in offices, hospitals, etc. (“cleaners”). In other words, the work traditionally performed by women in a family setting – as wives, mothers, daughters or daughters-in-law – is primarily meant here. Originating from the Western world, a multidimensional transformation of working relations was set in motion in the mid-twentieth century (post-Fordism, digitalisation, flexibilisation) and value perceptions (marriage, family, gender roles). These developments are framed by a globally-active capitalistic realism that is also decisive to national economies.

Simple models are not sufficient to render these complex relationships tangible. They sometimes leave my head spinning. For me as an artist, I am astonished time and time again how scientific views of the world can still create convincing images nonetheless. Before the socioeconomic globalisation really caught on, Jürgen Habermas aptly referred to these developments in the 1980s as complex.

The aim of my project *Doing the dirty work* is to find meaningful artistic images for the subjects of migration and care work. I do not pursue any scientific need for completeness in this, but rather zoom in on the details. For globalisation also always has a local aspect. Places such as Berlin, Haifa, Recife, Skopje, Genova, Kolobrezeg, Maputo and others serve as examples here. Many more places and interviews with domestic- and careworkers are to follow.

„We do not fight with the feminists! Who are they anyway? And what do they fight for? They are our employers! We are not fighting for the same thing!“

I., domestic worker and activist, Recife, 2016



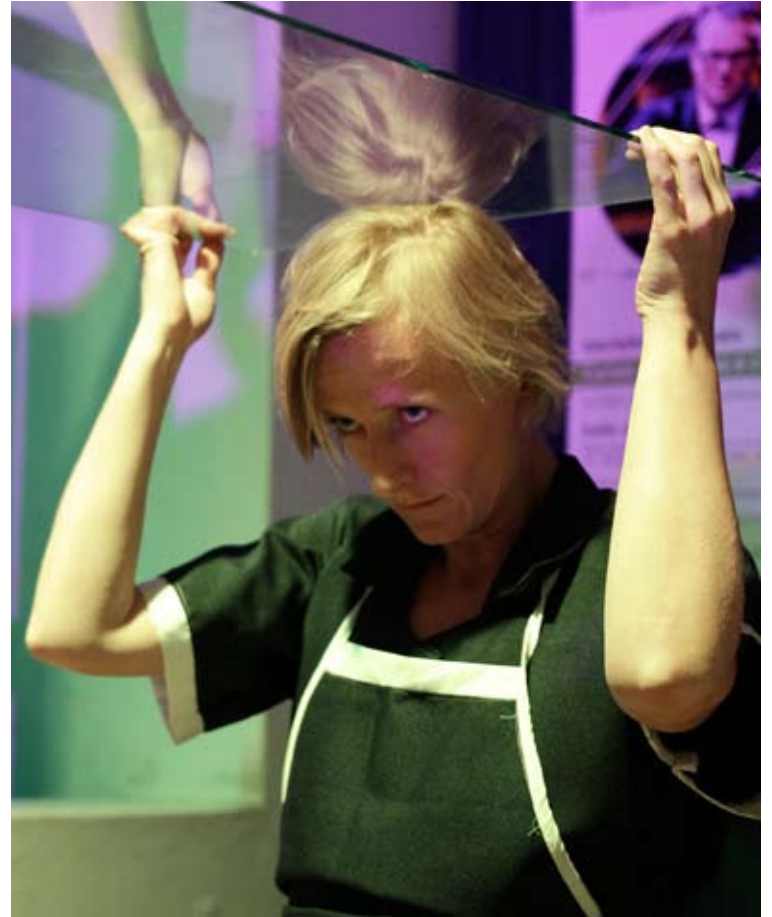
GUERREIRAS
Installation, mixed media, 2017



GUERREIRAS
Installation, detail, 2017



THE BAR
Performance, Centro Cultural Maputo
with Edna Jaime & Katharina Behrens (Sound), 2017





