

Temporary Service?

A Global Perspective on Domestic Work and the Life Cycle from Pre-Industrial Times to the Present

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Abstract: In recent years, labor history has taken a “global turn”, increasingly focusing on labor relations in the non-Western world. This article aims to challenge existing perceptions of the history of domestic work in Europe from a global labor history perspective by comparing them with the histories of domestic workers the world over. It seeks to discern continuities and discontinuities in the life cycles of domestic workers around the world over a long period of time. The profound influence of globalization and women’s emancipation on the contemporary international division of labor may make it seem quite new, but it remains rooted in older patterns of migration, colonial relations, and gender and ethnic stereotypes.

Although the study of domestic service has a long history,¹ it is safe to say that the historiography of domestic workers really only took off about fifty years ago. The 1960s not only witnessed the quick development of strands like the history of the family and demography, but it also saw the emergence of a “new social history” where an interest in the history of everyday life was taken. This was coupled with feminist historians’ interest in the work and lives of women in the past. Over the subsequent decades, a huge number of studies on domestic service in the pre-industrial and industrializing North Atlantic appeared.

Historical demographers such as Peter Laslett and Tony Wrigley of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure made meticulous, empirically-based historical reconstructions of household pat-

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1 See for an excellent overview of the literature: Raffaella Sarti, *Historians, Social Scientists, Servants, and Domestic Workers. Fifty Years of Research on Domestic and Care Work*, in: *International Review of Social History* 59. 2014, pp. 279 – 314.

terns in pre-industrial Western Europe and discovered that a large share of the population was living as non-kin in other people's households, usually as servants.² This fitted well with John Hajnal's model of the European marriage pattern, with its comparatively small nuclear households, and with men and women marrying relatively late. In this model, servanthood formed a particular stage in the life cycle most young men and women went through in order to earn money, learn skills and gain sociability. Hajnal's famous "Saint Petersburg-Trieste line" formed the geographical demarcation of this particular marriage pattern.³

In parallel with demographers' interest for domestic service as a historical stage in the life cycle, the rise of feminism and feminist studies led to various research projects on a wide array of aspects of domestic work in the past. In 1974, Leonore Davidoff, for instance, argued that, despite their class differences, there were also many similarities between maids and mistresses, due to their shared inferior position as women in society and in the household.⁴ A whole range of studies on (female) domestic workers appeared, stressing their migratory trajectories, working conditions, and the relationship between domestic service and the life cycle and marriage.⁵

Indeed, in much of Western and Central Europe, though varying according to period and region, work as a servant constituted a customary stage in the life cycle. This was a highly gendered phenomenon, which was perhaps different depending on the urban and the rural context. In the countryside, boys and girls often worked as live-in servants doing all sorts of agricultural tasks, which for girls were usually more household-oriented tasks than those for boys. In the urban context, boys were more likely to be apprenticed in artisanal trades, whereas girls performed shop assistant-type and household chores. In most early modern towns, 15 to 30 per cent of the population aged 15 to 65 were listed as servants in other people's households. For the "sending" household, engaging their daughters in domestic work for wages was intended to achieve specific, if limited, goals: a (small) independent income, a dowry, and an

2 Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost*, London 1965; Peter Laslett, *Size and Structure of the Household in England over Three Centuries*, in: *Population Studies* 23. 1969, pp. 199–223.

3 John Hajnal, *European Marriage Patterns in Perspective*, in: David V. Glass and David E.C. Eversley (eds.), *Population in History*, London 1965, pp. 101–146; John Hajnal, *Two Kinds of Pre-industrial Household Formation Systems*, in: *Population and Development Review* 8. 1982, pp. 449–494.

4 Leonore Davidoff, *Mastered for Life. Servant and Wife in Victorian and Edwardian England*, in: *The Journal of Social History* 7. 1974, pp. 406–428.

5 Leonore Davidoff, *Domestic Service and the Working-Class Life Cycle*, in: *Bulletin of the Society of the Study of Labour History* 1973, no. 26, pp. 10–13; Theresa McBride, *The Domestic Revolution. The Modernisation of Household Service in England and France 1820–1920*, London 1976; Louise A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott, *Women, Work and Family*, New York 1978; Karin Walsler, *Dienstmädchen. Frauenarbeit und Weiblichkeitsbilder um 1900*, Frankfurt 1985.

acquisition. While, at the same time, severely restricting their agency because of the control and power their masters and mistresses had over them, living-in also had advantages for the young servants concerned: it saved them or indeed their parents a lot of expense. The simple meals and clothes they received at their employers' homes were often far more plentiful than what they had been used to having from their family of origin.⁶

However, while Hajnal's and Laslett's model of "life cycle service" may have been quite customary for North-Western and Central Europe, it was not prevalent all over Europe.⁷ Moreover, whereas the history of domestic service since the 1960s has mostly been studied within the West European and North American context, labor history in recent years has evolved into exploring the history of the non-Western past or the "Global South".⁸ Such a perspective challenges existing perceptions of the history of work in the past.

Following this recent historiographical trend, this article aims to change long-standing views of the history of domestic work in Europe by giving a global labor history perspective on domestic work. In order to do so, various research questions are addressed that both seek to compare and to connect the histories of domestic workers in Europe and elsewhere. How do the experiences of domestic workers in pre-industrial and industrializing Europe compare to those in the other parts of the world we are now beginning to learn about? To what extent was domestic service a "life cycle event" outside Western and Central Europe? How did the encounters with Europeans in the context of the extension of global markets and colonialism shape domestic workers' lives and work experiences and to what extent did these connections resonate in the metropolises? And, to what extent and how is the "revival" of domestic work in the "Global North" in recent years related to international migration and new divisions of labor worldwide?

6 Dirk Hoerder, *Historical Perspectives on Domestic and Care-Giving Workers' Migrations. A Global Approach*, in: Hoerder, *Towards a Global History*, pp. 61 – 110.

7 Josef Ehmer, *Marriage*, in: David I. Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli (eds.), *The History of the European Family*, vol. 2: *Family Life in the Long Nineteenth Century*, New Haven 2002, p. 310; See also Sarti, *Historians, Social Scientists, Servants*, p. 289.

8 See e.g. Marcel van der Linden, *Labour History. The Old, the New and the Global*, in: *African Studies* 66. 2007, pp. 169–180. See also the ERC Starting Grant-project "Domestic Servants in Colonial South Asia" by Nitin Sinha and Nitin Varma: *re:work*, ERC Starting Grant, <https://rework.hu-berlin.de/de/erc.html>.

