

During the Second World War, 1.6 million Poles were subjected to forced labour in the Third Reich, most of them being employed in agriculture and industry. Their experiences have already been largely studied by historians. However, little is still known about the work carried out in German households, where many thousands of young Polish women were forcibly employed as housemaids, cooks or nannies. The aim of my project is to inquire into their specific experiences, often deviating from established narratives on forced labour in Nazi Germany. Moreover, I will extend my research through analysis of the attitudes, views and experiences of German families, that employed Polish maids in their households. It will allow me to reconstruct the complex microcosm of the German home, its relationships and rules, and to ask novel questions about the attitudes of German civilians in the face of the exploitation of slave labour during the Second World War. The project will be complemented by an analysis of the Nazi system of forced labour, by which Polish housemaids were regarded as a peculiar 'social benefit' that enabled Reich citizens to experience social advancement.

In the course of the project, I will analyse historical sources gathered in the German archives, such as diaries, memoirs, oral history interviews, the press, and official, court and police documents. This will allow for a comprehensive examination of the phenomenon of forced domestic labour, from both a macro- and micro-historical perspective. For instance I will use class habitus theory to illuminate how pre-war social experiences influenced the experiences of forced labour. To examine the survival strategies of Polish servants, I will utilise Alf Lüdtke's notion of *Eigen-sinn* (self-will) to identify specific acts of everyday resistance and struggle to maintain subjectivity. I will analyse the German household within a framework of the 'total institution' developed by Erving Goffman. Although, at first glance, the theory, which is applied to studies of prisons and psychiatric hospitals, among others, does not seem to fit individual contexts, I will show that the ritualised everyday life of the German household successfully meets the criteria of a 'total institution'.

The topic of Polish women's forced labour in German-Nazi households has not yet been a subject of an in-depth historical analysis, studied only in a contributory way. My research will not only illuminate hitherto unknown historical witness accounts, but will also forge a new research path for the studies on the experiences of Poles during the Second World War, allowing important questions to be raised about causal survival strategies, nuancing the narrative around the topic of forced labour.