

# THE 'MISTRESS' AND THE 'MAID' IN THE GLOBALIZED ECONOMY

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Most accounts of economic restructuring concentrate on global culture, the hypermobility of capital, and the power of transnationals. But in neglecting the sites of material production of advanced information and communications technology, we overlook the capital that is at least still partly embedded in national territories. If we focus on the practices that provide the infrastructure for the production and reproduction of global capital, we uncover a multiplicity of work cultures involving real people in real places. These include secretaries, pizza delivery persons, cleaning crews, truck drivers, dog walkers, industrial service workers, maids, child-care workers, and a host of other low-skilled, mostly 'blue-collar' workers who have become invisible in the narrative of hypermobile capital. As Saskia Sassen properly reminds us, the corporate work culture with its emphasis on specialized information services is overvalued while other kinds of work cultures are devalued. This is especially true of the work of women and immigrants.<sup>1</sup>

Globalization also differentiates women's work in new ways. The flexibilization of the labour market has produced greater equality between educated middle-class women and men while creating greater inequality among women. High value is placed on the integration of professional women into the formal economy while the 'paid' reproductive work of women in the informal economy (the household) continues to be undervalued; women's 'paid' work outside the home is not equal to women's 'paid' work inside it. Globalization and the process of individualization (i.e., social differentiation) are complementary processes which are restructuring both the private and the public arenas.<sup>2</sup>

These changes have produced two categories of women within the household: professional women and maids. The growing participation of professional women in the labour market is accompanied by the largely 'invisible' development of paid work in the private household. Growing numbers of migrant women are employed in undeclared jobs in the household-oriented service industry, in cleaning, and as child caretakers, allowing more women to have professional careers. An invisible link has thus emerged between women's increasing participation in the formal labour market and the informal labour market roles of migrant and immigrant women.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to recognize, however, that this development is directly linked to the neoliberal character of globalization as this is reflected in state policy. As long as most welfare states are reluctant to provide, and are in the process of scaling back, the support structure for working women, the conditions upon which women enter 'male work structures' are not just gender but also class and race specific. Professional women have the advantage of falling back upon mostly cheap, often undocumented migrants, to perform household tasks and child-rearing. Without adequate public child-care services, and without being able to fall back on the services of women from developing and transitional countries, educated women would not be able to climb professional ladders that demand great personal mobility and flexibility. Whether these activities are performed by (mostly) over-qualified East European women in Germany, or by African-Americans or Latin and Central American immigrants in the United States, or Filipina women in Italy and Canada, they involve a new international division of labour. On the one side is the 'mistress' and on the other stands the 'maid', separated by different racial, ethnic, class and national belongings and backgrounds.<sup>4</sup>

#### GENDER REGIMES IN THE GLOBALIZATION ERA

In the new decentralized 'flexible accumulation' processes<sup>5</sup> of the global economy the organization of work has changed. We witness a polarization between the 'feminization of work' with the creation of 'cheap-wage zones' even in highly industrialized countries,<sup>6</sup> and the emergence of a new professional class of global 'workers' that includes well-educated women. In Europe, women have filled more of the new jobs created in the last two decades than have men, and not all of these have been low-paid, insecure 'McJobs';<sup>7</sup> in the USA 52 percent of all the jobs created between February 1994 and February 1996 were in the top three deciles of classification by pay and only 32 percent were in the lower-paid categories.<sup>8</sup> In the 'global cities' young well-educated females have succeeded in entering the middle and upper echelons of the finance and business world,<sup>9</sup> although this comes with the caveat, as Saskia Sassen has again pointed out, 'that notwithstanding the growing number of top level women professionals in global economic activities and in international relations, both these worlds can be specified as male-gendered in so far as each in its distinct way has the cultural properties and power dynamics that we have

historically associated with men and power'.<sup>10</sup> As a result of these labour market changes, the gender order associated with the industrial Fordist regime is being radically transformed.<sup>11</sup>

### *1. The end of the Fordist family breadwinner model*

Globalization has eroded the material conditions for the male breadwinner and his dependent wife and family. The rise in the number of dual wage-earners since the 1970s is a product of this. One group of dual wage-earner families consists of relatively well-off professionals who are part of the formal economy. A much larger group can be found in the medium and lower level of the economy, relying on the additional wages of women to maintain or improve the family's living standard. Another category that has occupied the space vacated by the Fordist male breadwinner model are single parents (mostly female), whose numbers have increased dramatically.