I. Service as a Life Cycle Event: The Case of Pre-Industrial and Industrializing Europe

For many young people in Europe between circa 1500 and 1900, service signified “an interim stage between rural roots and adulthood”.⁹ This quote not only emphasizes the life cycle element of service, but also implies that migration, either short-distance from countryside to town, or over greater distances, was often inherent to this particular event. All over Europe, women and girls moved in large numbers, either to nearby dwellings, or to seek their fortune in large cities, such as London, Paris, Amsterdam, or Warsaw. Migration sometimes occurred over great distances, such as from Norway to the Dutch Republic, where young women followed the many Norwegian aspiring sailors to find work as domestics.¹⁰ In the German-language regions as a whole, domestic servants often moved in subsequent stages. First, they migrated from the countryside to a nearby town. Then they often went on towards larger urban centers, and would experience frequent changes of position and location in urban situations. As most domestic workers were live-in servants, changing jobs also meant changing homes.¹¹ This large turnover was typical for domestic servants in many parts of Western and Central Europe, including England, Germany, France and the Netherlands.¹² The late eighteenth century saw an increase in domestic service all over Western Europe, both in the urban and the rural context. Evidence from England, Germany and France shows that in the early nineteenth century, up to a third of all urban women between the ages of 15 and 24 were domestic servants.¹³ Most servants came from a rural background and carried out a couple of years of service to prepare for marriage: learning some skills and, more importantly, acquiring some savings. Although wages were generally low, they were partly paid in kind – boarding and food – which meant that the average servant did not have to spend much so could save a small amount of money.¹⁴ This was true for both young men and women, although it seems that the proportion of their income that consisted of monetary wage was somewhat

- 9 Deborah Simonton, *A History of European Women’s Work. 1700 to the Present*, London 1998, p. 59.
- 10 Sólvi Sogner, *Young in Europe around 1700. Norwegian Sailors and Servant-Girls Seeking Employment in Amsterdam*, in: Jean-Pierre Bardet et al. (eds.), *Mesurer et comprendre. Mélanges offerts à Jacques Dupâquier*, Paris 1993, pp. 514–532.
- 11 Hoerder, *Historical Perspectives*, p. 72.
- 12 Simonton, *A History of European Women’s Work*, p. 101; Corinne Boter, *Marriages Are Made in Kitchens. The European Marriage Pattern and Life-Cycle Servanthood in Eighteenth-Century Amsterdam*, in: *Feminist Economics* 23. 2016, no. 2, S. 68–92.
- 13 Simonton, *A History of European Women’s Work*, pp. 96 f.
- 14 Ann Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England*, Cambridge 1981; Simonton, *A History of European Women’s Work*, p. 99. For an estimate of savings, see Boter, *Marriages Are Made in Kitchens*.

larger for men.¹⁵ Sometimes, complete impoverishment led to a rise in supply of domestic servants. For instance, in the mid-nineteenth century, the impoverishment of the Habsburg Empire's Slovene regions forced young women from poor rural families to undertake domestic service in the port of Trieste, from which – via merchant families' connections – they often moved onwards, all the way to Alexandria (Egypt).¹⁶ In early modern Europe, women almost always outnumbered men in domestic service.¹⁷ Moreover, as a "feminization" of domestic work occurred all over Europe in the course of the nineteenth century, the image of the female servant has lingered, both in the public memory and in the majority of historical studies.¹⁸ In the urban context, employing male servants usually gave the employer a higher status. The richer a household was, the more servants it could hire, and men were often among them, as gardeners, butlers, or coach drivers. Middle-class and artisan households generally employed one servant, often a young woman, for the housework and sometimes for some assistance in the (work) shop.¹⁹ Apart from the young men serving in large households, for instance in English, French and Polish towns, service in the urban context for them usually rather resembled apprenticeship or being a journeyman with a local trader or artisan. Nevertheless, the lines between domestic chores and assisting in economic activities for the market were probably often blurred, both for female servants and male journeymen.²⁰ In the rural context, the boundaries between housework and farm work were even more unclear. In early nineteenth-century Sweden, for instance, both young men and women were hired on farms to do several – usually gender-specific – tasks, both involving cleaning and food preparation and specific agricultural tasks. For small farms, one maid and one (male) farmhand usually sufficed, and generally, there was more of a gender balance regarding servants than in towns.²¹

15 See e.g. Joyce Burnette, *Gender, Work and Wages in Industrial Revolution Britain*, Cambridge 2008, p. 96.

16 Hoerder, *Historical Perspectives*, p. 74.

17 One of the exceptions was 18th-century Poland, where (both in Warsaw and Cracow) the proportion of all men in domestic service exceeded that of women. Marta Kindler and Anna Kordasiewicz, *Maid-of-all-Work or Professional Nanny? The Changing Character of Domestic Work in Polish Households. Eighteenth Century to the Present*, in: Hoerder, *Towards a Global History*, pp. 158 – 181.

18 Raffaella Sarti and Francesca Scrinzi, Introduction to the Special Issue. Men in a Woman's Job, *Male Domestic Workers, International Migration and the Globalization of Care*, in: *Men and Masculinities* 13. 2010, pp. 4 – 15.

19 Marybeth Carlson, *A Trojan Horse of Worldliness? Maidservants in the Burgher Household in Rotterdam at the End of the Seventeenth Century*, in: E. Kloek et al. (eds.), *Women of the Golden Age*, Hilversum 1994, pp. 87 – 96; Kindler and Kordasiewicz, *Maid-of-all-Work*.

20 Simonton, *A History of European Women's Work*, pp. 48 f.

21 Christer Lundh, *Life-Cycle Servants in Nineteenth Century Sweden. Norms and Practices*, in: Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux (ed.), *Domestic Service and the Formation of*

In most of Europe, domestic service had been a “free” occupation since the late Middle Ages, although one can of course debate as to what extent the average domestic worker was entirely free to choose, against a background of poverty and their relationships with more powerful parents and masters. In antiquity and early medieval times, domestic slavery had been widespread, both in the Mediterranean and in the Carolingian Empire. Slaves came from Africa and the Middle East as well as from the conquered non-Christian peoples in Northern and Eastern Europe. They were generally used for domestic chores.²² However, the Black Death of the mid-1300s had an adverse effect on slavery, at least in much of Western Europe. The demographic shock of the plague that wiped out on average thirty per cent of the population, supposedly brought about more mobility for men and women, and an increase in waged labor. According to some authors, this was the time when serving became part of young women’s life cycle. It provided them with a “marriage budget” and a way to “escape the authority of their parents”.²³ Nevertheless, in the Mediterranean, domestic slavery continued to exist until the nineteenth century. It is no coincidence that the Spanish word *servir* means “to be subject to another person”.²⁴ Domestic slaves were usually women and they came from all over the world. Until well into the Early Modern period, domestic slavery was widespread in the Iberian Peninsula and in Italian towns.²⁵

Moreover, in much of Eastern Europe, the problem of labor scarcity following the Black Death led to the “second serfdom”, tying peasants to the land in bonded relationships. This institution, which was only reformed in the course of the nineteenth century, entailed major restrictions for large sections of the population of both men and women alike. This undoubtedly also affected domestic service, in the sense that adolescents were not free to choose where they wanted to work. Moreover, servant girls remained under their father’s custody well after having reached their majority.²⁶ And although high proportions of female servants and laborers were found in Russia as well,

European Identity. Understanding the Globalization of Domestic Work, 16th–21st Centuries, Bern 2004, pp. 75 f.; Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk and Richard Paping, Beyond the Census. Reconstructing Dutch Women’s Labor Market Participation in Agriculture in the Netherlands, ca. 1830–1910, in: History of the Family 19. 2014, pp. 447–468.

