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Editorial

Domestic Work

It is now more than 30 years ago since *domestic work* became a fiercely debated issue for feminists all over Europe; 'salary for domestic work' campaigns were launched in many countries as a result of (academic) feminist dispute about the role of housework in society. A German example provides a condensation of the debate. The famous article by Gisela Bock and Barbara Duden (1977), 'Arbeit aus Liebe – Liebe als Arbeit' (Labour of Love – Love as Labour), was first presented at the Berlin Feminist Summer University in 1976. In this historical analysis the authors labelled the *unpaid* work of housewives and mothers, seen and performed as 'natural' female destiny, the 'serving background work'. Bock and Duden showed that the making of the housewife was a product of modernity that first emerged as an ideal of the bourgeois classes and developed into the dominant female model during the late 19th and 20th century. In demonstrating the *longue durée* of this phenomenon, the authors questioned two aspects in the organization of social life, both contributing to the reproduction of 'the housewife'. First, the gendered division of the private and the public spheres, with the first reserved for women and the latter for men, allowed an implicit contract between the genders in which productive and reproductive work were differentiated along gender lines. Second, this gendered differentiation of work was linked to a hierarchical distinction that valued productive work more than reproductive work and hence led to a gender-based separation between paid and unpaid labour. Demands for the redistribution – or more equal distribution – of house- and care work between men and women, on the one hand, and for the upgrading of the status of this work and the opening of the labour market to women, on the other hand, have been key themes of feminist debate ever since.

Claims for the opening of the labour market for (educated) women were partly taken up and introduced in most EU countries as official government policy, first as emancipation and then as gender mainstreaming policy. However, the demand for a serious debate about the reorganization and equal distribution of care work has never been fulfilled.

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Moreover, the re-evaluation of the asymmetrical relation between care work and gainful employment has never been on the agenda of the EU or national state policies. All in all, care work has remained a female domain, reflecting the fact that many states now discuss the *compatibility* of gainful employment and family work as women's problem. On the EU level, care work is now treated under the heading of 'work-life balance' (see also Peterson, this issue, pp. 265–80).

Some states, in particular the Nordic states and France, have supported the implementation of crèches, all-day schooling and (home quality) care for the elderly. Before the transition from socialism began, all East European states, including the GDR, offered state-run facilities for all age groups (while the majority of women were pressurized into gainful employment). In some countries, part-time working was made feasible for many occupational groups so that fathers could care for small children for at least one day a week (e.g. in the Netherlands).

Recently, the introduction of neoliberal market politics has led to the withdrawal of the state from financing care facilities and, instead, benefiting the marketization of elderly, home and childcare. In summary, despite the many differences between European countries, stemming from differences between strong and weak welfare state organizations, currently the respective gender regimes seem to have more commonalities than differences.

An examination of the resurgence of domestic workers in European households makes this evident. Today, domestic workers can be found in homes all over Europe, working for the middle classes in all forms of household organization: families and single people, two-parent or single-parent households, young people and elders. Despite the overall lack of accurate data in this area, there are indications that the majority of domestic workers are female and from migrant backgrounds. This may explain why, with one exception, all the articles submitted to this special issue were about *migrant* domestic work.

We might say that the debate today is one about migrant domestic workers, or – in a more mundane language – about 'global women' (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002). From the articles in this issue, it becomes clear that the earlier feminist demand for a 'salary for domestic work' has returned with a somewhat cynical twist. While the debate 30 years ago was meant metaphorically to express the desire to radically change the gender codes of society, it has lost this meaning and, instead, has simply become a reality. It can be assumed that the activists of the 1970s did not envisage present developments. Whether *migrant domestic work* today should be assessed as a major defeat of the western feminist movement or as unfinished business, is an open question.

Reasons for the development of a migrant domestic labour market cannot only be found in the growing demand for domestic workers in

wealthy countries, but also in the fact that migrant women performing domestic work in Europe today come from a wide range of sending countries in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa. They seek work in countries where standards of living and thus salaries are much higher. Many are educated and most of them support (extended) families back home. The impoverishment of many countries in the world triggered by system transition, natural disasters, wars, the breakdown of national economies, etc. has contributed to the 'feminization of migration', which benefits the globalization of the domestic labour market. As these women are generating income that goes back to their countries as remittances and in many cases becomes one of the major contributions to national incomes, it is not appropriate to ask for the eradication of this market. But what would be an adequate feminist view of this situation?

