

Migrant women and precarious working conditions: emancipation at the cost of migrant women

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Introduction

This paper examines the growth of care work / domestic work in private homes as a sector that illustrates the complexities of struggles for women's emancipation. It outlines the precarious living and working conditions of migrant care workers in many countries and relates these to the improvements in opportunities for citizen women.

In many parts of the world, the working conditions of care workers are characterised by precarity. Care workers are particularly likely to work in the informal sector, or to be employed formally but without the protections that other groups of workers have. Precarity does not happen by accident but is planned - or allowed to continue to exist – by governments in order to produce the type of workforce and the type of migrant populations which are considered useful (Anderson 2010). As Helle Stenum puts it 'The legalizing and illegalizing of different types of migration and migrant statuses are important tools in governing the non-citizen population and in separating desired from unwanted migrants' (Stenum 2010 p23). The precarious working conditions of migrant women are not coincidental to the fact that they are women or migrants. Policy and public attitudes towards women's traditional roles in the home underpin the 'non-worker' status of many migrants and hold wages and conditions down.

The paper begins by outlining the growth of the care economy in the last two decades. It then examines in detail the precarious living conditions of domestic workers by highlighting the specific migration rules and employment regulations that they are subject to. These rules restrict workers' rights to citizenship and deny their status as 'workers', giving employers extensive control over them. The paper then looks at the relationship between the precarious lives of care workers and the 'emancipation' of women, before discussing the responses which local municipalities may be able to make.

Throughout I focus on care workers and domestic workers in private homes, as I have been researching paid domestic employment in the UK for over 15 years, but some of the debates presented here are also relevant to those employed in poor conditions in other care settings such as private nursing homes or childcare centres. At every level care work draws in migrants, many of who are subject to restrictive visa regimes and are denied citizenship in host countries. For example, despite government guidelines that are supposed to prohibit the recruitment of staff from the poorest countries, in 2001 about 40 per cent of new entrants to nursing in the UK were recruited from abroad and the countries supplying the largest numbers of nurses were the Philippines, South Africa, Australia, India and Zimbabwe. In 2000

health and associated professionals formed the largest group of work permit holders in Britain and about 26 per cent of doctors currently working in the National Health Service were trained overseas. The most important source countries for doctors included India, Pakistan and Nigeria (Raghuram and Kofman 2002). Doctors from overseas are often ghettoized in the least popular specialisms and have difficulty accessing additional training. The qualifications of nurses trained overseas are not always recognised and they may spend long periods on temporary or student visas, working in low-skilled jobs while they apply for recognition.

The growth of the care economy

The 'care economy' encompasses a range of activities inside and outside the private home with the most important elements being childcare, elder care, nursing and housework. In each country the balance between public and private provision of these services differs but in almost all countries in Europe we are seeing an increased privatisation, or commoditization of care services. That is that care is increasingly provided for money in the private sector where previously it was provided publically or for free within households. While other forms of low-paid work have been outsourced from richer to poorer countries care work cannot be. It has to be performed where the care recipients are and this involves the workers moving to the work, rather than the other way around.

Writing in the 1980s, the historian Frank Victor Dawes described domestic service as 'gone for good'. He argued that 'service' had been ended by improvements in working class living standards and because poor people no longer accepted that it was their lot in life to serve their 'betters'. Little did he know that within a decade domestic employment would be on the rise again, not just in Britain (where he was writing) but throughout Europe, North America and parts of Asia. Writing on domestic work would no longer be just about the history of ladies' maids and butlers but was now social science, research on contemporary life investigating the working lives of the many thousands of migrant women who now provide domestic services. Paid domestic labour has become an increasingly important topic for those interested in migration and gender relations. As Helma Lutz says, 'growing demand for labour power in the domestic work sector has contributed to the feminization of migration more than any other area of work' (2008a p3).

Domestic employment has been increasing in many parts of the world and migrant women make up the vast majority of this new domestic workforce. The low pay, long and unpredictable hours mean that few workers with any choice will take on these jobs. One hundred thousand migrant women work as domestics in Singapore, and similar numbers work in Hong Kong and the Gulf states. Canada imports domestic workers from Asia, the Caribbean and Britain, as does the USA, whilst European countries often have domestic workers from former colonies, or poorer neighbours in southern and Eastern Europe.