22 Hoerder, Historical Perspectives, pp. 70 f.

23 Tine de Moor and Jan Luiten van Zanden, Girl Power. The European Marriage Pattern and Labour Markets in the North Sea Region in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Period, in: Economic History Review 63. 2010, pp. 11–14.

24 Aurelia Martín Casares, Domestic Service in Spain. Legislation, Gender and Social Practice, in: Fauve-Chamoux, Domestic Service, pp. 189–209.

25 Sarti, Historians, Social Scientists, Servants, p. 281.

26 Hill Gates and François Hendrickx, Servants and Service in Eurasia, in: Theo Engelen and Arthur P. Wolf (eds.), Marriage and the Family in Eurasia. Perspectives on the Hajnal Hypothesis, Amsterdam 2008, pp. 289–318, here p. 300.

life cycle servants were probably much more uncommon there.²⁷ But how common was life cycle service in Western Europe? For one thing, it was not dominant everywhere, and recent research has shown that we need to be far more careful with generalizing for the whole of Western Europe. Many women stayed in the same household as servants for most of their lives, and they often became part of the family and were remembered in wills.²⁸ In the Austrian Alpine region, for instance, family farms employed many servants, a large share of whom stayed in service all of their lives, never being able to get married.²⁹ In many of these cases, recorded from all over Europe, life cycle service became lifetime service.

II. Perspectives from outside Europe: Domestic Service in Pre-Colonial Asia, America and Africa

Although sources for research on domestic work in the non-European world before the colonial period are scarce, it is possible to give a scattered historical account, especially with regard to Asia. In China up to the mid-twentieth century, girls were generally married off at a very young age, usually between 14 and 18, and some were even betrothed much younger than that. In many regions of China, infant girls were raised by their parents-in-law. In the household of their in-laws, young women occupied the lowest position in the family hierarchy.³⁰ Often, they would have to serve their (future) mothers-in-law. Thus, domestic work was often performed involuntarily and unpaid within the family context, as extended families prevailed in China. Nevertheless, there were also bonded female and male servants not related to the family, a category originating from the practice of selling children, and more rarely adults, into service resulting from general subsistence or specific family crises. The sale of a child ensured survival during famines and income for the rest of the family. Many, bound to the age of marriage, could leave bondage after a couple of years, but others remained in service for life.³¹

In early modern Japan, selling persons into service was quite common until this was forbidden by law in 1619. After this legislation, service as wage labor developed, usually by contract. Another way of getting servants was employing kin, such as nieces and nephews, but informal family networks became increasingly inefficient as the market economy advanced. In the eighteenth century, further laws stipulated that the length of contracts was restricted to

27 Tracy Dennison, *The Institutional Framework of Russian Serfdom*, Cambridge 2011, pp. 160–171.

28 Simonton, *A History of European Women's Work*, p. 59.

29 Ehmer, *Marriage*, p. 310.

30 Jan Kok, *Women's Agency in Historical Family Systems*, Paper for the Workshop "Deep Causes of Economic Development", Utrecht December 2014, p. 8 [unpub. manuscript].

31 Hoerder, *Historical Perspectives*, p. 98 and p. 101.

three to five years, which means that a similar type of life cycle service as in Europe had developed in Japan as well.³² Indeed, looking at this from an Asian perspective at least in central Japan, men and women married rather late, at an average age of 28 and 23 respectively.³³ In contrast to Europe, however, where service could – though not always did – mean liberation from the home family, it did by definition not free men and women from their family ties in Japan. Rather, it often took the form of “pawn service” in which young servants’ labor constituted the indemnity of money lent by their fathers.³⁴

In pre-colonial India, both caste and gender played important roles, and both slave and freer forms of domestic labor also existed. Within the caste system, “unclean” and servile work was generally attributed to those people belonging to the lowest castes. Aristocratic households employed large numbers of male as well as female servants, many of them slaves. Sometimes, due to the precarious gender boundaries, eunuch slaves attended to the harems of rich upper-caste men. Although enslaved servants could be freed, this did not occur frequently and depended very much on the whims of their employers. Conversely, artisan households in pre-colonial India seemed to more often resort to hiring servants instead of buying slaves. Male servants were engaged in many tasks, such as cooking, cleaning and sweeping. There was a clear rank of domestics, which was reflected in their wages – lower-caste water carriers (*saqqa*), sweepers and kitchen utensil cleaners generally occupying the lowest positions their entire lives. Usually, service in pre-colonial India was thus not life cycle bound, either due to lifelong slavery and/or to the caste system condemning the lowest castes to particular types of work. Nevertheless, both freed slaves and hired servants were known to get married and start their own family later in life.³⁵

In pre-colonial Southeast Asia, service work involved enslaved war captives, bonded domestic labor, and bonded servants to indicate status and power. Local rulers, such as on Java, often demanded tributes and in-kind payments from peasant families, also involving domestic service in the broadest sense: maintenance of the palaces and gardens, household chores, and providing the courts with wood and foodstuffs. The conscripted workers’ wives and daughters attended to the needs of the regent’s wife or wives, their sons to those of the regent. Bondage arrangements varied from “voluntary under constraints” (for instance resulting from poverty, debt, or the inability to pay taxes), to self-indenture by the impoverished, and forced labor such as war captives and bondage due to unmet *corvéé* obligations. Servants did, however,

32 Mary Louise Nagata, *Domestic Service and the Law in Early Modern Japan*, in: Fauve-Chamoux, *Domestic Service*, pp. 211 – 233.