Even in West Germany, which lags behind its European neighbours in regard to female employment, the number of working-age women employed has risen from around 40 percent in 1970 to 60 percent just before German unification. Despite Germany's inadequate child-care infrastructure, 81 percent of the women in one-parent households are active in the work-force and 61 percent of married women of all ages are employed (in the 18–40 age group the number increases to 70 percent).<sup>12</sup> If we extrapolate from recent trends, by the year 2008 women in the US will have the same labour force participation rate as men (at a level of 84 percent), and women in the European Union will reach it by the year 2014 (at a level of 67 percent).<sup>13</sup>

The integration of women into the labour market has led to new definitions of gender roles and to changes in the social value-system. The Fordist norm of women dependent on the male breadwinner is being replaced by the increasing individualization of women. A woman from Mexico, living in the United States, puts it as follows: 'Before, if you worked, everybody knew it was to help your husband but it was his obligation [to support the family]. Now it's your obligation; people expect women to work [outside the home] whether they like it or not'.<sup>14</sup>

### *2. The reconfiguration of the public/private and production/reproduction*

The flexibilization of the labour market has also undermined the separation between the productive and reproductive economy that was once the hallmark of the Fordist gender order.<sup>15</sup> The conceptual separation between private and public cannot deal with the fact that the daily work of many women is done in a 'triple shift'<sup>16</sup> in both the formal and informal sectors and in family activities. Whether this work is done by women in the Caribbean, in Asia, or in the 'global cities', its common feature is that women's work is a combination of activities in formal transnational production, in informal sector work, and in the subsistence economy of the family. The borders of this 'triple shift' are quite fluid for women, but relatively rigid for men. Women often spend up to

sixteen hours in this 'triple shift' in order to survive. In contrast, males do comparatively little work in the household economy and work either in the formal economy or as subcontractors or workers in the informal economy.<sup>17</sup>

These new forms of work are also redefining gender identity. While the woman was identified with the family and subordinated to the male in the Fordist period, she is 'individualized' in the global economy. Whether they are engaged in the formal economy as well-paid professionals, or employed in the informal economy of the Free Export Zones or in the global sweat-shops, or work as domestic servants, these women have in common the fact that combining productive with reproductive work is becoming ever more difficult. Neoliberal discourse is silent about how to reconcile the need for a job with the demands of raising children. From an economic standpoint, reproductive activities are 'invisible'. In the Fordist era reproductive work was at least socially recognized, despite its private seclusion. With the flexibilization of the labour market, child-rearing has again become an economic and social externality, and the dialectical relation between market and non-market activities has disappeared from the neoliberal discourse of the global economy.<sup>18</sup>

### *3. Increasing inequality among women*

The rising integration of women in the labour force has also meant a greater disparity between women of different classes, races and nationalities. Although the new members of the new 'club society' are mostly 'new boys', as Wendy Larner calls the new players in the global job-market,<sup>19</sup> professional women are no longer a rarity in the upper echelons of the knowledge and information industries. At the other end of the spectrum are the low-skilled service jobs that are not just an important part of the infrastructure of the formal economy, but essential to permit professional women to enter the job market. Women domestic servants are the key to permitting middle-class women to pursue their careers. Here we meet the new 'mistress' and her 'maid'; one cannot do without the other.<sup>20</sup> It is important to point out that this new dependency between 'mistress' and 'maid' is a structural problem of western capitalist societies and not a 'woman's problem'. As long as child care and care responsibilities remain privatized in the home, and as long as males do not contribute significantly to the unpaid labour in the home, professional women are forced to reinstitutionalize the system of housemaids of the last century.

In their triple dependence on the welfare state (as social workers, clients, and consumers), women are particularly hard hit by the social welfare crisis. The reduction in social services places the burden of caring for the elderly and the sick, and providing a range of needed inputs into education, once more on the shoulders of women. Moreover, the privatization of these and other social services destroys the very conditions that made the integration of women in the labour market possible. Particularly for women in less-skilled jobs, publicly provided child-care services often make the difference between seeking employment or staying at home. And the social service jobs generated by the

Keynesian welfare state, and which were often largely filled by women, disappear too.<sup>21</sup>

Globalization has thus fundamentally challenged the very notion of what is public and what is private. In the process, it has worsened gender-specific social division. Re-privatization of the domestic, as Janine Brodie argues, has elevated and revitalized the hetero-patriarchal family.<sup>22</sup> It rests on the dubious assumptions that the family is responsible for social reproduction, and that a family still consists of the male 'breadwinner' and his dependants. Aside from the conservative and ideological premise of these assumptions, they neglect to take into account the changing reality of the family. The Fordist gender order no longer exists. Today's reality is that women—even if they wanted to—no longer have the 'luxury' of remaining as caretakers in the home.