Within Europe there has been a general pattern of movement of women from poorer areas in the south and east to the richer areas of the north and west. Many countries also import domestic workers from places farther away but with which they have historical and colonial links. Traditionally, women from Ireland and the Caribbean worked in Britain, Algerians in France, and Surinamese women worked in the Netherlands. More recently migrants from within Europe have become more important.

There are, broadly speaking, three patterns of domestic employment that have been found in European countries. The first, characterised by Spain, Italy and Greece is described as characterised by a shift from a pattern of 'family care' to 'migrant in family care' (Williams and Gavanas 2008). In these countries large numbers of migrant workers live-in and this pattern is encouraged by government regularization policies. The second group includes countries such as the UK, Germany, France, Austria and Poland, where there is little policy encouragement of migration for domestic work but still large numbers of domestic workers are employed with varying levels of legality. In the third group, the Nordic countries, domestic employment is growing from a small base and supported by a range of cash payments to families. In Sweden, Denmark and Norway the au pair scheme is an increasingly important source of domestic labour.

To look at the first of these groups in more detail, Spain has quotas for domestic / care workers and these, along with policies to regularize the status of illegal immigrants, have led to an implicit normalization of the employment of migrant women to fill the care deficit (Williams and Gavanas 2008). There are about 150,000 documented household workers in Spain and probably a similar number of undocumented workers. Similarly, Italy relies on migrant women to provide household labour and work as care assistants to the elderly. By 2003 there were 500,000 documented domestic employees of foreign nationality in Italy but it is estimated that 77% of all care and domestic labour is undocumented (Scrinzi 2008). The vast majority of these workers are women but migrant men are also involved in care roles in Italy. Care workers to support the elderly within the home are a particularly important part of the sector. In Greece domestic and care workers come from Bulgaria, Albania, the Philippines, Georgia and other former USSR states (Hantzaroula 2008).

Within the second group domestic services take a slightly different form. In Germany it is estimated that 3 million households use some form of domestic service, yet there are very few domestic workers legally employed. Germany only has recruitment policies for two groups of domestic workers – au pairs and care workers for the elderly – both of which are temporary schemes. The vast majority of domestic workers are affected by 'dual illegalization' – that is they are migrants without a valid residence permit and they have no work permit (Lutz 2008b). There is very little live-in domestic work (this is restricted to care for the elderly and occasionally children) and most domestic workers live-out and work for a number of

households everyday. The pattern in the UK is similar although live-in work is more common and more likely to be provided for young children. Very large numbers of households employ a cleaner for a few hours a week informally. There are extremely limited opportunities for migrants from outside the EU to access the UK domestic labour market legally and the majority of employment in the sector is undeclared. Many domestic workers in the UK are therefore legally allowed to live and work in the country but still work in an informal manner (Busch 2011). Austria has very tight restrictions on labour migration but the category of 'au pair' has become important as a source of domestic workers since 2001 when this group was excluded from the quotas for workers from non EEA countries. In 2007 there were 14,597 registered au pairs in Austria, 80% of them from Eastern Europe (Haidinger 2008). There are also large numbers of domestic workers in Austria without legal residence or work permits and these include women from Poland and Ukraine. Ukrainian women also work in Poland in large numbers (as well as Italy, Greece and Spain) and since 2003 have used short term visas to migrate in a circular pattern – working for a few months in Poland and then returning home.

In the Nordic countries, the last group discussed here, paid domestic labour has recently re-appeared as a phenomenon and this reappearance has prompted wide-ranging debate over the appropriateness of employing domestic workers in equalitarian societies (see Isaksen 2010a). One of the most important new sources of domestic labour is au pairs – the majority of whom come from the Philippines. While total numbers are still low they have increased rapidly. Stenum (2008 p25) shows that in 1996 there were 318 au pair residence permits issued in Denmark and 202 in Norway. By 2007 there were 2939 in Denmark and 1760 in Norway. Other migrant care workers are also present in Nordic countries. Both Norway and Sweden import care workers for institutional settings and as nurses (Isaksen 2010b; Platzer 2010) and Sweden has domestic workers in a range of undocumented situations (Platzer 2010).