33 Sarti, *Historians, Social Scientists, Servants*, pp. 290 f.

34 Kok, *Women’s Agency*, p. 10.

35 Shireen Moosvi, *Domestic Service in Precolonial India. Bondage, Caste, Market*, in: Fauve-Chamoux, *Domestic Service*, pp. 543 – 573.

often receive some form of remuneration in addition to accommodation and board.³⁶

Although we do not know very much about service in Africa and the Americas before colonialism, the scant sources suggest that slavery was not uncommon in both parts of the world, and that slaves were also used for domestic purposes. In North African and East African coastal societies, for example, slave women from African, Turkish, Slavic, Georgian, and Circassian backgrounds had been employed for domestic tasks, childcare, or concubinage since antiquity. Female, male and child slaves who were fortunate could socialize into the lineage of their masters. In pre-colonial sub-Saharan Africa in many contexts, paid domestic labor probably was virtually absent, due to the low level of monetization. Older men exercised power over younger men and women who had to work for them. On the one hand, women were the main producers, not only the preparers of a household's food. They produced and reproduced and, in monetized economies, sold surplus vegetables or other agricultural produce on local or – depending on region and period – larger markets, thus gaining income. In addition, many societies customarily allowed people to pay debts “voluntarily” by entering debt bondage.³⁷

Studies on pre-Columbian Latin America are very scarce. Elisabeth Kuznesof has suggested that “[d]omestic service in Spanish America coincides with the beginning of Spanish colonization”,³⁸ but it is quite possible that this assertion relates to the lack of sources about everyday life of earlier societies in Latin America. However, it is clear that the Spanish who set foot in the Americas encountered gendered work patterns they were highly unfamiliar with. Most indigenous women's main responsibility was working the fields alongside their husbands, and they were thus not confined to work in the home as many of their counterparts in Europe were.³⁹ Although at first European missionaries' attempts to change this were rather fruitless, in the long run, encounters and settlement patterns changed the features of indigenous everyday life considerably, as is discussed below.

36 Ratna Saptari, *Studying Asian Domestic Labour Within Global Processes. Comparisons and Connections*, in: Jan Lucassen (ed.), *Global Labour History. A State of the Art*, Bern 2006, pp. 479 – 512, here pp. 492 – 494.

37 Hoerder, *Historical Perspectives*, pp. 87 f.

38 Elisabeth Kuznesof, *A History of Domestic Service in Spanish America, 1492 – 1980*, in: Elsa M. Chaney and Mary Garcia Castro (eds.), *Muchachas No More. Household Workers in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Philadelphia 1989, pp. 17 – 36, here p. 17.

39 Susan D. Amussen and Alysson Poska, *Restoring Miranda. Gender and the Limits of European Patriarchy in the Early Modern Atlantic World*, in: *Journal of Global History* 7. 2012, pp. 342 – 363.

III. Ethnicity, Gender, and Domesticity: Domestic Work under Colonialism

From the very first colonial encounters onwards, domestic workers formed the backbone of daily life in many settler communities. In the mid-seventeenth century Cape of Good Hope, black and Indian domestic workers and caregivers not only constituted the first intimate connections between the indigenous population and the European settlers, but also can be seen as – and indeed are now perceived as – the ancestral mothers of today’s South Africa.⁴⁰ In most other colonial enterprises too, ranging from Southeast Asia to the Western Frontier of the United States, domestic workers were vital to the settlement process of the first (white and predominantly male) colonizers. In many ways, employing non-white domestic and care workers in white colonial households fortified the ideology as well as the practice of imperialism and white superiority. On the one hand, employing domestic servants marked white households’ special privileges and status. On the other hand, local servants were often vital for the survival of settler families in the tropics, for instance in terms of food preparation and handling tropical diseases.⁴¹ As one European settler in colonial Singapore desperately noted about the reliance on Chinese domestic workers: “You are at the mercy of these servants.”⁴² Often, one of the implicit – and sometimes very explicit – aims of employing or forcing indigenous people into domestic work in the colonial project was “domestication”. For instance, the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century “outing” system in the United States, placing young Native American girls to do housework in white families’ homes, was seen as nurturing the Indians’ “desire to live civilized lives”. During Native American girls’ stay in white U.S. households, they were supposed to absorb the values of domesticity so that they could play an essential role in the transformation of their communities as future housewives and mothers.⁴³ Conversely, according to contemporary opinions, white mistresses’ attitudes towards their indigenous servants also

40 Shireen Ally, *Slavery, Servility, Service. The Cape of Good Hope, the Natal Colony, and the Witwatersrand, 1652–1914*, in: Hoerder, *Towards a Global History*, pp. 254–270.

41 For Java, see Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, *So Close and yet so Far. The Ambivalence of Dutch Colonial Rhetoric on Javanese Servants in Indonesia, 1900–1942*, in: Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda (eds.), *Domesticating the Empire. Race, Gender and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism*, Charlottesville 1998, pp. 130–153; For Tanganyika, see Robyn Allyce Pariser, *The Servant Problem. African Servants and the Making of European Domesticity in Colonial Tanganyika*, in: Hoerder, *Towards a Global History*, pp. 271–295.

42 Bela Kashyap, *Who’s in Charge, the Government, the Mistress, or the Maid? Tracing the History of Domestic Workers in Southeast Asia*, in: Hoerder, *Towards a Global History*, pp. 346–365.

43 Victoria K. Haskins, “The Matter of Wages Does not Seem to be Material”. *Native American Domestic Workers’ Wages under the Outing System in the United States, 1880s–1930s*, in: Hoerder, *Towards a Global History*, pp. 323–345.

contributed to maintaining the superiority of white settlers in the colonies. Thus, for instance, in the Dutch East Indies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, mistresses of the house were expected to teach their Javanese servants “Western” values such as hygiene and the proper way to perform domestic tasks.⁴⁴

Gender as well as race and ethnicity played significant roles in the “tense and tender ties” – the intimacies of colonial encounters, both in their violent and in their more gentle occurrences – constituting domestic service in the (post) colonial household.⁴⁵ In most cases the first colonial settlements – whether in Africa, Southeast Asia or on the U.S. frontier – involved distinctive gendered patterns of migration. Pioneers, sailors and soldiers were usually white men, who were not only in need of people to perform the domestic tasks they as boys had not generally learned at home, but also often felt the desire to engage in sexual relations. Many domestic servants (or slaves) combined these “personal services”, either voluntarily or because they were forced.⁴⁶

Gender and ethnicity also played a role in the choices made when employing domestic workers. Failed attempts to recruit white women to work as wage earners in frontier settlements and developing cities in the American West from the mid-nineteenth century, for instance, led to an increasing demand for male Chinese domestic workers who were very much appreciated and sought-after for their willingness to do the work that whites had stigmatized as un-American.⁴⁷ In much of colonial Africa as well, white European households employed black men to cook, clean, wash and serve. The proponents of using men as domestic workers lauded them for their ability to perform heavy manual labor that neither a female domestic servant nor the mistress of the house could do as well. Viewed from the point of view of the men taking on domestic work, they often preferred this over even harder labor, such as, for instance, working in the South-African mines in the late nineteenth century.⁴⁸

On a similar note to the aforementioned point, colonizers consciously utilized gender to designate African or Asian domestic workers as “others”. Not only were stereotypical European gender roles reversed by employing men for domestic work, white men and women even called them “houseboys”, as in

44 Locher-Scholten, *So Close and yet so Far*, pp. 141 f.

45 Ann Laura Stoler, *Tense and Tender Ties. The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies*, in: *The Journal of American History* 88. 2001, pp. 829 – 865.