Sound

by Katharina Behrens

Yani, Laura, Rosy, Ewa, Ada, Alma, Anja, Joy, Daniel, Sandy, Maggie, Berta, Gisele, Maja, Diana, Nuli, Valerie, Lina, Juliette, Yana, Ciada, Magnolia, Eva, Ivetta, Nina, Teresita, Jacki, Jean, Carmelita, Irina, Natasha, Natalia, Regina, Vivian, Maria, Dora, Henriqueta, Alicja, Ilsa, Pola Dagmar, Agata, Sayd, Edita, Nona, Fira, Irene, Perlita, Mary, Antonia, Denise, Ivetta, Nalda, Raquel, Milagros, Alem, Fernanda, Stefanie, Marlen, Ankica, Rebekka, Kaja, Jiliana, Elena, Eileen, Wiktorina, Esther, Quynn, Tamh, Mariana, Ella

THE BAR <
Performance, detail, 2017

from the series SHE ∨
p.16, 16/19, p.17, 1/19
Inkjet & quotes, 170 x 120 cm, since 2014



Eu me levanto cedo ás 4 horas da manha cuido da cas da minha familia epos vou para a cidade e faço limpeza numa casa na Polana depois estudo. Entre as 22 horas volto para casa faço algumas coisas e vou dormir.



Lo que me parece extraño, es que la primera generación de mujeres que pudo emanciparse económicamente, aun siguiera teniendo la aspiración de mantener el hogar en perfecto estado. Y que en vez de cuestionar la distribución del trabajo, encargaran a otras mujeres, en peores condiciones laborales y económicas de mantener esos hogares así. No me lo cuestiono moralmente. Mi madre trabajaba mucho y la recuerdo como alguien que siempre estaba ocupada: el trabajo, los hijos. Para ella hubiese sido imposible limpiar dos veces a la semana todas las ventanas y las puertas de la casa. Así que me parece bien que le encomendase ese trabajo a otra persona. Pero aún así sigue siendo raro, que esta emancipación haya tenido lugar, y lo siga teniendo, a costa de otras mujeres, que trabajen en peores condiciones y sueldos mucho más bajos.

Golden Marie shows a mechanical system with a broom sweeping gold dust. In the background can be heard the sound of an old german cuck-oo clock.



Golden Marie
mixed media, 2018



Lilofee / For a moment like this shows a woman's hand cleaning a toilet. It is wiped, scrubbed and the flush pulled. In the background, the cleaner can be heard singing an old German song of a wild waterman, "Es freit ein wilder Wassermann" and the wedding song "For a moment like this".

LILOFEE / FOR A MOMENT LIKE THIS
Video HDV, projection on porcellaine, 2016

„I worked illegally in Minsk as a carer. But I want a work contract and a secure life. That’s the only reason I came here. I’ve been here for ten years now, though, and I still don’t have a work contract or official papers.“

N., private careworker, Dresden, 2016



WELCOMEGIFT
Inkjet, 161 x 112 cm, 2016

UNIVERSIDADE EDUARDO MONDLANE MUSEU DE HISTÓRIA NATURAL.



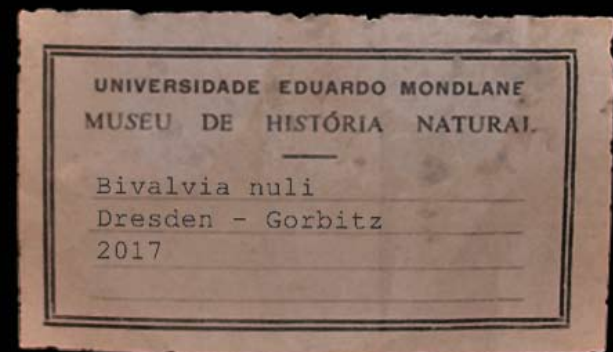
Passeando nas praias de Gijon,
Genova, Rostock, Skopje, Jiddah,
Berlim, Dresden, Recife, Maputo
Kołobrzeg e Hongkong será
inavitável perceber a quantidade
infinita de conchas. Milhares
habitam as regiões costeiras.
Olhando de uma maneira
superficial, aparentemente nada se
mexe. Mas a aparência engana.
Numa observação mais minuciosa
revela-se de maneira fascinante
uma forma particular de vida.

< Walking along the watersides in Maputo, Recife, Kolobzec, Rostock, Dresden or Gijon you will hardly be able to avoid the sight of a myriad of shells. Thousands colonize the coastal areas of the sea. If you look at them, nothing seems to be aroused. But appearances are deceptive. Look more closely and discover that it has adapted itself in a fascinating way to a special form of life.