Increases in other personal services

Alongside the privatisation of care we have also seen the growth in a range of other personal services. This growth is often underpinned by similar trends and employs a similar workforce – migrants, particularly women on low wages without recognised skills. Some of these personal services take place within homes, such as specialist forms of cleaning, pet care and maintenance, while others service households from outside, such as with pre-prepared and take away food, dry-cleaning and laundry. For the wealthiest households it is possible to buy almost any service. There are companies who will water your house plants, walk your dog or wash your wheelie bins. New 'concierge' services are designed to help people who do not have time to spend all the money they earn, they help with booking holidays, selecting gifts, organising parties and almost anything else imaginable.

Whilst I will not be discussing these services in detail in this paper (see Cox 2006 for more) they are worth considering. The growth of personal services reflects a

polarization of incomes between the wealthiest and poorest in society, which makes it increasingly easy for those who are well off to pay for the labour of those who are not. Personal service workers are also often subject to long hours of work, low pay, insecure working conditions and informal work. Workers are often isolated or in very small workplaces, unlikely to be unionised and hidden from the gaze of regulating authorities. The conditions of personal service workers are poor because their skills are not respected and because services are seen as replacing work which is generally done for free by household members. This holds wages down and means that the tasks done are not regarded as 'real' work.

The precarious lives of carers

Domestic work tends to produce particular working conditions which are a result of the fact that it largely takes place in the private sphere, is hidden from view and is highly unregulated. Migration and employment regimes categorise this form of work as different from other forms and produce precarity for domestic workers.

Fiona Williams and Anna Gavanas (2008: 15) have shown how the phenomenon of female migration into domestic and childcare work 'can be understood as part of the dovetailing of childcare regimes (state policy responses to changes in family and work) with migration regimes (state policy responses to changes in work, population movement and change).' Opportunities (or not) for migration to carry out domestic work are, therefore, directly related both to state policies on childcare, family leave etc and to cultural expectations about how domestic and care work should be done and who should do it. The resulting migration policies seek to produce particular types of labour (low waged, 'unskilled', insecure) performed by particular migrants (women, often from specific countries) which are seen as appropriate to the type of work and undemanding to the state (Walia 2010).

Following this, domestic workers are often subject to specific and highly restrictive migration rules. For the most part such rules give domestic workers fewer rights, for example to permanent settlement or family reunification, than other migrants and impose stricter controls on their behaviour (Ozyegin and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2008). Most commonly this includes stipulations that domestic workers live in their employers' homes but there may also be regulations that govern aspects of a domestic worker's private life, such as restrictions on personal relationships. Migration regulations can also act to empower employers to impose additional, even stricter, conditions on domestic workers which can cover aspects of dress, hairstyles and most other areas of life. Requirements that workers live-in and those that tie a worker to a particular employer increase employers power over domestic workers to enforce such rules. Migration schemes developed expressly to allow the import of domestic labour rarely give domestic workers protection against low pay and long hours of work. They may specifically exclude domestic workers from employment protections or they create other conditions – such as tying the worker to a named employer with whom they must live – that make it almost impossible for the worker to insist on their rights (see for example Anderson 1993). All of these rules make life precarious for the worker, she can be sacked from her employment for no reason and can face expulsion from the host country at very little notice.

Migration rules

One of the strictest schemes of this kind was operated in Hong Kong, which had over 160,000 foreign domestic workers in 1996 (Tam 1999). Here, migrant domestic workers are recruited on two year contracts that stipulate job rules, task timetables and appearance. Domestic workers can find they are banned from having long hair or wearing make-up and must submit to compulsory pregnancy tests as part of their visa regulations. Nicole Constable (2003: 120) found that it was not uncommon for employers in Hong Kong to issue lists of instructions to domestic workers that tried to control every area of their life and sometimes directly contradicted official employment contracts. A similar scheme for importing migrant domestic labour is operated in Singapore, which employs about 100,000 foreign domestic workers - one for every eight families in the city. Domestic workers are recruited directly from their home countries to Singapore through agencies and are expected to sign a two year contract. During the two year period they may not leave the country without a release paper from their employer and are entitled to only one day off a month. In addition they have to sign a statement prohibiting them from marrying or co-habiting with a Singaporean citizen or permanent resident and have to take a pregnancy test every six months. Domestic worker's passports are regularly held by their employers who are also allowed to retain 20 percent of a worker's earnings to cover the costs of their return passage. While employers are allowed to replace domestic workers within the two years, a domestic worker voluntarily leaving an employer must return home and, if insufficient notice is given, must forfeit a portion of her salary (Yeoh and Huang 1999a and 1999b)