46 Locher-Scholten, *So Close and yet so Far*; Ally, *Slavery, Servility, Service*; Amussen and Poska, *Restoring Miranda*.

47 Andrew Urban, *Imperial Divisions of Labor. Chinese Servants and Racial Reproduction in the White Settler Societies of California and the Anglophone Pacific, 1870 – 1907*, in: Hoerder, *Towards a Global History*, pp. 296 – 322.

48 Ally, *Slavery, Servility, Service*, p. 263.

colonial Tanganyika,⁴⁹ or falsely depicted them as feminized or eunuchs, as in the case of male Chinese domestic workers in the Pacific.⁵⁰ In all of these cases, the “masculinity” of African and Asian domestic workers was implicitly and explicitly questioned, while at the same time their virility and strength were employed for heavy tasks, as well as feared by white settlers. On the other hand, non-white female domestic workers often experienced gendered and racialized stereotyping of their femininity. Italian colonizers’ designation of characteristics such as “female” servility and sexual availability to the “Black Venuses” of colonial Eritrea still resonates in Eritrean female migrants’ gendered and racialized self-image as domestic workers in Italy today.⁵¹

Whereas “othering” has – often implicitly – been an aspect of domestic labor relations over the ages, colonial encounters have probably most explicitly shaped relationships between employers and employees in the domestic sphere, a mechanism extending well into the postcolonial period. On top of other denominators – such as social class or the urban-rural divide – race, ethnicity, and/or skin color often played a distinctive role in these mechanisms. For instance, domestic servants of Asian or African backgrounds were often believed to be more docile and loyal than white domestics.⁵² However, in some colonial settings colonizers tended to have an entirely opposite view of indigenous domestic workers, as was the case in late colonial Java where Javanese servants were depicted as “filthy, lazy and untrustworthy”. Here, instead of the convenience of particular (assumed) “traits” of black and Asian people, the disgust and even fear of certain characteristics of those “others” surfaced.⁵³

Interestingly, this “othering” did not only concern masters’ and mistresses’ stereotyping and downplaying of their domestic servants, it also worked the other way around. Colonized or formerly colonized domestic and care workers at times actively juxtaposed their own cultural values and skills, for instance in cleanliness or food-preparation, towards the – in their eyes – shiftless attempts at homemaking by their employers or mistresses. In many ways, indigenous as well as migrant domestic workers shaped the project of European domesticity, both in the colonies and in the metropolises. The specific skills colonized or migrant domestic workers brought with them were very much wanted and in many cases even indispensable to white households both in the past and today. This is what links the Tanganyika “houseboys” and the Chinese domestic workers in both the British Empire and the U. S. in the past with the Surinamese and Eritrean housekeepers and caregivers, or the Filipino nannies in white U. S.

49 Pariser, *The Servant Problem*.

50 Urban, *Imperial Divisions*.

51 Sabrina Marchetti, *Black Girls. Migrant Domestic Workers and Colonial Legacies*, Leiden 2014.

52 See e. g. Urban, *Imperial Divisions*, p. 299.

53 Locher-Scholten, *So Close and yet so Far*, p. 141.

American households today. Domestic workers were proud of the fact that they sometimes “knew better”, and this gave them a form of agency that transcends the stereotypical power relations of master-servant and colonizer-colonized. This was perhaps most forcefully illustrated in the quote from a Tanganyika “houseboy” Mzee, when his master told him he had sliced his lemons wrongly: “I know that some people do it that way, but I do it this way”.⁵⁴

While “othering” and juxtapositions of black and white, higher and lower class, male and female, is thus a powerful theme in the history of colonial as well as postcolonial domestic labor relations, there were also many ambiguities in the bonds between (white) employers and (non-white) domestic workers. In early colonial South-Africa, for instance, two women employed in the household of the colony’s first Governor, van Riebeeck, symbolize the very close and complex relations between white families and their colored servants. Van Riebeeck probably became sexually involved with the first black domestic servant he took into his home, the Khoena girl named Krotoa, whom he – probably not unintentionally – renamed “Eva”, the first woman on earth. The mutual importance of such emotional ties were also fervently illustrated by the story of Mooi Ansel, the formerly enslaved Bengal wet-nurse and nanny of van Riebeeck’s children who retained precious memories of her life in the van Riebeeck family until her death.⁵⁵

It was not only the masters of the house who developed intimate and sometimes sexual relationships with their domestic workers; mistresses also often developed close ties with their servants. There are examples of American women becoming emotionally involved with their Chinese male servants, as well as British women depending heavily on their Tanzanian “houseboys”, which, in turn, resulted in accusations that the propriety of white female bodies and domestic space was being violated. Sometimes, these intimate contacts were indeed expressly violent, as cases of Indian domestic workers raping their South-African mistresses show.⁵⁶ At other times, however, relationships were quite gentle and loving. Both types of bonds created anxiety among white male as well as female contemporaries, who, consequently, warned against overly intimate relationships between mistresses and their male servants of different race, at times making grotesque depictions of these relationships. While such representations may have influenced both contemporaries’ and historians’ take on employer-employee relations, making it seem more about simple power relations, further study should be dedicated to the tensions and ambiguities of working and living in the households of others, where distance and intimacy were (and still are) intrinsically entangled.

The gendered and racialized representations of domestic workers dating from colonial times still influence present-day relationships between employers and

54 Pariser, *The Servant Problem*, p. 280.

55 Ally, *Slavery, Servility, Service*, pp. 258 f.

56 *Ibid.*, pp. 260–262.

migrant domestics in various ways. This helps to explain the different trajectories of experiences of (post) colonial migrants to Europe in the past and today, as is shown in a recent comparison of Surinamese and Eritrean caregivers in the Netherlands and Italy respectively.⁵⁷ First of all, colonial heritages still influence the choice of specific migration patterns and possibly also the choice of the particular labor segment into which women migrating today fall. A case in point is the migration of domestic workers from the Philippines to the U.S., as well as black Eritrean women migrating to Italy in search for domestic work, but there are many other examples. Secondly, and equally importantly, their colonial past has shaped the countries that received postcolonial migrants, even if these countries nowadays do not typically perceive themselves as imperialistic. Indeed, the tense and tender ties of colonialism are still very much alive today, though perhaps tend to be referred to as “globalization” in contemporary rhetoric.