#### WHO IS DOING THE HOUSEWORK? THE GERMAN CASE

The discourse around this question has changed since the beginning of the feminist movement in the 1970s. The initial demand was to call on men to share equally in the burden of the housework and child care. The much hoped-for redistribution of household work has been disappointing. Virtually all studies show that despite the increasing integration of women into the labour force, men have not equally shared in the burden of domestic work—especially in Germany, where married men and fathers are, by comparison with the rest of Europe, almost the least willing to share household duties. Together with men in countries like Luxembourg and Ireland the average man in Germany continues to believe that household and family duties are the responsibility of the wife.<sup>23</sup>

Gøsta Esping-Andersen came to the same conclusion about men's contribution to unpaid labour in the home, noting that men's unpaid hours have changed little and show little variation internationally, typically being in the range of 10–15 hours. In contrast women's hours of unpaid labour vary a good deal, from 25 percent per week in Denmark to 45 in Spain.<sup>24</sup> The call for equal burden sharing of women and men in the domestic sphere thus seems to have failed. We are witnessing in virtually all industrial countries a new redistribution of housework and caring work which no longer counts on males to change their behaviour. The problem of sharing the new burdens is resolved by *other* women doing the daily household work for professional women (and of course, also for men).

This reliance by women on other women to do the housework is not new. But in Germany, as in other industrialized countries, the dismal working conditions of maids in the domestic sphere and the new job opportunities for women in industry and the service industry after 1945 led to a drastic decline of female servant workers.<sup>25</sup> What we are seeing now is a new version of what went before. The new 'maids' are often from a variety of foreign backgrounds. Many are undocumented migrants with insecure legal status. Another significant

difference from the past is that while domestic workers in the nineteenth century were invariably from the lower classes, today they include unemployed professionals—especially academics—from Eastern Europe.

To get reliable data on the number of people working in the domestic sphere, and the types of households that employ them, is a difficult task in all countries. Many of today's 'maids' are afraid to come out into the open for fear of being deported and thus endangering their economic survival. The 'employers' are equally reluctant to endanger the benefits they derive from 'black market' arrangements. Germany is no exception in this respect. The official number of socially insured domestic workers in the private household in 1994 is listed as 35,000.<sup>26</sup> Beyond these, 732,000 part-time workers were employed in private households in 1992. This number is mainly made up of women: 677,000 women (92.5 percent) versus 55,000 men.<sup>27</sup> In contrast to these official numbers, unofficial estimates of women working in German households tell a different story. It is estimated that 9 percent of households regularly employ help which translates to around 2.65 million households for 1994. This does not include the 1.4 million households (4.6 percent) which rely on household or cleaning help on an irregular basis. Which are the households employing domestic help? Not surprisingly, Munz estimates that 17 percent of families with incomes of more than DM 5,000<sup>28</sup> per month regularly employ help. By contrast, only 8 percent of all households rely on paid help.

If we compare the official data on socially insured domestic workers with the estimates of maids actually employed in the German household sector, we can assume that the discrepancy is the result of a flourishing 'black market'. In the past, the German tax system actually subsidized the black market for married German women who wanted to earn something 'on the side' by engaging in part-time household work. Since wives are covered by the social insurance of the husband, they have little incentive to get individual coverage. Their main interest is the net salary they can earn without jeopardizing the tax allowance husbands receive for wives who are participating in the labour market ('Ehegattensplitting').<sup>29</sup>

But the present demand for outside help in the private home can no longer be met by German housewives wanting to earn some money on the side. Both demand and supply side factors have contributed to a changing domestic labour market. Changes on the demand side include the increasing integration of women in the labour market; the flexibilization of the working time of spouses; the increase in single-parent homes; the absence of a social infrastructure permitting women to combine work with family life; the rising number of older single people with relatively high incomes; the refusal of men to share in the burden in the domestic sphere. Changes on the supply side are: the high unemployment rate among women; the increasing 'new poverty', particularly among women; the availability of cheap migrant labour from Yugoslavia and Turkey, and now also from Eastern Europe, as well as asylum seekers and refugees from the developing world.

In Germany, as well as in many other industrial countries, we are confronted with a 'scissors' phenomenon: an increase in the number of households with ever more income and little time and of others with little income and more time. These two factors, in combination with scaling back the social infrastructure for family assistance, have led to two different, but complementary labour markets for women: one cannot do without the other. 'Current occupational class structure produces two groups (of women) in relation to domestic work and child care: those who have not got the time to do it and those who have no alternative but to do it'.<sup>30</sup>

#### THE SOLUTION: OUTSOURCING OF DOMESTIC PRODUCTION

Gøsta Esping-Anderson has taken the unchanging level of men's burden-sharing and given it a positive twist with the provocative suggestion that women should stop 'nagging' their mates and instead bring household production to the market. His advice for men and women is to stop producing these services in the home and obtain them on the market instead.<sup>31</sup> This would create jobs, decrease poverty, and help resolve the welfare-state crisis. Instead of creating a women-friendly welfare state, we should head for a collective welfare state.