The contributors to this special issue give different answers – most of them show that there is no single answer, but that the whole issue is immensely complex and complicated. While the North American debate about the globalization of domestic work has been going for some time and English colleagues have been pioneering research on this in Europe, in many countries of continental Europe (for Germany, see Lutz, 2007) the phenomenon is not (yet) an issue of public and academic (gender studies) discussion. The evaluation and explanation of this situation has only recently begun. In Europe it is not only the wide range and marked differences in (welfare) state organization that make it complicated, but also that huge differences in migration policies, even between EU member states, mean that migrant domestic workers are dealt with by the state in various ways. One of the main differentiating factors in Europe is that between the legal recognition or ignorance of this employment sector. While some (e.g. the Mediterranean countries) have either recruitment policies for (elderly- and child-) care domestic workers or at least an *a posteriori* regulation of their status through 'earned legalization' programmes, others (like the Netherlands, Germany, Austria or the Nordic countries) have hardly any acknowledgement policies and instead ignore the existence of this phenomenon by transforming it into a 'twilight zone' that exists only as an irregular market. In those countries, trust replaces contracts and the employment relationship renders the workers vulnerable; at the same time, the employers are dependent on the workers remaining with them through loyalty. It seems that even in those countries with official recruitment policies, part of the sector is not regularized and many migrant women lack residence permits as well as employment contracts and are denied access to civil and human rights.

The articles in this special issue show that the employment relationship is characterized by its location in the emotionally loaded private sphere; domestic work, therefore, is always linked to intimacy and identity issues. Throughout this issue, the wide range of tasks (care work for children and

the elderly, cleaning and other household work) and the heterogeneity of working arrangements become visible. One difference between domestic workers is that between live-in and live-out arrangements. As we will see in the articles by Degiuli, Akalın and Cox, being confined to the house of the employer 24 hours a day narrows down the space for self-determination, privacy and self-planning. This is not to say that live-out arrangements have no drawbacks, but they definitely leave more space for a self-determined pattern of life. Perhaps not surprisingly then, a common theme in these articles is their reflection on the divide between employers and employees. Various other divisions, like nationality, ethnicity/race, age and class are also discussed in the articles.

The issue starts with an article by Francesca Degiuli, who draws her material from interviews with migrant domestic workers in Italy and introduces to the reader the workday of live-in home elderly carers. She shows that, contrary to the allegation that this work is just another job, the emotional involvement and thus excess emotion that is produced by someone who is available 24 hours a day, cannot be compared to other kinds of jobs.

Ayşe Akalın's article on migrant 'live-ins' in Turkey shows that Turkey, well known as a former country of emigration, has now become one of immigration, with the domestic work sector contributing to this change. As in many other modernizing countries, in Turkey's middle-class households domestic workers were traditionally recruited from internal migrants coming from rural areas to the shanty towns of the big cities (Özyeğin, 2001). Akalın explains why Turkey's professional women today prefer to employ migrant women from post-socialist countries in their homes. These domestic workers have left their family behind and so have no daily care obligations. Instead, they give their loving care to their employer's children. In addition, they are better educated than the local workers and as 'live-ins' they are available all day and night.

The case study of Gabriella Lazaridis about Greece focuses on yet another area where female migrant workers perform care work, as private nurses in hospitals and homes. Lazaridis calls these women 'infirmières exclusives' and shows that these 'quasi-nurses' hired for the care of one patient, in a certain way help to perpetuate a broken health care system. She also confirms the findings of other studies that this work is deskilling for the women involved and that it entails exploitation, marginalization and exclusion.

The question why employers prefer migrant instead of local domestic workers is explored by Bridget Anderson (this time exploring the British case). Based on several research projects where employers of domestic workers and au pairs were interviewed, Anderson concludes that the 'foreignness' of the workers, meaning their 'otherness' in terms of ethnicity, nationality and migrant status, is considered an asset in the employment situation.

In her analysis of the Spanish political debate about gender equality and the 'reconciliation of personal, family and work life', Elin Peterson

shows how these debates conceal the fact that the 'construction' of gender equality through the introduction of migrant domestic workers in private households produces new social inequalities, between those families who can afford a domestic worker and those who cannot and of course between the employer and the employee.

From the Spanish, Italian, Greek and Turkish cases we can see that not only have Mediterranean countries developed from being only countries of emigration into also being countries of immigration but that withal they have a growing female labour market participation. Due to weak welfare state policies that rest heavily on family support systems, requiring women to stay at home, they have now turned to global markets much more quickly than have other countries in Europe.

A further aspect of the magnitude of the domestic work issue is provided by Rosie Cox's article on au pairs. She explores the sexualized representation of au pairs in the British (tabloid) press, contrasting these images with competing portrayals by au pair agencies and the self-images of au pairs.

Taken together, the articles draw on interviews with employers and employees, giving a voice to both sides of this intricate relationship. Together they provide empirical/research substantiation of Ehrenreich and Hochschild's (2002: 11) apt description of the relationship:

To an extent then, the globalization of child care and housework brings the ambitious and independent women of the world together: the career-oriented upper-middle-class woman of an affluent nation and the striving woman from a crumbling Third World or post communist economy. Only it does not bring them together in the way that second-wave feminists in affluent countries once liked to imagine – as sisters and allies struggling to achieve common goals. Instead, they come together as mistress and maid, employer and employee, across a great divide of privilege and opportunity.

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