IV. The Global Care Chain: Domestic and Care Work in the Postcolonial World

After the Second World War, the domestic servant seemed to be disappearing at least in the Global North and, at best, was considered a vestige of the past.⁵⁸ Already in the early twentieth century, factory labor and administrative work had formed an attractive alternative for unmarried lower and middle-class women, leading to a “servant problem” in many of the industrialized countries. On top of this, rising living standards increasingly allowed married lower-class women to withdraw from the labor market. Simultaneously, if they did continue to participate in the labor market, the increasing level of education of middle-class, and eventually lower-class women, led them to choose more highly positioned jobs. The further development of the service sector, stimulated by new welfare arrangements developed by national governments, increased such opportunities for women in higher-status professions.

It was assumed that this increase in women’s labor market participation in the North (which involved the dilemma of women’s double roles) would not negatively impact on households because emerging welfare state institutions and modern household appliances would facilitate reproduction.⁵⁹ Public childcare and collective housing with laundry facilities and communal

57 Marchetti, *Black Girls*.

58 This section draws from Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk et al., *Domestic Workers of the World. Histories of Domestic Work as Global Labor History*, in: Hoerder, *Towards a Global History*, pp. 1 – 24.

59 Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein, *Women’s Two Roles. Home and at Work*, London 1956. For a debate on household appliances see e.g. Joy Parr, *Domestic Goods. The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years*, Toronto 1999.

restaurants were part of the utopian plans of social engineers. During the interwar years, feminists had already been striving to enable women to combine gainful employment with family life. In the post-war years this became possible and in some welfare states domestic workers seemed to have largely disappeared by the 1970s.⁶⁰

Simultaneously, many societies in the Global South experienced decades of struggle for independence and decolonization. For (potential) domestic workers, this meant that the former colonial-type households previously offering employment left the new state, which lowered the demand for their work. However, old indigenous elites had also hired domestic workers or, in some societies like Indonesia and Malaysia, had adopted the colonizers' custom of doing so.⁶¹ And new postcolonial elites also hired domestic workers. Therefore, unlike in the North-Atlantic realm, the demand for domestic workers did not vanish in most decolonized countries in Asia and Africa. This was also related to the economic consequences of independence. As former colonizers withdrew their capital, devastation and unemployment emerged, and despite reinvestments in some countries, this generally only created low-wage jobs. Moreover, new governing elites did not necessarily pursue employment-creating economic policies, preventing many households from building a sustainable living. While those who decided to migrate did not specifically move to the Global North with the aim of performing domestic and care work, the receiving societies often restricted them to these segments of the labor market. At this point new global inequalities, new migrant agency, and old views of service work as a female job merged.

In fact, it seems that the impact of colonialism on domestic work has continued to influence labor relations worldwide. Postcolonial migrations connect former colonized societies to the former colonizer via traditional migration connections (if in reverse), linguistic similarities, easier access to work permits, entitlement of residents, and even (former) citizenship, for example Algerians in France or Surinamese in the Netherlands. In turn, former colonizers now often provide development aid to their former colonies. The related migration of experts to the so-called "developing countries" has resulted in new domestic labor relationships: as they hire domestic workers (the children and grandchildren of the formerly colonized) for their comfort or

60 Karin Carlsson has analyzed how the development from domestic service to public service institutions was not as straightforward as it might appear. In Sweden, a new service profession called the "public home help service" was introduced at the end of the 1940s to work temporarily in private homes. Karin Carlsson, *Den tillfälliga husmodern. Hemvårdarinnekåren i Sverige 1940–1960*, Lund 2013.

61 Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power. Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*, Berkeley 2002, p. 24.

for charitable considerations – and upon returning home want to maintain the same service-supported lifestyle.⁶²

At the turn of the twenty-first century, domestic workers were on their way back into private households: according to International Labour Organization (ILO) statistics, the number of domestic workers grew by almost twenty million workers worldwide between 1995 and 2010.⁶³ Employing somebody to clean the house, to look after the children, or to take care of the infirm and elderly has become an essential part of life in many dual breadwinner families in the Global North.⁶⁴ Women's increased labor force participation combined with limited improvement in sharing household chores between partners, declining public provisions, in combination with the pursuit of a new lifestyle with active time off, stylish homes, and more time for children have increased the demand for domestic workers. At the same time, persisting economic hardship in parts of the Global South has increased supply. Bridget Anderson has argued that delegating domestic and care work is a strategy to avoid gender and generational conflict within middle-class households. This is when (undocumented) migrant domestic workers step in and they are often confronted with the downsides of such attempts to resolve internal household conflicts in the cheapest way possible.⁶⁵

As in the past, migrants are still over-represented among domestic workers and, at the turn of the twentieth century, hierarchies between employers and employed reflected the ethno-cultural, skin color, high and low-income distances between societies. Low wages paid to migrant domestic workers reflect and reinforce the global division of labor. Migrants, especially undocumented ones, have a weak bargaining position. In recent decades the social composition of migrant domestic workers has changed, if we look at it from a life cycle perspective. Instead of young unmarried women, many nowadays have to leave their own children behind – women from Central America or the Philippines are a case in point. Often, they were trained as teachers or skilled nurses in their countries of origin, where a lack of job opportunities or low salaries forces them to depart for jobs below their educational level in a different part of the world. In modern metropolises such as Hong Kong, New York, Singapore or London, women all too often have to

62 ILO, *Domestic Workers across the World. Global and Regional Statistics and the Extent of Legal Protection*, Geneva 2013, p. 44; Jennifer Fish, *Domestic Democracy. At Home in South Africa*, New York 2005, p. 6.

63 It grew from 33.2 to 52.6 million. ILO, *Domestic Workers across the World*, p. 24.

64 Anna Gavanas and Catharina Calleman (eds.), *Rena hem på smutsiga villkor. Hushållstjänster, migration och globalisering*, Göteborg 2013.

65 Bridget Anderson, *Just Another Job? The Commodification of Domestic Work*, in: Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (eds.), *Global Woman. Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*, New York 2003, pp. 104 – 114.

accept low wages and bad working conditions.⁶⁶ In order to dissolve power imbalances like these, domestic workers, union activists and many feminists have advocated (improvement of) regulations for domestic work and demanded recognition of such employment as “real” work.⁶⁷

For those migrating into the working conditions of the domestic and care work sectors in the Global North, their subordinate position may nevertheless still be a stepping stone for building a life in improved conditions given the conditions in their societies of origin. Entry barriers to the Global North reflect the nineteenth-century development in Western Europe of nation-states’ sovereignty over a territory, with the mapping and fencing of borders. This form of organization collectivized individuality into “national identity” and imposed a border-regime of rigorous entry restrictions at the turn of the twentieth century. For those outside what was once, for example, the German Reich, acceptance of, or submission to, domestic labor provided an entry path into a labor market segment inside what is now the Global North. If the state-of-entry allows or even provides options beyond the limits of this segment, this often exploitative economic niche may be a first step towards other segments of, or full membership in, the receiving society.