The hands of women performing their housework are filmed and projected onto shells can be seen in the videoinstallation *Shellcollection*. Background to this idea: loving/disparaging references to domestic workers as “pearls”. They perform valuable work for their employers and are often a part of the family and yet they also always remain employees who can be sacked.

SHELLCOLLECTION
Installation, details, 2017





SHELLCOLLECTION

Installation in the shellcollection, Museo de História Natural Maputo, International day of the museum, 2017



CLEAN UP THE DIRTY

(Monologue for an actress)

Insight from the interviews with domestic workers with legal and illegal status, trade unionists, social workers, scientific papers, activists and feminist groups in Germany, Poland, Brasil and Mozambique.

„ And mostly they aren't companies in that sense.

They're more like criminals! (Laughs.)

So they mediate – well, take – up to 40% of the women's wages!

There are also entirely informal arrangements – so a woman says: 'I have a job for you. Give me €300 and I'll give you the address!'

What's actually lacking is some kind of monitoring – or a place that people from both sides can turn to when problems or conflicts arise!

(Pauses.)

That is lacking.

And because it is on the verge of legality and illegality, people do not contact such places!

Where should I start?

This awful infrastructure! The exploitation, the deception, etc.

And these agencies – I think there must be just 2 or 3 honest ones in Germany! These companies guarantee – um – if things don't work out – if the chemistry isn't right – they try to find someone else – or to mediate!

And that's how it should be!

But it's rare, unfortunately!

To begin at the beginning, though: what motivates the women?

Most are no longer young. Uh... They can't find work in Poland. Their husband drinks or has left them. They have two or so kids. And somehow they have to earn money.

It's difficult in Poland! And it's an opportunity. And once again we come to a point that is misunderstood: only very, very rarely is it 24-hour work. ... That simply isn't true.

Uh...

If there is some kind of contract – agreed either in writing or verbally – the women get time off during the day. There are also regulations about whether the women can be woken in the night or not. Very often they can, yes!

Uh, but the women know: I'm here for up to six weeks, then we'll change!

Karen, didn't you know that?

Basically, 2 or 3 women work together and take it in turns to do the job.

And in our view it works like this:

Uh...

What opportunities do the women, who are unable to find work in Poland, have? None at all! And nor do their children. They earn €1,200 cash in hand here – if they aren't employed by an agency that is! And that's a lot of money!

That's tax-free, cash in hand!

And when they go home again, they receive gifts, packages, etc. and so on.

Uh...

And that's how the women finance their children's education.

AND – even more importantly – no one keeps track!

The women further themselves. They learn the language – and that's definitely not easy. Their knowledge is rudimentary, but there are small successes that the women don't experience at home otherwise.

They earn support – their employer, neighbours, etc.

That's really important!



CLEAN UP THE DIRTY - Monologue for an actress
Multichannel, HDV, 36. 12 min, since 2016





„If you can't reach, then just leave it! I'm afraid we don't have a ladder. But you can ask her. She's good at improvising – with chairs and tables. She'll be able to reach it. She's flexible and athletic! And it really needs to be cleaned up there again!“

S., cleaner, Berlin, 2017



RAG I/XII - ON STAND
natriumsilicate, acryl, 2016



„The stove short-circuits! I always have to be sure to use an extra cloth so that I don't get an electric shock! It takes 3 hours to make a simple soup! I've told them once, twice, three times... He always says that he'll get a new stove. I've been waiting for one year now!“

A., domestic worker, Maputo, 2017

RAG 7/XII - PLACED
Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, natriumsilicate, acryl, 2017

Thank

I would like to thank all of the domestic workers and interviewees who have helped and inspired me so far with their clever comments, inspiration, encouragement and crystal-clear views. I would not have been able to complete my work without these insights into individual experiences and opinions.

To be continued!

Sometimes he ask *Do you need a hand?*

Karen - a hand? Help?

I am not the only one who is living in that household!

D., wife, Skopje, 2016

WORK COAT
Inkjet, 160 x 110 cm, 2017



© photographs

Karen Packebusch, Germany
Robert Vanis, Germany/ Austria
Feling Capela, Mozambique
David Simon Gross, Germany
Matthias Blumhagen, Germany
Eduardo Peixoto, Brasil

The title

The title of this work is a quote taken from the 2000 book by Bridget Anderson entitled “Doing the Dirty Work”.

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