It is not only the city-states of Asia that have pursued methods of recruiting migrant domestic workers while denying them the rights of other employees. Canada operates the 'live-in caregiver programme' as a way of meeting demands for child and elder care from Canadian families. The programme allows workers into Canada for a period of up to four years with the condition that they have a contract for employment as a caregiver in a family and will live-in with that family. After two years workers are allowed to apply for an open visa and later for permanent residence - the Canadian equivalent to the US 'green card' (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2010). The programme treats domestic workers differently from other migrant workers by considering them as temporary visitors for the first two years, rather than allowing them to become landed migrants on arrival (Pratt 1997, 1999). The additional stipulation that they live-in makes them vulnerable to abuse and overwork, and they are also exempt from many of the employment protections that cover other workers (Walia 2010). As Abigail Bakan and Daiva Stasiulis (1997: 7) put it: 'Canada shares with more authoritarian regimes a glaring willingness and indeed determination to exploit female migrant domestic workers from developing countries whose limited wage earning options have made them particularly vulnerable to political and legal control.'

Israel operates a similar policy, known as the 'binding arrangement', which links the employment permit given to an employer with the visa given to a migrant worker. If the employee's contract expires, for any reason, the visa also ends. Careworkers are one of the few groups granted work permits by the Israeli state and they are

expected to provide round the clock care for elderly or disabled people, normally living in their employer's home. Perversely, because only the disabled or elderly in need of care are eligible to receive a work permit, a market has now developed in Israel for undocumented domestic workers who work for families not eligible for a work permit, for example those wanting childcare or housework. Undocumented workers can be paid up to 50 per cent more than documented workers because of this large market for their labour (Mundlak and Shamir 2008). The binding arrangement therefore restricts documented workers' employment rights by severely limiting their ability to negotiate with employers or to leave abusive situations, while simultaneously supporting demand for undocumented domestic workers who are also vulnerable because of their migration status even though they are better paid.

Immigration regimes can induce precarity by overlooking migrants as well as by overseeing them closely. In contrast to the specifically developed schemes outlined above, the United States does not have a formal government policy or system to recruit migrant domestic workers. The method most often used to bring domestic workers from abroad is the 'blind eye' turned by immigration authorities (Chang 2001; Hondagneu Sotelo 2001). The Immigration and Naturalization Service has traditionally served employers by ignoring the employment of undocumented migrants in private homes and some employers deliberately seek out undocumented domestic workers because they will accept lower wages and will be less likely to insist on their employment rights. Doreen Mattingly (1999) has found in her research that legislation designed to reduce illegal immigration from Mexico to the US has actually fuelled the growth in the employment of undocumented migrants as domestic workers. The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), passed in 1986, made it illegal for employers to hire undocumented workers. Before this it was illegal for such workers to seek work but their employers had not committed an offence by employing them. The Act made it much more difficult for undocumented migrants to work in the US and a larger proportion of them sought work that was informal and hidden from the immigration authorities, as domestic work is. In addition, the Act had the effect of driving down work opportunities and conditions for all migrants, even those who were legal, as many employers would no longer hire them. This had the knock-on effect of reducing the incomes of migrant households that had been dependent on a male wage earner and of pushing more migrant women into work to make up the loss in earnings. Mattingly (1999: 76) comments that, because of the efficiency with which it has driven migrant women into domestic labour as nannies and housekeepers, 'The IRCA may well be the country's most effective policy for supporting professional women.'

Through their specific restrictions, or by turning a blind eye, migration regimes produce a particular type of worker with particular characteristics, able to command particular pay and conditions (Anderson 2010). In the case of domestic workers the characteristics demanded are generally low cost to employers and insecurity. Migration regimes achieve this in a range of ways – from tightly regulating the migration of workers and giving them only limited rights to creating conditions which encourage the supply of undocumented workers who are inherently insecure, or as

in the case of UK au pairs, by creating a non-worker category that only migrants can fill.