Since increasing household demand for outside provision of domestic services is basically the result of rising income levels, favourable costs of such services, and shortage of time, Esping-Andersen concludes that the problem must lie in the currently high market prices for goods and services that substitute for household-produced services (e.g., private child care, domestic labour). High market prices lead to low market demand, since these services can be self-produced at a lower cost in the home. Yet Esping-Andersen does not question the class, race and gender aspects of external services that would ensure that their costs were 'favourable'.

If domestic services are to be obtained via the market, then we also have to accept large wage differentials—i.e., low wages for the workers providing them. Otherwise this development will be hampered by Baumol's 'cost disease'. Baumol has shown that the assumption of price inelasticity of demand for services is not justified in cases where the consumer can switch to substitution.<sup>32</sup> Simple services in the home have always competed with 'self-service'. The productivity of such service work increased over time through industrially produced household machines, tools, and other mechanical and electronic gadgets. If as a result of economic development the relative prices for industrial goods decreased while the price of domestic labour increased, then one could expect that 'self-production' would expand at the expense of the demand for services on the market. This conclusion led Fritz Scharpf to suggest that we are not on the road to a service-economy. Instead we are witnessing the rise of a 'self-help society'.<sup>33</sup>

If we want to avoid the 'cost disease' there are three solutions to the

problem. The first is to have the state provide and subsidize personal and household services. This is done in Sweden, Denmark and Norway where taxes are high and consequently the share of privately supplied personal and household services is low. At the same time, wage differentials are relatively low in the Nordic states. Second, we can accept high wage differentials and provide personal and household services via the private market. In the United States, the share of private domestic services is the highest of any industrial country while at the same time the wage differentials are also high. The third group of countries (Germany, Austria, France, Belgium and Holland) do not have large private nor public service sectors. Not surprisingly, these countries have the lowest share of people as a percentage of the working population working in the service economy. We are faced with three models: state subsidized care, services that are privatized and available at 'favourable cost', and domestic work which continues to be mainly done by the family itself (i.e., the woman).

These models have in common that they are gender-, class-, and race-blind. Esping-Andersen starts from the assumption that dual-earner families are income rich but short of time. Thus outsourcing domestic work is the answer. But in this calculation, the supply side is completely absent. Who are the 'workers' who are forced to sell their labour at a 'favourable price' and what level is considered 'favourable'? First, we know that the suppliers of such services are overwhelmingly women and not men. Second, they are mostly working-class women and their income is often crucial to the survival of their families. Third, many of these women are migrant domestic workers lacking many basic citizenship rights. Advocating low market prices for household services, as Esping-Andersen suggests, in order to increase the demand for such labour, means that we create at the household level a new ethnically defined female underclass that lacks political rights and legal rights.

Whether we look at female migrant workers in Italy, in Canada, the United States, England or Germany, studies show that they overwhelmingly find work in the domestic sphere. For Germany there are no available data on the number of non-Germans involved. However, various researchers have learned from interviews with representatives of labour administration, labour unions, welfare associations, organizations for foreigners and other such agencies that a large part of the paid work in the home is done by non-Germans. They include economic migrants, asylum seekers, expatriates from the former Eastern Europe, but also language students, women on tourist visas, as well as 'foreigners' of the second generation.<sup>34</sup> Rerrich suggests that a higher proportion of foreign women is found in cleaning homes than in caring for children. This has to do with the increasing number of foreign women pressured to find a job in the informal economy. They often do not possess a work permit and do not speak the language sufficiently to qualify for work in the formal economy. Given their insecure residence status and the need to find a paid job, migrant women are often forced to take the low-paid and little-valued domestic work.