However, if advances in the receiving society are unlikely, such domestic-care work may still serve to improve their families’ position in the country of origin via remittances. Today, the total amount of remittances generated by migrant domestic workers’ savings of whatever surplus their scant remuneration provides, is striking. This has the dual effect of sustaining families in the society-of-origin and, whether in Mexico, the Philippines, India, or Bangladesh, sustaining the nation’s balance of payments. In 2012, foreign workers, according to figures provided by the World Bank, collectively sent 350 billion U.S. dollar to “low and middle income countries” out of a total of 478 billion U.S. dollar.⁶⁸ Although these amounts are not specified according to occupation, it is clear that a large proportion of this comes from the growing number of domestic workers. For some families, there is some value from the housing and education for the children this provides. The mechanics of remitting foreign currency permits states to skim off part of the value added for investments, servicing of debts, and luxury consumption.⁶⁹

66 E.g. Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization. Women, Migration and Domestic Work*, Stanford, CA 2001; Ehrenreich and Hochschild, *Global Woman*; Encarnación Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, *Migration, Domestic Work and Affect. A Decolonial Approach on Value and the Feminization of Labor*, New York 2010.

67 Ally, *From Servants to Workers*, p. 6.

68 World Development Indicators, *Movement of People Across Borders*, <http://wdi.worldbank.org/table/6.13>.

69 Julia Aaserud et al., *The Protection of the Rights of Migrant Domestic Workers in a Country of Origin and a Country of Destination. Case Studies of the Philippines and Kuwait*, Washington 2013, p. 41.

States in the Global North have encouraged employment of migrant domestic workers even though they have constructed a Fortress Europe or an Iron-Concrete Curtain between North and Central America. The privatization of care institutions in many European welfare states in the 1980s and 1990s and the ageing population across the North have led to an increasing need and demand for care and domestic work. Tax reductions and subsidies in some states have led to emerging new markets for domestic “service” and care work, sometimes called “personal service”.⁷⁰ While tax reductions have been presented as a way of providing all social strata access to basic – “affordable” – domestic service in some countries, the advantage accrues to new groups of middle class families. Tax reductions have been said to increase acceptance of the sector and to limit illegal employment. In the case of Sweden, tax reductions introduced in 2007 led to rapid increase of households buying these services, but illegal employment has hardly decreased at all. Rather, the visible problems with undocumented entry and illegal employment have led to the formation of cleaning firms which employ cleaners both legally and illegally (veiled through a system of subcontractors).⁷¹ Traditional face-to-face hiring has become anonymous and the new economy of “service work” serves the interests of “clients” and “businesses” through temporary work agencies. The result is a less personalized, or even a depersonalized work relationship and a growing precariousness within the employment market. Unions are only beginning to address the problem and new forms of resistance and organization are emerging at a global level.

V. “Domestic Workers of the World Unite!”

While many scholars and policy-makers as well as the general public have seen the achievements of domestic workers resulting from the struggles of recent years, a historical perspective shows the continued need for more rights for domestic workers and increased recognition of their work. Boris and Fish have recently analyzed the attempts to organize domestic labor in the ILO context since the beginning of the twentieth century. They conclude that throughout the century, the advocates of recognition of domestic work as “work” have encountered organizational, ideological and representational obstacles, due to this generally highly gendered form of work which takes place in the domestic

70 Ruth Milkman et al., *The Macrosociology of Paid Domestic Labor*, in: *Work and Occupations* 25. 1998, pp. 483 – 510, here p. 483; Lise Widding Isaksen (ed.), *Global Care Work. Gender and Migration in Nordic Societies*, Lund 2010.

71 Anna Gavanas, *Who Cleans the Welfare State? Migration, Informalization, Social Exclusion and Domestic Services in Stockholm*, Stockholm 2010.

sphere.⁷² Moreover, some sources suggest that women activists in the Global North's labor movements who organized female factory workers in the aftermath of the Second World War, have employed domestic workers in their homes. This double role of labor activists, as employers and as organizers of domestic workers may have contributed to the somewhat ambiguous relationship between movement activists and the domestic workers' demands for rights and recognition.⁷³ Such ambiguity has also characterized the relationship between feminists and domestic workers in the interwar period and the 1950s and 1960s.

More recent decades have witnessed a wave of domestic workers (re)organizing themselves in the Global South since the 1980s and the Global North from the turn of the twenty-first century. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the first supraregional organization for domestic workers, *Confederación Latinoamericana y del Caribe Trabajadoras del Hogar*, was set up in 1988.⁷⁴ Domestic workers began to organize in the 1980s in different regions of Africa, and the South African ANC government was the first to recognize domestic workers as "workers" in its labor legislation of 1995. And in Asia, a continental domestic workers' union was set up in 1989. Caribbean, Latin American, and Asian domestic workers and communities carried their activities north, and founded a domestic workers' association in New York in 2000. During the United Nations Women's conference in Beijing in 1995, domestic workers' organizations from Latin America, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago and the Philippines campaigned for wages for housework. They formed an international network that was probably the most important vehicle to gain recognition as "workers". But due to lack of support from the labor movement and resources, the movement had to concentrate on activities at a local level.

When the first global conference of domestic workers was organized in the Netherlands in 2006, sixty participants from across the world took the first important step towards building a global network that promoted the exchange of information. The International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers Associations made it part of its organization, and supported domestic workers' lobbying at the ILO. The

72 Eileen Boris and Jennifer Fish, *Decent Work for Domesticity. Feminist Organizing, Worker Empowerment, and the ILO*, in: Hoerder, *Towards a Global History*, pp. 530–552.

73 For Swedish examples see Lisa Öberg, *Ett socialdemokratiskt dilemma. Från hembiträdesfrågan till pigdebatten*, in: Christina Florin et al. (eds.), *Kvinnor mot kvinnor. Om systemskapets svårigheter*, Stockholm 1999, pp. 159–199; Pernilla Jonsson and Silke Neunsinger, *Gendered Money. Financial Organization in Women's Movements, 1880–1933*, New York 2012, p. 147.

74 Eileen Boris and Jennifer Fish, *Domestic Workers Go Global. The Birth of the International Domestic Workers Federation*, in: *New Labor Forum* 23. 2014, pp. 76–81, here p. 78.

network has since built alliances with migrant organizations and cooperates with groups outside the union movement.⁷⁵ The resulting ILO Convention 189 addresses many and probably most of the demands formulated since the interwar years.⁷⁶ It affirms that domestic workers have the same fundamental rights as all workers: right of freedom of association, elimination of all forms of forced labor, abolition of child labor, and elimination of discrimination. Convention 189 demands minimum wages, maximum working hours, health and safety protection, access to social provisions, and protection against abuse by private employment agencies, as well as access to courts, labor tribunals or dispute resolution mechanisms. In October 2013, the International Domestic Workers Network became a formal federation on a stable foundation, the International Domestic Workers Federation.⁷⁷ Thus the struggles of domestic workers and their contributions to a society's economy have recently been institutionalized.