While domestic workers are by no means unique in having their pay and working conditions shaped by migration regulations (see Anderson 2010 for a fuller discussion of this process) the gendered nature of domestic work plays an important role in shaping the precise nature of paid domestic workers' conditions. The assumption that domestic work is women's work plays a part in who gets a visa or work permit and in rules, such as those from Singapore and Hong Kong that restrict domestic workers' reproductive rights. Lutz (2008), Williams and Gavanas (2008) and Sollund (2010), amongst others, have demonstrated the ways that gendered welfare regimes also shape employers' lives and so create demand for particular forms of paid domestic labour.

A more subtle affect of gendered assumptions is the condition that many domestic workers face, that they must live in their employers' homes. This requirement is both a cause and effect of the gendering of domestic work. The imagining of domestic work as women's natural duty means that paid domestic work becomes confused with the unpaid work of female household members and its true extent is overlooked. Simultaneously, the requirement that domestic workers live in seems logical or natural when their work is compared to women caring for their own families. Domestic work is cast in a particular light, as a form of labour that is unique and not easily separable from familial relations. This elision between paid and unpaid work is also reflected in employment law and has far reaching outcomes for domestic workers.

Domestic labour and employment rights

As well as being subject to specific migration rules domestic workers often face reduced employment rights, including not having the right to a minimum wage or maximum working hours that are available to other workers. Rules which exclude domestic workers from employment protections are often targeted specifically at those who live in. Living in differentiates domestic workers from most other groups and makes it easier for laws to include or exclude them specifically. These rules are generally framed in terms of either 'family membership' – that is that the domestic worker cannot be treated like any other employee because she is a 'member of the family' - or 'different work' – that the tasks domestic workers do are not equivalent to other forms of labour. These two rhetorics, and the regulations they support, arise from class and gender based assumptions about domestic work and domestic workers.

Discourses of 'family membership' are particularly used to describe live-in domestic workers. Rather than signalling that these workers are cared for and treated as equals by their employers, family membership is often used euphemistically to describe paternalistic relations which echo the dependent relations of Victorian (and earlier) domestic servants and their employers. When these discourses are invoked in employment regulations they are given as a reason why domestic workers should not have access to the same rights as other workers. For example, Geraldine Pratt

(2004: 49) recounts an exchange in a British Columbia legislative debate when a member of legislature, Ms Sanford, tabled an amendment to the B.C. Employment Standards Act to extend overtime pay provisions to live-in domestic workers.

Another member spoke against the amendment saying:

Remember that a domestic has to be accepted into a family. She [Ms Sanford] misses that point. That is the reason a domestic cannot keep time. You are accepted into the family as part of the family, and the principle that you have your time recorded doesn't work in the family scene [...] A domestic is part of the family and as part of the family takes part in family life, and that's the way it should be.

As Pratt comments, this discussion places the domestic worker in the 'highly gendered discursive frame of familialism' (2004: 50) rather than recognising her as simply an employee. Similarly Mundlak and Shamir (2008) review a legal case brought by a Romanian domestic care worker in Israel to claim overtime payments because of the long hours she had worked. The court found that while live-in workers were due some additional payment for long hours, the law did not apply to them as it did to other workers. Mundlak and Shamir (2008: 168) comment that an unspoken question lingers behind the courts decision 'would a mother demand overtime for attending to her children at night?' They argue that the courts aversion to treating the domestic worker as a worker reveals the regulative connection between paid and unpaid care work. If a housewife is unpaid and considered unproductive, how can a domestic worker be fully regulated and rewarded? In the USA live-in domestic workers are also excluded from the right to overtime pay. As Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001: 213) writes 'the legislation seems to encode the assumption that live-in domestic work is closer to being "just like one of the family" than to wage employment.' In all these cases there is an imagined continuity between the unpaid 'housewife' and the paid domestic worker which denies the labour of both.

In the UK a similar frame is used to exclude domestic workers from working time regulations and health and safety protections. The UK has a maximum working week of 48 hours and other regulations that govern rights to rest breaks and limits to night work. The legislation governing working time regulations uses a definition of a 'worker' which is taken from EC Framework Directive (89/391) which states that a worker is 'any person employed by an employer, including trainees and apprentices but excluding domestic servants' (DTI 1996: 13). This definition then specifically excludes 'domestic servants' from key protections including the limit on total hours worked and the right to have a health assessment before being assigned night work (as other groups of workers do). In addition domestic servants are exempted from a regulation that requires employers to ensure that employees doing monotonous work are given adequate rest breaks for the sake of their health and safety (Working Time Regulations 1998) and they are excluded from health and safety legislation more generally (Lourie 1998)ⁱ. The use of the word 'servant' and these exclusions from key protections that are offered to other workers construct domestic workers as inherently different. It is as if once a worker is a member of a *household* she is imagined as being a member of a *family* and her work is not

distinguishable from the labour of family members, and therefore cannot be counted, limited nor organised in a way that is helpful or safe to her.