While migrant women have often little choice but to take the cleaning jobs in the private German households, immigrant women with a more secure residence status face the problem of higher unemployment rates in contrast to both German women and foreign men. Thus they too are available for these domestic jobs. Germany has an immigrant population of 11 percent. The biggest number comes from Turkey. The increase of immigrant women who seek hourly paid work in the informal and black labour markets is a reflection of the general unemployment situation and the difficulty of finding regular work. There are, as Kaj Fölster emphasizes, no figures of the ratio of immigrants to non-immigrants in household services, as these workers are not part of the unemployment statistics.<sup>35</sup>

Refugees or expatriates of German origin from the East European countries are not included in the immigration statistics because they are registered as German citizens as soon as they enter the country. But their problems on the labour market are not much different from other immigrants. They often lack sufficient qualifications and do not have a sufficient command of German. Polish women are also increasingly entering the black market of paid domestic work in Germany. They invariably enter on a three-month tourist visa, and then return home. Often a relative or friend secures the replacement position at the work-place. The work is thus often shared among persons who know each other, and these work arrangements can be flexible enough to satisfy the employer. Employment on a tourist visa is illegal but their status as a tourist permits them to move about freely in Germany and their income is seldom checked. Polish women have an advantage over other immigrants, as they are culturally similar to Germans. Newspaper announcements that read: 'German, French, Russian and Polish-speaking woman, 40 years old, with educational training, undertakes child care and domestic work, live-in lodging desired' are no longer a rarity in Germany.<sup>36</sup>

Women asylum seekers, migrants, immigrants, expatriates of German origin who work in the domestic sphere in Germany reinforce women's position as hidden workers with peripheral problems. Whether they have to contend with sexual harassment, long hours of work, arbitrary treatment by their employers, insecurity or even the loss of the job and the right to stay in the country, these problems remain 'hidden' and do not precipitate a response from the state. Moreover, while 'paid housework' was initially sought as a short-term strategy by most immigrant women, it generally turns into long-term employment. This has two consequences. These jobs do not provide any kind of promotion or career prospects that will permit movement out of the domestic arena. In addition, a well-hidden fact is that many of these migrant women cannot take their children to the country of employment. We not only need to ask the question 'Who is doing the housework?' But also 'Who is doing the child care for the domestic worker?'

## CONCLUSION

Globalization has increased flexibilization and individualization in the labour markets. These global processes perpetuate old patterns of segregation and create new forms of marginality. The globalization literature has largely focused on the information technology revolution with its new ways of producing, communicating, managing, and living. Less attention has been paid to the formation of new social patterns which have arisen at the level of the household. As the trend toward women professionals increases we also witness, in the absence of public and communal child and domestic care facilities, the need for paid household workers. The much hoped for redistribution of caring work between men and women has not materialized. Instead we witness a new international division of labour between women of different ethnicity, class, generation, and citizenship. The new class of domestic servants are often migrant women who do not have independent legal status, nor are they counted as part of the official migrant population. In countries without security of residence, migrant women are at constant risk of deportation and abuse.

This development points to a new power relationship at the level of the household *between women*. We are witnessing the rise of a privileged professional class of women and the growth of an ethnically-defined female underclass. Increasingly, the career of middle-class women intersects with the position of immigrant women. Both sides are mutually dependent on the other. As Marianne Friese points out, there are risks for both sides that are not part of the traditional sexual contract between married men and women. While a husband is able to 'purchase' life-long freedom from domestic work through marriage, a wife with a professional job can only gain limited security from the services of a 'maid'.<sup>37</sup> More important, 'the occupation that brought women of different class backgrounds together in the women's sphere is now bringing race relations into the middle-class homemaker's home'.<sup>38</sup> In this struggle, majority and minority women's interests intersect, despite different social realities and origins.<sup>39</sup> The increasing equality among middle-class men and women of the same class and ethnic background is accompanied by a new kind of inequality among women of different ethnic and class backgrounds.

To avoid the creation of a new ethnically defined female underclass, the common struggle has to be fought at several levels. First, it is essential to 're-politicize the private'. The privatized nature of the household hides the class and race dynamics that are embedded in the new domestic service economy. At the same time, employing other women to do the caring work in the homes of professionals reproduces the gendered aspect of responsibility for the household. As long as state policies in most advanced capitalist countries adhere to the outdated 'breadwinner doctrine', deficiencies in social support systems and welfare state provisions are the logical result. The dismantling of the ideology of the male breadwinner model doctrine is a first step in the much needed discourse on how men and women can combine family and work without

exploiting women from other class and ethnic backgrounds. Feminist scholarship is also challenged to reveal and make visible the new inequities that arise in response to the neoliberal reprivatization discourse. Bakan and Stasiulis conclude that 'only by revealing how systematic practices render some relatively privileged women complicit in the reproduction of racial, ethnic, and other forms of inequities for other women that the real structural boundaries of oppression can be revealed, understood, and challenged'.<sup>40</sup> Finally, we need to focus more strongly on the 'feminization of migration' that ends for many women as undocumented domestic servants in the 'host' country. The newer discourses on citizenship stress that citizenship reflects the asymmetrical state relationships in the global economy. However, we also need to take into account that citizenship interacts with ethnic, gender, and class differences.

### NOTES

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