VI. Concluding Remarks: How Looking at the Global Changes Our Perspective

Since the 1960s, the study of domestic service has been on social historians' agenda. In recent years, global historians and sociologists have added to this increasing body of literature by studying domestic workers from a less Western-centric perspective. This more global approach allows historians to take a step back and review existing ideas on the history of domestic service in Western Europe from a comparative perspective, looking for similarities and differences, changes and continuities.

Throughout history, across the globe, domestic and care work have been inextricably entwined with migration. Although migration from rural to urban spaces has declined in some regions, women migrants from urban, small-town,

75 Celia Mather, 'Yes, We Did It!' How the World's Domestic Workers Won Their International Rights and Recognition, Cambridge, MA 2013, pp. 3–11.

76 See for a longer history of domestic workers' struggles: Boris and Fish, Decent Work for Domestic. For the convention see ILO, C189 – Domestic Workers Convention, http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:2551460. It became effective on 5th September 2013.

77 For the report on the founding congress of the Federation see International Domestic Workers Federation [hereafter IDWF], Domestic Workers of the World Unite – Report of the Founding Congress of the IDWF, <http://idwfed.org/files/files/publication/IDWF%20Founding%20Congress%20REV2.pdf>. See also its website <http://www.wiego.org/resources/international-domestic-workers-federation-idwf>. In recognition of its achievements the IDWN in 2013 received the George Meany-Lane Kirkland Human Rights Award of the U.S. union federation AFL-CIO: AFL-CIO, 2013 George Meany-Lane Kirkland Human Rights Award. International Domestic Worker's Network, <http://www.aflcio.org/About/Exec-Council/EC-Statements/2013-George-Meany-Lane-Kirkland-Human-Rights-Award-International-Domestic-Workers-Network>.

and agricultural regions with few job opportunities are still by far the largest group earning a living from domestic work in wealthier regions and societies for themselves and their families. Before the 1980s, it was usually young women without children who migrated. Today, these migrants themselves often have children, usually left behind in the care of others – a phenomenon that has been called the “Global Care Chain”. To spend time on their careers and with their loved ones, employer families outsource much of their care work for low wages to women who, in turn, have to outsource the care of their own children to family members in return for remittances.⁷⁸

This new international division of labor puts the more distant history of domestic work in a different light, when viewed from a life cycle perspective.⁷⁹ Whereas in many European countries, ranging from England to Poland, life cycle service was important for numerous young people in pre-industrial and industrializing Western Europe, recent studies have shown that here, too, a lot of variation existed, and lifelong service existed in many places. Although bonded domestic work has been rare in most of Western and Central Europe since the Black Death, there were areas, such as the Mediterranean, where slave domestic labor retained its importance well into the early modern period. Slave domestic workers were of course by definition not restricted to life cycle service, as only few of them would be freed and able to marry.

Simultaneously, bonded domestic work seems to have been far more common outside Europe, either in the form of market slavery, as in precolonial Southeast Asia and India, or children being outplaced in the homes of relatives or in the dwellings of their future spouses, as we have seen in China and Japan. Such forms of domestic labor could also take the shape of lifelong – or at least very long-lasting – commitments. The role of family structures and patriarchy within households goes a long way to explain such patterns, and will probably also be useful for exploring differences within Europe, instead of simply using Hajnal’s traditional West-East dichotomy. Exploring family structures worldwide, and distinguishing decisive factors as regards the form domestic work might take, also sheds a new light on European histories of domestic work.

Another interesting difference in domestic service in pre-industrial times is that in many non-European societies, men were traditionally comparatively more involved in household tasks. In China, Japan and Southeast Asia, both women and men regularly worked as domestic servants, either for wages or as unfree workers. While perhaps there were somewhat less clear-cut divisions

78 Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Children of Global Migration. Transnational Families and Gendered Woes*, Stanford 2005, pp. 99 – 112.

79 Another recent change is that, in addition to destinations in the Global North, migration occurs increasingly internally between and within societies in the Global South. Within Southeast Asia or in the Middle East, for example, elites and the growing middle classes increasingly hire domestic workers, cooks, and nannies from the countryside or across the border.

between “male” and “female” tasks, gender was nevertheless important. The eunuchs serving in early modern Indian courts, who were deprived of their manhood lest they could engage sexually with the ruler’s wife (or wives), are a telling example.

From the first colonial encounters, Europeans tended to take on the local tradition of hiring or forcing both male and female indigenous domestic servants. Female domestic servants, especially in the first period of colonization, when still very few white women settled overseas, also often had to provide sexual services, or became “temporary wives”.⁸⁰ Besides, or sometimes coupled with such outright exploitation, very tender ties developed between masters and servants at times, leading to considerable agency for the latter. This ambiguity also existed in relationships between mistresses and male indigenous servants. Nevertheless, the fact that so many black men were employed for what were considered “female” tasks in the metropolises undeniably reinforced their inferior and demasculinized positions, and this was further entrenched by the fact that both masters and mistresses tended to call them “boys”. Service in the colonies, moreover, was never intended to be life cycle-related. African “houseboys” were often married men, living on the premises of their masters with their families, whereas Southeast Asian nannies often cared for white children alongside their own offspring.

White Europeans returning from the colonies often nostalgically longed for the luxury of their numerous staff of male and female servants when they came back to the metropolis. What they experienced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was declared a “servant problem”, meaning that it was very hard to find good (if any) domestic servants. Industrialization in Europe and the U. S. had put an end to a century-long favored profession for young girls in the years before marriage. Different types of life cycle professions, such as factory labor and administrative work, had emerged. Moreover, the rising welfare of the European population since the 1950s allowed married women from all classes to withdraw from paid labor and conform to the ideal of the male breadwinner model. This, in conjunction with the generous arrangements of the welfare state, led social scientists to believe that domestic service, at least in the European context, had become a thing of the past.

Recent history suggests the contrary; both the legacy of colonialism and the emergence of new patterns of labor market participation for women in the West have led to an entirely new global division of labor. In contrast to historical experiences of domestic service in the West, these forms of domestic work are often not bound to a specific stage in the life cycle. While young women do indeed come to the Global North to work as au-pairs for some years, there are also many examples of women (and, increasingly, men) in domestic

80 Barbara Andaya Watson, *From Temporary Wife to Prostitute. Sexuality and Economic Change in Early Modern Southeast Asia*, in: *The Journal of Women’s History* 9. 1998, no. 4, pp. 11 – 34.

service who leave their children and spouses behind in their country of origin in search of a better living. While domestic workers have, in recent years, effectively struggled for better working conditions and acknowledgment as “workers”, millions of them still work and live in miserable, exploitative, and illegal conditions in order to provide the cheap domestic and care services that fit in so well with the Western lifestyle.

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