The UK regulations suggest that domestic work is distinct from other forms of work not only because it takes place in private households, but also because of the nature of the work involved. Whilst not expressly articulated, the exemptions of domestic work from regulations which are designed to ensure the health and safety of workers, suggest that domestic work is not imagined to be work. In the USA federal legislation which guarantees basic labour protections and minimum wages specifically excludes domestic employees who work as caregivers to children or the elderly from the right to earn minimum wage or overtime pay (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). This exclusion suggests that the content of domestic work is also somehow seen as inherently different to other forms of labour. The National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (NRLA) states that 'The term employee shall include any employee ... but shall not include any individual employed ... in the domestic service of any family or person in his home' (quoted in Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001: 221). This exclusion means that in the USA domestic workers do not have the legal right to organise collectively as other workers do.

Together, restrictive immigration policies and exclusion from employment protections mould domestic workers into a particular relationship to the labour market in many countries. Immigration rules that restrict domestic workers to a particular employer or to live-in conditions limit their ability to seek work freely or to leave the worst employers. At the same time exclusions from minimum wage and working time regulations bring down the pay and working conditions for all domestic workers, making their labour more easily available to employers.

Emancipation at the cost of migrant women?

The growth of the 'care economy' is generally explained with reference to two trends. First the withdrawal of state support for care services such as elder care and childcare and second, the movement of women from unpaid labour in the home to paid work in the public sphere. While the first of these trends is rarely applauded by social scientists, except perhaps economists, the second is a change that was fought for over many years by millions of women in many countries. So has the emancipation of middle-class, citizen women been achieved at the cost of poorer, migrant women?

There is still no country in Europe (or elsewhere) where women do not devote more time and take more responsibility for housework and care work than men. For most women 'emancipation' takes the form of a second or even third shift as they are increasingly forced to combine paid work with unpaid care work for their own households and other relatives.

However, some women in some countries have been able to escape the full extent of this burden and this is more likely to be through the employment of poorer women than through the full sharing of domestic responsibilities with men.

The process of emancipation at the cost of migrant women is perhaps most clearly drawn in the case of the Nordic countries which have introduced a plethora of policies to support women's participation in the paid work force. These countries provide forceful examples because of their relatively high levels of both real and rhetorical gender equality. In Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark there is evidence that strong welfare policies developed ostensibly to enhance gender equality have in fact underpinned the growth of low-waged domestic labour carried out by migrants. The most obvious case is migration policies which have been designed to encourage the inflow of migrant women to do low status jobs, or act as au pairs, but other policies, such as tax subsidies and cash payments for home assistance also underpin this growth.

Ellinor Platzer (2010) explains how the entry of Swedish women into the paid workforce was accompanied by an assumption on the part of government that families with two working members would need domestic workers and policies were developed to allow migration for domestic work and to subsidise the cost through tax allowances. Women are responsible for carrying out domestic tasks and for organising and monitoring that they are done when other women did them. Men continue to avoid responsibility for housework and carework. Writing on Norway, Karin Carlsson has shown that even when policies are developed to lessen the domestic burden of citizen women, they are still based on a traditional understanding of gender roles and offer no challenge to them. The 'woman friendly' Norwegian welfare state is constructed in a way which 'exempts some groups of women from domestic work by presupposing that it will be carried out by other groups of women' (Carlsson 2010 p208). An example of just how this works comes from the city of Copenhagen in Denmark. The city saw the solution to the small numbers of women in high-level administrative jobs as being to offer a subsidy for au pairs and cleaning services as part of recruitment packages. The Mayor of Copenhagen commented:

It is not even necessary for modern women to be faced by the dilemma of family and career. ... In special cases, the local council can even offer a subsidy for au pair and cleaning services as part of the salary package. We will create good possibilities for more female executives. We simply have to make it possible for women to make it to the top. (Quoted in Stenum 2010 p40).

There was, of course, no mention that men might have any responsibilities at home.

While tax subsidies and payments in Nordic countries have been introduced in part to increase the number of domestic workers employed formally and with employment rights, the majority of domestic workers still work without protection and middle-class, employing women are more likely to act to exert downward pressure on conditions and wages of domestic workers than to stand alongside them as 'sisters'. For women working in demanding jobs the 'flexibility' (which normally means long and irregular hours) of those providing domestic services can be invaluable. Many employers find that they can ensure this flexibility at an affordable rate by employing the most precarious workers – those who are undocumented or

tied to them. This means the immediate material interests of middle-class, employing women appear to be in stark opposition to those of migrant domestic workers and, as it is middle-class women who have political, social and economic capital, it is their interests which are protected by government policy.

One of the most interesting illustrations of this was what has become known as the 'Zoe Baird incident' in the USA. When newly elected as president of the United States, Bill Clinton selected first Kimba Wood and then Zoë Baird as nominees for the post of Attorney General. In a series of events that was both shocking and comical each of the two women was revealed to be unappointable because they were employing undocumented domestic labour and not paying the correct employment taxes or social security payments. Much of the press coverage that followed the incident revealed an acceptance of the employment of undocumented migrants by middle-class Americans. This included a piece in the *New York Times* by Erica Jong which argued that women's groups should defend Baird and Wood and that 'We should be marching down Fifth Avenue waving banners that say "I hired an illegal alien."' In such pieces employing women were clearly portrayed as the oppressed group and the employment or immigration rights of their employees were not considered. Feminist action was seen to be defending the right of middle class women to employ migrant women in conditions which most undermined their rights.

When care work is seen as the individual responsibility of individual women, this problem will always exist. Measures of women's emancipation which focus only on their participation in the public sphere without questioning what is happening at home will tend to lead to 'solutions' which shift reproductive labour to less powerful women. Not only does men's involvement in unpaid labour need to be tackled, gender-aware analyses need to be consistently aware of the effects of class, ethnicity and citizenship too.

Conclusion: Local solutions to global problems?

These examples show that great care needs to be taken in the provision of care-related services and subsidies. Policies which on the face of it appear to support all women can in fact underpin growth in the most marginal and poorly paid jobs which ghettoise migrant women in roles related to domestic tasks.

Public provision of high quality, flexible care services appears to be the most obvious way in which local areas can put a stop to the process which encourages the emancipation of some women at the cost of others, who are more disadvantaged. In the past we have seen extensive campaigns around the provision of childcare, in the future it may well be elder care services that feminists and others find themselves fighting for.

Beyond this there is also the question of who should do this work. Why is it still the case that it is transferred from one group of women to another? Policies which take for granted men's equal responsibility for caring labour are also needed. This is not

about legislating that men should do housework (they should but are unlikely to respond to legal rulings). It is about thinking through the operation of parental leave and family friendly policies and workplace and social attitudes towards men's and women's roles. Local municipalities have a part to play in involving men in schemes to participate in childcare, schools and youth work and to encourage men to volunteer in the sorts of community roles that it is taken for granted that women will do. Men – including advantaged men - need to be visible in caring and reproductive roles without this being unusual or overly celebrated. When a task is done by the most privileged in society the status of that task is raised and with it the status of others associated with the work.

One of the greatest influences on the organisation of domestic work is the organisation of paid work outside the home. Long hours, inflexibility and presenteeism all make the reconciliation of work and home life harder for anyone with caring responsibilities. Municipalities have a role in creating good working environments for all their employees – not only those with known caring responsibilities - and in supporting good practice amongst employers in their regions. The reconciliation of paid work and home is a 'whole environment' problem that needs to be thought about not just in terms of working practices and home lives but also the links between them – provision of services, transport, opening hours etc. At best solving this problem also relates to planning to reduce commute times, design of housing and much more.

To address the problem of precarious conditions for care workers we need to address the status of their work. This can only be done by societies recognising the value of this work and seeing it as a communal rather than an individual good. When care work is hidden from view and considered to be a problem for individual families or individual women, care workers are also hidden and considered to be a problem. The status of the sector as a whole needs to be raised and this can only happen when this work, which is currently viewed as 'unproductive', is recognised as being the most important thing that any society can do.

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